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Solid biofuels — Bridging behaviour of bulk biofuels

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 238, *Solid biofuels*.

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Introduction

In all particulate matter that is flowing through an opening, the particles have the tendency to form a solid bridge over that opening. This can cause interruptions or failures, particularly during a vertical transport, with the consequence of clogging of silo outlets, hoppers, down pipes, funnels or screw conveyors. To understand this phenomenon better, a determination test method was developed. The results of these tests can be used to improve the design of handling systems in order to minimize the risk of bridging.

Bridging is a phenomenon that can occur because of the inhomogeneous nature of the biofuel, particularly the variation in particle size, moisture content and number of overlong particles. In addition, biofuels are often not well understood by the designers of handling, storage and conversion systems. Bridging phenomenon can lead to an alternating build-up and collapse of bridges or shafts, often called ratholes (see also Figure 1).

Comprehensive studies referring to the bridging behaviour of solid biomass fuels were first performed by Mattsson[1] and by Mattsson and Kofman[3] in the early 1990s. They considered the basic handling characteristics of solid biofuels, i.e. the angle of repose, the friction of solid biofuels against surfaces and the tendency to build bridges over an opening. As these parameters had until then never been investigated with solid biomass fuels, new measuring principles and devices had to be developed. For determining the bridge building tendency, a test apparatus was constructed consisting of a movable floor which could be gradually opened so that a bridge of fuel could form over the opening until it finally collapsed[1]. Various fuels were tested and the impact of key parameters such as bed depth, moisture content of the fuels and size distribution of the particles were studied.

The test method was further developed as part of the European Project Bionorm 2[15]. The objective was to develop a mechanically improved apparatus to overcome deficiencies related to the inclination of the flexible floor and by assuring constant and reproducible low bending radiuses at the edges of the slot opening. At the same time, a new drive system for a moving floor was also developed, which allows for a more sensitive and dynamic adjustment of the opening speed during measurement[5]. Best practice guidelines[6] for the revised method were also developed and tested, and an international interlaboratory test was performed[7].

The Bionorm 2 project also had the objective of providing detailed descriptions and procedures based on the applied measurement principle. The intention was to establish a useful starting point for any future attempt to develop a harmonized standard method for direct determination of bridging behaviour. In order to document the extensive research and experimental work conducted, this document describes the main outcome.

Bridging behaviour cannot be defined as an absolute value for a particular biofuel since the propensity for bridging varies with moisture content, particle size distribution and content of overlong particles. In existing product specifications of biofuels, bridging characteristics are not normally provided for trade purposes due to variability from sample to sample. However, susceptibility to bridging has been identified as useful for the engineering design of handling and storage facilities, and their relationship to effective transportation of biofuels and safety.