



Designation: C1778 – 16

# Standard Guide for Reducing the Risk of Deleterious Alkali-Aggregate Reaction in Concrete<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C1778; 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 reapproval. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

## 1. Scope

1.1 This guide provides guidance on how to address the potential for deleterious alkali aggregate reaction (AAR) in concrete construction. This guide addresses the process of identifying both potentially alkali-silica reactive (ASR) and alkali-carbonate reactive (ACR) aggregates through standardized testing procedures and the selection of mitigation options to minimize the risk of expansion when ASR aggregates are used in concrete construction. Mitigation methods for ASR aggregates are selected using either prescriptive or performance-based alternatives. Preventive measures for ACR aggregates are limited to avoidance of use. Because the potential for deleterious reactions depends not only on the concrete mixture but also the in-service exposure, guidance is provided on the type of structures and exposure environments where AAR may be of concern.

1.2 *Units*—The values stated in either SI units or inch-pound units are to be regarded separately as standard. The values stated in each system may not be exact equivalents; therefore, each system shall be used independently of the other. Combining values from the two systems may result in nonconformance with the 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*:<sup>2</sup>

[C33/C33M Specification for Concrete Aggregates](#)

<sup>1</sup> This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee C09 on Concrete and Concrete Aggregates and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee C09.50 on Risk Management for Alkali Aggregate Reactions.

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

[C125 Terminology Relating to Concrete and Concrete Aggregates](#)

[C150/C150M Specification for Portland Cement](#)

[C294 Descriptive Nomenclature for Constituents of Concrete Aggregates](#)

[C295 Guide for Petrographic Examination of Aggregates for Concrete](#)

[C311 Test Methods for Sampling and Testing Fly Ash or Natural Pozzolans for Use in Portland-Cement Concrete](#)

[C586 Test Method for Potential Alkali Reactivity of Carbonate Rocks as Concrete Aggregates \(Rock-Cylinder Method\)](#)

[C595 Specification for Blended Hydraulic Cements](#)

[C618 Specification for Coal Fly Ash and Raw or Calcined Natural Pozzolan for Use in Concrete](#)

[C823/C823M Practice for Examination and Sampling of Hardened Concrete in Constructions](#)

[C856 Practice for Petrographic Examination of Hardened Concrete](#)

[C989 Specification for Slag Cement for Use in Concrete and Mortars](#)

[C1105 Test Method for Length Change of Concrete Due to Alkali-Carbonate Rock Reaction](#)

[C1157 Performance Specification for Hydraulic Cement](#)

[C1240 Specification for Silica Fume Used in Cementitious Mixtures](#)

[C1260 Test Method for Potential Alkali Reactivity of Aggregates \(Mortar-Bar Method\)](#)

[C1293 Test Method for Determination of Length Change of Concrete Due to Alkali-Silica Reaction](#)

[C1567 Test Method for Determining the Potential Alkali-Silica Reactivity of Combinations of Cementitious Materials and Aggregate \(Accelerated Mortar-Bar Method\)](#)

### 2.2 *ACI Standard*:<sup>3</sup>

[ACI 318 Building Code Requirements for Structural Concrete and Commentary](#)

<sup>3</sup> Available from American Concrete Institute (ACI), P.O. Box 9094, Farmington Hills, MI 48333-9094, <http://www.concrete.org>.

### 2.3 AASHTO Standard:

**AASHTO PP 65** Standard Practice for Determining the Reactivity of Concrete Aggregates and Selecting Appropriate Measures for Preventing Deleterious Expansion in New Concrete Construction<sup>4</sup>

### 2.4 CSA Standards:<sup>5</sup>

**A23.2-26A** Determination of Potential Alkali-Carbonate Reactivity of Quarried Carbonate Rocks by Chemical Composition

**A23.2-27A** Standard Practice to Identify Degree of Alkali-Aggregate Reactivity of Aggregates and to Identify Measures to Avoid Deleterious Expansion in Concrete

**A23.2-28A** Standard Practice for Laboratory Testing to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supplementary Cementing Materials and Lithium-Based Admixtures to Prevent Alkali-Silica Reaction in Concrete

## 3. Terminology

### 3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For definitions of terms used in this Guide, refer to Terminology **C125** and Descriptive Nomenclature **C294**.

