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Standard Test Method for Particle Size Distribution of Catalytic Materials by Laser Light Scattering¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This test method covers the determination of the particle size distribution of catalyst, catalyst carrier, and catalytic raw material particles and is one of several found valuable for the measurement of particle size. The range of average particle sizes investigated was from 1 to 300 μm equivalent spherical diameter. The technique is capable of measuring particles above and below this range. The angle and intensity of laser light scattered by the particles are selectively measured to permit calculation of a volume distribution using light-scattering techniques.

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

1.3 *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

- D3766 Terminology Relating to Catalysts and Catalysis
- E105 Practice for Probability Sampling of Materials
- E177 Practice for Use of the Terms Precision and Bias in ASTM Test Methods
- E456 Terminology Relating to Quality and Statistics
- E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method
- E1617 Practice for Reporting Particle Size Characterization Data

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D32 on Catalysts and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D32.02 on Physical-Mechanical Properties.

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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. Terminology

3.1 Definitions and recommended nomenclature pertaining to catalysts and to materials used in their manufacture can be found in Terminology D3766.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *background*—extraneous scattering of light by material present in the dispersion fluid other than the particles to be measured. It includes scattering by contamination in the measurement path.

3.2.2 *Fraunhofer Diffraction*—the optical theory that describes the low-angle scattering of light by particles that are large compared to the wavelength of the incident light.

3.2.3 *Mie Scattering*—the complex electromagnetic theory that describes the scattering of light by spherical particles. It is applied when the sample includes particles with diameters that are close to the wavelength of the incident light. The real and imaginary indices of light refraction of the particles are needed.

3.2.4 *multiple scattering*—the re-scattering of light by a particle in the path of light scattered by another particle. This usually occurs in heavy concentrations of a particle dispersion.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 A prepared sample of particulate material is dispersed in water or a compatible organic liquid and is circulated through the path of a laser light beam or some other suitable source of light. The particles pass through the light beam and scatter it. Photodetector arrays collect the scattered light which is converted to electrical signals to be analyzed using Fraunhofer Diffraction, or Mie Scattering, or both. Scattering information, typically, is analyzed assuming a spherical geometry for the particles. Calculated particle sizes are, therefore, presented as equivalent spherical diameters.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 It is important to recognize that the results obtained by this test method or any other method for particle size determination utilizing different physical principles may disagree. The results are strongly influenced by physical principles employed by each method of particle size analysis. The results of any particle sizing method should be used only in a relative sense and should not be regarded as absolute when comparing results

obtained by other methods. Particularly for fine materials (that is, average particle size < 20 μm), significant differences are often observed for laser light scattering instruments of different manufacturers. These differences include lasers of different wavelengths, detector configuration, and the algorithms used to convert scattering to particle size distribution. Therefore, comparison of results from different instruments may be misleading.³

5.2 Light scattering theories (Fraunhofer Diffraction⁴ and Mie Scattering⁵) that are used for determination of particle size have been available for many years. Several manufacturers of testing equipment now have units based on these principles. Although each type of testing equipment utilizes the same basic principles for light scattering as a function of particle size, different assumptions pertinent to application of the theory and different models for converting light measurements to particle size, may lead to different results for each instrument. Furthermore, any particles which are outside the size measurement range of the instrument will be ignored, causing an increase in the reported percentages within the detectable range. A particle size distribution which ends abruptly at the detection limit of the instrument may indicate that particles outside the range are present. Therefore, use of this test method cannot guarantee directly comparable results from different types of instruments.

5.3 This test method can be used to determine particle size distributions of catalysts, supports, and catalytic raw materials for specifications, manufacturing control, and research and development work.

5.4 For fine materials (that is, average particle size < 20 μm), it is critical that Mie Scattering Theory be applied. This involves entering an “optical model” consisting of the “real” and “imaginary” refractive indices of the solid at the wavelength of the laser. The “imaginary” refractive index is also referred to as the “absorbance,” as it has a value of zero for transparent materials such as glass beads. For common materials and naturally occurring minerals (for example, kaolin), these values are known and published, and usually included in the manufacturer’s instrument manual (for example, as an appendix). For example, kaolinite measured at 589.3 nm has a “real” refractive index of 1.55. The absorbance (imaginary component) for minerals and metal oxides is normally taken as 0.001, 0.01 or 0.1. Many of the published values were measured at 589.3 nm (sodium light) but often values at other wavelengths are also given. Extrapolation, interpolation, or estimation to the wavelength of the laser being used can therefore be made.⁶

³ Jilavenkatesa, A., et al., *Particle Size Characterization*, NIST Recommended Practice Guide SP 960-1, 2001.

⁴ Born, M., and Wolf, E., *Principles of Optics*, Chapter 8, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1957.

⁵ van Hulst, H. C., *Light Scattering by Small Particles*, Chapter 9, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1908.

⁶ Xu, R., *Particle Characterization: Light Scattering Methods*, Chapter 3, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.

6. Interferences

6.1 Air bubbles entrained in the circulating fluid will scatter light and then be reported as particles. Circulating fluids, typically, do not require degassing, but should be bubble-free on visual inspections.

6.2 Contaminants, such as non-aqueous solvents, oil or other organic coatings on the sample may emulsify in an aqueous carrier, scatter light, and be reported as part of the particle size distribution. Samples containing such contaminants may be analyzed in a non-aqueous carrier solvent to dissolve the contaminants or washed free of the contaminant with a compatible aqueous solvent.

6.3 Reagglomeration or settling of particles during analysis will cause erroneous results. Dispersions shall be prepared such that a stable dispersion is maintained throughout the analysis.

6.4 Insufficient sample loading may cause electrical noise interference and poor data reproducibility. High sample loading may cause excessive light attenuation and multiple scattering, resulting in erroneous particle size distributions.

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Particle Size Analyzer*, based on Fraunhofer Diffraction or Mie Scattering, or both, light scattering analysis techniques. Ensure that the analyzer system or subsystem is optimum for the range of the powder being tested.

7.2 *Micro Sample Splitter*, used in accordance with MNL 32⁷ to obtain the test portion of sample.

7.3 *Ultrasonic Probe or Bath*, if needed, to ensure dispersion of agglomerates prior to analysis.

8. Reagents and Materials

8.1 The selected liquid carrier shall:

8.1.1 Be compatible with the construction materials of the sample delivery system.

8.1.2 Not cause dissolution or clumping of the particles.

8.1.3 Be sufficiently clean to achieve acceptable background levels.

8.2 The use of surfactant(s) is often recommended by equipment manufacturers. However, agents such as surfactants, antifoams, and viscosity modifiers should be used with caution. An interlaboratory study of this test method showed that the use of different types and concentrations of surfactant can significantly affect the results. In calculating the precision of this test method, results obtained using surfactants were excluded because they contributed disproportionately to the scatter in results. Comparisons between laboratories should be performed with liquid carriers which are identical in all respects.

9. Sampling and Sample Size

9.1 A representative test sample shall be obtained according to Practice E105. The test portion shall be extracted from the

⁷ MNL 32, “Manual on Test Sieving Methods,” Pope, L. R. and Ward, C. W., eds., 4th ed, ASTM International, 1998.