



Designation: ~~E1461 – 11~~ E1461 – 13

Standard Test Method for Thermal Diffusivity by the Flash Method¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E1461; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reappraisal. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reappraisal.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method covers the determination of the thermal diffusivity of primarily homogeneous isotropic solid materials. Thermal diffusivity values ranging from ~~$\pm 0.1^{-7}$~~ to ~~$\pm 1000^{-3}$~~ $\text{m}(\text{mm})^2\text{-s}^{-1}$ are measurable by this test method from about 75 to 2800 K.

1.2 Practice [E2585](#) is adjunct to this ~~Test Method~~ test method and contains detailed information regarding the use of the flash method. The two documents are complementing each other.

1.3 This test method is a more detailed form of Test Method [C714](#), having applicability to much wider ranges of materials, applications, and temperatures, with improved accuracy of measurements.

1.4 This test method is intended to allow a wide variety of apparatus designs. It is not practical in a test method of this type to establish details of construction and procedures to cover all contingencies that might offer difficulties to a person without pertinent technical knowledge, or to ~~stop or~~ restrict research and development for improvements in the basic technique.

1.5 This test method is applicable to the measurements performed on essentially fully dense (preferably, but low porosity would be acceptable), ~~homogeneous~~, homogeneous, and isotropic solid materials that are opaque to the applied energy pulse. Experience ~~has shown, however,~~ shows that some deviation from these strict guidelines can be accommodated with care and proper experimental design, substantially broadening the usefulness of the method.

~~1.6 This test method can be considered an absolute (or primary) method of measurement, since no reference standards are required. It is advisable to use reference materials to verify the performance of the instrument used.~~

1.6 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.7 For systems employing lasers as power sources, it is imperative that the safety requirement be fully met.

1.8 *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.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

[C714 Test Method for Thermal Diffusivity of Carbon and Graphite by Thermal Pulse Method](#)

[E228 Test Method for Linear Thermal Expansion of Solid Materials With a Push-Rod Dilatometer](#)

[E2585 Practice for Thermal Diffusivity by the Flash Method](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.1.1 *thermal conductivity, λ , of a solid material*—the time rate of steady heat flow through unit thickness of an infinite slab of a homogeneous material in a direction perpendicular to the surface, induced by unit temperature difference. The property must be identified with a specific mean temperature, since it varies with temperature.

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee [E37](#) on Thermal Measurements and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee [E37.05](#) on Thermophysical Properties.

Current edition approved Dec. 1, 2011; Sept. 1, 2013. Published February 2012/October 2013. Originally approved in 1992. Last previous edition approved in 2007/2011 as ~~E1461 – 07~~ E1461 – 11. DOI: ~~10.1520/E1461-11~~ 10.1520/E1461-13.

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.

3.1.2 *thermal diffusivity, α , of a solid material*—the property given by the thermal conductivity divided by the product of the density and heat capacity per unit mass.

3.2 *Description of Symbols and Units Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 D —diameter, m.

3.2.2 C_p —specific heat capacity, $\text{J}\cdot\text{kg}^{-1}\cdot\text{K}^{-1}$.

3.2.3 k —constant depending on percent rise.

3.2.4 K —correction factors.

3.2.5 K_1, K_2 —constants depending on β .

3.2.6 L —specimen thickness, mm.

3.2.7 t —response time, s.

3.2.8 $t_{1/2}$ —half-rise time or time required for the rear face temperature rise to reach one half of its maximum value, s.

3.2.9 t^* —dimensionless time ($t^* = 4\alpha_s t/D_T^2$).

3.2.10 T —temperature, K.

3.2.11 α —thermal diffusivity, $\text{m}(\text{mm})^2\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$.

3.2.12 β —fraction of pulse duration required to reach maximum intensity.

3.2.13 ρ —density, $\text{kg}\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$.

3.2.14 λ —thermal conductivity, $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-1}\cdot\text{K}^{-1}$.

3.2.15 ΔT_5 — $T(5t_{1/2})/T(t_{1/2})$.

3.2.16 ΔT_{10} — $T(10t_{1/2})/T(t_{1/2})$.

3.2.17 ΔT_{max} —temperature difference between baseline and maximum rise, K.

3.2.18 τ —pulse duration (see Fig. 1).

