



Designation: D4546 – 21

Standard Test Methods for One-Dimensional Swell or Collapse of Soils¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D4546; 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 standard covers two laboratory test methods for measuring the magnitude of one-dimensional wetting-induced swell or collapse of unsaturated soils and one method for measuring load-induced compression subsequent to wetting-induced deformation.

1.1.1 Test Method A is a procedure for measuring one-dimensional wetting-induced swell or hydrocompression (collapse) of reconstituted specimens simulating field condition of compacted fills. The magnitude of swell pressure (the minimum vertical stress required to prevent swelling), and free swell (percent swell under a pressure of 1 kPa or 20 lbf/ft²) can also be determined from the results of Test Method A.

1.1.2 Test Method B is a procedure for measuring one-dimensional wetting-induced swell or collapse deformation of intact specimens obtained from a natural deposit or from an existing compacted fill. The magnitude of swell pressure and free swell can also be determined from the results of Test Method B.

1.1.3 Test Method C is a procedure for measuring load-induced strains on a reconstituted or intact specimen after the specimen has undergone wetting-induced swell or collapse deformation.

1.2 In Test Method A, a series of reconstituted specimens duplicating compaction condition of the fine fraction of the soil in the field (excluding the oversize particles) are assembled in consolidometer units. Different loads corresponding to different fill depths are applied to different specimens and each specimen is given access to free water until the process of primary swell or collapse is completed (Fig. 1) under a constant vertical total stress (Fig. 2). The resulting swell or collapse deformations are measured. This test method can be referred to as *wetting-after-loading tests* on multiple reconstituted specimens. The data from these tests can be used to estimate one-dimensional ground surface heave or settlement that can occur due to full wetting after fill construction. In

¹ These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D18 on Soil and Rock and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.05 on Strength and Compressibility of Soils.

Current edition approved April 1, 2021. Published April 2021. Originally approved in 1985. Last previous edition approved in 2014 as D4546 – 14^{e1}. DOI: 10.1520/D4546-21.

addition, the magnitude of swell pressure and the magnitude of free swell can be interpreted from the test results.

1.3 Test Method B is commonly used for measuring one-dimensional wetting-induced swell or hydrocompression of individual intact samples. This method can be referred to as *single-point wetting-after-loading test*. The vertical pressure at wetting for the specimen is chosen equal to the vertical in-situ stress (overburden stress plus structural stress, if any) corresponding to the sampling depth. The test result indicates the amount of heave or hydrocompression that can result when the soil at a given fill depth is wetted from the current moisture condition to full inundation condition. If intact specimens from various depths are tested, the swell or collapse strain data can be used to estimate heave or settlement of the ground surface. If the objective of the test is to measure swell pressure for an expansive soil, a series of intact specimens from a given depth zone can be wetted under a range of pressures (similar to Test Method A) and the results interpreted to determine the magnitude of the swell pressure.

1.4 Test Method C is for measuring load-induced strains after wetting-induced swell or collapse deformation has occurred. This method can be referred to as *loading-after-wetting test*. The test can be performed on either intact or reconstituted specimens, and can be on one specimen or a series of specimens. The results would apply to situations where new fill, additional structural loads, or both, are applied to the ground that has previously gone through wetting-induced heave or settlement. The first part of the test is the same as in Test Method A or B. After completion of the swell or collapse under a given vertical load, additional vertical load increments are applied to the specimen in the same manner as in a consolidation test (Test Methods D2435/D2435M) and the load-induced strains are measured.

1.5 It shall be the responsibility of the agency requesting this test to specify the magnitude of each load for Test Method A and Test Method B. For Test Method C, the agency requesting the test should specify the magnitude of the stress under which the specimen is wetted, and the magnitudes of the additional stress increments subsequent to wetting.

1.6 These test methods do not address the measurement of soil suction and suction-controlled swell-collapse tests. The addition of suction-controlled wetting does not constitute nonconformance to these test methods.

