



Designation: D4318 – 17

Standard Test Methods for Liquid Limit, Plastic Limit, and Plasticity Index of Soils¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D4318; 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 These test methods cover the determination of the liquid limit, plastic limit, and the plasticity index of soils as defined in Section 3 on Terminology.

1.2 Two procedures for preparing test specimens are provided as follows: *Specimen Preparation Procedure 1 (Wet Preparation)*, as described in 11.1 and *Specimen Preparation Procedure 2 (Dry Preparation)*, as described in 11.2. The specimen preparation procedure to be used shall be specified by the requesting authority. If no specimen preparation procedure is specified, use the wet preparation procedure. (See Section 6, Interferences.)

1.3 Two methods for determining the liquid limit are provided as follows: *Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)*, as described in Sections 12 and 13, and *Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method)*, as described in Sections 14 and 15. The method to be used shall be specified by the requesting authority. If no method is specified, use Method A. (See Section 6, Interferences.)

1.4 The plastic limit test, *Method for Plastic Limit*, is performed on material prepared for the liquid limit test. When determining the plastic limit, two procedures for rolling portions of the test specimen are provided as follows: *Plastic Limit Rolling Procedure 1 (Hand Rolling)*, and *Plastic Limit Rolling Procedure 2 (Using the Rolling Device)*.

1.5 The liquid limit and plastic limit of soils (along with the shrinkage limit) are often collectively referred to as the Atterberg limits. These limits distinguished the boundaries of the several consistency states of plastic soils.

1.6 The plasticity index, *Method for Plasticity Index*, is calculated using results from liquid limit and plastic limit testing.

1.7 The methods described herein are performed only on that portion of a soil that passes the 425- μm (No. 40) sieve.

¹ These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D18 on Soil and Rock and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.03 on Texture, Plasticity and Density Characteristics of Soils.

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Therefore, the relative contribution of this portion of the soil to the properties of the sample as a whole must be considered when using these methods to evaluate the properties of a soil.

1.8 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are mathematical conversions to inch-pound units, which are provided for information only and are not considered standard. Reporting of test results in units other than SI shall not be regarded as nonconformance with this standard.

1.8.1 The converted inch-pound units use the gravitational system of units. In this system, the pound (lbf) represents a unit of force (weight), while the unit for mass is slugs. The converted slug unit is not given, unless dynamic ($F = ma$) calculations are involved.

1.8.2 It is common practice in the engineering/construction profession to concurrently use pounds to represent both a unit of mass (lbm) and of force (lbf). This implicitly combines two separate systems of units; that is, the absolute system and the gravitational system. It is scientifically undesirable to combine the use of two separate sets of inch-pound units within a single standard. As stated, this standard includes the gravitational system of inch-pound units and does not use/present the slug unit for mass. However, the use of balances or scales recording pounds of mass (lbm) or recording density in lbm/ft³ shall not be regarded as nonconformance with this standard.

1.8.3 The “alternative” sieve size designations listed in Specification E11 for the 425- μm and 2.00-mm sieves are given in parentheses following the “standard” designations, that is, 425- μm (No. 40) and 2.00-mm (No. 10).

1.8.4 The standard units for the resilience tester covered in Annex A1 are inch-pound, not SI. The SI values given in Fig. A1.1 are for information only.

1.9 All observed and calculated values shall conform to the guidelines for significant digits and rounding established in Practice D6026.

1.9.1 For purposes of comparing a measured or calculated value(s) with specified limits, the measured or calculated value(s) shall be rounded to the nearest decimal or significant digits in the specified limits.

1.9.2 The procedures used to specify how data are collected/recorded or calculated, in this standard are regarded as the industry standard. In addition, they are representative of the

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

significant digits that generally should be retained. The procedures do not consider material variation, purpose for obtaining the data, special purpose studies, or any considerations for the user's objectives; and it is common practice to increase or reduce significant digits of reported data to be commensurate with these considerations. It is beyond the scope of this standard to consider significant digits used in analysis methods for engineering design.

1.10 *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.*

1.11 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

- [C702 Practice for Reducing Samples of Aggregate to Testing Size](#)
- [D75 Practice for Sampling Aggregates](#)
- [D420 Guide to Site Characterization for Engineering Design and Construction Purposes \(Withdrawn 2011\)³](#)
- [D653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids](#)
- [D1241 Specification for Materials for Soil-Aggregate Subbase, Base, and Surface Courses](#)
- [D2216 Test Methods for Laboratory Determination of Water \(Moisture\) Content of Soil and Rock by Mass](#)
- [D2487 Practice for Classification of Soils for Engineering Purposes \(Unified Soil Classification System\)](#)
- [D3282 Practice for Classification of Soils and Soil-Aggregate Mixtures for Highway Construction Purposes](#)
- [D3740 Practice for Minimum Requirements for Agencies Engaged in Testing and/or Inspection of Soil and Rock as Used in Engineering Design and Construction](#)
- [D4542 Test Methods for Pore Water Extraction and Determination of the Soluble Salt Content of Soils by Refractometer](#)
- [D4753 Guide for Evaluating, Selecting, and Specifying Balances and Standard Masses for Use in Soil, Rock, and Construction Materials Testing](#)
- [D6026 Practice for Using Significant Digits in Geotechnical Data](#)
- [E11 Specification for Woven Wire Test Sieve Cloth and Test Sieves](#)
- [E177 Practice for Use of the Terms Precision and Bias in ASTM Test Methods](#)

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 The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For common definitions of terms in this standard, refer to Terminology [D653](#). The definitions below appear in [D653](#) and are shown here for convenience. The italic capital letter "D" indicates that the applicable units used to express the term are dimensionless.

3.1.2 *Atterberg Limits—in cohesive soils*, originally, six "limits of consistency" of fine-grained soils were defined by Albert Atterberg: the upper limit of viscous flow, the liquid limit, the sticky limit, the cohesion limit, the plastic limit, and the shrinkage limit. In current engineering usage, the term usually refers only to the liquid limit, plastic limit, and in some references, the shrinkage limit.

3.1.3 *liquid limit, LL, w_L [D]*—*in cohesive soils*, the water content, in percent, of a soil at the arbitrarily defined boundary between the semi-liquid and plastic states.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—The undrained shear strength of soil at the liquid limit is considered to be approximately 2 kPa (0.28 psi).

