



Designation: E1413 – 13

Standard Practice for Separation of Ignitable Liquid Residues from Fire Debris Samples by Dynamic Headspace Concentration¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice describes the procedure for separation of small quantities of ignitable liquid residues from fire debris samples using the method of dynamic headspace concentration.

1.2 Dynamic headspace concentration uses adsorption and subsequent solvent elution or thermal desorption.

1.3 Both positive and negative pressure systems for adsorption are described, as well as a thermal desorption system.

1.4 While this practice is suitable for successfully extracting ignitable liquid residues over the entire range of concentration, the headspace concentration methods are best used when a high level of sensitivity is required due to a very low concentration of ignitable liquid residues in the sample.

1.5 Alternate separation and concentration procedures are listed in Section 2. If archival of the extract is of importance, then this practice's thermal desorption procedure, SPME (Practice E2154), and headspace (Practice E1388) sample separation techniques are not recommended unless a portion of the extract can be split and retained. In order to have an archivable extract, then this practice's sample collection on charcoal, solvent extraction (Practice E1386), or passive headspace concentration (Practice E1412) is recommended.

1.6 This practice offers a set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations. This standard cannot replace knowledge, skill, or ability acquired through appropriate education, training, and experience and should be used in conjunction with sound professional judgment.

1.7 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.01 on Criminalistics.

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2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

E1386 Practice for Separation of Ignitable Liquid Residues from Fire Debris Samples by Solvent Extraction

E1388 Practice for Sampling of Headspace Vapors from Fire Debris Samples

E1412 Practice for Separation of Ignitable Liquid Residues from Fire Debris Samples by Passive Headspace Concentration With Activated Charcoal

E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation

E1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory

E1618 Test Method for Ignitable Liquid Residues in Extracts from Fire Debris Samples by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry

E2154 Practice for Separation and Concentration of Ignitable Liquid Residues from Fire Debris Samples by Passive Headspace Concentration with Solid Phase Microextraction (SPME)

E2451 Practice for Preserving Ignitable Liquids and Ignitable Liquid Residue Extracts from Fire Debris Samples

3. Summary of Practice

3.1 The sample, preferably in its original container, is heated, forcing volatile compounds to vaporize. The headspace in the sample is then drawn or pushed through a tube containing an adsorption media (typically activated charcoal or Tenax) which adsorbs the vaporized compounds.

3.2 Other solid adsorbents and collection systems can be used as long as the method has been validated with a wide variety of ignitable liquids with a range of both flash points and polarity.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is useful for preparing extracts from fire debris for later analysis by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS), see Test Method E1618.

² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

4.2 This is a very sensitive separation procedure, capable of isolating quantities smaller than 0.1 μL of ignitable liquid residue from a sample

4.2.1 Actual recovery will vary, depending on several factors, including adsorption temperature, container size, and competition from the sample matrix.

4.3 This is a potentially destructive technique. Portions of the sample subjected to this procedure may not be suitable for re-sampling. Therefore, a portion of the sample extract should be saved for potential future analysis. Consider using passive headspace concentration as described in Practice E1412.

5. Apparatus

5.1 Positive Pressure Apparatus:

5.1.1 *Sample Pressurization Device*—A system capable of delivering pressurized dry nitrogen (or other inert gas) at up to 40 psi (276 kPa) to an orifice to be inserted into the bottom of the sample container.

5.1.1.1 A needle valve capable of fine control of the flow rate of the dry nitrogen, at up to 1500 cc/min.

5.1.1.2 A flow meter capable of measuring the flow of dry nitrogen through the end of the adsorption tube at the rate of 0 to 1500 cc/min.

5.1.1.3 *Container Closure*—A device suitable for sealing the container and directing the effluent nitrogen (or other inert gas) and vapors to the adsorption tube.

