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**Determination of the ultimate aerobic  
biodegradability of plastic materials  
under controlled composting  
conditions — Method by analysis of  
evolved carbon dioxide —**

Part 1:  
**General method**

*Évaluation de la biodégradabilité aérobie ultime des matériaux  
plastiques dans des conditions contrôlées de compostage — Méthode  
par analyse du dioxyde de carbone libéré —*

*Partie 1: Méthode générale*



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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.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

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.

ISO 14855-1 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 61, *Plastics*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Physical-chemical properties*.

It cancels and replaces ISO 14855:1999, the main aims of the revision being to combine the parent standard with its amendment ISO 14855:1999/Amd.1:2004 and to renumber the standard as Part 1.

ISO 14855 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastic materials under controlled composting conditions — Method by analysis of evolved carbon dioxide*:

- *Part 1: General method*
- *Part 2: Gravimetric measurement of carbon dioxide evolved in a laboratory-scale test* [in preparation]

## Introduction

The main method specified in this part of ISO 14855 uses a solid-phase respirometric test system based on mature compost used as a solid bed, a source of nutrients, and an inoculum rich in thermophilic microorganisms. Mature compost is a very heterogeneous and complex material. Therefore, it can be difficult to quantify the residual polymeric material left in the bed at the end of the test, to detect possible low-molecular-mass molecules released into the solid bed by the polymeric material during degradation, and to assess the biomass. As a result, it can be difficult to perform a complete carbon balance. Another difficulty which is sometimes encountered with mature compost is a “priming effect”: the organic matter present in large amounts in the mature compost can undergo polymer-induced degradation, known as the “priming effect”, which affects the measurement of the biodegradability.

To overcome these difficulties and to improve the reliability of the method, the mature compost can be replaced by a solid mineral medium which is used as the composting bed, thus facilitating analyses. This variant can be used to measure the biodegradation in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> evolution, to quantify and analyse the biomass and the residues of polymeric material left in the solid bed at the end of the test, and to perform a complete carbon balance. Furthermore, the method is not sensibly affected by the priming effect and can, therefore, be used to assess materials known to cause this problem with mature compost. The mineral bed can also be subjected to an ecotoxicological analysis to verify the absence of any ecotoxic activity in the bed after biodegradation.

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# Determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastic materials under controlled composting conditions — Method by analysis of evolved carbon dioxide —

## Part 1: General method

**WARNING** — Sewage, activated sludge, soil and compost may contain potentially pathogenic organisms. Therefore appropriate precautions should be taken when handling them. Toxic test compounds and those whose properties are unknown should be handled with care.

### 1 Scope

This part of ISO 14855 specifies a method for the determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastics, based on organic compounds, under controlled composting conditions by measurement of the amount of carbon dioxide evolved and the degree of disintegration of the plastic at the end of the test. This method is designed to simulate typical aerobic composting conditions for the organic fraction of solid mixed municipal waste. The test material is exposed to an inoculum which is derived from compost. The composting takes place in an environment wherein temperature, aeration and humidity are closely monitored and controlled. The test method is designed to yield the percentage conversion of the carbon in the test material to evolved carbon dioxide as well as the rate of conversion.

Subclauses 8.6 and 8.7 specify a variant of the method using a mineral bed (vermiculite) inoculated with thermophilic microorganisms obtained from compost with a specific activation phase, instead of mature compost. This variant is designed to yield the percentage of carbon in the test substance converted to carbon dioxide and the rate of conversion.

The conditions described in this part of ISO 14855 may not always correspond to the optimum conditions for the maximum degree of biodegradation to occur.

### 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application 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 5663:1984, *Water quality — Determination of Kjeldahl nitrogen — Method after mineralization with selenium*

ISO 8245:1999, *Water quality — Guidelines for the determination of total organic carbon (TOC) and dissolved organic carbon (DOC)*