



Standard Test Method for Sulfate Ion in Water¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D516; 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.

This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the U.S. Department of Defense.

1. Scope*

1.1 This turbidimetric test method covers the determination of sulfate in water in the range from 5 to 40 mg/L of sulfate ion (SO_4^{--}).

1.2 This test method was used successfully with drinking, ground, and surface waters. It is the user's responsibility to ensure the validity of this test method for waters of untested matrices.

1.3 Former gravimetric and volumetric test methods have been discontinued. Refer to [Appendix X1](#) for historical information.

1.4 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.5 *This standard does not purport to address the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

- [D1066 Practice for Sampling Steam](#)
- [D1129 Terminology Relating to Water](#)
- [D1193 Specification for Reagent Water](#)
- [D2777 Practice for Determination of Precision and Bias of Applicable Test Methods of Committee D19 on Water](#)
- [D3370 Practices for Sampling Water from Closed Conduits](#)
- [D4327 Test Method for Anions in Water by Suppressed Ion Chromatography](#)
- [D5810 Guide for Spiking into Aqueous Samples](#)

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D19 on Water and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D19.05 on Inorganic Constituents in Water.

Current edition approved June 1, 2016. Published June 2016. Originally approved in 1938. Last previous edition approved in 2011 as D516 – 11. DOI: 10.1520/D0516-16.

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.

- [D5847 Practice for Writing Quality Control Specifications for Standard Test Methods for Water Analysis](#)
- [E60 Practice for Analysis of Metals, Ores, and Related Materials by Spectrophotometry](#)
- [E275 Practice for Describing and Measuring Performance of Ultraviolet and Visible Spectrophotometers](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 For definitions of terms used in this standard, refer to Terminology [D1129](#).

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 Sulfate ion is converted to a barium sulfate suspension under controlled conditions. A solution containing glycerin and sodium chloride is added to stabilize the suspension and minimize interferences. The resulting turbidity is determined by a nephelometer, spectrophotometer, or photoelectric colorimeter and compared to a curve prepared from standard sulfate solutions.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 The determination of sulfate is important because it has been reported that when this ion is present in excess of about 250 mg/L in drinking water, it causes a cathartic action (especially in children) in the presence of sodium and magnesium, and gives a bad taste to the water.

5.2 Test Method [D4327](#) ("Test Method of Anions in Water by Suppressed Ion Chromatography") may be used.

6. Interferences

6.1 Insoluble suspended matter in the sample must be removed. Dark colors that cannot be compensated for in the procedure interfere with the measurement of suspended barium sulfate (BaSO_4).

6.2 Polyphosphates as low as 1 mg/L will inhibit barium sulfate precipitation causing a negative interference. Phosphonates present in low concentrations, depending on the type of phosphonate, will also cause a negative interference. Silica in excess of 500 mg/L may precipitate along with the barium sulfate causing a positive interference. Chloride in excess of 5000 mg/L will cause a negative interference. Aluminum,

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

polymers, and large quantities of organic material present in the test sample may cause the barium sulfate to precipitate nonuniformly. In the presence of organic matter certain bacteria may reduce sulfate to sulfide. To minimize the action of sulfate reducing bacteria, samples should be refrigerated at 4°C when the presence of such bacteria is suspected.

6.3 Although other ions normally found in water do not appear to interfere, the formation of the barium sulfate suspension is very critical. Determinations that are in doubt may be checked by a gravimetric method in some cases, or by the procedure suggested in [Note 2](#).

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Photometer*—One of the following which are given in order of preference.

7.1.1 Nephelometer or turbidimeter;

7.1.2 Spectrophotometer for use at 420 nm with light path of 4 to 5 cm;

7.1.3 Filter photometer with a violet filter having a maximum near 420 nm and a light path of 4 to 5 cm.

7.2 *Stopwatch*, if the magnetic stirrer is not equipped with an accurate timer.

7.3 *Measuring Spoon*, capacity 0.2 to 0.3 mL.

7.4 Filter photometers and photometric practices prescribed in this test method shall conform to Practice [E60](#); spectrophotometer practices shall conform to Practice [E275](#).

8. Reagents and Materials

8.1 *Purity of Reagents*—Reagent grade chemicals shall be used in all tests. Unless otherwise indicated, it is intended that all reagents shall conform to the specifications of the Committee on Analytical Reagents of the American Chemical Society.³ Other grades may be used, provided it is first ascertained that the reagent is of sufficiently high purity to permit its use without lessening the accuracy of the determination.