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

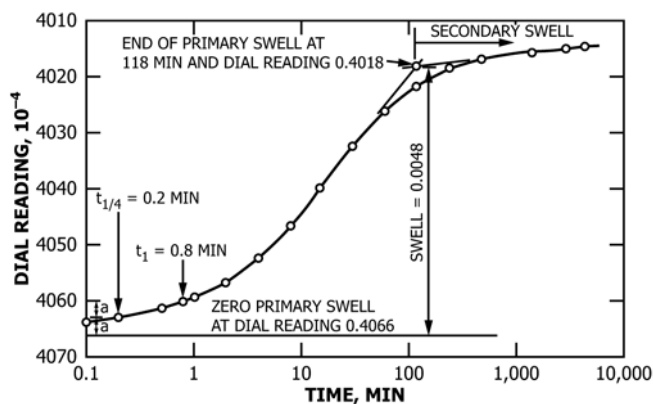


FIG. 1 Time-Swell Curve

1.7 These test methods have a number of limitations and their results can be affected by one or a combination of factors including the effect of significant amounts of oversize particles (in Test Method A), sampling disturbance (in Test Method B) and differences between the degree of wetting in the laboratory test specimens and in the field. For details of these and other limitations, see Section 6.

1.8 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses after SI units are provided for information only and are not considered standard. Test results recorded in units other than SI shall not be regarded as nonconformance with this standard. Figures depicting the test results can be either in SI units or in inch-pound units.

1.8.1 The converted inch-pound units use the gravitational system of units. In this system, the pound (lbf) represents a unit of force (weight), while the unit for mass is slugs. The slug unit is not given, unless dynamic ($F = ma$) calculations are involved.

1.8.2 It is common practice in the engineering/construction profession to concurrently use pounds to represent both a unit of mass (lbm) and of force (lbf). This implicitly combines two separate systems of units; that is, the absolute system and the gravitational system. It is scientifically undesirable to combine the use of two separate sets of inch-pound units within a single standard. As stated, this standard includes the gravitational system of inch-pound units and does not use/present the slug unit for mass. However, the use of balances or scales recording pounds of mass (lbm) or recording density in lbm/ft^3 shall not be regarded as nonconformance with this standard.

1.8.3 The terms density and unit weight are often used interchangeably. Density is mass per unit volume whereas unit weight is force per unit volume. In this standard density is given only in SI units. After the density has been determined, the unit weight is calculated in SI or inch-pound units, or both.

1.9 All observed and calculated values shall conform to the guidelines for significant digits and rounding established in Practice D6026.

1.9.1 The procedures used to specify how data are collected/recorded, or calculated, in this standard are regarded as the industry standard. In addition, they are representative of the significant digits that generally should be retained. The procedures used do not consider material variation, purpose for

obtaining the data, special purpose studies, or any consideration for the user's objectives; and it is common practice to increase or reduce significant digits of reported data to be commensurate with these considerations. It is beyond the scope of this standard to consider significant digits used in analysis methods for engineering design.

1.10 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.

1.11 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

- C127 Test Method for Relative Density (Specific Gravity) and Absorption of Coarse Aggregate
- D422 Test Method for Particle-Size Analysis of Soils (Withdrawn 2016)³
- D653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids
- D854 Test Methods for Specific Gravity of Soil Solids by Water Pycnometer
- D1587/D1587M Practice for Thin-Walled Tube Sampling of Fine-Grained Soils for Geotechnical Purposes
- D2216 Test Methods for Laboratory Determination of Water (Moisture) Content of Soil and Rock by Mass
- D2435/D2435M Test Methods for One-Dimensional Consolidation Properties of Soils Using Incremental Loading
- D2487 Practice for Classification of Soils for Engineering Purposes (Unified Soil Classification System)
- D2488 Practice for Description and Identification of Soils (Visual-Manual Procedures)
- D3550/D3550M Practice for Thick Wall, Ring-Lined, Split Barrel, Drive Sampling of Soils
- D3740 Practice for Minimum Requirements for Agencies Engaged in Testing and/or Inspection of Soil and Rock as Used in Engineering Design and Construction
- D4220/D4220M Practices for Preserving and Transporting Soil Samples
- D4318 Test Methods for Liquid Limit, Plastic Limit, and Plasticity Index of Soils
- D4718/D4718M Practice for Correction of Unit Weight and Water Content for Soils Containing Oversize Particles
- D4753 Guide for Evaluating, Selecting, and Specifying Balances and Standard Masses for Use in Soil, Rock, and Construction Materials Testing

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.