3.1.4 *plastic limit, PL, w_p [D]*—*in cohesive soils*, the water content, in percent, of a soil at the boundary between the plastic and semi-solid states.

3.1.5 *plastic soil*—a soil which has a range of water content over which it exhibits plasticity and which will retain its shape on drying.

3.1.6 *plasticity index, PI*—*in cohesive soils*, the range of water content over which a soil behaves plastically. Numerically, it is the difference between the liquid limit and the plastic limit.

3.1.7 *consistency*—the relative ease with which a soil can be deformed.

3.1.8 *relative consistency, I_c , C_r [D]*—*in cohesive soils*, the ratio of: (1) the liquid limit minus the water content at a given condition/state, to (2) the plasticity index.

3.1.9 *liquidity index, I_L [D]*—*in cohesive soils*, the ratio of: (1) the water content of a soil at a given condition/state minus its plastic limit, to (2) its plasticity index.

3.1.10 *activity number, A*—*in cohesive soils*, the ratio of (1) the plasticity index of a soil to (2) the percent by mass of particles having an equivalent diameter smaller than 2 μm .

4. Summary of Test Methods

4.1 The specimen is processed to remove any material retained on a 425- μm (No. 40) sieve.

4.2 The liquid limit is determined by performing trials in which a portion of the specimen is spread in a brass cup, divided in two by a grooving tool, and then allowed to flow together from the shocks caused by repeatedly dropping the cup in a standard mechanical device—following either *Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)*, or *Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method)*.

4.3 The plastic limit is determined by alternately pressing together and rolling into a 3.2-mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ -in.) diameter thread a small portion of plastic soil until its water content is reduced to a point at which the thread crumbles and can no longer be pressed together and re-rolled. The water content of the soil at this point is reported as the plastic limit.

4.4 The plasticity index is calculated as the difference between the liquid limit and the plastic limit.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 These test methods are used as an integral part of several engineering classification systems to characterize the fine-grained fractions of soils (see Practices [D2487](#) and [D3282](#)) and to specify the fine-grained fraction of construction materials (see Specification [D1241](#)). The liquid limit, plastic limit, and plasticity index of soils are also used extensively, either individually or together, with other soil properties to correlate with engineering behavior such as compressibility, hydraulic conductivity (permeability), compactibility, shrink-swell, and shear strength. (See Section [6](#), Interferences.)

5.2 The liquid and plastic limits of a soil and its water content can be used to express its relative consistency or liquidity index. In addition, the plasticity index and the percentage finer than 2- μ m particle size can be used to determine its activity number.

5.3 These methods are sometimes used to evaluate the weathering characteristics of clay-shale materials. When subjected to repeated wetting and drying cycles, the liquid limits of these materials tend to increase. The amount of increase is considered to be a measure of a shale's susceptibility to weathering.

5.4 The liquid limit of a soil containing substantial amounts of organic matter decreases dramatically when the soil is oven-dried before testing. Comparison of the liquid limit of a sample before and after oven-drying can therefore be used as a qualitative measure of organic matter content of a soil (see Practice [D2487](#)).

NOTE 1—The quality of the result produced by this standard is dependent on the competence of the personnel performing it and the suitability of the equipment and facilities used. Agencies that meet the criteria of Practice [D3740](#), generally, are considered capable of competent and objective testing/sampling/inspection/etc. Users of this standard are cautioned that compliance with Practice [D3740](#) does not in itself assure reliable results. Reliable results depend on many factors; Practice [D3740](#) provides a means of evaluating some of those factors.

6. Interferences

6.1 The liquid and plastic limits of many soils that have been allowed to dry before testing may be considerably different from values obtained on non-dried samples. If the liquid and plastic limits of soils are used to correlate or estimate the engineering behavior of soils in their natural moist state, samples should not be permitted to dry before testing unless data on dried samples are specifically desired. For this reason *Specimen Preparation Procedure 1 (Wet Preparation)* is used unless *Specimen Preparation Procedure 2 (Dry Preparation)* is specified by the requesting authority.

6.2 The *Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)* is generally more precise than the one-point method. It is recommended that the *Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)* be used in cases where test results may be subject to dispute, or where greater precision is required.

6.3 Because the *Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method)* requires the operator to judge when the test specimen is approximately at its liquid limit, it is particularly not recommended for use by inexperienced operators.

6.4 The correlation on which the calculations of the *Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method)* are based may not be valid for certain soils, such as organic soils or soils from a marine environment. It is strongly recommended that the liquid limit of these soils be determined by the *Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)*.

6.5 The composition and concentration of soluble salts in a soil affect the values of the liquid and plastic limits as well as the water content values of soils (see Test Method [D4542](#)). Special consideration should therefore be given to soils from a marine environment or other sources where high soluble salt concentrations may be present. The degree to which the salts present in these soils are diluted or concentrated must be given careful consideration.

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Liquid Limit Device*—A mechanical device consisting of a brass cup suspended from a carriage designed to control its drop onto the surface of a block of resilient material that serves as the base of the device. [Fig. 1](#) shows the essential features and dimensions of the device. The device may be operated by either a hand crank or electric motor.

NOTE 2—The dimensions marked as essential in [Fig. 1](#) are necessary to properly manufacture the liquid limit device. Laboratories are not expected to have the capability to confirm all of the essential dimensions. Laboratories should have the ability to check critical dimensions subject to wear as described in 10.1, Inspection of Wear.

7.1.1 *Base*—A block of resilient material having a resilience rebound of at least 77 % but no more than 90 %. Conduct resilience tests on the finished base with the feet attached. Details for measuring the resilience of the base are given in [Annex A1](#).

7.1.2 *Rubber Feet*, supporting the base, designed to provide dynamic isolation of the base from the work surface.

7.1.3 *Cup*, brass, with a mass, including cup hanger, of 185 to 215 g.

7.1.4 *Cam*—Designed to raise the cup smoothly and continuously to its maximum height, over a distance of at least 180° of cam rotation, without developing an upward or downward velocity of the cup when the cam follower leaves the cam. (The preferred cam motion is a uniformly accelerated lift curve.)