8.2 *Purity of Water*—Unless otherwise indicated, reference to water shall be understood to mean reagent water conforming to Specification [D1193](#), Type I. Other reagent water types may be used provided it is first ascertained that the water is of sufficiently high purity to permit its use without adversely affecting the precision and bias of the test method. Type II water was specified at the time of round robin testing of this test method.

8.3 *Barium Chloride*—Crystals of barium chloride ($\text{BaCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) screened to 20 to 30 mesh. To prepare in the laboratory, spread crystals over a large watch glass, desiccate for 24 h, screen to remove any crystals that are not 20 to 30 mesh, and store in a clean, dry jar.

8.4 *Conditioning Reagent*—Place 30 mL of concentrated hydrochloric acid (HCl, sp gr 1.19), 300 mL reagent water, 100

mL 95 % ethanol or isopropanol and 75 g sodium chloride (NaCl) in a container. Add 50 mL glycerol and mix.

8.5 *Sulfate Solution, Standard* (1 mL = 0.100 mg SO_4^{--})—Dissolve 0.1479 g of anhydrous sodium sulfate (Na_2SO_4) in water, and dilute with water to 1 L in a volumetric flask. A purchased stock solution of adequate purity is also acceptable.

8.6 *Filter Paper*—Purchase suitable filter paper. Typically the filter papers have a pore size of 0.45- μm membrane. Material such as fine-textured, acid-washed, ashless paper, or glass fiber paper are acceptable. The user must first ascertain that the filter paper is of sufficient purity to use without adversely affecting the bias and precision of the test method.

9. Sampling

9.1 Collect the sample in accordance with Practice [D1066](#), and Practices [D3370](#), as applicable.

10. Calibration

10.1 Follow the procedure given in Section [11](#), using appropriate amounts of the standard sulfate solution prepared in accordance with [8.5](#) and prepare a calibration curve showing sulfate ion content in milligrams per litre plotted against the corresponding photometer readings ([Note 1](#)). Prepare standards by diluting with water 0.0, 5.0, 10.0, 15.0, 20.0, 30.0, and 40.0 mL of standard sulfate solution to 100-mL volumes in volumetric flasks. These solutions will have sulfate ion concentrations of 0.0, 5.0, 10.0, 15.0, 20.0, 30.0, and 40.0 mg/L (ppm), respectively.

NOTE 1—A separate calibration curve must be prepared for each photometer and a new curve must be prepared if it is necessary to change the cell, lamp, or filter, or if any other alterations of instrument or reagents are made. Check the curve with each series of tests by running two or more solutions of known sulfate concentrations.

11. Procedure

11.1 Filter ([8.6](#)) the sample if it is turbid through a 0.45- μm membrane and adjust the temperature to between 15 and 30°C.

11.2 Pipette into a 250-mL beaker 100 mL or less of the clear sample containing between 0.5 and 4 mg of sulfate ion ([Note 2](#)). Dilute to 100 mL with water if required, and add 5.0 mL of conditioning reagent ([Note 1](#)).

NOTE 2—The solubility of BaSO_4 is such that difficulty may be experienced in the determination of sulfate concentrations below about 5 mg/L (ppm). This can be overcome by concentrating the sample or by adding 5 mL of standard sulfate solution (1 mL = 0.100 mg SO_4^{--}) to the sample before diluting to 100 mL. This will add 0.5 mg SO_4 to the sample, which must be subtracted from the final result.

11.3 Mix in the stirring apparatus.

11.4 While the solution is being stirred, add a measured spoonful of BaCl_2 crystals (0.3 g) and begin timing immediately.

11.5 Stir exactly 1.0 min at constant speed.

NOTE 3—The stirring should be at a constant rate in all determinations. The use of a magnetic stirrer has been found satisfactory for this purpose.

11.6 Immediately after the stirring period has ended, pour solution into the cell and measure the turbidity at 30-s intervals for 4 min. Record the maximum reading obtained in the 4-min period.

³ *Reagent Chemicals, American Chemical Society Specifications*, American Chemical Society, Washington, DC. For Suggestions on the testing of reagents not listed by the American Chemical Society, see *Annual Standards for Laboratory Chemicals*, BDH Ltd., Poole, Dorset, U.K., and the *United States Pharmacopeia and National Formulary*, U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention, Inc. (USPC), Rockville, MD.