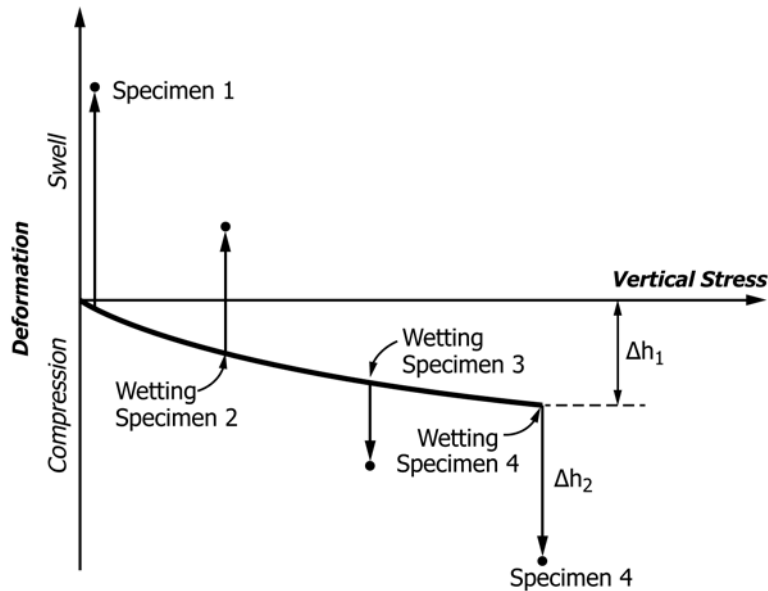


FIG. 2 Deformation Versus Vertical Stress, Test Method A

[D6026 Practice for Using Significant Digits in Geotechnical Data](#)

[D6027/D6027M Practice for Calibrating Linear Displacement Transducers for Geotechnical Purposes](#)

[D6913/D6913M Test Methods for Particle-Size Distribution \(Gradation\) of Soils Using Sieve Analysis](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of common technical terms in this standard, refer to Terminology [D653](#).

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *collapse or hydrocompression (L)*—wetting-induced decrease in height of a soil element or test specimen.

3.2.2 *collapse or hydrocompression strain*—%—wetting-induced change in height divided by the height immediately prior to wetting.

3.2.3 *compression (L)*—decrease in height of a soil element or test specimen due to wetting (synonymous with hydrocompression or collapse) or due to increase in total stress.

3.2.4 *free swell, %*—percent swell following absorption of water at the seating pressure of 1 kPa (20 lbf/ft²).

3.2.5 *intact specimen*—a test specimen obtained from a natural deposit or from an existing compacted fill or embankment using undisturbed sampling equipment.

3.2.6 *percent heave or settlement, %*—change in vertical height divided by the height of a column of soil immediately before wetting.

3.2.7 *primary swell or collapse (L)*—amount of swell or collapse characterized as being completed at the intersection of the two tangents to the curve shown in [Fig. 1](#).

3.2.8 *reconstituted specimen*—a test specimen compacted into a mold.

3.2.9 *secondary swell or collapse (L)*—long-term swell or collapse characterized as the linear portion of the plot shown in [Fig. 1](#) following completion of primary swell or collapse.

3.2.10 *settlement (L)*—decrease in vertical height of a column of soil.

3.2.11 *swell (L)*—increase in thickness of a soil element or a soil specimen following absorption of water.

3.2.12 *swell pressure (FL⁻²)*—the minimum stress required to prevent swelling.

4. Summary of Test Methods

4.1 In these test methods a soil specimen is restrained laterally in a rigid mold and loaded vertically (axially) in increments up to a load that depends on the purpose of the test. Subsequent to reaching equilibrium under the applied load, the specimen is inundated with test water and the one-dimensional wetting-induced swell or collapse strain is measured. Test Method A is specified for specimens that are reconstituted using the fill material excluding the oversize fraction. Test Method B is for intact samples of a natural soil or an existing fill. In both cases, the measured strains are wetting-induced, not load-induced. Test Method C is used for measuring load-induced compression subsequent to wetting-induced swell or collapse.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 The wetting-induced swell/collapse strains measured from Test Methods A and B can be used to develop estimates of heave or settlement of a confined soil profile (1-4).⁴ They can also be used to estimate the magnitudes of the swell pressure ([Fig. 3](#)) and the free swell strain (percent swell under a pressure of 1 kPa (20 lbf/ft²)). The load-induced strains after wetting from Test Method C can be used to estimate stress-induced settlement following wetting-induced heave or settlement. Selection of test method, loading, and inundation sequences should, as closely as possible, simulate field

⁴ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this standard.