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Standard Guide for Evaluation of Hydrocarbon Heat Transfer Fluids¹

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1. Scope²

1.1 This guide provides information, without specific limits, for selecting standard test methods for testing heat transfer fluids for quality and aging. These test methods are considered particularly useful in characterizing hydrocarbon heat transfer fluids in closed systems.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:³

- D86 Test Method for Distillation of Petroleum Products at Atmospheric Pressure
- D91 Test Method for Precipitation Number of Lubricating Oils
- D92 Test Method for Flash and Fire Points by Cleveland Open Cup Tester
- D93 Test Methods for Flash Point by Pensky-Martens Closed Cup Tester
- D95 Test Method for Water in Petroleum Products and Bituminous Materials by Distillation
- D97 Test Method for Pour Point of Petroleum Products
- D189 Test Method for Conradson Carbon Residue of Petroleum Products
- D445 Test Method for Kinematic Viscosity of Transparent and Opaque Liquids (and Calculation of Dynamic Viscosity)
- D471 Test Method for Rubber Property—Effect of Liquids
- D524 Test Method for Ramsbottom Carbon Residue of Petroleum Products
- D664 Test Method for Acid Number of Petroleum Products by Potentiometric Titration
- D893 Test Method for Insolubles in Used Lubricating Oils

- D1160 Test Method for Distillation of Petroleum Products at Reduced Pressure
- D1298 Test Method for Density, Relative Density, or API Gravity of Crude Petroleum and Liquid Petroleum Products by Hydrometer Method
- D1500 Test Method for ASTM Color of Petroleum Products (ASTM Color Scale)
- D2270 Practice for Calculating Viscosity Index from Kinematic Viscosity at 40 and 100°C
- D2717 Test Method for Thermal Conductivity of Liquids
- D2766 Test Method for Specific Heat of Liquids and Solids
- D2887 Test Method for Boiling Range Distribution of Petroleum Fractions by Gas Chromatography
- D4530 Test Method for Determination of Carbon Residue (Micro Method)
- D6743 Test Method for Thermal Stability of Organic Heat Transfer Fluids
- E659 Test Method for Autoignition Temperature of Liquid Chemicals
- G4 Guide for Conducting Corrosion Tests in Field Applications

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1 *heat transfer fluid*—a petroleum oil or related hydrocarbon material which remains essentially a liquid while transferring heat to or from an apparatus or process. Small percentages of nonhydrocarbon components such as antioxidants and dispersants can be present.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 The significance of each test method will depend upon the system in use and the purpose of the test method as listed under Section 5. Use the most recent editions of ASTM test methods.

5. Recommended Test Procedures

5.1 Pumpability of the Fluid:

5.1.1 *Flash Point*, closed cup (Test Method D93)—This test method will detect low flash ends which are one cause of cavitation during pumping. In closed systems, especially when fluids are exposed to temperatures of 225°C (approximately 400°F) or higher, the formation of volatile hydrocarbons by

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² The background for this standard was developed by a questionnaire circulated by ASTM-ASLE technical division L-VI-2 and reported in *Lubrication Engineering*, Vol 32, No. 8, August 1976, pp. 411–416.

³ 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.

breakdown of the oil may require venting through a pressure relief system to prevent dangerous pressure build-up.

5.1.2 *Pour Point* (Test Method **D97**)—The pour point can be used as an approximate guide to the minimum temperature for normal pumping and as a general indication of fluid type and low temperature properties. Should a heat transfer system be likely to be subjected to low temperatures when not in use, the system should be trace heated to warm the fluid above minimum pumping temperature before start-up.

5.1.3 *Viscosity* (Test Method **D445**)—Fluid viscosity is of importance in the determination of Reynolds and Prandtl numbers for heat transfer systems, to estimate fluid turbulence, heat transfer coefficient, and heat flow. Generally, a fluid that is above approximately 200 centistokes is difficult to pump. The pump and system design will determine the viscosity limit required for pumping. The construction of a viscosity/temperature curve using determined viscosities can be used to estimate minimum pumping temperature.

5.1.4 *Specific Gravity* (Test Method **D1298**)—Hydraulic shock during pumping has been predicted via the use of a combination of density and compressibility data.

