



Designation: ~~C403/C403M—08~~ C403/C403M – 16

Standard Test Method for Time of Setting of Concrete Mixtures by Penetration Resistance¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C403/C403M; 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 (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the U.S. Department of Defense.

1. Scope*

1.1 This test method covers the determination of the time of setting of concrete, with slump greater than zero, by means of penetration resistance measurements on mortar sieved from the concrete mixture.

1.2 This test method is suitable for use only when tests of the mortar fraction will provide the information required.

1.3 This test method may also be applied to prepared mortars and grouts.

1.4 This test method is applicable under controlled laboratory conditions, as well as under field conditions.

1.5 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 non-conformance with the standard.

1.6 *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

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

[C143/C143M Test Method for Slump of Hydraulic-Cement Concrete](#)

[C172 Practice for Sampling Freshly Mixed Concrete](#)

[C173/C173M Test Method for Air Content of Freshly Mixed Concrete by the Volumetric Method](#)

[C192/C192M Practice for Making and Curing Concrete Test Specimens in the Laboratory](#)

[C231 Test Method for Air Content of Freshly Mixed Concrete by the Pressure Method](#)

[C670 Practice for Preparing Precision and Bias Statements for Test Methods for Construction Materials](#)

[C802 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Test Program to Determine the Precision of Test Methods for Construction Materials](#)

[D1558 Test Method for Moisture Content Penetration Resistance Relationships of Fine-Grained Soils](#)

[E11 Specification for Woven Wire Test Sieve Cloth and Test Sieves](#)

[E2251 Specification for Liquid-in-Glass ASTM Thermometers with Low-Hazard Precision Liquids](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Definitions are given in Terminology [C125](#).

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 A mortar sample is obtained by sieving a representative sample of fresh concrete. The mortar is placed in a container and stored at a specified ambient temperature. At regular time intervals, the resistance of the mortar to penetration by standard needles is measured. From a plot of penetration resistance versus elapsed time, the times of initial and final setting are determined.

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee [C09](#) on Concrete and Concrete Aggregates and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee [C09.23](#) on Chemical Admixtures.

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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.

*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Since the setting of concrete is a gradual process, any definition of time of setting must necessarily be arbitrary. In this test method, the times required for the mortar to reach specified values of resistance to penetration are used to define times of setting.

5.2 This test method can be used to determine the effects of variables, such as water content; brand, type and amount of cementitious material; or admixtures, upon the time of setting of concrete. This test method may also be used to determine compliance with specified time-of-setting requirements.

5.3 This test method may also be applied to prepared mortars and grouts. However, when the setting time of concrete is desired, the test shall be performed on mortar sieved from the concrete mixture and not on a prepared mortar intended to simulate the mortar fraction of the concrete; it has been shown that the initial and final setting times may be increased when using the prepared mortar.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Containers for Mortar Specimens*—The containers shall be rigid, watertight, nonabsorptive, free of oil or grease, and either cylindrical or rectangular in cross section. Mortar surface area shall be provided for ten undisturbed readings of penetration resistance in accordance with clear distance requirements specified in Procedure. The lateral dimension shall be at least 6 in. [150 mm] and the height at least 6 in. [150 mm].

6.2 *Penetration Needles*—Needles shall be provided which can be attached to the loading apparatus and which have the following bearing areas: 1, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{10}$, $\frac{1}{20}$, and $\frac{1}{40}$ in.² [645, 323, 161, 65, 32, and 16 mm²]. Each needle shank shall be scribed circumferentially at a distance 1 in. [25 mm] from the bearing area. The length of the $\frac{1}{40}$ in.² [16-mm²] needle shall be not more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. [90 mm].

6.3 *Loading Apparatus*—A device shall be provided to measure the force required to cause penetration of the needles. The device shall be capable of measuring the penetration force with an accuracy of ± 2 lbf [10 N] and shall have a capacity of at least 130 lbf [600 N].

NOTE 1—Suitable loading apparatus can be of the spring-reaction type as described in Test Method D1558, or of other types with a calibrated force measuring device, such as an electronic load cell or a hydraulic pressure gage.