5.2 Negative Pressure Apparatus:

5.2.1 *Inlet and Outlet System*—A tube containing approximately 1 cm of charcoal is fitted into the lid of the original container with a suitable penetrable seal. This serves as a filter for incoming room air. A vacuum is pulled on an adsorption tube also fitted into the lid of the original container with a suitable penetrable seal.

5.2.2 A vacuum system capable of pulling between 200 and 1500 cc/min on the sample collection tube.

5.2.3 A flow meter capable of measuring the flow of air through the end of the charcoal tube at the rate of 200 to 1500 cc/min.

5.3 Thermal Desorption Apparatus:

5.3.1 *Sampling System*—An air-tight syringe is connected to the back-end of a Tenax tube. The front end of the Tenax tube is fitted into the heated container.

5.3.2 In order to prevent leakage and contamination, the system should be designed to minimize loss of vapors from the container. For example by means of a septum mounted on top of the lid of the container.

5.3.3 *Thermal Desorption Device*—A system capable of desorbing the volatiles by means of elevated temperature and trapping the volatiles in a cold-trap. This apparatus is directly coupled to a GC-MS.

5.4 Adsorption Tubes:

5.4.1 *Charcoal Tubes*—Suitable charcoal filter and sample adsorption tubes may be made by inserting a small (approximately 1 cm) plug of glass wool or cotton in the bottom of a Pasteur pipette (approximately 5 mm diameter), then adding

2.5 to 5 cm of activated charcoal, and finally, holding the charcoal in place with an additional plug of glass wool or cotton.

5.4.1.1 Alternatively, charcoal tubes are available from commercial sources.

5.4.2 *Tenax Tubes*—Suitable Tenax tubes are commercially available. Note that solvent extraction of these tubes results in complications in the desorbing phase because certain solvents cause the dissolution of the Tenax. Tenax should be employed when thermal desorption is to be performed.

5.5 *Heating System*—A heating mantel designed to fit the evidence container or an oven or a hot plate.

5.5.1 An oven may be set up with any number of stations to allow for multiple sample preparation.

5.6 *Temperature Measuring Device*—A thermometer or thermocouple capable of measuring temperatures in the range of 40 to 150°C.

6. Reagents and Materials

6.1 *Purity of Reagents*—Reagent grade or better chemicals shall be used in all tests. Unless otherwise indicated, it is intended that all reagents conform to the specifications of the Committee on Analytical Reagents of the American Chemical Society where such specifications are available.³ Other grades may be used, provided it is first ascertained that the reagent is of sufficiently high purity to permit its use without lessening the accuracy of the determination.

6.2 Solid Adsorbent:

6.2.1 *Activated Charcoal* (coconut).

6.2.1.1 Charcoal may be activated and cleaned by heating in a 400°C oven for approximately 4 hours and cooling in a desiccator.

6.2.1.2 Test each new or reconditioned batch of charcoal for residual hydrocarbons by analyzing a concentrated extract of blank adsorption media according to Test Method E1618.

6.2.2 *Tenax*:

6.2.2.1 Tenax may be cleaned and conditioned according to the manufacturer's instructions.

6.2.2.2 Test each new or reconditioned batch of Tenax for residual hydrocarbons by analyzing a concentrated extract of blank adsorption media according to Test Method E1618.

6.3 *Glass Wool*, or cotton, free of extractable hydrocarbons.

6.4 *Extraction solvent* (for example, carbon disulfide, pentane, ethyl ether).

6.4.1 Read and follow the safety precautions described in the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) of the extraction solvent that is used.

6.4.2 Test each new lot number of the extraction solvent by analyzing a concentrated portion according to Test Method E1618.

³ *Reagent Chemicals, American Chemical Society Specifications*, American Chemical Society, Washington, DC. For suggestions on the testing of reagents not listed by the American Chemical Society, see *Analar Standards for Laboratory Chemicals*, BDH Ltd., Poole, Dorset, U.K., and the *United States Pharmacopeia and National Formulary*, U.S. Pharmaceutical Convention, Inc. (USPC), Rockville, MD.