



Designation: D6954 – 24

Standard Guide for Exposing and Testing Plastics that Degrade in the Environment by a Combination of Oxidation and Biodegradation¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D6954; 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 (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope*

1.1 This guide provides a framework or road map to compare and rank the controlled laboratory rates of degradation and degree of physical property losses of polymers by thermal and photooxidation processes as well as the biodegradation and ecological impacts in defined applications and disposal environments after degradation. Disposal environments range from exposure in soil, landfill, and municipal or industrial compost in which thermal oxidation may occur and land cover and agricultural use in which photooxidation may also occur.

1.2 In this guide, established ASTM International standards are used in three tiers for accelerating and measuring the loss in properties and molecular weight by both thermal and photooxidation processes and other abiotic processes (Tier 1), measuring biodegradation (Tier 2), and assessing ecological impact of the products from these processes (Tier 3).

1.3 The Tier 1 conditions selected for thermal oxidation and photooxidation accelerate the degradation likely to occur in a chosen application and disposal environment. The conditions should include a range of humidity or water concentrations based on the application and disposal environment in mind. The measured rate of degradation at typical oxidation temperatures is required to compare and rank the polymers being evaluated in that chosen application to reach a molecular weight that constitutes a demonstrable biodegradable residue (using ASTM International biometer tests for CO₂ evolution appropriate to the chosen environment). By way of example, accelerated oxidation data must be obtained at temperatures and humidity ranges typical in that chosen application and disposal environment, for example, in soil (20 to 30°C), landfill (20 to 35°C), and municipal or industrial composting facilities (30 to 65°C). For applications in soils, local temperatures and humidity ranges must be considered as they vary widely with

geography. At least one temperature must be reasonably close to the end use or disposal temperature, but under no circumstances should this be more than 20°C away from the removed that temperature. It must also be established that the polymer does not undergo a phase change, such as glass transition temperature (T_g) within the temperature range of testing.

1.4 The residues resulting from the oxidations are then exposed to appropriate disposal or use environments in standard biometric test methods to measure the rate and degree of biodegradation (Tier 2).

1.5 The data generated under Tier 1 evaluation and the determined time for the biodegradation in the chosen environment (Tier 2) allow ranking relative to other polymers evaluated under similar environmental conditions with this guide. The degree and time for biodegradation should be consistent with ASTM International methods, and any residues from the intermediate oxidation stage and from biodegradation must be shown to be environmentally benign and not persistent (Tier 3).

NOTE 1—The intended use of this guide is for comparison and ranking of data to aid in the design and development and the reduction of environmental impacts of polymers that require no more than 24 months to oxidize and biodegrade in the intended use and disposal options and create no harmful or persistent residues under the appropriate disposal conditions (for example, two seasons of crop-growing conditions in soil).

1.6 It is cautioned that the results of any laboratory exposure in this guide cannot be directly extrapolated to actual disposal environments; confirmation to real world exposure is ultimately required as with all ASTM International standards.

1.7 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard.

NOTE 2—There is no ISO standard that is the equivalent of this standard guide.

1.8 *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.*

1.9 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the*

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D20 on Plastics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D20.96 on Environmentally Degradable Plastics and Biobased Products.

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*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard

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:²

D883 Terminology Relating to Plastics

D3826 Practice for Determining Degradation End Point in Degradable Polyethylene and Polypropylene Using a Tensile Test

D3987 Practice for Shake Extraction of Solid Waste with Water

D5071 Practice for Exposure of Photodegradable Plastics in a Xenon Arc Apparatus

D5208 Practice for Fluorescent Ultraviolet (UV) Exposure of Photodegradable Plastics

D5272 Practice for Outdoor Exposure Testing of Photodegradable Plastics

D5338 Test Method for Determining Aerobic Biodegradation of Plastic Materials Under Controlled Composting Conditions, Incorporating Thermophilic Temperatures

D5510 Practice for Heat Aging of Oxidatively Degradable Plastics (Withdrawn 2010)³

