



# Standard Practice for The Ion Exchange Separation of Small Volume Samples Containing Uranium, Americium, and Plutonium Prior to Isotopic Abundance and Content Analysis<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C1816; 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 This practice is an alternative to Practice C1411 for the ion exchange separation in small mass samples (~5  $\mu\text{g}$  of plutonium and up to 0.5 mg of uranium in 1 mL of solution) of uranium and plutonium from each other and from other impurities for subsequent isotopic abundance and content analysis by thermal ionization mass spectrometry (TIMS). In addition to being adapted to smaller sample sizes, this practice also avoids the use of hydrochloric acid (HCl) and hydrofluoric acid (HF) and does not require the use of two anion exchange columns as required in Practice C1411.

1.2 In chemically unseparated samples isobaric nuclides at mass 238 ( $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $^{238}\text{Pu}$ ), and mass 241 ( $^{241}\text{Pu}$  and  $^{241}\text{Am}$ ) will be measured together thus compromising the accuracy of the results of isotopic composition of Pu. Therefore, chemical separation of elements is essential prior to isotopic analyses. Concentrations and volumes given in the paragraphs below can be modified for larger sample sizes, different types of anion exchange resin, etc.

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

1.4 *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 and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

### 2.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee C26 on Nuclear Fuel Cycle and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee C26.05 on Methods of Test.

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

- C698 Test Methods for Chemical, Mass Spectrometric, and Spectrochemical Analysis of Nuclear-Grade Mixed Oxides ((U, Pu)O<sub>2</sub>)
- C833 Specification for Sintered (Uranium-Plutonium) Dioxide Pellets
- C859 Terminology Relating to Nuclear Materials
- C1008 Specification for Sintered (Uranium-Plutonium) Dioxide Pellets—Fast Reactor Fuel (Withdrawn 2014)<sup>3</sup>
- C1168 Practice for Preparation and Dissolution of Plutonium Materials for Analysis
- C1347 Practice for Preparation and Dissolution of Uranium Materials for Analysis
- C1411 Practice for The Ion Exchange Separation of Uranium and Plutonium Prior to Isotopic Analysis
- C1415 Test Method for  $^{238}\text{Pu}$  Isotopic Abundance By Alpha Spectrometry
- C1625 Test Method for Uranium and Plutonium Concentrations and Isotopic Abundances by Thermal Ionization Mass Spectrometry
- C1672 Test Method for Determination of Uranium or Plutonium Isotopic Composition or Concentration by the Total Evaporation Method Using a Thermal Ionization Mass Spectrometer
- D1193 Specification for Reagent Water

## 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in this practice, refer to Terminology C859.

## 4. Summary of Practice

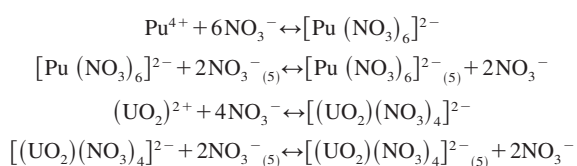
4.1 Solid samples are dissolved according to Practices C1168 or C1347 or other appropriate methods. The resulting solution is processed by this practice to prepare separate solutions of plutonium and uranium for mass spectrometric isotopic abundance analysis using Test Method C698, C1625, or C1672. Appropriate portions are taken to provide up to 5  $\mu\text{g}$  of plutonium on the ion exchange column to be separated from 0.5 mg or less of uranium. All dilutions should be performed by

<sup>3</sup> The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org).

mass to ensure the smallest uncertainty possible. This practice can be used for higher uranium to plutonium ratios, but column rinsing volumes should be adjusted accordingly (see 10.1.3.8). Using the volumes proposed in this practice leads to a separation efficiency of at least 99.999 % between uranium and plutonium. Valence adjustment is obtained by using the procedure described in 4.1.1 or by an alternative method demonstrated by the user to perform the equivalent reduction/oxidation procedure.

4.1.1 For any sample type, especially those containing large amounts of impurities, ferrous sulfate may be used for reduction. The sample is diluted in 1 M nitric acid (HNO<sub>3</sub>). Ferrous sulfate is added to reduce all plutonium to plutonium (III), then 0.7 M sodium nitrite (NaNO<sub>2</sub>) is added to oxidize plutonium (III) to plutonium (IV).

