



Designation: D4972 – 19

## Standard Test Methods for pH of Soils<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D4972; 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 These test methods cover the measurement of the pH of soils that will pass the 2.00 mm (No. 10) sieve. Such measurements are used in the agricultural, environmental, geotechnical, and natural resources fields. This measurement determines the degree of acidity or alkalinity in soil materials suspended in water and a 0.01 M calcium chloride solution. Measurements in both liquids are necessary to fully define the soil's pH. This variable is useful in determining the solubility of soil minerals and the mobility of ions in the soil and assessing the viability of the soil-plant environment. A more detailed discussion of the usefulness of this parameter is given in Refs (1-6)<sup>2</sup>.

1.2 Two methods for measuring the pH of soils are provided. The method to be used shall be specified by the requesting authority. When no method is specified, Method A shall be used. The pH is determined in test water and a calcium chloride solution for both methods.

1.2.1 *Method A*—The pH is measured using a potentiometer having a pH sensitive electrode system. This method can be used for any application and must be used when the application warrants a higher level of resolution.

1.2.2 *Method B*—The pH is measured using pH sensitive paper. This method can be used for any application, however, because paper typically has a lower resolution, it provides an approximate estimate of the pH of the soil and should not be used when the application requires a higher level of resolution (Note 1).

NOTE 1—For example, paper with a sensitivity to the nearest 1 pH unit placed into a buffer solution of 4 should indicate a pH of 4, however, it would not indicate if the pH is 4.449 or 3.449.

1.3 *Units*—The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

<sup>1</sup> These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D18 on Soil and Rock and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.22 on Media for Plant Growth.

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<sup>2</sup> The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this standard.

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

1.4.1 The procedures used to specify how data are collected/recorded and calculated in the 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 considerations 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 these test methods to consider significant digits used in analysis methods for engineering data.

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*:<sup>3</sup>

C670 Practice for Preparing Precision and Bias Statements for Test Methods for Construction Materials

D653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids

D1193 Specification for Reagent Water

D2487 Practice for Classification of Soils for Engineering Purposes (Unified Soil Classification System)

D2488 Practice for Description and Identification of Soils (Visual-Manual Procedures)

D3740 Practice for Minimum Requirements for Agencies Engaged in Testing and/or Inspection of Soil and Rock as

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

Used in Engineering Design and Construction  
**D4220/D4220M** Practices for Preserving and Transporting  
 Soil Samples  
**D4753** Guide for Evaluating, Selecting, and Specifying Bal-  
 ances and Standard Masses for Use in Soil, Rock, and  
 Construction Materials Testing  
**D6026** Practice for Using Significant Digits in Geotechnical  
 Data  
**D6913** Test Methods for Particle-Size Distribution (Grada-  
 tion) of Soils Using Sieve Analysis  
**G51** Test Method for Measuring pH of Soil for Use in  
 Corrosion Testing

### 3. Terminology

#### 3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For definitions of common technical terms used in this standard, refer to Terminology **D653**.

### 4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 This test method is used to determine the pH of a soil. Two similar test specimens are obtained from a representative sample that has been air-dried and screened over a 2.00 mm (No. 10) sieve. From the material passing the 2.00 mm (No. 10) sieve, one specimen is mixed with test water and one is mixed with a calcium chloride solution. They are then thoroughly stirred and both are allowed to stand for one hour prior to testing using Method A or B.

### 5. Significance and Use

5.1 The pH of the soil is a useful variable in determining the solubility of soil minerals, the mobility of ions in the soil, and assessing the viability of the soil-plant environment.

5.2 pH measurements are made in both test water and a calcium chloride solution because the calcium displaces some of the exchangeable aluminum. The low ionic strength counters the dilution effect on the exchange equilibrium by setting the salt concentration of the solution closer to that expected in the soil solution. The pH values obtained in the solution of calcium chloride are slightly lower than those measured in water due to the release of more aluminum ions which then hydrolyses. Therefore, both measurements are needed to fully define the character of the soil's pH.

5.3 For the purpose of these test methods, the test specimens are sieved through a 2.00 mm (No. 10) sieve. Measurements on soils or soil fractions having particle sizes larger than 2.0 mm by these test methods may be invalid. If soil or soil fractions with particles larger than 2.0 mm are used, it must be stated in the report since the results may be significantly different.

NOTE 2—The quality of the result produced by this standard is dependent on the competence of the personnel performing it, and the suitability of the equipment and facilities used. Agencies that meet the criteria of Practice **D3740** are generally considered capable of competent and objective testing/sampling/inspection/etc. Users of this standard are cautioned that compliance with Practice **D3740** does not in itself assure reliable results. Reliable results depend on many factors; Practice **D3740** provides a means of evaluating some of those factors.

### 6. Interferences

6.1 When using Method A, a pH probe has possible interferences due to a suspension effect or sedimentation potential. Refs (5) and (6) provide a more detailed discussion of the effect of this mechanism.

6.2 This effect is the main reason Test Method **G51** cannot be used for general measurement of pH outside of that for corrosion analysis. Test Method **G51** measures pH, an aqueous parameter, without adding any aqueous phase to the soil. This lack of aqueous phase results in excessive soil particle-pH probe contact that overestimates the activity of the hydrogen ions in solution and is therefore unacceptable for general soil analysis.

6.3 The suspension effect can be mitigated by careful attention to inserting the probe into the aqueous phase of the slurry. The aqueous phase consists of the partially settled suspension.

### 7. Apparatus

7.1 Use one of the following devices to measure the pH.

7.1.1 *pH Meter*—Potentiometer equipped with an electrode system with a readability to the nearest 0.1 pH unit and an accuracy of  $\pm 0.1$  pH unit or better. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the pH meter used. A silver/silver chloride electrode system or similar is also acceptable.

7.1.2 *pH Paper*—pH-sensitive paper having a typical range from 1 to 12 with sensitivity to the nearest 0.5 pH unit or better. The range of the paper may vary based on the typical pH of the materials being tested. It is acceptable to use paper ranging between other values as long as the range is large enough to bracket the expected pH result.

7.2 *Balance*—Balances shall conform to the requirements of Specification **D4753**.

7.2.1 To determine the mass of the specimen, the balance shall have readability without estimation of 0.1 g or better. The capacity of this balance will need to exceed the mass of the container plus soil. In general, a balance with a minimum capacity of 300 g is sufficient.

7.3 *Separation Sieve*—2.00 mm (No. 10) sieve used to separate the coarse material from the representative sample. This sieve is subjected to rough operation and shall not be used for quantitative testing.

7.4 *Specimen-Mixing Container*—A glass beaker or equivalent inert container with enough capacity to hold the specimen and the test water. Usually, a 100 mL to 250 mL glass beaker is large enough.

7.5 *Drying Oven (Optional)*—Vented, thermostatically controlled oven capable of maintaining uniform temperatures of  $105 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$  and  $130 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$  as needed throughout the drying chamber. These requirements typically require the use of a forced-draft oven.

7.6 *Volumetric Flask or Cylinder*—Two, glass or plastic; one each with capacities of 1 L and 2 L. Required for making calcium chloride hydrate solutions, otherwise, they are optional.