NOTE 3—The cam and follower design in [Fig. 1](#) is for uniformly accelerated (parabolic) motion after contact and assures that the cup has no velocity at drop off. Other cam designs also provide this feature and may be used. However, if the cam-follower lift pattern is not known, zero velocity at drop off can be assured by carefully filing or machining the cam and follower so that the cup height remains constant over the last 20 to 45° of cam rotation.

DIMENSIONS

| LETTER | A ^Δ | B ^Δ | C ^Δ | E ^Δ | F | G | H | J ^Δ | K ^Δ | L ^Δ | M ^Δ |
|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----|----|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| MM | 54 ± 0.5 | 2 ± 0.1 | 27 ± 0.5 | 56 ± 2.0 | 32 | 10 | 16 | 60 ± 1.0 | 50 ± 2.0 | 150 ± 2.0 | 125 ± 2.0 |
| LETTER | N | P | R | T | U ^Δ | V | W | Z | | | |
| MM | 24 | 28 | 24 | 45 | 47 ± 1.0 | 3.8 | 13 | 6.5 | | | |

^Δ ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS

| CAM ANGLE DEGREES | CAM RADIUS |
|-------------------|------------|
| 0 | 0.742 R |
| 30 | 0.753 R |
| 60 | 0.764 R |
| 90 | 0.773 R |
| 120 | 0.784 R |
| 150 | 0.796 R |
| 180 | 0.818 R |
| 210 | 0.854 R |
| 240 | 0.901 R |
| 270 | 0.945 R |
| 300 | 0.974 R |
| 330 | 0.995 R |
| 360 | 1.000 R |

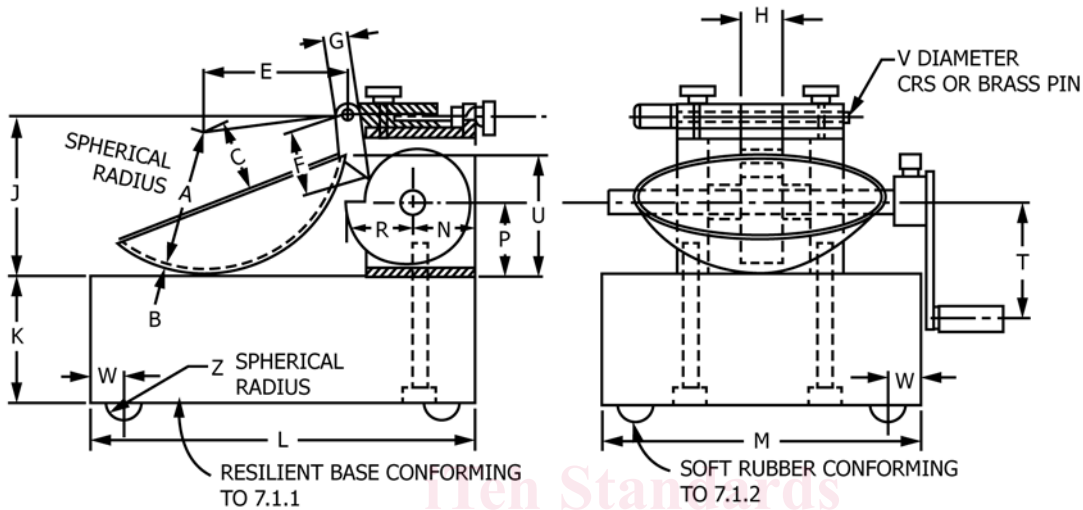


FIG. 1 Hand-Operated Liquid Limit Device

7.1.5 *Carriage*, constructed in a way that allows convenient but secure adjustment of the height-of-drop of the cup to 10 mm (0.394 in.), and designed such that the cup and cup hanger assembly is only attached to the carriage by means of a removable pin. See 10.2 and Fig. 2 for explanation and determination of the height-of-drop of the cup.

7.1.6 *Motor Drive (Optional)*—As an alternative to the hand crank shown in Fig. 1, the device may be equipped with a motor to turn the cam. Such a motor must turn the cam at 2 ± 0.1 revolutions per second and must be isolated from the rest of the device by rubber mounts or in some other way that prevents vibration from the motor being transmitted to the rest of the apparatus. It must be equipped with an ON-OFF switch and a means of conveniently positioning the cam for height-

of-drop adjustments. The results obtained using a motor-driven device must not differ from those obtained using a manually operated device.

7.1.7 *Counter (Optional)*—A mechanism to automatically count the number of drops of the cup during operation of the liquid limit device.

7.2 *Flat Grooving Tool*—A tool made of plastic or noncorroding-metal having the dimensions shown in Fig. 3. The design of the tool may vary as long as the essential dimensions are maintained. The tool may, but need not, incorporate the height gauge (shown as dimension K) for adjusting the height-of-drop of the liquid limit device.

NOTE 4—Prior to the adoption of this test method, a curved grooving

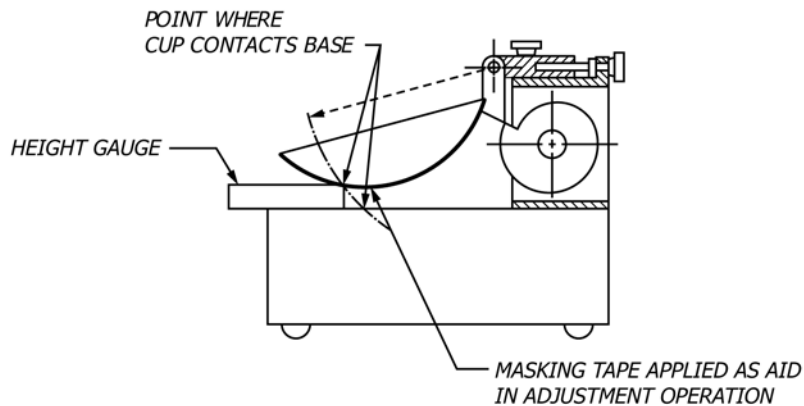


FIG. 2 Adjustment for Height-of-Drop

DIMENSIONS

| LETTER | A ^Δ | B ^Δ | C ^Δ | D ^Δ | E ^Δ | F ^Δ |
|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| MM | 2 ± 0.1 | 11 ± 0.2 | 40 ± 0.5 | 8 ± 0.1 | 50 ± 0.5 | 2 ± 0.1 |
| LETTER | G | H | J | K ^Δ | L ^Δ | N |
| MM | 10 MINIMUM | 13 | 60 | 10 ± 0.05 | 60 DEG ± 1 DEG | 20 |