3.3 *Description of Subscripts Specific to This Standard:*

3.3.1 a —ambient.

3.3.2 s —specimen.

3.3.3 T —thermocouple.

3.3.4 x —percent rise.

3.3.5 C —Cowan.

3.3.6 R —ratio.

3.3.7 m — m_{max} —maximum.

3.3.8 t_p — $t_{p, constant pressure}$.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 A small, thin disc specimen is subjected to a high-intensity short duration radiant energy pulse (Fig. 1). The energy of the pulse is absorbed on the front surface of the specimen and the resulting rear face temperature rise (thermogram) (thermal curve) is recorded. The thermal diffusivity value is calculated from the specimen thickness and the time required for the rear face temperature rise to reach certain percentages a percentage of its maximum value (Fig. 2). When the thermal diffusivity of the specimen is to be determined over a temperature range, the measurement must be repeated at each temperature of interest. This test method is described in detail in a number of publications (1, 2) and review articles (3, 4, 5). A summary of the theory can be found in Appendix X1.

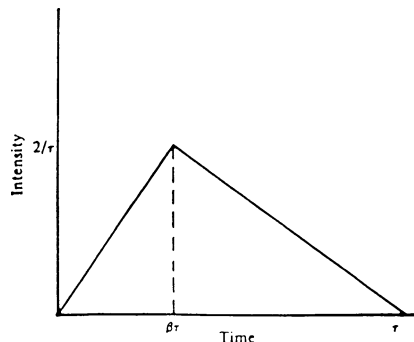


FIG. 71 Laser Pulse Shape

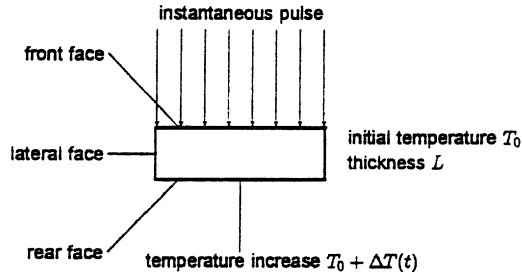


FIG. 12 Schematic of the Flash Method

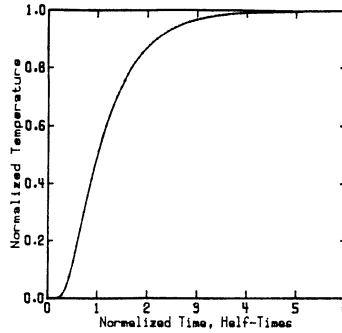


FIG. 23 Characteristic Thermogram Thermal Curve for the Flash Method

NOTE 1—This test method is described in detail in a number of publications (1, 2)³ and review articles (3, 4, 5). A summary of the theory can be found in Appendix X1.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Thermal diffusivity is an important transient thermal property, required for such purposes under transient heat flow conditions, such as design applications, determination of safe operating temperature, process control, and quality assurance.

5.2 The flash method is used to measure values of thermal diffusivity, α , of a wide range of solid materials. It is particularly advantageous because of simple specimen geometry, small specimen size requirements, rapidity of measurement and ease of handling.

5.3 Under certain strict conditions, specific heat capacity of a homogeneous isotropic opaque solid specimen can be determined when the method is used in a quantitative fashion (see Appendix X2).

5.4 Thermal diffusivity results, together with related values of specific heat capacity (C_p) and density (ρ) values, can be used in many cases to derive thermal conductivity (λ), according to the relationship:

$$\lambda = \alpha C_p \rho \quad (1)$$

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6. Interferences

6.1 In principle, the thermal diffusivity is obtained from the thickness of the specimen and from a characteristic time function describing the propagation of heat from the front surface of the specimen to its back surface. The sources of uncertainties in the measurement are associated with the specimen itself, the temperature measurements, the performance of the detector and of the data acquisition system, the data analysis and more specifically the finite pulse time effect, the nonuniform heating of the specimen and the heat losses (radiative and conductive). These sources of uncertainty can be considered systematic, and should be carefully considered for each experiment. Errors random in nature (noise, for example) can be best estimated by performing a large number of repeat experiments. The relative standard deviation of the obtained results is a good representation of the random component of the uncertainty associated with the measurement. Guidelines in performing a rigorous evaluation of these factors are given in (6).

