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Ambient air — Determination of numerical concentration of inorganic fibrous particles — Scanning electron microscopy method

Air ambiant — Détermination de la concentration en nombre des particules inorganiques fibreuses — Méthode par microscopie électronique à balayage

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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 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).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

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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 146, *Air quality*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Ambient atmospheres*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 14966:2002), which has been technically revised. It also incorporates the corrected version ISO 14699:2002/Cor 1:2007. The main changes compared to the previous edition are as follows:

— Counting rules, changed to the recommended method (membrane filter method) of the WHO (World Health Organization);

— Analytical procedure (classification), using normalized peak height ratios in addition to the method of the previous edition;

— Rule for early termination of filter evaluation (counting and analysis). A formula is given to terminate the filter evaluation, if the calculated (asbestos) fibre concentration is above a set limit value for this fibre concentration.

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.

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Introduction

This document describes a method for measurement of the numerical concentration of inorganic fibrous particles in ambient air using the scanning electron microscope. This document is based on VDI 3492[1].

The method is also suitable for determining the numerical concentrations of inorganic fibres in the interior atmospheres of buildings, for example measurement of residual airborne fibre concentrations after the removal of asbestos-containing building materials.

Biological research has shown that the fibrogenic or carcinogenic effect of a fibre is related to its length, diameter and its resistance to dissolution in a biological environment. The point at which fibres are too short, too thick or of insufficient durability to produce a fibrogenic or carcinogenic effect is uncertain. Fibres with lengths greater than 10 µm and diameters of a few tenths of 1 µm, which also have durabilities such that they remain unchanged for many years in the body, are regarded as particularly carcinogenic. Based on current knowledge, fibres shorter than 5 µm are thought to have a lower carcinogenic potential[2]–[5].

For the purposes of this document, a fibre is defined as a particle which has a minimum length to width (aspect) ratio of 3:1. Fibres with lengths greater than 5 µm and widths extending from the lower limit of visibility up to 3 µm are counted. Fibres with diameters less than 3 µm are considered to be respirable. Since the method requires recording the lengths and widths of all fibres, the data can be re-evaluated if it is required to derive concentrations for fibres with a higher minimum aspect ratio[6].

The range of concentration to be measured extends from that found in clean air environments, in which the mean value of a large number of individual measurements of asbestos fibre concentrations has been found to be generally lower than 100 fibres/m^3 (fibres longer than 5 µm), up to higher exposure scenarios in which concentrations as much as two orders of magnitude higher have been found[4][6].

This method is used to measure the numerical concentration of inorganic fibres with widths smaller than 3 µm and lengths exceeding 5 µm up to a maximum of 100 µm. Using energy-dispersive X-ray analysis (EDXA), fibres are classified as fibres with compositions consistent with those of asbestos fibres, calcium sulfate fibres and other inorganic fibres.

Calcium sulfate fibres are separated from other inorganic fibres and are not included in the final result, because on the basis of current knowledge, they do not represent any health hazard. Nevertheless, the numerical concentration of calcium sulfate fibres should be determined, since a high concentration of these fibres can negatively bias the results for probable asbestos fibres, and in some circumstances the sample may have to be rejected[7]. In addition, knowledge of the numerical concentration of calcium sulfate fibres is of importance in the interpretation of fibre concentrations in ambient atmospheres.

Detection and identification of fibres becomes progressively more uncertain as the fibre width is reduced below 0,2 µm. Identification of a fibre as a specific species is more confident if the source of emission is known or suspected, such as in a building for which bulk materials are available for analysis.

In order to facilitate the scanning electron microscope examination, organic particles collected on the filter are almost completely removed by a plasma ashing treatment.

Except in situations where fibre identification is difficult, there should be only minor differences between fibre counting results obtained by this method and those obtained using the procedures for determination of PCM-equivalent fibres in Annex E of the transmission electron microscopy method ISO 10312[8].

