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An American National Standard

Standard Practice for Acceptance of Evidence Based on the Results of Probability Sampling[1]

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E141; 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 practice presents rules for accepting or rejecting evidence based on a sample. Statistical evidence for this practice is in the form of an estimate of a proportion, an average, a total, or other numerical characteristic of a finite population or lot. It is an estimate of the result which would have been obtained by investigating the entire lot or population under the same rules and with the same care as was used for the sample.

1.2 One purpose of this practice is to describe straightforward sample selection and data calculation procedures so that courts, commissions, etc. will be able to verify whether such procedures have been applied. The methods may not give least uncertainty at least cost, they should however furnish a reasonable estimate with calculable uncertainty.

1.3 This practice is primarily intended for one-of-a-kind studies. Repetitive surveys allow estimates of sampling uncertainties to be pooled; the emphasis of this practice is on estimation of sampling uncertainty from the sample itself. The parameter of interest for this practice is effectively a constant. Thus, the principal inference is a simple point estimate to be used as if it were the unknown constant, rather than, for example, a forecast or prediction interval or distribution devised to match a random quantity of interest.

1.4 A system of units is not specified in this standard.

1.5 *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.*

1.6 *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:*[2]

E105 Guide for Probability Sampling of Materials

E122 Practice for Calculating Sample Size to Estimate, With Specified Precision, the Average for a Characteristic of a Lot or Process

E456 Terminology Relating to Quality and Statistics

E1402 Guide for Sampling Design

E2586 Practice for Calculating and Using Basic Statistics

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Refer to Terminology E456 for definitions of other statistical terms used in this practice.

3.1.1 *audit subsample, n*—a small subsample of a sample selected for review of all sample selection and data collection procedures.

3.1.2 *equal complete coverage result, n*—the numerical characteristic of interest calculated from observations made by drawing randomly from the frame, all of the sampling units covered by the frame.

3.1.2.1 *Discussion*—Locating the units and evaluating them are supposed to be done in exactly the same way and at the same time as was done for the sample. The quantity itself is denoted θ. The equal complete coverage result is never actually calculated. Its purpose is to serve as the objectively defined concrete goal of the investigation. The quantity θ may be the population mean, $(\bar{Y})$, total (Y), median (M), the proportion (P), or any other such quantity.

3.1.3 *frame, n*—a list, compiled for sampling purposes, which designates all of the sampling units (items or groups) of a population or universe to be considered in a specific study. **E1402**

3.1.4 *probability sample, n*—a sample in which the sampling units are selected by a chance process such that a

[1] This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E11 on Quality and Statistics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E11.10 on Sampling / Statistics.

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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.

specified probability of selection can be attached to each possible sample that can be selected. **E1402**

3.1.5 *replicate subsamples, n*—a number of disjoint samples, each one separately drawn from the frame in accord with the same probability sampling plan.

3.1.6 *sample, n*—a group of observations or test results, taken from a larger collection of observations or test results, which serves to provide information that may be used as a basis for making a decision concerning the larger collection. **E2586**

3.1.7 *sampling unit, n*—an item, group of items, or segment of material that can be selected as part of a probability sampling plan. **E1402**

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is designed to permit users of sample survey data to judge the trustworthiness of results from such surveys. Practice E105 provides a statement of principles for guidance of ASTM technical committees and others in the preparation of a sampling plan for a specific material. Guide E1402 describes the principal types of sampling designs. Practice E122 aids in deciding on the required sample size.

4.2 Section 5 gives extended definitions of the concepts basic to survey sampling and the user should verify that such concepts were indeed used and understood by those who conducted the survey. What was the frame? How large (exactly) was the quantity N? How was the parameter θ estimated and its standard error calculated? If replicate subsamples were not used, why not? Adequate answers should be given for all questions. There are many acceptable answers to the last question.

4.3 If the sample design was relatively simple, such as simple random or stratified, then fully valid estimates of sampling variance are easily available. If a more complex design was used then methods such as discussed in Ref **(1)**[3] or in Guide E1402 may be acceptable. Use of replicate subsamples is the most straightforward way to estimate sampling variances when the survey design is complex.

4.4 Once the survey procedures that were used satisfy Section 5, see if any increase in sample size is needed. The calculations for making it objectively are described in Section 6.

4.5 Refer to Section 7 to guide in the interpretation of the uncertainty in the reported value of the parameter estimate, $\hat{\theta}$, that is, the value of its standard error, $se(\hat{\theta})$. The quantity $se(\hat{\theta})$ should be reviewed to verify that the risks it entails are commensurate with the size of the sample.

4.6 When the audit subsample shows that there was reasonable conformity with prescribed procedures and when the known instances of departures from the survey plan can be shown to have no appreciable effect on the estimate, the value of $\hat{\theta}$ is appropriate for use.

[3] The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this standard.

5. Concepts and Procedures of Sampling

5.1 *Probability sampling* is a procedure by which one obtains a result from a selected set of sampling units that will agree, within calculable limits of variation, with the equal complete coverage result. Probability sampling plans include instructions for using either (*1*) prepared tables of random numbers, (*2*) computer algorithms to generate pseudo-random numbers, or (*3*) certifiably honest physical devices to select the sample units so that inferences may be drawn from the test results and decisions may be made with risks correctly calculated by probability theory.

5.1.1 Such plans are defined and their relative advantages discussed in Guide E1402 and Refs **(1-3)**.

5.2 *Procedures* must be described in written form. Parties interested in collecting data should agree on the importance of knowing θ and its definition including measurement methods. The frame shall be carefully and explicitly constructed. Every sampling unit in the frame (*1*) has a unique serial number, which may be preassigned or determined by some definite rule and (*2*) has an address—a complete and clear instruction (or rules for its formulation) as to where and when to make the observation or evaluation. Address instructions should refer to concrete clerical materials such as directories, dials of clocks or of meters, ledgers, maps, aerial photographs, etc. Duplicates in the frame shall be eliminated. N shall be well established. Random numbers (or a certifiably honest physical random device) shall dictate selection of the sample. There shall be no substitution of one sampling unit for another. The method of sample selection shall permit calculation of a standard error of the estimate. The use of replicate subsamples is recommended (see 5.4). An audit subsample should be selected and processed and any departures from prescribed measurement methods and location instructions noted (see 5.5). A report should list $\hat{\theta}$ and its standard error with the degrees of freedom in the $se(\hat{\theta})$.

5.3 *Parameter Definition*—The equal complete coverage result may or may not be acceptable evidence. Whether it is acceptable depends on many considerations such as definitions, method of test, care exercised in the testing, completeness of the frame, and on other points not to be settled by statistical theory since these points belong to the subject matter, and are the same whether one uses sampling or not. Mistakes, whether in testing, counting, or weighing will affect the result of a complete coverage just as such mistakes will affect the sample result. By a more expensive method of measurement or more elaborate sampling frame, it may be possible to define a quantity, θ', as a target parameter or ideal goal of an investigation. Criticism that holds θ to be an inappropriate goal should demonstrate that the numerical difference between θ and θ' is substantial. Measurements may be imprecise but so long as measurement errors are not too biased, a large size of the lot or population, N, insures that θ and θ' are essentially equal.

5.4 *Replicate Subsamples*—When appropriate, separate laboratories should each work on separate replicate subsamples and teams of investigators should be assigned to separate replicate subsamples. This approach insures that the calculated standard error will not be a systematic underestimate. Such subsamples were called interpenetrating in Ref **(4)** where many