



Standard Practice for Determination of Adsorptive Capacity of Activated Carbon by Aqueous Phase Isotherm Technique¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers the determination of the adsorptive capacity of activated carbon to remove undesirable constituents from water and waste water. It can be used to evaluate the adsorptive capacity of activated or reactivated carbon.

1.2 This practice is not recommended unless special precautions are taken to reduce loss during sample preparation and analysis.

1.3 This practice is recommended to determine the adsorptive capacity of activated carbon for the following applications, but is not limited to these applications:

- 1.3.1 Removal of color from dye mill waste water,
- 1.3.2 Removal of taste or odor constituents, or both, from potable waters,
- 1.3.3 Removal of toxicants from water,
- 1.3.4 Removal of surface active agents from water,
- 1.3.5 Removal of BOD₅ from sanitary waste waters, and
- 1.3.6 Removal of TOC from industrial waste waters.

1.4 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.5 The following safety caveat applies to the procedure section of this practice: *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

[D1129 Terminology Relating to Water](#)

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D28 on Activated Carbon and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D28.02 on Liquid Phase Evaluation.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

[D1193 Specification for Reagent Water](#)

[D3370 Practices for Sampling Water from Closed Conduits](#)

[D2652 Terminology Relating to Activated Carbon](#)

[D2867 Test Methods for Moisture in Activated Carbon](#)

[E300 Practice for Sampling Industrial Chemicals](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For definitions of terms used in this practice relating to activated carbon, refer to Terminology [D2652](#).

3.1.2 For definition of terms used in this practice relating to water, refer to Terminology [D1129](#).

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 This practice consists of the determination of the adsorptive capacity of activated carbon for adsorbable constituents by contacting the aqueous solution with activated carbon, determining the amount of the constituents removed, and calculating the adsorptive capacity from a Freundlich isotherm plot.

4.1.1 Sample weights of activated carbon may have to be adjusted, depending on the concentration of adsorbable constituents in the water.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This practice is used when activated carbon is considered as an adsorbent in treating water. Since both granular and powdered activated carbons are commercially available, a standard practice is needed to ensure that the activated carbons are evaluated under the same test conditions. Specified particle size carbon is to be used to ensure that the same test conditions are used. The practice is generally performed at 20°C; however, other temperatures may be used and noted.

6. Interferences

6.1 The water sample must not contain any immiscible oil.

6.2 Generally, membrane filters contain a slight amount of leachable surfactants and wetting agents that might be a source of detectable error in waters having low concentrations of adsorbable constituents.

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Agitator*, able to keep slurried activated carbon in suspension.

NOTE 1—A wrist-action shaker or a magnetic stirrer is suitable as an agitator.

7.2 *Grinding mill*, capable of grinding material so that 95 % passes through a 325-mesh sieve.

7.3 *Vacuum or pressure-filtration apparatus*.

7.4 *Membrane filters*, 0.40 to 0.45 µm.

7.5 *Erlenmeyer flasks*, glass stoppered, 500-mL and 1000-mL capacity.

7.6 *Analytical balance*, capable of weighing to the nearest 0.1 mg.

7.7 *Oven*, forced-air circulation, capable of temperature regulation between 145 and 155°C.

7.8 *Constant temperature water bath*, capable of temperature regulation of $20 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$.

7.9 *Pipet*, 100-mL.

8. Sampling

8.1 Sample activated carbon that has been sampled according to Practice E300 and reduced in particle size so that 95 % passes through a U.S. 325-mesh sieve by wet screening or equivalent, and oven-dried according to Test Method D2867 (3 hours at 150°C is usually sufficient).

8.2 Collect water samples in accordance with Practices D3370.

9. Procedure

9.1 Table 1 is a suggested list of the activated carbon weights and solution sample volumes to be used for the expected concentrations of adsorbable constituents. Suggested carbon weights or solution sample volumes should be adjusted to obtain a maximum of 85 % adsorbate removal and a minimum of 10 % adsorbate removal.

9.2 For water containing >10 mg/L adsorbable constituents, pipet aliquots of 100 mL each into 500-mL glass-stoppered Erlenmeyer flasks. For water containing ≤10 mg/L, measure 500-mL aliquots into 1000-mL glass-stoppered Erlenmeyer flasks.

9.3 Add to the containers the appropriate amount of pulverized activated carbon corrected to dry basis (Table 1) in regular intervals to allow time for filtration. Generally, a 5-min interval is adequate. Use one flask without activated carbon for a control sample.

9.4 After the addition of each activated carbon sample, swirl the flask to wet the carbon. Stopper the flask and place on the agitator. Record the time.

9.5 Allow each flask to shake or agitate for 2 h in a water bath at the desired temperature. Two hours contact time is normally sufficient to achieve steady state. However, a contact time study should be performed to verify that steady state is achieved (see 4.1).

9.6 After 2 h, immediately filter each test and control samples through separate new 0.40 to 0.45-µm membrane filters.

NOTE 2—If the water sample contains volatile constituents, use pressure filtration with nitrogen gas to reduce loss.

NOTE 3—It is recommended that each membrane filter be rinsed with 500 mL of reagent grade Type II water (Specification D1193) prior to filtration.

9.7 Immediately analyze the filtrates for the specific constituent of interest and record the results along with the corresponding carbon weight.

10. Calculation

10.1 Determine the amount of constituent adsorbed, X , as follows:

$$X = C_o V - CV$$

where:

X = amount of constituent adsorbed, mg,

C_o = concentration of constituents before carbon treatment, mg/L,

C = concentration of constituents after carbon treatment, mg/L, and

V = volume of sample, L .

10.2 Determine the amount of constituent adsorbed per unit weight of carbon, X/M , as follows:

$$X/M = \frac{(C_o V - CV)}{M}$$

TABLE 1 Solution Sample Volumes and Carbon Weights for Determining Adsorbable Constituents

Concentration of Adsorbable Constituents, mg/L	Solution Sample Volume, mL	Suggested Carbon Weights (Dry Basis)
≤10	500	1.0, 2.5, 5.0, 7.5, 10.0, 25.0, and 50.0 mg
>10; 100	100	0.01, 0.02, 0.04, 0.10, 0.20, 0.40, 1.0, 2.0, and 4.0 g
>100	100	0.05, 0.1, 0.2, 0.5, 1.0, 2.0, 5.0, and 10.0 g