



Designation: D5237 – 14 (Reapproved 2024)

## Standard Guide for Evaluating Fabric Softeners<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D5237; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

### 1. Scope

1.1 This guide evaluates the performance characteristics of fabric softener products. It provides guidance for evaluating the on fabric efficacy of treatment chemicals dosed into the wash, rinse, or dryer cycle in a home laundry washer or dryer. This guide can be used for screening of fabric softener products, or to evaluate the products through multiple accumulative cycles.

1.2 The relative ranking of products assessed by these procedures may be affected by such factors as machine type and settings, fabric load composition, as well as by the washing and drying procedures used.

1.3 The values stated in inch-pound units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are mathematical conversions to SI units that are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

1.4 *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, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.5 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

### 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*<sup>2</sup>

E313 Practice for Calculating Yellowness and Whiteness Indices from Instrumentally Measured Color Coordinates  
E1958 Guide for Sensory Claim Substantiation

<sup>1</sup> This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D12 on Soaps and Other Detergents and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D12.15 on Physical Testing.

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

E2164 Test Method for Directional Difference Test

2.2 *AATCC Standard:*<sup>3</sup>

AATCC Test Method 110-1994 Whiteness of Textiles

### 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 *fabric softener, n*—laundry auxiliary product or laundry detergent ingredient that gives fabrics a soft feel, smooth surface, provides fragrance, or reduces static electricity, or a combination thereof.

3.1.2 *front-loading high-efficiency (HE) washing machine/washer, n*—horizontally or nearly horizontally oriented machine used for laundry that uses varying amounts of water to launder fabrics.

3.1.2.1 *Discussion*—These washers (1) may not exhibit any visible free water or may show significant quantities of visible free water, (2) may lift and tumble the clothes load, (3) may employ both spinning and tumbling in both the washer or rinse processes, (4) may use jet sprays of wash solution or rinse solution, or (5) may use thermal or chemical inputs, or both, to offer sanitation or allergen claims. HE washers use considerably less water and energy than traditional deep-fill washers in the laundering process. HE washers are labeled by the appliance industry and may be recognized by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as Energy Star rated machines.

3.1.3 *home laundering, n*—cleaning or conditioning, or both, of textile materials using the washing and drying equipment commonly found in the home.

3.1.4 *top-loading high-efficiency (HE) washing machine/washer, n*—vertically oriented agitation machine that is used for home laundry, with the fundamental difference from a traditional top-loading washer being that this washer uses reduced water resources during the process.

3.1.4.1 *Discussion*—This washer may (1) deep fill once (during the wash or rinse), (2) partially fill one or more times, (3) may have a full agitator, (4) may have an impeller in place of an agitator, (5) may use thermal or chemical inputs, or both, to offer sanitation or allergen claims, or (6) may use spray

<sup>3</sup> Available from American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, P.O. Box 12215, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709.

washing or spray rinsing technologies, or combination thereof. HE washers use considerably less water and energy than traditional deep-fill washers in the laundering process. HE washers are labeled by the appliance industry and may be recognized by the U.S. DOE and U.S. EPA as Energy Star rated machines.

3.1.5 *traditional deep-fill top-loading washing machine/washer, n*—vertically oriented agitation machine that is used for home laundry.

3.1.5.1 *Discussion*—This washer fills to the basket top at least two times during the wash process: once for washing and once for rinsing. This type of washer may also include spray flushes in either the wash or rinse portions of the cycle.

## 4. Summary of Guide

4.1 Fabrics are evaluated for the impact of fabric softener products applied in the wash, rinse or dryer cycle for softness, whiteness retention, rewet or water absorbency, static control, or fragrance, or combination thereof, using test panels or instrumental methods.

## 5. Significance and Use

5.1 The methods in this guide can be used for screening of fabric softener products or to evaluate their performance, through a single cycle or multiple accumulative cycles, relative to a designated reference product or a comparative product(s).

5.2 A single assessment of each of the product characteristics tested by these methods will not predict overall performance of the softener product. A single test run under specified fixed conditions cannot be expected to reflect the comparative performance under many other possible conditions of use.

