
**Plastics — Determination of aerobic
biodegradation of non-floating plastic
materials in a seawater/sediment
interface — Method by analysis of
evolved carbon dioxide**

*Plastiques — Détermination de la biodégradation aérobie des
matières plastiques non-flottantes à l'interface eau de mer/sédiments
— Méthode par analyse du dioxyde de carbone libéré*

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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).

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For an explanation on 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 the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

The committee responsible for this document is ISO/TC 61, *Plastics*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Physical-chemical properties*.

Introduction

Products made with biodegradable plastics are designed to be recovered by means of organic recycling in composting plants or in anaerobic digesters. The uncontrolled dispersion of biodegradable plastics in natural environments is not desirable. The biodegradability of products cannot be considered as an excuse to spread wastes that should be recovered and recycled. However, test methods to measure rate and level of biodegradation in natural environments (such as soil or the marine environment) are of interest in order to better characterize the behaviour of plastics in these very particular environments. As a matter of fact, some plastics are used in products that are applied in the sea (e.g. fishing gear) and sometimes they can get lost or put willingly in marine environment. The characterization of biodegradable plastic materials can be enlarged by applying specific test methods that enable the quantitative assessment of biodegradation of plastics exposed to marine sediment and seawater. Plastic products are directly littered or arrive with fresh waters in the pelagic zone (free water). From there, and depending on density, tides, currents, and marine fouling plastics may sink to the sublittoral, and reach the seafloor surface. Many biodegradable plastics have a density higher than 1 and therefore tend to sink. The sediment passes from aerobic to anoxic and finally anaerobic conditions going from the surface (the interface with seawater) into deeper layers, displaying a very steep oxygen gradient.

Plastics — Determination of aerobic biodegradation of non-floating plastic materials in a seawater/sediment interface — Method by analysis of evolved carbon dioxide

1 Scope

This International Standard specifies a test method to determine the degree and rate of aerobic biodegradation of plastic materials when settled on marine sandy sediment at the interface between seawater and the seafloor, by measuring the evolved carbon dioxide.

This test method is a simulation under laboratory conditions of the habitat found in different seawater/sediment-areas in the sea, e.g. in a benthic zone where sunlight reaches the ocean floor (photic zone) that, in marine science, is called sublittoral zone

The determination of biodegradation of plastic materials buried in marine sediment is outside the scope of this International Standard.

Measurement of aerobic biodegradation can also be obtained by monitoring the oxygen consumption, as described in ISO 18830.

The conditions described in this International Standard may not always correspond to the optimum conditions for the maximum degree of biodegradation to occur.

2 Normative references

The following documents, in whole or in part, are normatively referenced in this document and are indispensable for its application. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 14852:1999, *Determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastic materials in an aqueous medium — Method by analysis of evolved carbon dioxide*

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

3 Terms and definitions

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

3.1

theoretical amount of evolved carbon dioxide

ThCO₂

maximum theoretical amount of carbon dioxide evolved after completely oxidising a chemical compound, calculated from the molecular formula or from determination of total organic carbon (TOC)

Note 1 to entry: It is expressed as milligrams of carbon dioxide evolved per milligram or gram of test compound.

3.2

total organic carbon

TOC

amount of carbon bound in an organic compound

Note 1 to entry: Total organic carbon is expressed as milligrams of carbon per 100 mg of the compound.