³ The boldface numbers given in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of the text.

7. Apparatus

The essential components of the apparatus are shown in Fig. 34. These are the flash source, specimen holder, environmental enclosure (optional), temperature response detector and recording device.

7.1 The flash source may be a pulse laser, a flash lamp, or other device capable to generate a short duration pulse of substantial energy. The duration of the pulse should be less than 2 % of the time required for the rear face temperature rise to reach one half of its maximum value (see Fig. 23), to keep the error due to finite pulse width less than 0.5 %, if pulse width correction (7, 8, 9) is not applied.

NOTE 2—A pulse length correction may be applied (7, 8, 9) permitting use of pulse durations greater than 0.5 %.

7.1.1 The energy of the pulse hitting the specimen’s surface must be spatially uniform in intensity.

7.2 An environmental control chamber is required for measurements above and below room temperature.

7.3 The temperature detector can be a thermocouple, infrared detector, optical pyrometer, or any other sensor that can provide a linear electrical output proportional to a small temperature rise. It shall be capable of detecting 0.05 K change above the specimen’s initial temperature. The detector and its associated amplifier must have a response time not more than 2 % of the half-rise time value.

7.4 The signal conditioner includes the electronic circuit to bias out the ambient temperature reading, spike filters, amplifiers, and analog-to-digital converters.

7.5 Data Recording:

7.5.1 The data acquisition system must be of an adequate speed to ensure that time-resolution in determining half of the maximum temperature rise on the thermogram is at least 1 %, half-rise time on the thermal curve is no more than 1 % of the half-rise time, for the fastest thermogram thermal curve for which the system is qualified.

7.6 Measurement of specimen’s temperature is to be done by accepted means, performed using calibrated temperature sensors such as calibrated thermocouple, optical pyrometer, platinum RTD, etc. whichever is appropriate for the temperature range. In all cases, such a device must resistance temperature detector (RTD), etc. The temperature sensor shall be in intimate contact with or trained on the sample holder, in close proximity of the specimen. Touching the specimen with thermocouples is not recommended. Embedding thermocouples into the specimen is not acceptable.

NOTE 3—Touching the specimen with thermocouples is not recommended. Embedding thermocouples into the specimen is not acceptable.

7.7 The temperature controller and/or programmer are to bring the specimen to the temperatures of interest.

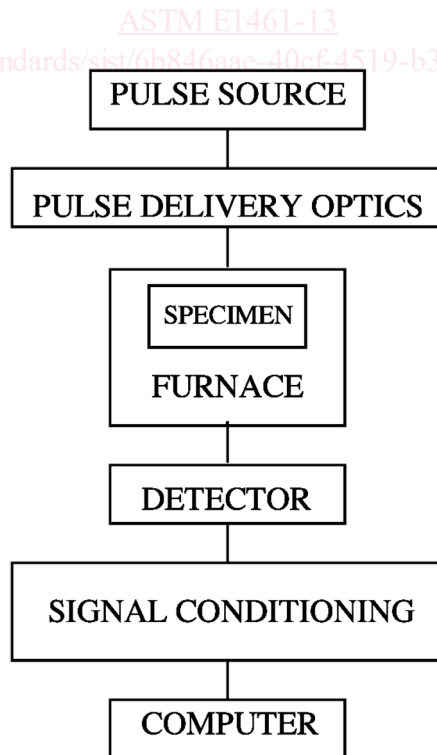


FIG. 34 Block Diagram of a Flash System

8. Test Specimen

8.1 The usual specimen is a thin circular disc with a front surface area less than that of the energy beam. Typically, specimens are 10 to 12.5 mm in diameter (in special cases, as small as 6 mm diameter and as large as 30 mm diameter have been reported as used successfully). The optimum thickness depends upon the magnitude of the estimated thermal diffusivity, and should be chosen so that the time to reach half of the maximum temperature falls within the 10 to 1000 ms range. Thinner specimens are desired at higher temperatures to minimize heat loss corrections; however, specimens should always be thick enough to be representative of the test material. Typically, thicknesses are in the 1 to 6 mm range.