^Δ ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS

□ BACK AT LEAST 15 MM FROM TIP

NOTE : DIMENSION A SHOULD BE 1.9-2.0 AND DIMENSION D SHOULD BE 8.0-8.1 WHEN NEW TO ALLOW FOR ADEQUATE SERVICE LIFE

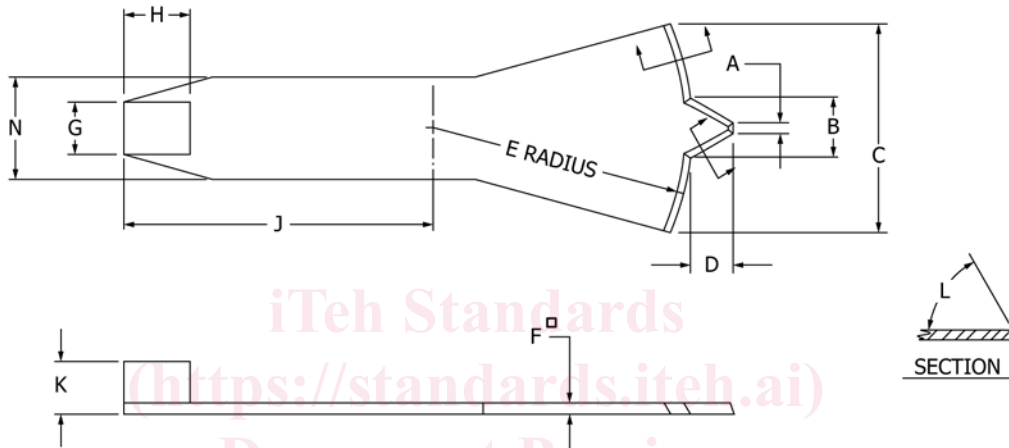


FIG. 3 Grooving Tool (Optional Height Gauge Attached)

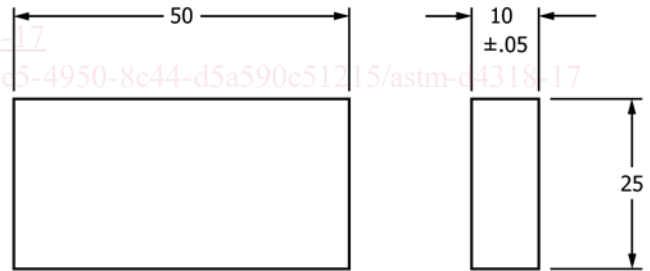
tool was specified as part of the apparatus for performing the liquid limit test. The curved tool is not considered to be as accurate as the flat tool described in 7.2 since it does not control the depth of the soil in the liquid limit cup. However, there are some data which indicate that typically the liquid limit is slightly increased when the flat tool is used instead of the curved tool.

NOTE 5—The dimensions marked as essential in Fig. 3 are necessary to properly manufacture the grooving tool. Laboratories are not expected to have the capability to confirm all of the essential dimensions. Laboratories should have the ability to check critical dimensions subject to wear as described in 10.1.2.

7.3 Height Gauge—A metal gauge block for adjusting the height-of-drop of the cup, having the dimensions shown in Fig. 4. The design of the tool may vary provided the gauge will rest securely on the base without being susceptible to rocking, and the edge which contacts the cup during adjustment is straight, at least 10 mm (3/8 in.) wide, and without bevel or radius.

7.4 Water Content Containers—Small corrosion-resistant containers with snug-fitting lids for water content specimens. Aluminum or stainless steel cans 2.5 cm (1 in.) high by 5 cm (2 in.) in diameter are appropriate.

7.5 Balance, conforming to Guide D4753, Class GP1 (readability of 0.01 g).



DIMENSIONS IN MILLIMETRES

FIG. 4 Height Gauge

7.6 Mixing and Storage Container or Dish—A container to mix the soil specimen (material) and store the prepared material. During mixing and storage, the container shall not contaminate the material in any way, and prevent moisture loss during storage. A porcelain, glass, or plastic dish about 11.4 cm (4½ in.) in diameter and a plastic bag large enough to enclose the dish and be folded over is adequate.

7.7 Plastic Limit:

7.7.1 Ground Glass Plate—A ground glass plate of sufficient size for rolling plastic limit threads.

7.7.2 Plastic Limit-Rolling Device (optional)—A device made of acrylic conforming to the dimensions shown in Fig. 5.^{4,5} The type of unglazed paper attached to the top and bottom plate (see 17.2.2) shall be such that it does not add foreign matter (fibers, paper fragments, etc.) to the soil during the rolling process.

7.8 Spatula—A spatula or pill knife having a blade about 2 cm (3/4 in.) wide, and about 10 to 13 cm (4 to 5 in.) long.

7.9 Sieve(s)—A 200-mm (8-in.) diameter, 425- μ m (No. 40) sieve conforming to the requirements of Specification E11 and having a rim at least 5 cm (2 in.) above the mesh. A 2.00-mm (No. 10) sieve meeting the same requirements may also be needed.

7.10 Wash Bottle—Or similar container for adding controlled amounts of water to soil and washing fines from coarse particles.

7.11 Drying Oven—Meeting the requirements of Test Methods D2216.

7.12 Washing Pan—Round, flat-bottomed, at least 7.6 cm (3 in.) deep, and slightly larger at the bottom than a 20.3-cm (8-in.) diameter sieve.

⁴ The plastic limit-rolling device is covered by a patent (U.S. Patent No. 5,027,660).⁵ Interested parties are invited to submit information regarding the identification of an alternative(s) to this patented item to ASTM Headquarters. Your comments will receive careful consideration at a meeting of the responsible subcommittee, which you may attend.

⁵ Bobrowski, L. J., Jr. and Griekspoor, D. M., "Determination of the Plastic Limit of a Soil by Means of a Rolling Device," *Geotechnical Testing Journal*, GTJODJ, Vol 15, No. 3, September 1992, pp. 284–287.

8. Reagents and Materials

8.1 Purity of Water—Where distilled water is referred to in this test method, either distilled or demineralized water may be used.