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Ambient air — Determination of numerical concentration of inorganic fibrous particles — Scanning electron microscopy method

1 Scope

This document specifies a method using scanning electron microscopy for determination of the concentration of inorganic fibrous particles in the air. The method specifies the use of gold-coated, capillary-pore, track-etched membrane filters, through which a known volume of air has been drawn. Using energy-dispersive X-ray analysis, the method can discriminate between fibres with compositions consistent with those of the asbestos varieties (e.g. serpentine and amphibole), gypsum, and other inorganic fibres. Annex C provides a summary of fibre types which can be measured.

This document is applicable to the measurement of the concentrations of inorganic fibrous particles in ambient air. The method is also applicable for determining the numerical concentrations of inorganic fibrous particles in the interior atmospheres of buildings, for example to determine the concentration of airborne inorganic fibrous particles remaining after the removal of asbestos-containing products.

The range of concentrations for fibres with lengths greater than 5 µm, in the range of widths which can be detected under standard measurement conditions (see 7.2), is approximately 3 fibres to 200 fibres per square millimetre of filter area. The air concentrations, in fibres per cubic metre, represented by these values are a function of the volume of air sampled.

The ability of the method to detect and classify fibres with widths lower than 0,2 µm is limited. If airborne fibres in the atmosphere being sampled are predominantly <0,2 µm in width, a transmission electron microscopy method such as ISO 10312[8] can be used to determine the smaller fibres.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1
acicular
shape shown by an extremely slender crystal with cross-sectional dimensions which are small relative to its length, i.e. needle-like

3.2
amphibole
any of a group of rock-forming double-chain silicate minerals, closely related in crystal form and composition, and having the nominal formula:

$$A_{0\text{-}1}B_2C_5T_8O_{22}(OH,F,Cl)_2$$

where

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A = K, Na;

B = Fe^{2+}, Mn, Mg, Ca, Na;

C = Al, Cr, Ti, Fe^{3+}, Mg, Fe^{2+};

T = Si, Al, Cr, Fe^{3+}, Ti

Note 1 to entry: In some varieties of amphibole, these elements can be partially substituted by Li, Pb, or Zn. Amphibole is characterized by a cross-linked double chain of Si-O tetrahedra with a silicon: oxygen ratio of 4:11, by columnar or fibrous prismatic crystals and by good prismatic cleavage in two directions parallel to the crystal faces and intersecting at angles of about 56° and 124°.

3.3
amphibole asbestos
amphibole (3.2) in an *asbestiform* (3.5) *habit* (3.17)

3.4
analytical sensitivity
calculated airborne *fibre* (3.13) concentration equivalent to counting one fibre in the analysis

Note 1 to entry: The analytical sensitivity is expressed in fibres per cubic metre.

Note 2 to entry: This method does not specify a unique analytical sensitivity. The analytical sensitivity is determined by the needs of the measurement and the conditions found on the prepared sample.

3.5
asbestiform
specific type of mineral fibrosity in which the *fibres* (3.13) and fibrils possess high tensile strength and flexibility

3.6
asbestos
any of a group of silicate minerals belonging to the serpentine and *amphibole fibres* (3.2) groups which have crystallized in the *asbestiform* (3.5) *habit* (3.17), causing them to be easily separated into long, thin, flexible, strong *fibres* (3.13) when crushed or processed

Note 1 to entry: The Chemical Abstracts Service Registry Numbers of the most common asbestos varieties are: chrysotile (12001-29-5), crocidolite (12001-28-4), grunerite asbestos (amosite) (12172-73-5), anthophyllite asbestos (77536-67-5), tremolite asbestos (77536-68-6) and actinolite asbestos (77536-66-4).

3.7
aspect ratio
ratio of length of a particle to its width

3.8
chrysotile
fibrous variety of the mineral serpentine, which has the nominal composition:

$Mg_3Si_2O_5(OH)_4$

Note 1 to entry: Most natural chrysotile deviates little from this nominal composition. In some varieties of chrysotile, minor substitution of silicon by Al_3+ can occur. Minor substitution of magnesium by Al^{3+}, Fe^{2+}, Fe^{3+}, Ni^{2+}, Mn^{2+} and Co^{2+} can also be present. Chrysotile is the most prevalent type of asbestos.

