



Standard Test Method for Determination of MTBE, ETBE, TAME, DIPE, tertiary-Amyl Alcohol and C₁ to C₄ Alcohols in Gasoline by Gas Chromatography¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D4815; 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 test method covers the determination of ethers and alcohols in gasolines by gas chromatography. Specific compounds determined are methyl *tert*-butylether (MTBE), ethyl *tert*-butylether (ETBE), *tert*-amylmethylether (TAME), diisopropylether (DIPE), methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, *n*-propanol, isobutanol, *tert*-butanol, *sec*-butanol, *n*-butanol, and *tert*-pentanol (*tert*-amylalcohol).

1.2 Individual ethers are determined from 0.20 mass % to 20.0 mass %. Individual alcohols are determined from 0.20 mass % to 12.0 mass %. Equations used to convert to mass % oxygen and to volume % of individual compounds are provided. At concentrations <0.20 mass %, it is possible that hydrocarbons may interfere with several ethers and alcohols. The reporting limit of 0.20 mass % was tested for gasolines containing a maximum of 10 volume % olefins. It may be possible that for gasolines containing >10 volume % olefins, the interference may be >0.20 mass %. [Annex A1](#) gives a chromatogram showing the interference observed with a gasoline containing 10 volume % olefins.

1.3 This test method includes a relative bias correlation for ethanol in spark-ignition engine fuels for the U.S. EPA regulations reporting based on Practice [D6708](#) accuracy assessment between Test Method D4815 and Test Method [D5599](#) as a possible Test Method D4815 alternative to Test Method [D5599](#). The Practice [D6708](#) derived correlation equation is only applicable for ethanol in fuels in the concentration range from 2.28 % to 14.42 % by mass as measured by Test Method D4815. The applicable Test Method [D5599](#) range for ethanol is from 2.16 % to 14.39 % by mass as reported by Test Method [D5599](#).

1.4 Alcohol-based fuels, such as M-85 and E-85, MTBE product, ethanol product, and denatured alcohol, are specifi-

cally excluded from this test method. The methanol content of M-85 fuel is considered beyond the operating range of the system.

1.5 Benzene, while detected, cannot be quantified using this test method and must be analyzed by alternate methodology (see Test Method [D3606](#)).

1.6 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. Alternate units, in common usage, are also provided to increase clarity and aid the users of this test method.

1.7 *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:*²

[D1298 Test Method for Density, Relative Density, or API Gravity of Crude Petroleum and Liquid Petroleum Products by Hydrometer Method](#)

[D1744 Test Method for Water in Liquid Petroleum Products by Karl Fischer Reagent](#)³

[D3606 Test Method for Determination of Benzene and Toluene in Finished Motor and Aviation Gasoline by Gas Chromatography](#)

[D4052 Test Method for Density, Relative Density, and API Gravity of Liquids by Digital Density Meter](#)

[D4057 Practice for Manual Sampling of Petroleum and Petroleum Products](#)

[D4307 Practice for Preparation of Liquid Blends for Use as Analytical Standards](#)

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee [D02](#) on Petroleum Products, Liquid Fuels, and Lubricants and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee [D02.04.0L](#) on Gas Chromatography Methods.

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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.

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

D4420 Test Method for Determination of Aromatics in Finished Gasoline by Gas Chromatography (Withdrawn 2004)³

D5599 Test Method for Determination of Oxygenates in Gasoline by Gas Chromatography and Oxygen Selective Flame Ionization Detection

D6708 Practice for Statistical Assessment and Improvement of Expected Agreement Between Two Test Methods that Purport to Measure the Same Property of a Material

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.1.1 *low volume connector*—a special union for connecting two lengths of tubing 1.6 mm inside diameter and smaller. Sometimes this is referred to as zero dead volume union.

3.1.2 *oxygenate*—any oxygen-containing organic compound that can be used as a fuel or fuel supplement, for example, various alcohols and ethers.

3.1.3 *split ratio*—in capillary gas chromatography, the ratio of the total flow of carrier gas to the sample inlet versus the flow of the carrier gas to the capillary column, expressed by

$$\text{split ratio} = (S + C)/C \quad (1)$$

where:

S = flow rate at the splitter vent, and

C = flow rate at the column outlet.

3.1.4 *tert-amyl alcohol*—*tert*-pentanol.

3.2 *Acronyms:*

3.2.1 *DIPE*—diisopropylether.

3.2.2 *ETBE*—ethyl *tert*-butylether.

3.2.3 *MTBE*—methyl *tert*-butylether.

3.2.4 *TAME*—*tert*-amyl methylether.

3.2.5 *TCEP*—1,2,3-tris-2-cyanoethoxypropane—a gas chromatographic liquid phase.

