



**International
Standard**

ISO 10840

**Plastics — Specifications and
guidance for the use of standard fire
tests**

*Plastiques — Spécifications et lignes directrices pour l'utilisation
d'essais au feu normalisés*

**Third edition
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Contents

Page

Foreword	v
Introduction	vi
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	1
4 Enclosure fire scenarios	2
4.1 General	2
4.2 Initiation and early growth of fire	2
4.3 Development of fire	3
4.4 Fully developed fire	3
4.5 Decay	3
4.6 Important parameters for the fire stages	3
5 Categories of fire tests	4
5.1 Material characterisation tests	4
5.1.1 Tests done on behalf of customers undertaking no further reaction-to-fire testing	4
5.1.2 Tests done on behalf of customers seeking compliance with reaction-to-fire tests on a finished product	4
5.2 Quality-control tests	4
5.3 Pre-selection tests	5
5.4 End-product tests	5
5.5 Fire test based on the fire scenario	6
5.6 Use of fire safety engineering (FSE)	6
5.6.1 Basics of fire safety engineering	6
5.6.2 Fire tests for fire safety engineering on plastic products	7
6 Important considerations in the fire testing of plastics materials and products	8
6.1 Influence of the chemical or physical nature of the test specimen	8
6.2 Sample and test specimen preparation and conditioning	8
6.3 Influence of test procedures	8
6.3.1 Test apparatus	8
6.3.2 Burning effluence	9
6.4 Burning behaviours of specimens	9
6.5 Operation of tests	9
6.6 Other critical factors	10
6.7 Characteristics of ignition sources	10
6.8 Operating procedures in the event of specimen collapse or deformation	10
6.9 Debris of specimen	11
7 Advantages and disadvantages of scale in fire tests	11
7.1 General	11
7.2 Large-scale tests	11
7.3 Intermediate-scale tests	12
7.4 Small-scale tests	12
7.5 Influence of test apparatus design on the applicability of test data	13
7.6 Calibration of the test apparatus and attainable precision	13
7.7 Uncertainty associated with fire test measurements	13
8 Potentially problematical specimen behaviour	13
8.1 Test developed for materials other than plastics	13
8.2 Shrinking	14
8.3 Bubbling	14
8.4 Intumescence	14
8.5 Extinguishing of pilot flames by highly flame retarded plastics	14
8.6 Slumping of thermoplastic sheets	14

8.7 Detection of flaming drips 15

8.8 Edge effects 15

8.9 Profiles products 15

Annex A (informative) End-user relevant preparation of test specimens 16

Annex B (informative) Environmental impact assessment 25

Bibliography 27

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 61, *Plastics*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Burning behaviour*, in collaboration with the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Technical Committee CEN/TC 249, *Plastics*, in accordance with the Agreement on technical cooperation between ISO and CEN (Vienna Agreement).

This third edition cancels and replaces the second edition (ISO 10840:2008), which has been technically revised.

The main changes are as follows:

- the reference documents have been reviewed and updated;
- the terms and definitions have been reviewed and updated;
- a new [subclause 5.5](#) for fire safety engineering has been added.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Many of the current reaction-to-fire tests were developed, prior to the widespread use of synthetic polymers, to assess products incorporating materials such as wood (in the building industry), paper (in electrical wires and cables), and naturally occurring fibres such as cotton, wool and horsehair (in many textile, furniture and electrical applications). The reaction-to-fire characteristics of these so-called traditional materials are often very different from those of synthetic materials, especially thermoplastics.

ISO/TC 61/SC 4 recognises the need for guidance for users of fire-test standards commonly applied to materials and products made of, or incorporating, plastics. In 2003, the first edition of ISO 10840 was published, based on the now withdrawn ISO TR 10840:1993 (*Plastics – Burning behaviour – Guidance for development and use of fire test*), which listed a series of potential problems associated with the reaction-to-fire testing of plastics materials and products. ISO TR 10840, however, provided users of the test methods with no practical assistance on how to cope with the listed difficulties.

This document provides detailed information about how to conduct standard fire tests which are more relatable to the real conditions of plastics products in a variety of applications.

With more concerns expressed about the environmental impact of fires involving plastics, additional guidance has been included in the second edition, and extended in this third edition.

Particular attention is given to the provision of guidance for inexperienced users who need to assess the fire performance of materials or products made of, or incorporating, plastics. This document also provides answers to frequently asked questions concerning fire tests; these cover factors such as cost, duration, complexity, required operator skills, quality of the data produced, relevance to fire hazard assessment as well as test repeatability and reproducibility. This document contains a bibliography of the most frequently used fire tests applied to the materials and products within the scope of ISO/TC 61/SC 4.