8.1.1 In some cases, the cations of salts present in tap water will exchange with the natural cations in the soil and significantly alter the test results if tap water is used in the soaking and washing operations. Unless it is known that such cations are not present in the tap water, use distilled or demineralized water.

NOTE 6—As a general rule, water containing more than 100 mg/L of dissolved solids should not be used for either the soaking or washing operations.

9. Sampling and Specimen

9.1 Samples may be taken from any location that satisfies testing needs. However, Practices C702 and D75 and Guide D420 should be used as guides for selecting and preserving samples from various types of sampling operations. Samples in which specimens will be prepared using the wet-preparation procedure (11.1) must be kept at their as-sampled water content prior to preparation.

9.1.1 Where sampling operations have preserved the natural stratification of a sample, the various strata must be kept separated and tests performed on the particular stratum of interest with as little contamination as possible from other strata. Where a mixture of materials will be used in construction, combine the various components in such proportions that the resultant sample represents the actual construction case.

9.1.2 Where data from these test methods are to be used for correlation with other laboratory or field test data, use the same material as used for those tests where possible.

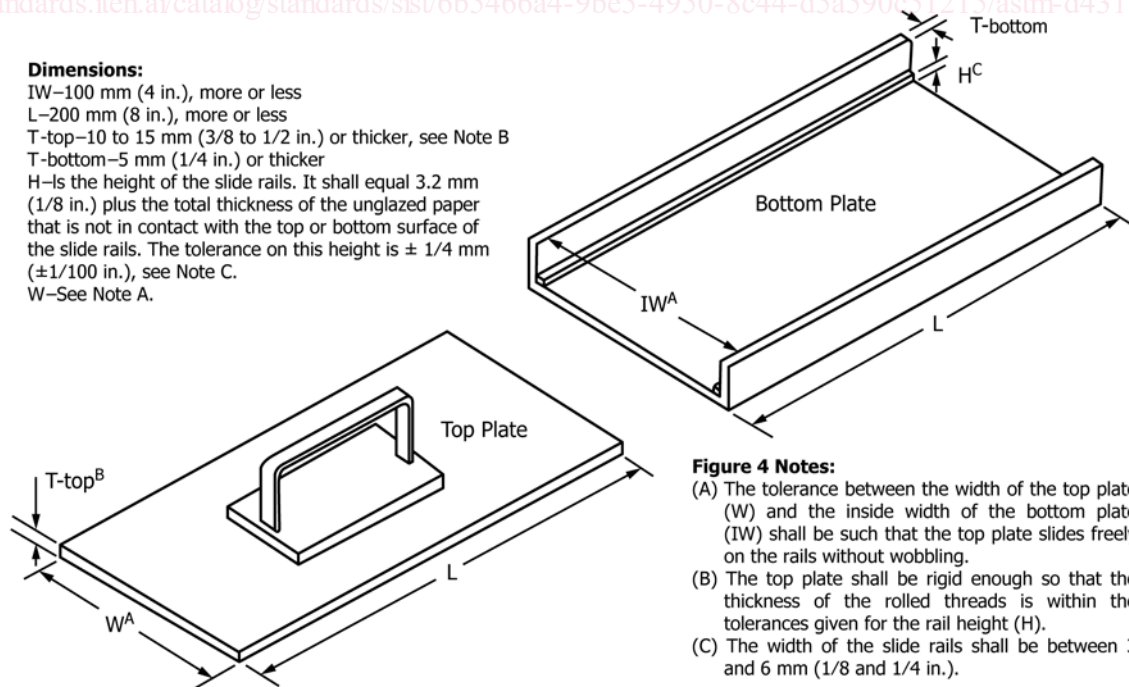


FIG. 5 Plastic Limit-Rolling Device

Figure 4 Notes:

- (A) The tolerance between the width of the top plate (W) and the inside width of the bottom plate (IW) shall be such that the top plate slides freely on the rails without wobbling.
- (B) The top plate shall be rigid enough so that the thickness of the rolled threads is within the tolerances given for the rail height (H).
- (C) The width of the slide rails shall be between 3 and 6 mm (1/8 and 1/4 in.).

9.2 *Specimen*—Obtain a representative portion from the total sample sufficient to provide 150 to 200 g of material passing the 425- μm (No. 40) sieve. Free flowing samples (materials) may be reduced by the methods of quartering or splitting. Non-free flowing or cohesive materials shall be mixed thoroughly in a pan with a spatula or scoop and a representative portion scooped from the total mass by making one or more sweeps with a scoop through the mixed mass.

10. Verification of Apparatus

10.1 *Inspection of Wear:*

10.1.1 *Liquid Limit Device*—Determine that the liquid limit device is clean and in good working order. Check the following specific points.

10.1.1.1 *Wear of Base*—The spot on the base where the cup makes contact should be worn no greater than 10 mm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.) in diameter. If the wear spot is greater than this, the base can be machined to remove the worn spot provided the resurfacing does not make the base thinner than specified in 7.1 and the other dimensional relationships are maintained.

10.1.1.2 *Wear of Cup*—Replace the cup when the grooving tool has worn a depression in the cup 0.1 mm (0.004 in.) deep or when the rim of the cup has been reduced to half its original thickness. Verify that the cup is firmly attached to the cup hanger.

10.1.1.3 *Wear of Cup Hanger*—Verify that the cup hanger pivot does not bind and is not worn to an extent that allows more than 3 mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) side-to-side movement of the lowest point on the rim.

10.1.1.4 *Wear of Cam*—The cam shall not be worn to an extent that the cup drops before the cup hanger (cam follower) loses contact with the cam.

10.1.1.5 *Rubber Feet*—The feet should prevent the base from bouncing or sliding on the work surface. Replace rubber feet that become hard, cracked, or brittle from age.

10.1.2 *Grooving Tools*—Inspect grooving tools for wear on a frequent and regular basis. The rapidity of wear depends on the material from which the tool is made, and the types of soils being tested. Soils containing a large proportion of fine sand particles may cause rapid wear of grooving tools; therefore, when testing these materials, tools should be inspected more frequently than for other soils.

10.1.2.1 The critical grooving tool dimensions to be checked for wear are the width of the tip (dimension A in Fig. 3) and the depth of the tip (dimension D in Fig. 3).