### 3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *alkali content, n*—the alkali content of the cement expressed as % Na<sub>2</sub>O<sub>eq</sub> and calculated as Na<sub>2</sub>O + (0.658 K<sub>2</sub>O).

3.2.2 *alkali loading, n*—the total amount of alkalis in the concrete mixture expressed in kg/m<sup>3</sup> or lb/yd<sup>3</sup>; this is calculated by multiplying the portland cement content of the concrete in kg/m<sup>3</sup> or lb/yd<sup>3</sup> by the alkali content of the cement divided by 100.

3.2.3 *deleteriously reactive, adj*—used to describe aggregates that undergo chemical reactions that subsequently result in premature deterioration of concrete.

3.2.3.1 *Discussion*—The term used in this standard guide describes aggregates that undergo chemical reactions with hydroxide (OH<sup>-</sup>) in the pore solution.

3.2.4 *non-reactive, adj*—used to describe materials that do not undergo chemical reactions that subsequently result in premature deterioration of concrete.

3.2.4.1 *Discussion*—Some aggregates with minor amounts of reactive constituents may exhibit the symptoms of alkali-aggregate reaction (AAR) without producing any damage to the concrete; these are termed as non-reactive aggregates.

## 4. Summary of Guide

4.1 Alkali-aggregate reactions (AAR) occur between the alkali hydroxides in the pore solution of concrete and certain components found in some aggregates. Two types of AAR are recognized depending on the nature of the reactive component: alkali-silica reaction (ASR) involves various types of reactive siliceous (SiO<sub>2</sub> containing) minerals and alkali-carbonate reaction (ACR) involves certain types of rocks that contain dolomite [CaMg(CO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>]. Both types of reaction can result in

expansion and cracking of concrete elements when exposed to moisture, leading to a reduction in the service life of concrete structures.

4.2 This guide describes approaches for identifying potentially deleteriously reactive aggregates and selecting appropriate preventive measures to minimize the risk of expansion when such aggregates are used in concrete in exposure environments where AAR may be of concern. Preventive measures include avoiding use of the reactive aggregate, limiting the alkali loading of the concrete, using supplementary cementitious materials, using lithium-based admixtures, or a combination of these strategies.

## 5. Significance and Use

5.1 This guide provides recommendations for identifying the potential for deleterious AAR and selecting appropriate preventive measures, based on a prescriptive-based or performance approach, to minimize the risk of deleterious reaction. In regions where occurrences of AAR are rare or the aggregate sources in use have a satisfactory field performance record verified by following the guidance in this standard, it is reasonable to continue to rely on the previous field history without subjecting the aggregates to laboratory tests for AAR. In regions where AAR problems have occurred or the reactivity of aggregates is known to vary from source to source, it may be necessary to follow a testing program to determine potential reactivity and evaluate preventive measures. In this guide, the level of prevention required is a function of the reactivity of the aggregate, the nature of the exposure conditions (especially availability of moisture), the criticality of the structure, and the availability of alkali in the concrete.

5.2 *Risk Evaluation*—To use this guide effectively, it is necessary to define the level of risk that is acceptable, as this will determine the type and complexity of testing (**Note 1**). The risk of deleterious expansion occurring as a result of a failure to detect deleteriously reactive aggregates can be reduced by routine testing using petrography, or laboratory expansion tests, or both.

**NOTE 1**—The level of risk of alkali-silica reaction will depend upon the nature of the project (criticality of the structure and anticipated exposure). The determination of the level of risk is the responsibility of the individual in charge of the design, commonly a representative of the owner, and for structures designed in accordance with ACI 318, the level of acceptable risk would be determined by the licensed design professional.

5.3 For conventional structures, preventive measures determined by either performance testing or the prescriptive approach described in this guide can be expected to generally reduce the risk of expansion as a result of ASR to an acceptable level. For certain critical structures, such as those exposed to continuous moisture (for example, hydraulic dams or power plants), in which ASR-related expansion cannot be tolerated, more conservative mitigation measures may be warranted.

5.4 There are no proven measures for effectively preventing damaging expansion with alkali carbonate reactive rocks in concrete and such materials need to be avoided.

