



Designation: D4138 – 07a (Reapproved 2017)

# Standard Practices for Measurement of Dry Film Thickness of Protective Coating Systems by Destructive, Cross-Sectioning Means<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D4138; 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 practice describes the measurement of dry film thickness of coating films by microscopic observation of precision angular cuts in the coating film. Use of these procedures may require repair of the coating film. This practice is intended to supplement the manufacturers' instructions for the manual operation of the gages and is not intended to replace them. It includes definitions of key terms, reference documents, the significance and use of the practice, and the advantages and limitations of the instruments.

1.2 Three procedures are provided for measuring dry film thickness of protective coating systems:

1.2.1 *Procedure A*—Using groove cutting instruments.

1.2.2 *Procedure B*—Using grinding instruments.

1.2.3 *Procedure C*—Using drill bit instruments.

1.3 These procedures are not applicable for soft or ductile substrates that may deform under the test gage cutting tip. The substrate should be sufficiently rigid to prevent deformation of the coating during the cutting process. The surface may be flat or moderately curved. Pipes as small as 25 mm (1 in.) in diameter may be measured in the axial direction.

1.4 Individual coats in a multicoat system where there is a discernible visual difference between coats or the overall thickness of a coating system can be measured by these procedures.

1.5 The range of thickness measurement is typically 2 to 2000 microns (0.1 to 80 mils) and depends upon the cutting angle of the blade.

1.6 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as the standard. The values given in parentheses are for information only.

1.7 *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 appro-*

*priate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.8 *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:*<sup>2</sup>

[D823 Practices for Producing Films of Uniform Thickness of Paint, Varnish, and Related Products on Test Panels](#)

[D1005 Test Method for Measurement of Dry-Film Thickness of Organic Coatings Using Micrometers](#)

[D7091 Practice for Nondestructive Measurement of Dry Film Thickness of Nonmagnetic Coatings Applied to Ferrous Metals and Nonmagnetic, Nonconductive Coatings Applied to Non-Ferrous Metals](#)

## 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms:*

3.1.1 *accuracy, n*—the measure of the magnitude of error between the result of a measurement and the true thickness of the item being measured.

3.1.2 *dry film thickness, n*—the thickness of a coating (or coating layers) as measured from the surface of the substrate.

3.1.3 *micrometre (micron), n*—one one-thousandths of a millimetre (0.001 mm); 25.4 microns = 1 mil.

3.1.4 *mil, n*—an imperial unit of measure; one one-thousandths of an inch (0.001 in.); 1 mil = 25.4 microns.

3.1.5 *reticle, n*—a scale on transparent material fitted at the focal plane of the eyepiece of the microscope for the purpose of measuring the width of a feature within the image.

## 4. Summary of Practice

4.1 The three procedures are based on measurement of dry film thickness by observation of the width of angular cuts in the

<sup>1</sup> These practices are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D01 on Paint and Related Coatings, Materials, and Applications and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D01.23 on Physical Properties of Applied Paint Films.

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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.

coating through a microscope having a built-in reticle with a scale. Each procedure employs different instruments to make the cut in the coating.

4.2 *Procedure A*—Uses a carbide or carbide-tipped wedge to cut a groove in the coating. The groove is cut at a precise angle to the surface. Various wedge angles are available. This procedure requires the manual cutting of the coating by dragging a cutting wedge through both the coating and the surface of the substrate. In this operation, the cutter trails midway between the two guide studs. Continuous 3-point surface contact should be maintained to assure precise vertical alignment of the groove. Excessive pressure on the guide studs should be avoided. On wood or other directional material, incisions should be made in the grain or “machine” direction to avoid ragged cuts.

4.3 *Procedure B*—Uses a high speed rotary grinding disk or drum type bit to cut partial cylindrical cavities in the coating. Axes of the cavities can be oriented at various angles of inclination to the surface. This procedure is similar to Procedure A except in how the cut is made. This technique eliminates the deformations of coating and substrate that may occur when conventional cutting wedges are used. Hard, brittle, tough, fibrous, tender, or elastomeric materials exhibit clean, non-tearing, controlled disintegration under the rotary cutter. The high-speed “erodes” away surface material in a precise pattern, leaving adjacent and underlying areas undisturbed.

4.4 *Procedure C*—Uses a specific angle tip drill bit to cut a conical cavity in the coating. This procedure is commonly used for hard, brittle or very thin coatings. Less damage often results from the small hole used to measure thickness.

4.5 All procedures involve cutting through the coating. The cutting operation works better on some coatings than on others. For example, elastomeric coatings may close up after cutting. Some plastic coatings may stretch. Other coatings may tear. The cutting process must result in a clearly visible cross-

section of the coating or coating system and the substrate. Soft or elastic materials can sometimes be cooled or frozen to obtain good cutting characteristics. With some coatings, improved cuts can be achieved by wetting the surface, or by speeding or slowing the cutting rate.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Many coating properties are markedly affected by the film thickness of the dry film such as adhesion, flexibility, and harness. To be able to compare results obtained by different operators, it is essential to measure film thickness carefully.

5.2 Most protective and high performance coatings are applied to meet a requirement or a specification for the dry-film thickness of each coat, or for the complete system, or both. Coatings must be applied within a certain minimum and maximum thickness tolerances in order that they can fulfill their intended function.

6. Test Specimen

6.1 The test specimen can be the coated structure or component/part on which the thickness is to be evaluated, or can be test panels of similar material and surface roughness on which it is desired to measure the coating thickness.

6.2 If multiple coats of paint are to be measured, successive contiguous coats should be of contrasting colors to aid sharp discrimination of interfaces.

6.3 For test panels, if measurement repeatability is desired for a particular paint system, care shall be taken in panel preparation. Coating shall be uniformly applied in accordance with Practice D823 or as agreed upon between the contracting parties. Panels shall be placed in a horizontal position during drying. Uniform application thickness shall be verified by another measurement method such as Test Method D1005 or Practice D7091.

PROCEDURE A — GROOVE CUTTING INSTRUMENTS

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Scribe Cutter and an Illuminated Microscope with Measuring Reticle.* The scribe cutter and illuminated microscope may be combined as a single instrument. Verification of instrument accuracy shall be performed by taking measurements on applied films of known thickness (see Test Method D1005).

7.2 *Cutting Tips* shall be designed to provide a very smooth incision in the paint film at a precise angle to the surface (see Fig. 1). Separate tip designs (angles) shall provide cuts of known slopes such as 1 to 1, 1 to 2, and 1 to 10. These tips shall be nominally designated 1x, 2x, and 10x to indicate the ratio of the lateral measurement to vertical depth (see Fig. 2). The lateral measurement is represented by the reticle markings and the vertical depth is represented by the coating film thickness. Ensure that the tip aligns vertically with the painted surface for a precisely aligned incision.

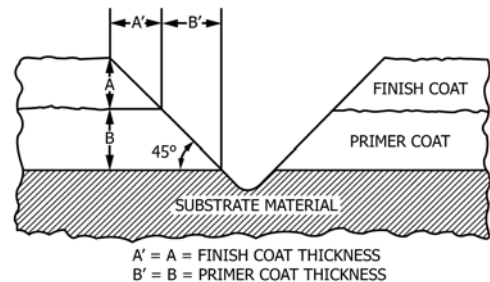


FIG. 1 Geometry of Thickness Measurement

7.3 *Illuminated Microscope* typically of 50+ magnification, shall contain a scaled reticle (see Fig. 3).

8. Procedure

8.1 Select a test panel or choose a site for the thickness measurement.