NOTE 7—The width of the tip of grooving tools is conveniently checked using a pocket-sized measuring magnifier equipped with a millimeter scale. Magnifiers of this type are available from most laboratory supply companies. The depth of the tip of grooving tools can be checked using the depth-measuring feature of vernier calipers.

10.2 *Adjustment of Height-of-Drop*—Adjust the height-of-drop of the cup so that the point on the cup that comes in contact with the base rises to a height of 10 ± 0.2 mm. See Fig. 2 for proper location of the gauge relative to the cup during adjustment.

NOTE 8—A convenient procedure for adjusting the height-of-drop is as follows: place a piece of masking tape across the outside bottom of the cup parallel with the axis of the cup hanger pivot. The edge of the tape away from the cup hanger should bisect the spot on the cup that contacts the

base. For new cups, placing a piece of carbon paper on the base and allowing the cup to drop several times will mark the contact spot. Attach the cup to the device and turn the crank until the cup is raised to its maximum height. Slide the height gauge under the cup from the front, and observe whether the gauge contacts the cup or the tape. (See Fig. 2.) If the tape and cup are both simultaneously contacted, the height-of-drop is ready to be checked. If not, adjust the cup until simultaneous contact is made. Check adjustment by turning the crank at 2 revolutions per second while holding the gauge in position against the tape and cup. If a faint ringing or clicking sound is heard without the cup rising from the gauge, the adjustment is correct. If no ringing is heard or if the cup rises from the gauge, readjust the height-of-drop. If the cup rocks on the gauge during this checking operation, the cam follower pivot is excessively worn and the worn parts should be replaced. Always remove tape after completion of adjustment operation.

11. Preparation Procedures for Test Specimens

11.1 *Specimen Preparation Procedure 1 (Wet Preparation Procedure)*—Except where *Specimen Preparation Procedure 2 (Dry Preparation Procedure)* is specified (11.2), prepare the specimen for testing as described in the following sections.

11.1.1 *For Specimens Consisting of Material that Entirely Passes the 425- μm (No. 40) Sieve:*

11.1.1.1 Determine by visual and manual methods that the specimen from 9.2 has little or no material retained on a 425- μm (No. 40) sieve. If this is the case, prepare 150 to 200 g of material by mixing thoroughly with distilled or demineralized water on the glass plate or mixing dish using the spatula. If desired, soak the material in a mixing/storage dish with a small amount of water to soften the material before the start of mixing (see 8.1.1). If using Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method), adjust the water content of the material to bring it to a consistency that would require about 25 to 35 drops of the cup of the liquid limit device (commonly referred to as “blows”) to close the groove. For Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method), the number of drops should be between about 20 and 30.

11.1.1.2 If, during mixing, a small percentage of material is encountered that would be retained on a 425- μm (No. 40) sieve, remove these particles by hand (if possible). If it is impractical to remove the coarser material by hand, remove small percentages (less than about 15 %) of coarser material by working the material (having the above consistency) through a 425- μm sieve. During this procedure, use a piece of rubber sheeting, rubber stopper, or other convenient device provided the procedure does not distort the sieve or degrade material that would be retained if the washing method described in 11.1.2 were used. If larger percentages of coarse material are encountered during mixing, or it is considered impractical to remove the coarser material by the procedures just described, wash the sample as described in 11.1.2. When the coarse particles found during mixing are concretions, shells, or other fragile particles, do not crush these particles to make them pass a 425- μm sieve, but remove by hand or by washing.

11.1.1.3 Place the prepared material in the mixing/storage dish, check its consistency (adjust if required), cover to prevent loss of moisture, and allow to stand (cure) for at least 16 h (overnight). After the standing period and immediately before starting the test, thoroughly remix the soil.

NOTE 9—The time taken to adequately mix a soil will vary greatly, depending on the plasticity and initial water content. Initial mixing times

of more than 30 min may be needed for stiff, fat clays.

11.1.2 For Specimens Consisting of Material Containing Particles Retained on a 425- μm (No. 40) Sieve:

11.1.2.1 Place the specimen (see 9.2) in a pan or dish and add sufficient water to cover the material. Allow the material to soak until all lumps have softened and the fines no longer adhere to the surfaces of the coarse particles. (See 8.1.1.)

11.1.2.2 When the material contains a large percentage of particles retained on the 425- μm (No. 40) sieve, perform the following washing operation in increments, washing no more than 0.5 kg (1 lb) of material at one time. Place the 425- μm sieve in the bottom of the clean pan. Transfer, without any loss of material, the soil-water mixture onto the sieve. If gravel or coarse sand particles are present, rinse as many of these as possible with small quantities of water from a wash bottle, and discard. Alternatively, transfer the soil-water mixture over a 2.00-mm (No. 10) sieve nested atop the 425- μm sieve, rinse the fine material through and remove the 2.00-mm sieve.

11.1.2.3 After washing and removing as much of the coarser material as possible, add sufficient water to the pan to bring the level to about 13 mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in.) above the surface of the 425- μm sieve. Agitate the slurry by stirring with the fingers while raising and lowering the sieve in the pan and swirling the suspension so that fine material is washed from the coarser particles. Disaggregate fine soil lumps that have not slaked by gently rubbing them over the sieve with the fingertips. Complete the washing operation by raising the sieve above the water surface and rinsing the material retained with a small amount of clean water. Discard material retained on the 425- μm sieve.

11.1.2.4 Reduce the water content of the material passing the 425- μm (No. 40) sieve until it approaches the liquid limit. Reduction of water content may be accomplished by one or a combination of the following methods: (a) exposing to air currents at room temperature, (b) exposing to warm air currents from a source such as an electric hair dryer, (c) decanting clear water from surface of the suspension, (d) filtering in a Büchner funnel or using filter candles, or (e) draining in a colander or plaster of Paris dish lined with high retentivity,⁶ high wet-strength filter paper. If a plaster of Paris dish is used, take care that the dish never becomes sufficiently saturated that it fails to absorb water into its surface. Thoroughly dry dish between uses. During evaporation and cooling, stir the material often enough to prevent over-drying of the fringes and soil pinnacles on the surface of the mixture. For materials containing soluble salts, use a method of water reduction (a or b) that will not eliminate the soluble salts from the test specimen.