6.4 *Tamping Rod*—The tamping rod shall be a round, straight, steel rod $\frac{5}{8}$ in. [16 mm] in diameter and approximately 24 in. [600 mm] in length, having the tamping end or both ends rounded to a hemispherical tip, the diameter of which is $\frac{5}{8}$ in. [16 mm].

6.5 *Pipet*—A pipet or other suitable instrument shall be used for drawing off bleed water from the surface of the test specimen.

6.6 *Thermometer*—The thermometer shall be capable of measuring the temperature of the fresh mortar to ± 1 °F [± 0.5 °C]. ASTM liquid-in-glass thermometers having a temperature range from 0 to 120 °F [−20 to 50 °C], and conforming to the requirements of Thermometer 97F (or 97C) as prescribed in Specification E2251 are satisfactory. Other thermometers of the required accuracy, including the metal immersion type, are acceptable.

7. Sampling, Test Specimens, and Test Units

7.1 For tests under field conditions, prepare three specimens from each sample of concrete.

7.2 For tests under laboratory conditions, the requirements depend upon the purpose of the tests.

7.2.1 For testing to prove compliance of a material with performance requirements, make at least three separate concrete batches for each variable under investigation. Perform one time of setting test on each batch. Make an equal number of batches for each variable on any one day. When it is impossible to perform at least one test for each variable on any one day, mix the entire series of batches in as few days as possible, and repeat one of the mixtures each day as a standard for comparison.

7.2.2 For other tests, prepare three test specimens from one batch of concrete for each test variable.

7.3 Record the time at which initial contact was made between cement and mixing water.

7.4 For tests under field conditions, obtain a representative sample of the fresh concrete in accordance with Practice C172. For tests under laboratory conditions, make the concrete in accordance with Practice C192/C192M. Determine and record the slump (Test Method C143/C143M) and air content (Test Method C173/C173M or C231) of the fresh concrete.

7.5 From the concrete not used in the slump and air content tests, select a representative portion of sufficient volume to provide enough mortar to fill the test container, or containers, to a depth of at least $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. [140 mm].

7.6 Using the procedure in Practice C172, obtain a mortar sample by wet-sieving the selected portion of concrete through a 4.75-mm sieve³ and onto a nonabsorptive surface.

7.7 Thoroughly remix the mortar by hand methods on the nonabsorptive surface. Measure and record the temperature of the mortar. Place the mortar in the container, or containers, using a single layer. Consolidate the mortar to eliminate air pockets in the specimen and level the top surface. This may be accomplished by rocking the container back and forth on a solid surface, by

³ Detailed requirements for this sieve are given in Specification E11.

tapping the sides of the container with the tamping rod, by rodding the mortar, or by placing the container on a vibrating table (see **Note 2**). If rodding is used, rod the mortar with the hemispherical end of the tamping rod. Rod the mortar once for each 1 in.² [645 mm²] of top surface area of the specimen and distribute the strokes uniformly over the cross section of the specimen. After completion of the rodding, tap the sides of the containers lightly with the tamping rod to close voids left by the tamping rod and to further level the surface of the specimen. Upon completion of specimen preparation, the mortar surface shall be at least ½ in. [10 mm] below the top edge of the container to provide space for the collection and removal of bleed water and to avoid contact between the mortar surface and the protective covering specified in Section 8.

NOTE 2—Sieved mortar is generally of fluid consistency and air pockets are readily removed by the listed consolidation methods. The user should exercise judgment in the selection of the consolidation method. Rocking the container or tapping of the sides should be sufficient for fluid mortars. Rodding or using a vibrating table may be desirable for stiffer mortars. When using a vibrating table, use low-amplitude vibration so that portions of the sample are not ejected from the container.

8. Conditioning

8.1 For tests under laboratory conditions, the storage temperature for specimens shall be within the range 68 to 77 °F [20 to 25 °C], or as specified by the user.

8.2 For tests under field conditions, store the specimens under ambient conditions, or as specified by the user. Shield the specimens from direct sunlight.