5.5 If an aggregate is identified as potentially deleteriously reactive as a result of ASR, and the structure size, class, and

<sup>4</sup> Available from American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), 444 N. Capitol St., NW, Suite 249, Washington, DC 20001, <http://www.transportation.org>.

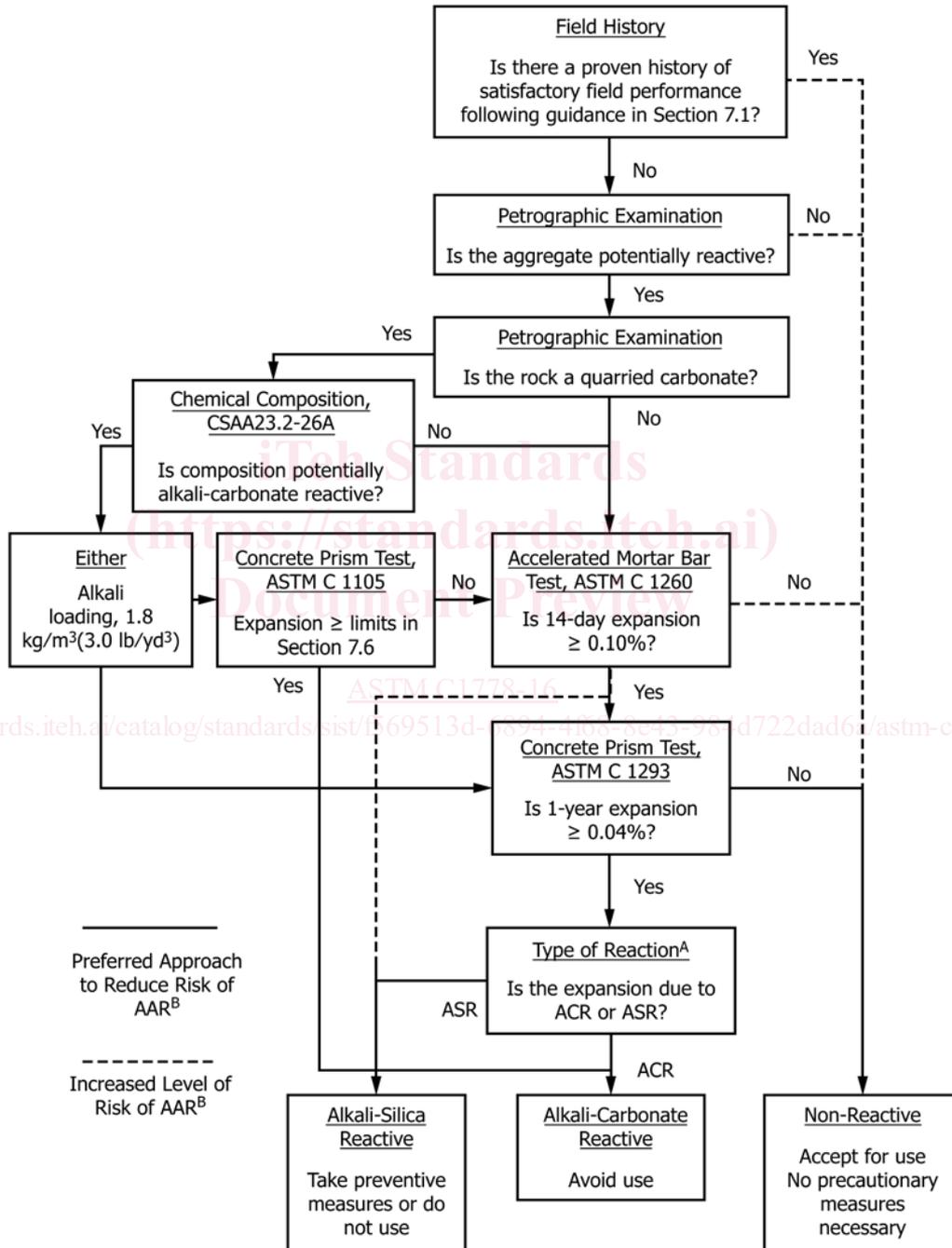
<sup>5</sup> Available from Canadian Standards Association (CSA), 5060 Spectrum Way, Suite 100, Mississauga, ON, L4W 5N4, Canada, <http://www.csa.ca>.

exposure condition requires preventive measures, the aggregate may be accepted for use together with appropriate preventive measures following the prescriptive or performance methods outlined in this guide.