11.1.2.5 If applicable, remove the material retained on the filter paper. Thoroughly mix this material or the above material on the glass plate or in the mixing dish using the spatula. Adjust the water content of the mixture, if necessary, by adding small increments of distilled or demineralized water or by allowing the mixture to dry at room temperature while mixing

on the glass plate. If using Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method), the material should be at a water content that would require about 25 to 35 drops of the cup of the liquid limit device to close the groove. For Liquid Limit Method B (One-Point Method), the number of drops should be between about 20 and 30. Put, if necessary, the mixed material in the storage dish, cover to prevent loss of moisture, and allow to stand (cure) for at least 16 h. After the standing period and immediately before starting the test, thoroughly remix the specimen.

11.2 Specimen Preparation Procedure 2 (Dry Preparation Procedure):

11.2.1 Dry the specimen from 9.2 at room temperature or in an oven at a temperature not exceeding 60°C until the soil clods will pulverize readily. (See Section 6, Interferences.) Disaggregation is expedited if the material is not allowed to completely dry. However, the material should have a dry appearance when pulverized.

11.2.2 Pulverize the material in a mortar with a rubber-tipped pestle or in some other way that does not cause breakdown of individual particles. When the coarse particles found during pulverization are concretions, shells, or other fragile particles, do not crush these particles to make them pass a 425- μm (No. 40) sieve, but remove by hand or other suitable means, such as washing. If a washing procedure is used, follow 11.1.2.1 – 11.1.2.5.

11.2.3 Separate the material on a 425- μm (No. 40) sieve, shaking the sieve by hand to assure thorough separation of the finer fraction. Return the material retained on the 425- μm sieve to the pulverizing apparatus and repeat the pulverizing and sieving operations. Stop this procedure when most of the fine material has been disaggregated and material retained on the 425- μm sieve consists of individual particles.

11.2.4 Place material retained on the 425- μm (No. 40) sieve after the final pulverizing operations in a dish and soak in a small amount of water. Stir this mixture and transfer it to a 425- μm sieve, catching the water and any suspended fines in the washing pan. Pour this suspension into a dish containing the dry soil previously sieved through the 425- μm sieve. Discard material retained on the 425- μm sieve.

11.2.5 Proceed as described in 11.1.2.4 and 11.1.2.5.

METHODS FOR LIQUID LIMIT—LIQUID LIMIT METHOD A (MULTIPOINT METHOD)

12. Procedure for Liquid Limit Method A (Multipoint Method)

12.1 Thoroughly remix the specimen (soil) in its mixing dish, and, if necessary, adjust its water content until the consistency requires about 25 to 35 drops of the cup of the liquid limit device to close the groove. Using a spatula, place a portion(s) of the prepared soil in the cup of the liquid limit device at the point where the cup rests on the base, squeeze it down, and spread it into the cup to a depth of about 10 mm at its deepest point, tapering to form an approximately horizontal surface. Take care to eliminate air bubbles from the soil pat, but form the pat with as few strokes as possible. Keep the unused soil in the mixing/storage dish. Cover the dish with a wet towel (or use other means) to retain the moisture in the soil.

⁶ S and S 595 filter paper available in 320-mm circles has proven satisfactory. If you are aware of alternative suppliers, please provide this information to ASTM International Headquarters. Your comments will receive careful consideration at a meeting of the responsible technical committee,¹ which you may attend.

12.2 Form a groove in the soil pat by drawing the tool, beveled edge forward, through the soil on a line joining the highest point to the lowest point on the rim of the cup. When cutting the groove, hold the grooving tool against the surface of the cup and draw in an arc, maintaining the tool perpendicular to the surface of the cup throughout its movement. See Fig. 6. In soils where a groove cannot be made in one stroke without tearing the soil, cut the groove with several strokes of the grooving tool. Alternatively, cut the groove to slightly less than required dimensions with a spatula and use the grooving tool to bring the groove to final dimensions. Exercise extreme care to prevent sliding the soil pat relative to the surface of the cup.

12.3 Verify that no crumbs of soil are present on the base or the underside of the cup.

12.4 Lift and drop the cup by turning the crank at a rate of 1.9 to 2.1 drops per second until the two halves of the soil pat come in contact at the bottom of the groove along a distance of 13 mm (½ in.). See Fig. 7 and Fig. 8. The base of the machine shall not be held with the hand, or hands, while the crank is turned.

NOTE 10—Use of a scale is recommended to verify that the groove has closed 13 mm (½ in.).

12.5 Verify that an air bubble has not caused premature closing of the groove by observing that both sides of the groove have flowed together with approximately the same shape. If a bubble has caused premature closing of the groove, reform the soil in the cup, adding a small amount of soil to make up for that lost in the grooving operation and repeat 12.1 – 12.4. If the soil slides on the surface of the cup, repeat 12.1 – 12.4 at a higher water content. If, after several trials at successively

higher water contents, the soil pat continues to slide in the cup or if the number of drops required to close the groove is always less than 25, record that the liquid limit could not be determined, and report the soil as nonplastic without performing the plastic limit test.

12.6 Record the number of drops, N , required to close the groove.

12.7 Obtain a water content specimen by removing a slice of soil approximately the width of the spatula, extending from edge to edge of the soil cake at right angles to the groove and including that portion of the groove in which the soil flowed together, place in a container of known mass, and cover.

12.8 Return the soil remaining in the cup to the dish. Wash and dry the cup and grooving tool and reattach the cup to the carriage in preparation for the next trial.

12.9 Remix the entire soil specimen in the dish adding distilled water to increase the water content of the soil and decrease the number of drops required to close the groove. Repeat 12.1 – 12.8 for at least two additional trials producing successively lower numbers of drops to close the groove. One of the trials shall be for a closure requiring 25 to 35 drops, one for closure between 20 and 30 drops, and one trial for a closure requiring 15 to 25 drops.

12.10 Determine the water content, w_n , of the soil water content specimen from each trial, n , in accordance with Test Methods D2216.