The main focus of this document is on reaction-to-fire testing. Fire resistance testing has also been considered, in particular for the use of plastic construction of small ships, to take account of the widespread use of advanced polymer composites and related materials with superior thermo-mechanical stability which can be used in applications where there is a demand for some degree of fire resistance.

This document provides specifications and guidance for use of fire test of plastics based on the fire safety engineering (FSE) using methodologies prescribed in ISO 23932-1^[45], IEC 60695-1-11^[46] and IEC 60695-1-12^[47].

This document also provides guidance on some standard fire tests which give data that is applicable for assessment of the potentially adverse environmental impact of combustion products that can be generated in large-scale fires involving plastics materials and products (see [Annex B](#)).

NOTE The term, 'adverse environmental impact', covers undesirable direct effects on the environment as well as indirect effects on people of ISO 10840 through environmental exposure.

Plastics — Specifications and guidance for the use of standard fire tests

1 Scope

This document provides specifications and guidance for the use of standard fire testing for plastics and the products in the following aspects:

- selection of appropriate tests that reflect realistic end-use conditions;
- grouping of the reaction-to-fire characteristics that any given test or tests can measure;
- assessment of tests as to their relevance in areas such as material characterisation, quality control, pre-selection, end-product testing, environmental profiling and design for the environment (DfE);
- definition of potential problems that can arise when plastics are tested in standard fire tests.

This document does not include specification for development or design of new fire-tests for plastics.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 10093, *Plastics — Fire tests — Standard ignition sources*

ISO 13943, *Fire safety — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 13943 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

end-product test

fire hazard assessment test on a complete product, piece, part component or sub-assembly

3.2

pre-selection test

combustion characteristic test made on a standardized shape, for the process of assessing and choosing candidate materials, components or subassemblies for making an end product

3.3

spalling

breaking off of fragments or solid articles from a heated surface

4 Enclosure fire scenarios

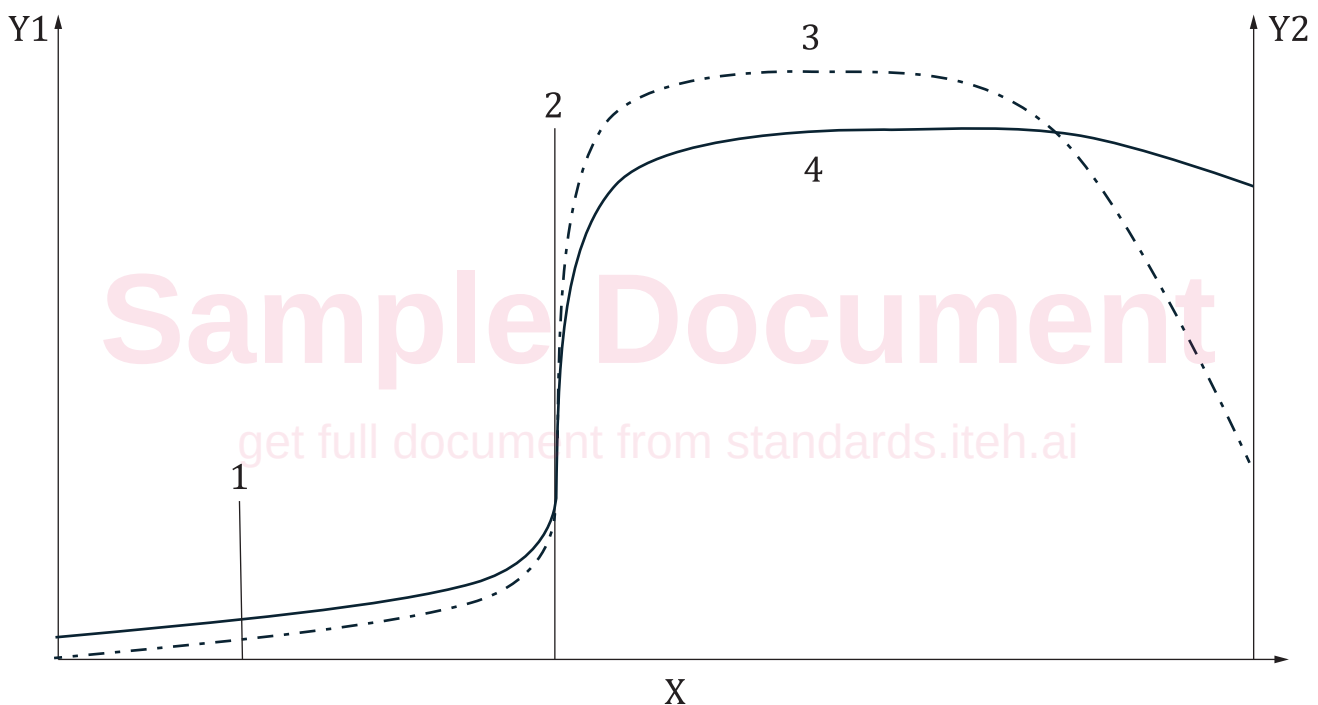
4.1 General

A number of fire parameters influence the development of a fire. The fire parameters measured during the pre-flash-over and the post-flash-over conditions differ greatly.