8.3 Measure and record the ambient air temperature at the start and finish of the test. To prevent excessive evaporation of moisture, keep the specimens covered with a suitable material such as damp burlap or a tight-fitting, water-impermeable cover for the duration of the test, except when bleed water is being removed or penetration tests are being made.

9. Procedure

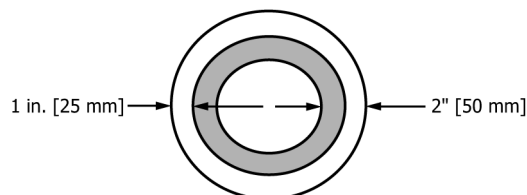
9.1 Just prior to making a penetration test, remove bleed water from the surface of the mortar specimens by means of a pipet or suitable instrument. To facilitate collection of bleed water, tilt the specimen carefully to an angle of about 10° from the horizontal by placing a block under one side 2 min prior to removal of the water.

9.2 Insert a needle of appropriate size, depending upon the degree of setting of the mortar, in the penetration resistance apparatus and bring the bearing surface of the needle into contact with the mortar surface. Gradually and uniformly apply a vertical force downward on the apparatus until the needle penetrates the mortar to a depth of $1 \pm \frac{1}{16}$ in. [25 ± 2 mm], as indicated by the scribe mark (**Note 4**). The time required to penetrate to the 1-in. [25-mm] depth shall be 10 ± 2 s. Record the force required to produce the 1-in. [25-mm] penetration and the time of application, measured as elapsed time after initial contact of cement and water. Calculate the penetration resistance by dividing the recorded force by the bearing area of the needle, and record the penetration resistance. In subsequent penetration tests take care to avoid areas where the mortar has been disturbed by previous tests. The clear distance between needle impressions shall be at least two diameters of the needle being used, but not less than ½ in. [15 mm]. The clear distance between any needle impression and the side of the container shall be at least 1 in. [25 mm], but not more than 2 in. [50 mm], as depicted in **Fig. 1**.

NOTE 3—For a cylindrical container with the smallest allowable outer diameter of 6 in., the operator can reasonably expect to achieve approximately eight penetrations before impinging upon previous penetrations. This is based on using needles of the following surface areas: 1 @ ½ [13], 2 @ ¼ [6], 2 @ ⅓ [2.5], 2 @ ⅒ [1.3], and 1 @ ⅛ [0.6] in.² [mm²].

NOTE 4—To facilitate determination of when the required penetration has been attained, a sliding marker may be attached to the needle shaft. For example, a paper clip or masking tape may be placed on the shaft so that it coincides with the scribe mark. The marker should not interfere with the penetration of the needle into the mortar. The position of the marker should be checked prior to making a penetration.

9.3 For conventional concrete mixtures at laboratory temperatures of 68 to 77 °F [20 to 25 °C], make the initial test after an elapsed time of 3 to 4 h after initial contact between cement and water. Subsequent tests should be made at ½- to 1-h intervals. For concrete mixtures containing accelerators, or at temperatures higher than laboratory, it is advisable to make the initial test after an elapsed time of 1 to 2 h and subsequent tests at ½-h intervals. For concrete mixtures containing retarders, or at temperatures lower than laboratory, the initial test may be deferred until an elapsed time of 4 to 6 h. In all cases, time intervals between subsequent tests may be adjusted as necessary, depending upon the rate of setting, to obtain the required number of penetrations.



NOTE 1—Dark-colored areas define where needle penetrations are permitted.

FIG. 1 Top View of Mortar Test Specimen

9.4 Make at least six penetrations for each time-of-setting test, with time intervals of such duration as to provide a satisfactory curve of penetration resistance versus elapsed time (Note 5). Continue testing until one at least penetration resistance reading equals or exceeds 4000 psi [27.6 MPa].