8.2 Specimens must be prepared with faces flat and parallel within 0.5 % of their thickness, in order to keep the error in thermal diffusivity due to the ~~measurement~~measured average thickness, to less than 1 %. Non-uniformity of either surface (craters, scratches, markings) ~~of significant depth compared to the specimen thickness~~ should be avoided

8.3 *Specimen Surface Preparation*—It is a good practice to apply a very thin, uniform graphite or other high emissivity coating on both faces of the specimen to be tested, prior to performing the measurements. The coating may be applied by spraying, painting, sputtering, etc. This will improve the capability of the specimen to absorb the energy applied, especially in case of highly reflective materials. For transparent materials, a layer of gold, silver, or other opaque materials must be deposited first, followed by graphite coating. For some opaque reflective materials, grit blasting of the surface can provide sufficient pulse absorption and emissivity, especially at higher temperatures, where coatings may not be stable or may react with the material.

9. Calibration and Verification

~~9.1 Calibrate the micrometer used to measure the specimen thickness, so that the thickness measurements are accurate to within 0.2 %.~~

9.1 The Flash Method is an absolute (primary) method by itself, therefore it requires no calibration. However, actual execution of the measurement itself is subject to random and systematic errors. ~~It is therefore~~ It is important to periodically verify the performance of a ~~device,~~ device and to establish the extent these errors may affect the data generated. This can be accomplished by testing one or several materials whose thermal diffusivity is well known. ~~While most materials used are not true certified standards, they are generally accepted industry-wide with the best available literature data known (see Appendix X3).~~

9.1.1 ~~It must be emphasized that the~~ The use of reference materials to establish validity of the data on unknown materials ~~has often led~~ can lead to unwarranted statements on accuracy. The use of references is only valid when the properties of the reference (including half-rise times and thermal diffusivity values) are ~~closely~~ similar to those of the unknown and the temperature-rise curves are determined in an identical manner for the reference and unknown.

9.1.2 ~~One~~ An important check of the validity of data (in addition to the comparison of the rise curve with the theoretical model), when corrections have been applied, is to vary the specimen thickness. Since the half times vary as L^2 , decreasing the specimen thickness by one-half should decrease the half time to one-fourth of its original value. Thus, if one obtains the same thermal diffusivity value (appropriate heat loss corrections being applied) with representative specimens from the same material of significantly different thicknesses, the results can be assumed valid.

10. Procedure

10.1 For commercially produced systems, follow manufacturer's instructions.

10.2 The testing procedure must contain the following functions:

10.2.1 Determine and record the specimen thickness.

10.2.2 Mount the specimen in its holder.

10.2.3 Establish vacuum or inert gas environment in the chamber if necessary.

10.2.4 Determine specimen temperature unless the system will do it automatically.

10.2.5 Especially at low temperatures, use the lowest level of power for the energy pulse able to generate a measurable temperature rise, in order to ensure that the detector functions within its linear range.

10.2.6 After the pulse delivery, monitor the raw or processed ~~thermogram~~ thermal curve to establish in-range performance. In case of multiple specimen testing, it is advisable (for time economy) to sequentially test specimens at the same temperature (including replicate tests) before proceeding to the next test temperature.

10.2.7 ~~In all cases, the~~ The temperature stability (base line) prior and during a test ~~must~~ shall be verified either manually or automatically to be less than 4 % of the maximum temperature rise. ~~Testing on a ramp is not recommended.~~

NOTE 4—Testing during the temperature program is not recommended as it results in lower precision.

10.2.8 Determine the specimen ambient temperature and collect the base line, transient-rise and cooling data, and analyze the results according to Section 11.

10.2.9 Change or program the specimen temperature as desired and repeat the data collection process to obtain measurements at each temperature.

10.2.10 If required, repeat the measurements at each temperature on the specimen's cooling or on its re-heating over the same cycle.

11. Calculation

11.1 Determine the baseline and maximum rise to give the temperature difference, ΔT_{\max} . Determine the time required from the initiation of the pulse for the rear face temperature to reach half ΔT_{\max} . This is the half-rise time, $t_{1/2}$. Calculate the thermal diffusivity, α , from the specimen thickness, L , in m and the half-rise time $t_{1/2}$ in s, as follows, as follows (1):

$$\alpha = 0.13879 L^2 / t_{1/2} \tag{2}$$

Check the validity of the experiment by calculating α at a minimum of two other points on the rise curve. The equation is as follows:

$$\alpha = k_x L^2 / t_x \tag{3}$$

where:

t_x = the time required for the temperature rise to reach x percent of ΔT_{\max} . Values of k_x are given in Table 1.