3.9
cleavage
breaking of a mineral along one of its crystallographic directions

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3.10
cluster
fibrous structure in which two or more *fibres* (3.13), or *fibre bundles* (3.14) are randomly oriented in a connected grouping

3.11
countable fibre
any object longer than 5 µm, having a maximum width less than 3 µm and a minimum aspect ratio of 3:1

3.12
energy-dispersive X-ray analysis
measurement of the energies and intensities of X-rays by use of a solid-state detector and multi-channel analyser system

3.13
fibre
elongated particle which has parallel or stepped sides and a minimum aspect ratio of 3:1

3.14
fibre bundle
structure composed of apparently attached, parallel *fibres* (3.13)

Note 1 to entry: A fibre bundle can exhibit diverging fibres at one or both ends. The length is defined as equal to the maximum length of the structure, and the diameter is defined as equal to the maximum width in the compact region.

3.15
fibril
single *fibre* (3.13) of asbestos which cannot be further separated longitudinally into smaller components without losing its fibrous properties or appearances

3.16
fibrous structure
fibre (3.13), or connected grouping of fibres, with or without other particles

3.17
habit
the characteristic crystal growth form or combination of these forms of a mineral, including characteristic irregularities

3.18
image field
the area on the filter sample which is shown on the screen

3.19
limit of detection
calculated airborne *fibre* (3.13) concentration equivalent to the upper 95 % confidence limit of 2,99 fibres predicted by the Poisson distribution for a count of zero fibres

Note 1 to entry: The limit of detection is expressed in fibres per cubic metre.

3.20
magnification
ratio of the size of the image of an object on the observation screen to the actual size of the object

Note 1 to entry: For the purposes of this document, magnification values always refer to that applicable to the observation screen.

3.21
matrix
structure in which one or more *fibres* (3.13) or *fibre bundles* (3.14) touch, are attached to, or partially concealed by a single particle or connected group of non-fibrous particle

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3.22
serpentine
any of a group of common rock-forming minerals having the nominal formula:

$Mg_3Si_2O_5(OH)_4$

3.23
split fibre
agglomeration of *fibres* (3.13) which, at one or several points along its length, appears to be compact and undivided, whilst at other points appears to separate into separate fibres

3.24
structure
single *fibre* (3.13), *fibre bundle* (3.14), *cluster* (3.10)or matrix

4 Abbreviated terms

EDXA	Energy-dispersive X-ray analysis
FWHM	Full width, half maximum
PTFE	Polytetrafluoroethylene
SEM	Scanning electron microscope

5 Principle

A sample of airborne particulate is collected by drawing a measured volume of air through a gold-coated, capillary pore track-etched membrane filter with a maximum nominal pore size of 0,8 µm, which is subsequently examined in the scanning electron microscope (SEM). Before analysis, the gold-coated filter is treated in a plasma asher to remove organic particles, to the extent that this is possible. The individual fibrous particles and constituent fibres in a randomly-selected area of the filter are then counted at a magnification of approximately 2 000×. If a fibre is detected at the magnification of approximately 2 000×, it is examined at a higher magnification of approximately 10 000× to measure its dimensions. At the higher magnification of approximately 10 000×, energy-dispersive X-ray analysis (EDXA) is used to classify the fibre according to the chemical composition.

The limit of detection for this method is defined as the numerical fibre concentration below which, with 95 % confidence, the actual concentration lies when no fibres are found during the SEM examination. The limit of detection theoretically can be lowered indefinitely by filtration of progressively larger volumes of air and by examination of a larger area of the specimen in the SEM. In practice, the lowest achievable limit of detection for a particular area of SEM specimen examined is controlled by the total suspended particulate concentration remaining after the plasma ashing step.

A limit of detection of approximately 300 fibres/m^3 is obtained if an air volume of 1 m^3 per square centimetre of filter surface area passes through the filter, and an area of 1 mm^2 of the filter area is examined in the SEM. This corresponds to an evaluated sample air volume of 0,01 m^3.

6 Apparatus and materials

6.1 Air sampling

6.1.1 Sampling head

A disposable, 3-piece, conductive plastic field monitor cassette may be used as the sampling head, provided that the design is such that significant leakage around the filter does not occur. A re-usable

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