## 6. Fabric Preparation

### 6.1 Scope:

6.1.1 This section provides a procedure for preparing new or previously used textile specimens for further treatment and evaluation.

6.1.2 All new fabrics received directly from the mill or purchased from vendors must be stripped of mill conditioners and processing auxiliaries. Test fabrics are to be used for only a single evaluation while ballast used for load bulk may be reused indefinitely if stripping is done between each evaluation.

### 6.2 Apparatus and Materials:

6.2.1 *Automatic Washing Machine*,

6.2.2 *Automatic Laundry Dryer*, gas or electric.

6.2.3 *Test Fabrics*, white cotton or cotton/polyester loop terry cloth, or both, such as hand towels. Other fabrics suitable for fabric softener products are also acceptable. Care should be taken to use matched sets of fabrics of the same brand and manufacturing origin, and similar construction, weight, and fiber blend within each specific test.

6.2.4 *Fabric Load*, Minimum of 6 lb (2.7 kg) for each total load. Supplement test fabrics with ballast fabrics, such as pillow cases, terry towels, or commercially available yard goods cut in pieces no larger than 1 yd<sup>2</sup> (0.8 m<sup>2</sup>) per piece. All ballast loads shall be the same composition for each run within

a test. When running successive test loads, use fresh ballast or strip the ballast prior to use.

6.2.5 *Standard Reference Detergent*, such as, AATCC (American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists), liquid or powder (suggested to use without brightener formula if testing whiteness retention), or a commercially built anionic detergent, if desired.

6.3 *Stripping Procedure*—The objective of this procedure is to remove finishes or residues, or both, from the ballast and test fabrics. The procedure below is one suggested way to meet this objective.

6.3.1 Load washer with appropriate amount of fabrics. Do not overload.

6.3.2 Add appropriate dosage of built anionic detergent.

6.3.3 Set machine for hot wash temperature setting. Allow washer to fill with water and continue on through the complete wash and rinse cycle.

6.3.4 Repeat 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 four more times.

6.3.5 Wash this load of fabric through an additional complete cycle three times with no detergent. If there appears to be residual detergent (as evidenced by sudsing during the previous cycle) repeat the water only cycles one or two more times or as needed to ensure removal of residual anionic detergent to a minimal level.

6.3.6 Dry fabrics in an automatic dryer at the *normal* or *hot* setting until the load is dry.

6.3.7 If fabrics are stored prior to evaluation, protect from environmental influences such as odor, moisture, dust, etc.

## 7. Fabric Treatment with Fabric Softener

### 7.1 Scope:

7.1.1 This section provides the procedure for application of the test products to the textile substrates.

7.2 *Fixed Test Conditions*—All test conditions not under study should be fixed within the range of normal household practice. The following are suggested as representative of many households.

7.2.1 *Matched Washing Machines*—All washings shall be performed in the same machine or in mechanically matched units of the same model machine using a controlled experimental design.

### 7.2.2 Household Automatic Washing Machine:

7.2.2.1 *Conventional Deep-fill Traditional Top Loader*—Normal/casual with 10 min to 14 min wash cycle, appropriate water fill for load size, and regular spin speed.

7.2.2.2 *Front-loading High Efficiency*—Normal/casual or normal/colors setting, normal soil level, and high spin speed,

7.2.2.3 *Top-loading High Efficiency*—Normal/casual or normal/colors setting, normal soil level, and high spin speed.

7.2.3 *Household Automatic Laundry Dryer*, gas or electric.

7.2.4 *Stripped Test Fabrics*, defined in 6.2 and 6.3.

7.2.5 *Water Hardness*—35 ppm (2 grains/gal); 100 ppm (6 grains/gal); 150 ppm (9 grains/gal); and 260 ppm (15 grains/gal). 120 ppm (7 grains/gal) is suggested if only one level is tested.

7.2.5.1 The calcium/magnesium ratio of the hardness minerals (expressed as CaCO<sub>3</sub>) should be adjusted to attain different water hardness as shown in Table 1.