4.2 After oxidation state adjustment, the resulting solution is passed through an anion exchange column in the nitrate form, which retains negatively-charged complexes of Pu(IV), U(VI), U(IV), etc. The process of complex formation and sorption in solutions of HNO<sub>3</sub> for Pu and U may be written down in a simplified manner as follows:



As the nitrate concentration increases, the concentration of the hexanitate complex increases and the maximum adsorption is attained at an acidity of about 7.7 M.

The adsorbed plutonium is washed with 7-8 M HNO<sub>3</sub> to remove americium and other impurities that are not adsorbed, and then washed with 3-4 M HNO<sub>3</sub> to remove uranium. The uranium is recovered and then the column is rinsed with a large volume of 3-4 M HNO<sub>3</sub> to remove the residual uranium. Two mechanisms are used in the desorption of tetravalent plutonium from the anion exchanger. One is to shift the complex formation equilibrium by decreasing the concentration of nitrate ions in the eluent. The second mechanism consists of reducing Pu(IV) to Pu(III) by addition of the reducing agent *hydroxylammonium nitrate* (NH<sub>3</sub>OHNO<sub>3</sub>). The plutonium is stripped from the column with a solution of 0.2 to 0.35 M HNO<sub>3</sub> and 1.9E-02 M *hydroxylammonium nitrate* (NH<sub>3</sub>OHNO<sub>3</sub>). The volume of the eluting solution needed is smaller compared to using only 0.2 to 0.35 M HNO<sub>3</sub>, and the solution obtained after purification is more concentrated.

## 5. Significance and Use

5.1 Uranium and plutonium are used in nuclear reactor fuel and must be analyzed to ensure that they meet acceptance criteria for isotopic composition as described in Specifications C833 and C1008. The criteria are set by mutual agreement between the manufacturer and end user (or between buyer and seller). This standard practice is used to separate chemically the isobaric interferences from <sup>238</sup>U and <sup>238</sup>Pu and from <sup>241</sup>Am and <sup>241</sup>Pu, and from other impurities prior to isotopic abundance determination by TIMS.

5.2 In facilities where perchloric acid use is authorized, the separation in Test Method C698 may be used prior to isotopic abundance determination. Uranium and plutonium content as well as isotopic abundances using TIMS can be determined by using this separation practice and by following Test Methods C698, C1625, or C1672.

## 6. Mass Spectrometry Interferences Resolved by this Separation Practice

6.1 The separated heavy element fractions placed on mass spectrometric filaments must be pure. The quantity required depends upon the sensitivity of the instrument detection system. Chemical purity of the sample becomes more important as the sample size decreases, because the ion emission of the sample is repressed by impurities.

6.2 Organic compounds from the degradation of ion exchange resin, if present, could affect the response of the mass spectrometer during the plutonium and uranium isotopic abundance measurements. Evaporation of the samples in concentrated HNO<sub>3</sub> after the ion exchange separation will destroy resin degradation products.

NOTE 1—The sample should not be evaporated using heat above approximately 170°C to avoid oxide formation that will make re-dissolving the sample difficult.

6.3 Elemental impurities, especially alkali elements, tend to produce unstable ion emission that alter the observed plutonium and uranium isotope ratios in an unpredictable manner.

6.4 Isobaric impurities or contaminants will alter the observed isotope ratios; most notable of these for plutonium are <sup>241</sup>Am and <sup>238</sup>U; the most notable isobaric impurity for uranium is <sup>238</sup>Pu.

6.5 Extreme care must be taken to avoid contamination of the sample by environmental uranium. The level of uranium contamination should be measured by analyzing an aliquant of 8 M HNO<sub>3</sub> reagent as a blank taken through the same chemical processing as the sample, including the addition of <sup>233</sup>U or U<sup>235</sup>, and computing the amount of uranium it contains.

## 7. Apparatus

7.1 *Polyethylene Ion Exchange Columns*—Disposable, 0.9 cm id × 3 cm with a 15-mL reservoir (or other column with sufficient volume for operation).

7.2 *Laboratory Balance*—Precision ±0.1 mg.

7.3 *Beakers or Alternate Acceptable Containers*—Pretreated, 10-30 mL, borosilicate glass. To avoid cross contamination, use only new borosilicate glass containers. Depending on the need, containers can be pretreated by heating in 4 M HNO<sub>3</sub> to leach uranium, and then rinsed in deionized water, and air or oven dried prior to use.

7.4 *Infrared Heating Lamps or Hot Plate* with adjustable low and high heat settings.

7.5 *Transfer Pipets*—Disposable.

## 8. Reagents

8.1 Reagent grade or better chemicals should be used. Unless otherwise indicated, it is intended that all reagents