6. Procedure

6.1 The flow chart in Fig. 1 shows the general sequence of

testing and decisions that should be made when evaluating a source of aggregate for potential AAR. Prior documented satisfactory field performance of the aggregate in concrete is generally considered to be sufficient for its acceptance in new concrete. However, reliance on prior field performance without following the guidance and recommended testing in 7.1 may not be sufficient to safeguard against damage as a result of



<sup>A</sup> The type of reaction only needs to be determined after the concrete prism test if the aggregate being tested is a quarried carbonate that has been identified as being potentially alkali-carbonate reactive by chemical composition in accordance with test method CSA A23.2-26A.  
<sup>B</sup> The solid lines show the preferred approach. However, some agencies may want to reduce the amount of testing and accept a higher level of risk and this can be achieved by following the direction of the hashed lines.

FIG. 1 Sequence of Laboratory Tests for Evaluating Aggregate Reactivity

AAR in new construction. This is due to the difficulties in assuring that the materials and mixture proportions used in existing structures built 10 to 20 years ago (the time frame needed to ensure that a deleterious reaction as a result of AAR has not occurred) are similar to those being proposed for use today. In most cases, it will be necessary to perform laboratory tests to determine whether the aggregate is potentially deleteriously reactive for the specific concrete mixture to be used. There are several test methods available for evaluating potential AAR; petrographic examination, determination of chemical constituents, and mortar bar and concrete prism expansion tests are recommended in this guide. If the aggregate is deemed to be non-reactive, it can be accepted for use in concrete with no further consideration of mitigation provided that the other physical properties of the aggregate render it suitable for use (refer to Specification C33/C33M). If the aggregate is a quarried carbonate, additional tests are required to determine whether the potential reaction is of the alkali-carbonate or alkali-silica type.

6.2 Steps for selecting appropriate preventive measures for ASR follow either a performance-based (Section 8) or prescriptive-based (Section 9) approach. In the performance-based approach, a potential preventive measure is tested to determine if the measure provides a reduction in expansion below the limits outlined in this guide. Both approaches are intended to minimize the potential for deleterious expansion in field concrete.

## 7. Determining Aggregate Reactivity

### 7.1 Use of Field Performance History:

7.1.1 The long-term field performance history of an aggregate can be established by surveying existing structures that were constructed using the same aggregate source. As many structures as practical should be included in the survey and these structures should, if possible, represent different types of construction (for example, foundations, walls, bridges, pavements, sidewalks, and structural elements). Practice C823/C823M provides useful guidance when surveying structures to establish field performance history. The following information should be documented for each structure:

7.1.1.1 *Age*—Structures should be at least 15 years old as visible damage from AAR can take more than ten years to develop.

7.1.1.2 Cement content and alkali content of the cement used during construction.

7.1.1.3 Use and content of pozzolans or slag cement or blended cements during construction.

7.1.1.4 *Exposure Condition*—Availability of moisture and use of deicing chemicals.

7.1.1.5 Symptoms of distress observed.

7.1.2 Cores should be taken from a representative number of these structures and a petrographic examination conducted using Practice C856 to establish the following (Note 2):

7.1.2.1 The aggregate used in the structure surveyed is of similar mineralogical composition, as determined by Guide C295, to that of the aggregate to be used.

7.1.2.2 Any evidence of damage as a result of AAR; and

7.1.2.3 The presence, quantity, and composition (if known) of fly ash, slag cement, or other supplementary cementitious materials.

NOTE 2—Even if signs of deterioration are not observed, cores should be taken to establish uniformity of materials.

7.1.3 If the results of the field survey indicate that the aggregate is non-reactive, the aggregate may be used in new construction provided that the new concrete is not produced with a higher concrete alkali content, a lower SCM replacement level, or placed in a more aggressive exposure condition than the structures included in the survey.