5.1.5 *Water Content* (Test Method **D95**)—The water content of a fresh heat transfer fluid can be used to indicate how long the heat transfer system must be dried out during commissioning, while raising the bulk oil temperature through the 100°C plus region, with venting, before the system can be safely used at higher temperatures. The expansion tank should be full during the operations to ensure that moisture is safely vented in the lowest pressure part of the systems. Positive nitrogen pressure on the heat exchange systems will minimize entry of air or moisture. Heat transfer systems operating at temperatures of 120° or greater must, for reasons of safety, be dry, because destructive high pressures are generated when water enters the high temperature sections of the system. Heating the oil before it is placed in service also removes most of the dissolved air in the oil. If not removed, the air can cause pump cavitation. The air can also accumulate in stagnant parts of the system at high pressure and could cause an explosion.

5.2 *Safety in Use:*

5.2.1 *Autoignition Temperature* (Test Method **E659**)—The above test relates to the autoignition temperature of a bulk fluid. Hydrocarbon fluids absorbed on porous inert surfaces can ignite at temperatures more than 50°C (approximately 100°F) lower than indicated by Test Method **E659**. An open flame will ignite leaking hydrocarbon fluids exposed on a porous surface at any temperature.

5.2.2 *Flash Point* (Test Methods **D92** and **D93**)—Some heat transfer fluids are volatile and present a fire hazard at slightly elevated temperatures, or even below 25°C (77°F).

5.3 *Effect on Equipment:*

5.3.1 *Effect on Rubber or Elastomeric Seals* (Test Method **D471**)—Most seals in heat exchange equipment are made of steel or other metal. If rubber seals are present, it is desirable to maintain rubber swelling in the range of 1 to 5 % to prevent leakage because of poor seal contact. Seals may degrade in some fluids. As an oil deteriorates in service, additional tests may be required to assure that seals remain compatible with the

altered oil. The temperature ranges of the tests should correspond to temperatures to which seals will be exposed in service.

5.3.2 *Corrosion* (Guide **G4**)—The above tests concern selection of materials of construction with fluids usable for heat transfer systems. Guide **G4** uses test metal specimens fixed within the stream of test fluid under use. The specimens and conditions for test must be specified for each system.

5.4 *Efficiency:*

5.4.1 *Thermal Conductivity* (Test Method **D2717**) and *Specific Heat* (Test Method **D2766**)—These thermal conductivity and specific heat tests are difficult to carry out, facilities for performing them are few, and the precision data is yet to be established. Values can be estimated for design use from the general chemical composition. Differences contribute to efficiency to a lesser degree than values such as viscosity, moisture contamination, and other measurable values in 5.1 and 5.5 of this guide. The values for thermal conductivity and specific heat may be available from the fluid supplier.⁴

5.5 *Service Life:*

5.5.1 *Thermal Stability, Laboratory Tests*⁵—Thermal stability is here defined as the resistance of a hydrocarbon liquid to permanent changes in properties that make it a less efficient heat transfer fluid. These changes may be related to alterations in the liquid's properties, such as viscosity, or to the tendency to foul heat exchanger surfaces with insulating deposits. Normally, testing should be done in the absence of air and moisture to stimulate “tight” systems. The test may be useful for assessing the remaining service life of a used fluid, or it may be used to compare the expected service life of competitive new heat transfer fluids.

5.5.2 The following test methods can be used to determine the change in values between new and used fluids, or between a fluid before and after subjection to a laboratory thermal stability test. These test methods have been found especially useful for determining the end of a fluid's service life when an identical fluid has been monitored with the same tests throughout its service life. These test methods can also detect leakage of foreign material into the heat transfer fluid.

5.5.2.1 *Precipitation Number* (Test Method **D91**) and *Insolubles* (Test Method **D893**)—These test methods determine the extent to which insolubles that may contribute to fouling of metal surfaces are increasing.

5.5.2.2 *Flash Point* (Test Methods **D92** and **D93**)—A lowering of flash point is indicative of thermal cracking to produce lower molecular weight hydrocarbons. A rapid increase may indicate that fluid is being exposed to excessive temperatures.

5.5.2.3 *Carbon Residue* (Test Methods **D189**, **D524**, and **D4530**)—An increase of carbon residue during service provides an indication of the fluid's tendency to form carbonaceous deposits. These deposits, which may impair heat transfer, are caused by precipitation of high molecular weight materials produced by thermal cracking of the fluid.

⁴ Useful estimates may be obtained from sources such as the “Technical Data Book, Petroleum Refining,” American Petroleum Institute, 1220 L St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-4070.

⁵ Test Method **D6743** measures thermal stability of organic heat transfer fluids.