D5526 Test Method for Determining Anaerobic Biodegradation of Plastic Materials Under Accelerated Landfill Conditions

D5951 Practice for Preparing Residual Solids Obtained After Biodegradability Standard Methods for Plastics in Solid Waste for Toxicity and Compost Quality Testing (Withdrawn 2011)³

D5988 Test Method for Determining Aerobic Biodegradation of Plastic Materials in Soil

D6002 Guide for Assessing the Compostability of Environmentally Degradable Plastics (Withdrawn 2011)³

D6400 Specification for Labeling of Plastics Designed to be Aerobically Composted in Municipal or Industrial Facilities

E1440 Guide for Acute Toxicity Test with the Rotifer Brachionus

2.2 Other Standards:

EPA TITLE 40 CFA 40CFR62, 40CFR50-189, 40CFR260-299, 40CFR300-399, 700-799, and 49CFR100-180⁴

OECD Guideline 207 Earthworm, Acute Toxicity Tests⁵

OECD Guideline 208 Terrestrial Plants, Growth Test⁵

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 Definitions of most terms applicable to this guide appear in Terminology **D883** and Guide **D6002**.

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.

³ The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

⁴ Available from United States Environmental Protection Association (EPA), Ariel Rios Bldg., 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20460.

⁵ Available from OECD, 2 rue Andre Pascal, F-75775 Paris Cedex 16, France.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *environmental degradation of a plastic, n*—abiotic or biotic degradation process or both that occurs in a given environment and includes photodegradation, oxidation, hydrolysis, and biodegradation. Living organisms effect biotic degradation processes and abiotic degradation processes are nonbiological in nature.

3.2.1.1 *Discussion*—Term not defined in Terminology **D883**.

3.2.2 *gels, n*—cross-linked polymer structures insoluble in solvents that do not break the primary or cross-linking bonds in the polymer. Cross-links created during oxobiodegradation of polymers are chemical bonds created by the degradation process, mostly carbon-carbon bonds, and thus extremely resistant to solvent degradation.⁶

3.2.3 *oxidation, n*—process promoted thermally or by irradiation in the presence of oxygen.

4. Summary of Guide

4.1 This guide may be used to compare and rank the rate and degree of thermal oxidative degradation of a plastic material relatively to a molecular weight range that can be established as biodegradable in a chosen environment. Subsequently, the biodegradation of these degraded polymers in diverse environments such as soil, municipal or industrial compost, landfill, and water may be compared and ranked using standard biometric test methods and measuring carbon dioxide evolution.

NOTE 3—If municipal or industrial composting is the designated disposal route, Specification **D6400** is the only ultimate and definitive applicable specification for measuring biodegradation in a municipal or industrial compostability process. Oxidation followed by biodegradation under the conditions found in this guide does not confer the designation “municipally or industrially compostable” or any connotation that the applications are acceptable for composting in a commercial or municipal composting facility.

4.2 This guide uses a tiered criteria-based approach to assess the consecutive oxidation and biodegradability of plastic products and ecological impacts in defined applications. This is shown schematically in Section 6. Each tier in this guide includes objectives and a summary that presents test methods, method principles, test duration, and interpretation of results.

4.3 The tiered approach is chosen in the laboratory for convenient separation of oxidative degradation, biodegradation, and ecological impact stages even though in the real world all three are likely to be concurrent rather than consecutive.

4.4 Tiered Methodology:

4.4.1 Tier 1 measures the rate and extent of molecular weight loss resulting from oxidation that is indicative of losses in physical properties from oxidation. Tier 1 requires either accelerated testing or long-term testing over a range of relative humidity or amount of moisture. Accelerated testing must be performed under conditions and temperatures that are acceptably typical of the specific application and disposal environments under consideration. Practices **D5208**, **D5510**, and

⁶ Vollmert, B., *Polymer Chemistry*, Springer-Verlag, New York, 1973, p. 27, also pp. 543- 561.