7.1.4 There is a certain level of uncertainty associated with accepting aggregates solely on the basis of field performance because of difficulties in establishing unequivocally that the materials and proportions used more than 10 to 15 years ago are sufficiently similar to those to be used in new construction. If field performance indicates that an aggregate source is potentially deleteriously reactive, laboratory testing can be conducted to determine the level of aggregate reactivity and evaluate preventive measures. The use of long-term performance is considered to be a reliable method in determining the suitability of an aggregate; however, it is often very difficult to acquire the necessary information and background for existing structures.

### 7.2 Petrographic Assessment:

7.2.1 Petrographic examination of aggregates should be conducted in accordance with Guide C295. Petrography can reveal useful information about the composition of an aggregate, including the identification and approximate amount of potentially reactive minerals. Petrography can be used to classify an aggregate as potentially reactive, but expansion testing is required to determine the extent of the reactivity and appropriate mitigation measures. Aggregates may be accepted as non-reactive solely on the basis of petrography, but there is a certain level of uncertainty associated with such a decision. For example, some reactive phases may not be detected by optical microscopy. If a petrographer is examining aggregates from well-known and tested sources, it is reasonable to use petrography to classify the aggregate reactivity on a routine basis.

7.2.2 Petrographers should look for alkali-reactive silica components such as opal, chert, chalcedony, cristobalite, tridymite, strained and micro-crystalline quartz, and volcanic glass. Petrographers should also ascertain the presence of mineralogical and textural features characteristic of alkali-carbonate reactive aggregates. Deleteriously reactive alkali-carbonate aggregates often exhibit a characteristic microscopic texture consisting of dolomite rhombs within a fine-grained matrix of calcite, quartz, and clay (2). However, there have been reports of deleterious ACR with aggregates that do not exhibit this “classic” texture (3).<sup>6</sup>

7.3 *Determination of Potential Alkali-Carbonate Reactive Rocks by Chemical Composition, CSA A23.2-26A*—If the aggregate being assessed is a quarried carbonate rock, the

<sup>6</sup> The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.

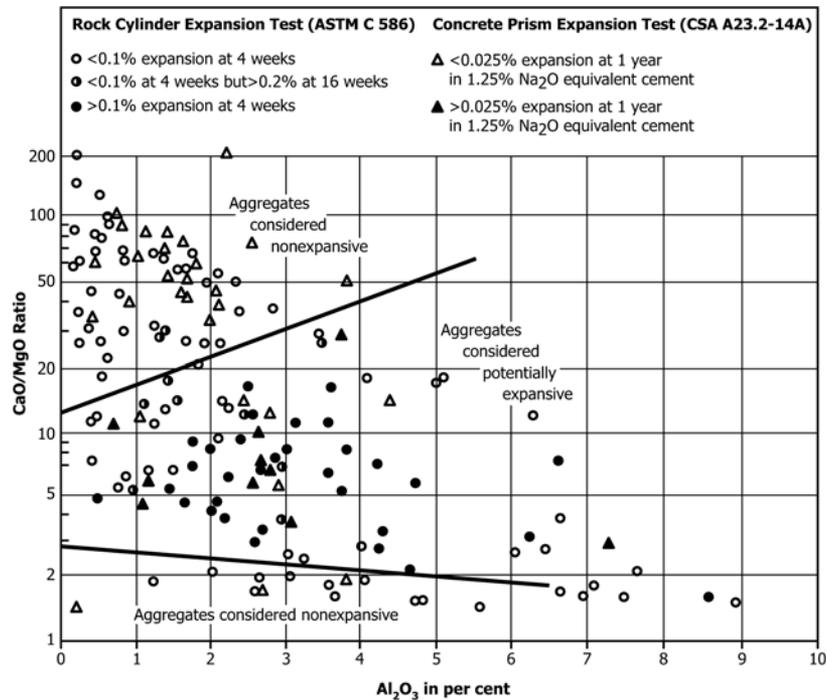


FIG. 2 Plot of CaO/MgO Ratio Versus the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> Content of Quarried Carbonite Rocks (1)

potential for ACR may be assessed on the basis of its chemical composition (1). This test involves the determination of lime (CaO), magnesia (MgO), and alumina (Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) contents of the rock and determining where the composition of the rock falls on a plot of CaO/MgO ratio versus the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> content, as shown in Fig. 2.