NOTE 5—A satisfactory curve is one which represents the overall development of penetration resistance and includes points before and after the times of initial and final setting to improve the accuracy of the required interpolation. For normal setting mixtures, test points are usually at equally spaced time intervals. Premature penetration testing will result in too many data points earlier than the initial setting time. This may decrease the accuracy of the estimated setting time by biasing the best fit line when regression analysis is used to analyze the penetration resistance data.

9.5 *Plotting Test Results*—One of the following alternative procedures may be used to plot the test results and obtain times of setting (Note 6). Appendix X1 illustrates the application of these procedures.

NOTE 6—The plot of penetration resistance versus elapsed time provides information on the rate of setting. The plot may be used to select the time for subsequent penetration tests and it can assist in identifying spurious test results. Therefore, it is recommended that the data be plotted as they are being accumulated.

9.5.1 Use the following plotting procedure to determine the times of setting by hand-fitting a smooth curve through the data. Prepare a graph of penetration resistance, as the ordinate, versus elapsed time, as the abscissa, using a scale such that 500 psi [3.5 MPa] and 1 h are each represented by a distance of at least ½ in. [15 mm]. Plot the values of penetration resistance as a function of elapsed time.

9.5.2 Use the following plotting procedure to determine the times of setting by linear regression analysis of the logarithms of the data by using a suitable calculator. Using log-log graph paper, prepare a graph of penetration resistance, as the ordinate, versus elapsed time in minutes, as the abscissa. The limits of penetration resistance on the ordinate should extend from 10 psi [0.1 MPa] to 10 000 psi [100 MPa], and the limits of elapsed time on the abscissa should extend from 10 to 1000 min. If slow setting mixtures are used, the time limits may have to be 100 to 10 000 min. Plot the values of penetration resistance as a function of elapsed time (Note 5).

9.5.3 Use the following procedure if a computer is used to plot test results and obtain the times of setting by regression analysis of the data. As the test results are obtained, enter the time and penetration resistance into the computer and plot the penetration resistance as the ordinate and the elapsed time as the abscissa. For software that permits only linear regression analysis, convert the data by taking their logarithms. The converted data will be fitted by a straight line⁴ (see Eq 1):

$$\text{Log}(PR) = a + b \text{Log}(t) \quad (1)$$

where:

PR = penetration resistance
 t = elapsed time
 a and b = regression constants

The data do not have to be converted if the software permits direct fitting of a power function:

$$PR = ct^d \quad (2)$$

where:

c and d = regression constants

9.5.4 The procedures in 9.5.2 and 9.5.3 assume that the data obey (Eq 1) or (Eq 2). Verify that the data obey one of these relationships. If the correlation coefficient for the regression analysis, after removal of outliers (see Note 7), is less than 0.98, use the procedure in 9.5.1.

10. Calculation

10.1 For each variable under investigation, separately plot the results of three or more time-of-setting tests. For each plot prepared according to 9.5.1, hand fit a smooth curve to the data points. For each plot prepared according to 9.5.2 or 9.5.3, use the method of least squares to obtain the constants of the best-fit relationship given by (Eq 1) or (Eq 2), whichever is applicable. Disregard data points that are obvious outliers from the trend defined by the rest of the points (Note 7).

NOTE 7—Outliers may occur because of factors such as: interferences due to the larger particles in the mortar; presence of large voids within the penetration zone; interferences from the impressions created by adjacent penetrations; failure to maintain the instrument perpendicular to the test surface during penetration; errors in reading the load; variations in the penetration depths; or variations in rate of loading. Judgement of the operator is required to identify those points that should not be included in the data analysis.

10.2 For each plot, determine the times of initial and final setting as the times when the penetration resistance equals 500 psi [3.5 MPa] and 4000 psi [27.6 MPa], respectively. For plots made according to 9.5.1, determine times of setting by visual inspection of the drawn curves. For plots made according to 9.5.2 or 9.5.3, determine the times of setting by interpolation using the best-fit regression equation. Record the times of setting in hours and minutes to the nearest 5 min.

⁴ Popovics, S., 1971, "Physical Aspects of the Setting of Portland Cement Concrete," *Journal of Materials*, JMLSA, Vol. 6, No. 1, March, pp. 150–162.