11.1.1 Ideally, the calculated values of α for different values of x should all be the same. If the values at 25, 50 and 75 % ΔT_{\max} lie within $\pm 2\%$, $\pm 2\%$, the overall accuracy is probably within $\pm 5\%$ $\pm 5\%$ at the half-rise time. If the α values lie outside of this range, the response curve should be analyzed further to see if thermal radiation heat loss, finite-pulse time or non-uniform heating effects are present.

11.1.2 Thermal radiation heat loss effects are most readily determined from the temperature of the specimen and the rear-face temperature response after $4t_{1/2}$. The recommended procedure is to plot by plotting the experimental values of $\Delta T / \Delta T_{\max}$ versus $t / t_{1/2}$ along with the values for the theoretical model. Some numbers for the theoretical model are given in Table 2.

11.1.3 Prepare a display of the normalized experimental data and the theoretical model can be prepared readily on-line with a computer-based data acquisition system or by preparing graphs using the tabulated values of $\Delta T / \Delta T_{\max}$ and $t / t_{1/2}$ and plotting the corresponding experimental data at several percent levels of the rise. All normalized experimental curves must pass through $\Delta T / \Delta T_{\max} = 0.5$ and $t / t_{1/2} = 1.0$. Therefore, calculations including the 25 to 35 % and 65 to 80 % ranges are required to compare the experimental data with the theoretical curve.

11.1.4 Examples of the normalized plots for experiments that approximate the ideal case, in which both radiation heat losses and finite pulse time effect exist, are shown in Figs. 45 and 56, and Fig. 67. Various procedures for correcting for these effects are also given in Refs. (4, 107-13, 11, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13) and specific examples are given in 11.2 and 11.3.

11.1.5 The corrections can be minimized by the proper selection of specimen thickness. The finite pulse time effect decreases as the thickness is increased, while heat losses decrease as the thickness is reduced.

11.1.6 Non-uniform heating effects also cause deviations of the reduced experimental curve from the model because of two-dimensional heat flow. Since there are a variety of non-uniform heating cases, there are a variety of deviations. Hot center cases approximate the radiation heat loss example. Cold center cases result in the rear face temperature continuing to rise significantly after $4t_{1/2}$. Non-uniform heating may arise from the nature of the energy pulse or by non-uniform absorption on the front surface of the specimen. The former case must be eliminated by altering the energy source, while the latter may be eliminated by adding an absorbing layer and using two-layer mathematics (4, 14).

11.2 Finite pulse time effects usually can be corrected for using the equation:

$$\alpha = K_1 L^2 / (K_2 t_x - \tau) \tag{4}$$

$$\alpha = K_1 L^2 / (K_2 t_x - \tau) \tag{4}$$

For this to be valid, the evolution of the pulse intensity must be representable by a triangle of duration τ and time to maximum intensity of $\beta\tau$ as shown in Fig. 71. The pulse shape for the laser should be determined using an optical detector that can detect the laser pulse as opposed to the flash lamp pulse detector. From the pulse shape so determined, β and τ are obtained. Values of the two constants K_1 and K_2 for various values of β are given in Table 3 for correcting α_{θ, s_x} .

11.3 Heat loss corrections can be performed using procedures proposed in a (12, 13), for example. Both of these corrections are affected by non-uniform heating effects. Corrections given in (12) by Cowan are affected by conduction heat losses to the holders in addition to the radiation heat losses from the specimen surfaces. Thus, the errors in the correction procedures are affected by different physical phenomena and a comparison of thermal diffusivity values corrected by the two procedures is useful in determining the presence or absence of these phenomena.

TABLE 1 Values of the Constant k_x for Various Percent Rises

x(%)	k_x	x(%)	k_x
10	0.066108	60	0.162236
20	0.084251	66.67	0.181067
25	0.092725	70	0.191874
30	0.101213	75	0.210493
33.33	0.106976	80	0.233200
40	0.118960	90	0.303520
50