7.3.1 If the composition does not fall in the range of “aggregates considered to be potentially expansive” in Fig. 2, the aggregate is considered to be not potentially alkali-carbonate reactive and should be tested using the options for evaluation of potential alkali-silica reactivity outlined in this guide.

7.3.2 If the composition falls in the range of “aggregates considered to be potentially expansive” in Fig. 2, the aggregate is considered to be potentially alkali-carbonate reactive. Such aggregates may be tested using either of the following concrete prism tests: Test Method C1293 or C1105 using a low-alkali content (see 7.5 and 7.6).

7.4 Accelerated Mortar Bar Test, Test Method C1260—This test method is suitable for assessing potentially alkali-silica reactive aggregates (Note 3).

NOTE 3—Test Method C1260 (accelerated mortar bar test) is not suitable for detecting ACR as aggregates that are alkali-carbonate reactive may not expand when crushed to the gradations used in Test Method C1260.

7.4.1 If mortar bars in this test expand by less than 0.10 % after 14 days immersion, the aggregate is considered to be innocuous in most cases. If the mortar bars expand by 0.10 % or greater after 14 days immersion it is considered to be potentially deleteriously reactive (Note 4). If the mortar bars expand by 0.10 % or greater after 14 days immersion it is recommended to confirm reactivity using Test Method C1293 (concrete prism test) (Note 5).

NOTE 4—Test Method C1260—Coarse aggregate for Test Method C1260 are crushed to sand size (<5 mm [0.2 in.]) and then washed and graded to meet the grading requirements of the test method. Sands are washed and graded to meet the same grading requirements. The test is intended to evaluate coarse and fine aggregates separately and should not be used to evaluate job combinations of coarse and fine aggregates.

NOTE 5—In regions where Test Method C1260 is known to produce false-positive results, that is, expansion is by 0.10 % or greater yet the aggregate has a record of good field performance, it may be desired to rely on Test Method C1293. In 8.3 and Fig. 3 this would be Zone 1 where relying solely on Test Method C1567 to evaluate preventive measures would result in overly conservative estimates of the amount of SCM to control ASR.

7.5 Concrete Prism Test, Test Method C1293—This concrete prism test is suitable for evaluating potentially alkali-silica reactive aggregates and alkali-carbonate reactive aggregates. It is considered by many researchers to be the most reliable laboratory test for predicting field performance of aggregates (4). If the potentially reactive aggregate being tested is a coarse aggregate, use a non-reactive fine aggregate and vice versa. The coarse-fine aggregate combination should be used to make concrete prisms with a specified high-alkali loading. The test is intended to evaluate coarse and fine aggregates separately and should not be used to evaluate job combinations of coarse and fine aggregates.

7.5.1 If concrete prisms in this test expand by less than 0.04 % after one year, the aggregate is considered non-reactive and may be used in concrete with no further testing for AAR. If the prisms expand by 0.04 % or greater at one year, the aggregate is considered to be reactive and preventive measures, as outlined in Section 8 or 9, are required if the aggregate is to be used in concrete construction for structures and exposure conditions requiring preventive measures.