12.10.1 Determination of initial masses (container plus moist soil) should be performed immediately after completion of the test. If the test is to be interrupted for more than about

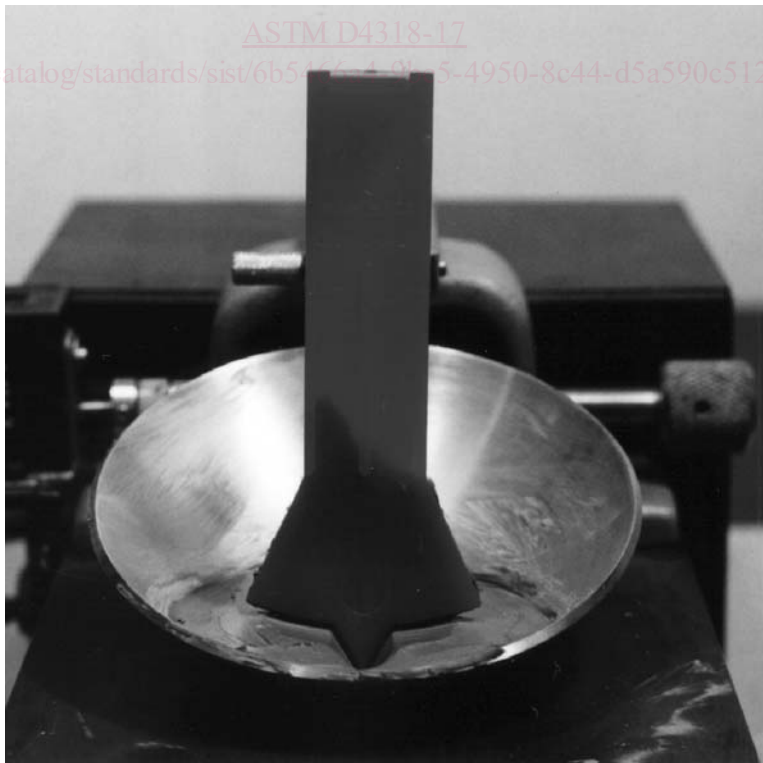


FIG. 6 Example of Grooving Tool Placed in a Properly Grooved Soil Pat

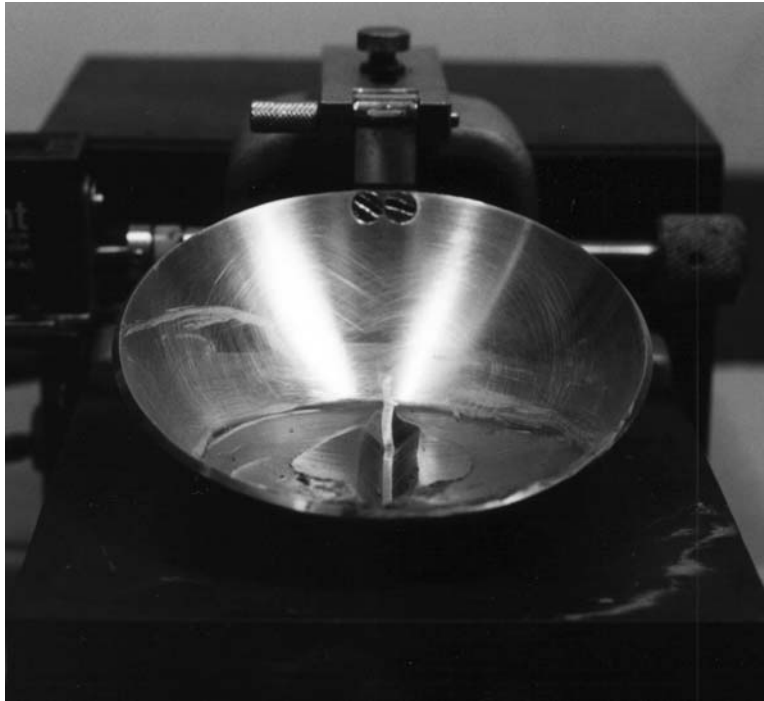


FIG. 7 Grooved Soil Pat in Liquid Limit Device

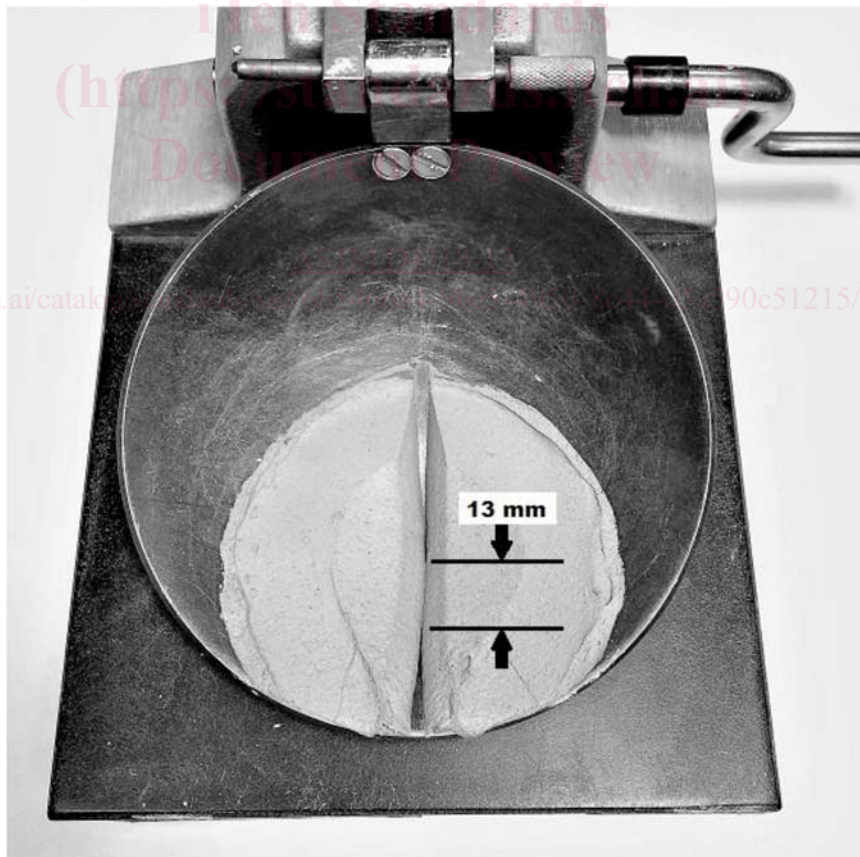


FIG. 8 Soil Pat After Groove Has Closed

15 minutes, determine the mass of the water content specimens already obtained at the time of the interruption.