3.2.6 *WCOT*—a type of capillary gas chromatographic column prepared by coating the inside of the capillary with a thin film of stationary phase.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 An appropriate internal standard, such as 1,2-dimethoxyethane (ethylene glycol dimethyl ether), is added to the sample, which is then introduced into a gas chromatograph equipped with two columns and a column switching valve. The sample first passes onto a polar TCEP column, which elutes lighter hydrocarbons to vent and retains the oxygenated and heavier hydrocarbons.

4.2 After methylcyclopentane, but before DIPE and MTBE elute from the polar column, the valve is switched to backflush the oxygenates onto a WCOT nonpolar column. The alcohols and ethers elute from the nonpolar column in boiling point order, before elution of any major hydrocarbon constituents.

TABLE 1 Pertinent Physical Constants and Retention Characteristics for TCEP/WCOT Column Set Conditions as in Table 2

Component	Retention Time, Min.	Relative Retention Time		Molecular Mass	Relative Density at 15.56/15.5 6°C
		(MTBE = 1.00)	(DME = 1.00)		
Water	2.90	0.58	0.43	18.0	1.000
Methanol	3.15	0.63	0.46	32.0	0.7963
Ethanol	3.48	0.69	0.51	46.1	0.7939
Isopropanol	3.83	0.76	0.56	60.1	0.7899
<i>tert</i> -Butanol	4.15	0.82	0.61	74.1	0.7922
<i>n</i> -Propanol	4.56	0.90	0.67	60.1	0.8080
MTBE	5.04	1.00	0.74	88.2	0.7460
<i>sec</i> -Butanol	5.36	1.06	0.79	74.1	0.8114
DIPE	5.76	1.14	0.85	102.2	0.7282
Isobutanol	6.00	1.19	0.88	74.1	0.8058
ETBE	6.20	1.23	0.91	102.2	0.7452
<i>tert</i> -Pentanol	6.43	1.28	0.95	88.1	0.8170
1,2-Dimethoxyethane (DME)	6.80	1.35	1.00	90.1	0.8720
<i>n</i> -Butanol	7.04	1.40	1.04	74.1	0.8137
TAME	8.17	1.62	1.20	102.2	0.7758

4.3 After benzene and TAME elute from the nonpolar column, the column switching valve is switched back to its original position to backflush the heavy hydrocarbons.

4.4 The eluted components are detected by a flame ionization or thermal conductivity detector. The detector response, proportional to the component concentration, is recorded; the peak areas are measured; and the concentration of each component is calculated with reference to the internal standard.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Ethers, alcohols, and other oxygenates can be added to gasoline to increase octane number and to reduce emissions. Type and concentration of various oxygenates are specified and regulated to ensure acceptable commercial gasoline quality. Drivability, vapor pressure, phase separation, exhaust, and evaporative emissions are some of the concerns associated with oxygenated fuels.

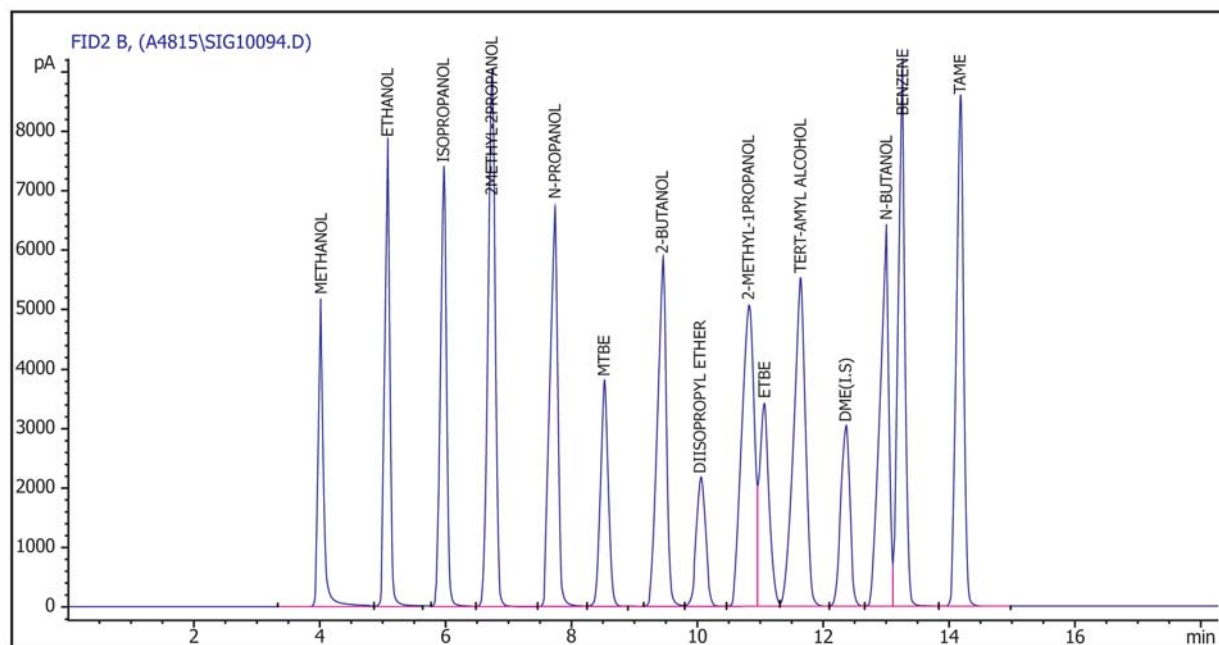
5.2 This test method is applicable to both quality control in the production of gasoline and for the determination of deliberate or extraneous oxygenate additions or contamination.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Chromatograph*—While any gas chromatographic system, which is capable of adequately resolving the individual ethers and alcohols that are presented in Table 1, can be used for these analyses, a gas chromatographic instrument, which can be operated at the conditions given in Table 2 and has a column switching and backflushing system equivalent to Fig. 1, has been found acceptable. Carrier gas flow controllers shall be capable of precise control where the required flow rates are low (see Table 2). Pressure control devices and gages shall be capable of precise control for the typical pressures required.