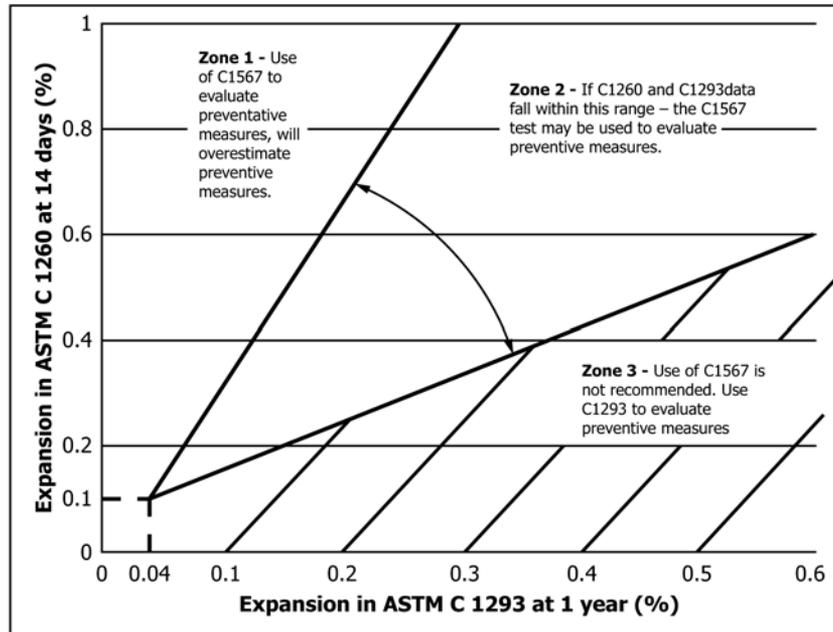


FIG. 3 Comparison of Test Method C1260, Accelerated Mortar Bar, and Test Method C1293, Concrete Prism Test, Data for Purpose of Determining Whether Test Method C1567 is Suitable for Evaluating Preventative Measures with a Specific Aggregate

7.5.2 If the aggregate tested is a quarried carbonate rock with a chemical composition that falls within the region in (Fig. 2), labeled as “aggregates considered to be potentially reactive,” and exhibited concrete prism expansion of 0.04 % or greater at one year, and was not tested using Test Method C1105 (see 7.6), the concrete prisms should be examined to determine whether ACR contributed to the expansion or additional testing may be warranted (Note 6). If damaging ACR is detected, either in isolation or in combination with ASR, the aggregate should not be used in concrete without selective quarrying or aggregate processing to limit the alkali-reactive carbonate components to acceptable levels.

NOTE 6—The determination of the extent to which the ACR contributed to the expansion of the concrete should be conducted by an expert having experience with ACR. Methods may include one or more of the following: petrographic examination of the concrete (Practice C856), accelerated microbar testing of the aggregate (5), or rock cylinder expansion tests (Test Method C586) conducted on samples of rock from the quarry.

7.5.3 If an aggregate is reactive according to Test Method C1293, and is to be used in concrete construction, appropriate preventative measures need to be taken following the procedures outlined in 8 or 9.

7.6 Concrete Prism Test for Alkali-Carbonate Reaction, Test Method C1105—For quarried carbonate rocks with compositions falling within the region of “aggregates considered to be potentially reactive” in Fig. 2, this concrete prism test for alkali-carbonate reaction may also be used, but the alkali loading of the concrete should be kept below 1.8 kg/m<sup>3</sup> [3.0 lb/yd<sup>3</sup>] Na<sub>2</sub>O<sub>eq</sub> to minimize the risk of deleterious expansion as a result of ASR.

7.6.1 If the expansion results from Test Method C1105 are 0.025 % or greater at six months or are 0.030 % or greater at twelve months, the aggregate is considered to be alkali-carbonate reactive and its use in concrete is to be avoided (Note

7). If the expansion results do not exceed these values, the aggregate is considered to be not alkali-carbonate reactive but should be tested for alkali-silica reactivity as outlined in this guide.

NOTE 7—It is recommended that the test be conducted for a period of twelve months, but expansion values at six months can be used if needed.

7.7 Interpretation of Results from Laboratory Tests—Use Fig. 1 to interpret the results from laboratory and field testing and to make decisions regarding the risk of alkali-silica or alkali-carbonate reaction occurring in concrete. 78-16

7.7.1 Fig. 1 shows dotted lines from the boxes marked “Field History,” “Petrographic Examination,” and “Accelerated Mortar Bar Test” to the box marked “Non-Reactive” as there is an element of uncertainty associated with accepting aggregates solely on the basis of these tests. With some aggregates, it may not be possible to identify reactive constituents by petrographic examination.

7.7.2 Test Method C1260 is generally recognized as a relatively severe test that identifies as potentially deleteriously reactive many aggregate sources that have a history of satisfactory field performance and that Test Method C1293 identifies as non-reactive. For this reason, results from Test Method C1260 should not be used to reject an aggregate. If an aggregate is potentially reactive based on the results of Test Method C1260 (expansion ≥ 0.10 % after 14 days immersion), its reactivity should be confirmed by testing using Test Method C1293 or the potentially reactive aggregate should be used with appropriate mitigation measures (Section 8 or 9). If the results of Test Methods C1260 and C1293 are in disagreement, the results of Test Method C1293 should be considered the more reliable.

Although there were exceptions, in the past, it was often assumed that aggregates that passed Test Method C1260