INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

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# Ambient air — Determination of asbestos fibres — Indirect-transfer transmission electron microscopy method

*Air ambiant — Dosage des fibres d'amiante — Méthode par microscopie électronique à transmission par transfert indirect*



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# Foreword

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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 documents 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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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 146, *Air quality*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Ambient atmospheres*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 13794:1999), which has been technically revised. The main changes compared to the previous edition are as follows:



— the use of electronic display systems with measurement software is permitted;

— the maximum particulate loading for TEM specimens is increased from 10 % to 25 %;

— a simplified fibre identification procedure for investigation of known sources of the regulated asbestos varieties and richterite/winchite asbestos is permitted;

— the reporting requirements have been changed to permit reporting of the concentrations of fibres and bundles longer than 5 µm and/or the concentrations of PCM equivalent fibres without the requirement to report the concentrations of structures equal to or greater than 0,5 µm;

— there is no requirement to report the 95 % confidence intervals of the fibre concentrations.

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

This document is applicable to the measurement of airborne asbestos in a wide range of ambient air situations, including the interior atmospheres of buildings, and for a detailed evaluation of any atmosphere. Because the best available medical evidence indicates that the numerical fibre concentration and the fibre size and type are the relevant parameters for evaluation of the inhalation hazards, a fibre counting and measuring technique is the only logical approach. Most fibres in ambient atmospheres are not asbestos, and therefore there is a requirement for fibres to be identified. Many airborne asbestos fibres in ambient atmospheres have diameters below the resolution limit of the optical microscope. This document is based on transmission electron microscopy, which has adequate resolution to allow for the detection of small fibres and is currently the only technique capable of unequivocal identification of the majority of individual fibres of asbestos. The fibres found suspended in an ambient atmosphere can often be identified unequivocally, if sufficient measurement effort is expended. However, if each fibre were to be identified in this way, the analysis becomes prohibitively expensive. Because of instrumental deficiencies or because of the nature of the particulate, some fibres cannot be positively identified as asbestos, even though the measurements all indicate that they could be asbestos. Subjective and instrumental factors therefore contribute to this measurement, and consequently a very precise definition of the procedure for identification and enumeration of asbestos fibres is required.

In addition to single fibres and bundles, asbestos is often found in air samples as very complex, aggregated structures, which may or may not be also aggregated with other particles. The number of asbestos fibres and bundles incorporated in these complex structures often exceeds the number of isolated fibres and bundles observed, and many of them may be completely obscured in direct-transfer transmission electron microscope (TEM) preparations. The method defined in this document incorporates specimen preparation procedures that result in the selective concentration of asbestos fibres and the removal of organic, water-soluble and acid-soluble materials. These procedures have the effect of dispersing the majority of the complex clusters and aggregates of fibres into their component fibres and bundles so that the asbestos in the air sample can be more accurately quantified. All of the feasible specimen preparation techniques result in some modification of the airborne particulate. Even the collection of particles from a three-dimensional airborne dispersion on to a two-dimensional filter surface can be considered a modification of the particulate, and some of the particles in most samples are modified by the specimen preparation procedures. Although this method results in dispersal of complex clusters and aggregates, it minimizes other effects on the size distribution of fibres and fibre bundles.



This document requires a very detailed and logical procedure is used to reduce the subjective aspects of the measurement. The method of data recording specified in the document is designed to allow re-evaluation of the fibre counting data as new medical evidence becomes available.

This document describes the method of analysis for a single air filter. However, one of the largest potential errors in characterizing asbestos in ambient atmospheres is associated with the variability between filter samples. For this reason, it is necessary to design a replicate sampling scheme in order to determine the standard's accuracy and precision.

Comparison of results obtained using this indirect-transfer procedure with those from the direct-transfer procedure cannot be done a priori. This can only be achieved by a site-specific inter-comparison study that takes into account the fibre size and type of asbestos, and also the nature of the source of the airborne asbestos.