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## Nanotechnologies — Particle size distribution for cellulose nanocrystals

*Nanotechnologies — Distribution en taille des particules pour les  
nanocristaux de cellulose*

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# Contents

Page

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Scope</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Normative references</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 Terms and definitions</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4 Abbreviated terms</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5 Dispersion of CNCs</b>	<b>2</b>
5.1 General considerations	2
5.2 Dispersion of CNCs by sonication	3
5.3 Dynamic light scattering assessment of dispersions	4
5.4 Determination of optimal sonication energy	5
<b>6 Sample preparation for microscopy</b>	<b>5</b>
6.1 General considerations	5
6.2 AFM sample preparation	6
6.3 TEM sample preparation	6
<b>7 Atomic force microscopy</b>	<b>6</b>
7.1 General	6
7.2 Instrumentation and accessories	7
7.3 Microscope calibration	7
7.4 Data acquisition	7
7.5 Image analysis	8
<b>8 Transmission electron microscopy</b>	<b>8</b>
8.1 General	8
8.2 Instrumentation and accessories	9
8.3 Microscope calibration	9
8.4 Data acquisition	9
8.5 Image analysis	9
<b>9 Data analysis</b>	<b>10</b>
9.1 General	10
9.2 Assessment of data quality	10
9.3 Fitting distribution models to data	10
9.4 Measurement uncertainty	11
<b>10 Test report</b>	<b>12</b>
10.1 Atomic force microscopy	12
10.1.1 General information	12
10.1.2 Sample	12
10.1.3 Data acquisition	12
10.1.4 Image analysis	13
10.2 Transmission electron microscopy	13
10.2.1 General information	13
10.2.2 Sample	13
10.2.3 Data acquisition	13
10.2.4 Image analysis	14
<b>Annex A (informative) Assessment of CNC dispersions</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Annex B (informative) Assessment of applied imaging force</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Annex C (informative) Interlaboratory comparison results: AFM</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Annex D (informative) Interlaboratory comparison results: TEM</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>34</b>

## Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 229, *Nanotechnologies*.

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](http://www.iso.org/members.html) and [www.iec.ch/national-committees](http://www.iec.ch/national-committees).

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## Introduction

Cellulose nanomaterials, including cellulose nanocrystals (CNCs) and cellulose nanofibrils, are anticipated to have significant commercial impact. Cellulose nanocrystals are produced from naturally occurring cellulose, primarily from wood pulps and annual plants, by acid hydrolysis. Their production from readily available cellulose sources makes them a candidate for use as a potentially non-toxic, biodegradable and sustainable nanomaterial. The recent demonstration of the feasibility of large-scale CNC production and the availability of infrastructure for harvesting raw materials will facilitate their commercial development. CNCs and cellulose nanofibrils are produced in a number of countries on pilot, pre-commercial or commercial scales. Estimates of the market potential for cellulosic nanomaterials are as high as 35 million metric tons annually, depending on the predicted applications and the estimated market penetration<sup>[10],[11]</sup>. Standards for characterization of CNCs are required for material certification to facilitate sustained commercial and applications development.

Cellulose nanocrystals have high crystallinity and are nanorods with high aspect ratio, surface area and mechanical strength. They assemble to give a chiral nematic phase with unique optical properties and their surface chemistry can be modified to ensure colloidal stability in water and to facilitate dispersion in a variety of matrices. These properties, plus their biocompatibility, low cost and minimal toxicity, enable many potential applications. Industrial producers are working with receptor industries in various application areas, including nanocomposite materials, health and personal care products, paints, adhesives and thin films, rheology modifiers and optical films and devices. Standardization activities within ISO/TC 229 and ISO/TC 6 have focused on nomenclature and terminology, characterization methods in general and specific methods for determining surface functional groups, metal ion and dry ash content. Particle size distribution is also a key property for CNC characterization. Particle morphology and size distribution control some properties of individual CNCs and contribute in part to their organization in suspensions, dry films and matrices. These properties and chemical characteristics determine CNC colloidal stability, viscosity and self-assembly, as well as performance in applications (e.g. reinforcement of nanocomposites). Length distribution may also be used to differentiate among cellulose nanocrystal grades or products.

This document describes a method for reproducibly dispersing dry CNCs for preparation of microscopy samples, provides image acquisition protocols for atomic force and transmission electron microscopy and summarizes image analysis procedures for determining particle size distributions. The methods are compatible with analysis of CNCs as produced by several processes and can be extended to surface modified CNCs with adjustment of dispersion and sample deposition methods. The two microscopy methods provide complementary information, and both have been widely used for size analysis of CNCs.