There are four main stages of fire development within an enclosure (i.e. pre-ignition, fire growth, flash-over and fully developed fire), which are assessed using measurements of temperature and heat release rate in terms of time. [Figure 1](#) shows the different phases in the development of fires, (see [Table 1](#)), within an enclosure space (see ISO/TS 3814[3]).

In [Figure 1](#), the pre-ignition stage is in the duration from the start until ignition time. The fire growth stage starts at the ignition and continue until flash-over (see [4.2](#)). The fully developed fire stage starts at the flash-over (see [4.4](#)) followed by fire decay stage (see [4.5](#)).

Sometimes, fire does not reach flash-over due to limited combustibles present or due to the intervention of active firefighting measures (e.g. sprinklers, fire brigades).



Key

X	time
Y1	heat release rate (kW)
Y2	temperature (°C)
1	ignition
2	flash-over
3	heat release rate curve
4	temperature curve

Figure 1 — Development of fire in terms of temperature and heat release rate

4.2 Initiation and early growth of fire

This stage of fire includes the exposure of a product to a heat source, ignition and early development of a fire. ISO 871[6] gives a test method to determine the ignition temperature of plastic materials. ISO 3582[7], ISO 4589 series[8][9][10][11], ISO 9239-1[31], ISO 9772[12], ISO 9773[13], ISO 11925 series[33][34][35] and ISO 12992[14]

specify fire test method for determination of ignitability of plastics and building materials which contain plastics by small heat sources. ISO 10093 specifies ignition sources for use in fire tests. ISO 1182[28] specifies the test methods for non-combustibility (no-ignition). IEC 60695-11-2[23], IEC 60695-11-5[24], IEC 60695-11-10[25] and IEC 60695-11-20[27] specify various test methods for determination of ignitability and flame spread of materials used in electrotechnical products (in many cases, plastics).

Two types of combustion can exist at this stage, smouldering and flaming. Smouldering is a slow, flameless combustion producing very little heat, but having the potential to fill an enclosure with smoke and toxic gases. A test method for measuring toxic gases in fire effluents is given in ISO/TS 19700[60].

After ignition, the development of a flaming fire will depend on the following effects:

- fire growth on first ignited item;
- fire spread to other items;
- the effect of intervention (portable extinguishers, sprinklers, fire brigades);
- the ventilation conditions.

4.3 Development of fire

As a fire develops, a hot smoke and gas layer usually builds up below the ceiling. The radiant heat transfer to combustible items accelerates the thermal decomposition of material below the smoke layer, and the rate of fire spread increases. ISO 5658-2[30], ISO 21367[19] and ISO 23949[21] specify test methods for the determination of flame spread capability. ISO 5659[48] provides test method for smoke generation.

Heat release from burning materials and products governs the fire growth. ISO 1716[29], ISO 5660 series[49][50][51][52], ISO 12136[36], ISO 13927[15], ISO 14696[37] and ISO 24473[53] give fire test methods for measurement of heat release from burning materials and products.

Flash-over, which usually occurs at temperatures around 600 °C, corresponds to an abrupt sudden transition from a localised fire to the ignition of the gas layer and to the sudden subsequent ignition of all exposed flammable surfaces, leading to a fully developed fire. The rate of heat release increases rapidly, and this leads to a rapid temperature rise within the enclosure. However, temperature at flash-over is not always the maximum temperature in the compartment of the fire. Flash-over is uncommon in large enclosures, as the required temperature conditions are not often reached.

4.4 Fully developed fire

A fire is regarded as fully developed when all fuel within an enclosure is burning. This stage usually follows flash-over, but some fires can become fully developed without passing through the flash-over phase.

4.5 Decay

The decay stage of a fire is reached when the fire load or available air has been consumed, or when the fire is suppressed. In the pre-flash-over phase reaction to fire characteristics of products are important, while in the post-flash-over phase resistance to fire parameters of complete assemblies apply.

4.6 Important parameters for the fire stages

Fire building regulations make a distinction between these two conditions. Table 1 summarises the important fire parameters associated with reaction to fire and resistance to fire. ISO 5659[48] gives specification of test method for measuring generation of smoke. ISO 11907 series[55][56] give specifications for corrosivity tests. Some literatures[57][58][59] also give guidance for consideration on corrosivity.