6.1.1 *Detector*—A thermal conductivity detector or flame ionization detector can be used. The system shall have sufficient sensitivity and stability to obtain a recorder deflection of at least 2 mm at a signal-to-noise ratio of at least 5 to 1 for 0.005 volume % concentration of an oxygenate.

³ The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.



NOTE 1—Detector B is optional and used to simplify setting cut times.

FIG. 1 Analysis of Oxygenates in Gasoline Schematic of Chromatographic System

TABLE 2 Chromatographic Operation Conditions

Temperatures	Flows, mL/min	Carrier Gas: Helium
Column Oven	60	to injector 75
Injector, °C	200	Column 5
Detector—TCD, °C	200	Auxiliary 3
—FID, °C	250	Makeup 18
Valve °C	60	

^A Sample size must be adjusted so that alcohols in the range of 0.1 mass % to 12.0 mass % and ethers in the range of 0.1 mass % to 20.0 mass % are eluted from the column and measured linearly at the detector. A sample size of 1.0 µL has been introduced in most cases.

6.1.2 *Switching and Backflushing Valve*—A valve, to be located within the gas chromatographic column oven, capable of performing the functions described in Section 11 and illustrated in Fig. 1. The valve shall be of low volume design and not contribute significantly to chromatographic deterioration.

6.1.2.1 *Valco Model No. A 4C10WP*, 1.6 mm (1/16 in.) fittings. This particular valve was used in the majority of the analyses used for the development of Section 15.

6.1.2.2 *Valco Model No. C10W*, 0.8 mm (1/32 in.) fittings. This valve is recommended for use with columns of 0.32 mm inside diameter and smaller.

6.1.2.3 Some gas chromatographs are equipped with an auxiliary oven, which can be used to contain the valve and polar column. In such a configuration, the nonpolar column is located in the main oven and the temperature can be adjusted for optimum oxygenates resolution.

6.1.3 An automatic valve switching device must be used to ensure repeatable switching times. Such a device should be synchronized with injection and data collection times.

6.1.4 *Injection System*—The chromatograph should be equipped with a splitting-type inlet device if capillary columns

or flame ionization detection are used. Split injection is necessary to maintain the actual chromatographed sample size within the limits of column and detector optimum efficiency and linearity.

6.1.4.1 Some gas chromatographs are equipped with on-column injectors and autosamplers, which can inject small samples sizes. Such injection systems can be used provided that sample size is within the limit of the column and detectors optimum efficiency and linearity.

6.1.4.2 Microlitre syringes, automatic syringe injectors, and liquid sampling valves have been used successfully for introducing representative samples into the gas chromatographic inlet.

6.2 Data Presentation or Calculation, or Both:

6.2.1 *Recorder*—A recording potentiometer or equivalent with a full-scale deflection of 5 mV or less can be used to monitor detector signal. Full-scale response time should be 1 s or less with sufficient sensitivity and stability to meet the requirements of 6.1.1.

6.2.2 *Integrator or Computer*—Means shall be provided for determining the detector response. Peak heights or areas can be measured by computer, electronic integration, or manual techniques.

6.3 Columns, Two as Follows:

6.3.1 *Polar Column*—This column performs a pre-separation of the oxygenates from volatile hydrocarbons in the same boiling point range. The oxygenates and remaining hydrocarbons are backflushed onto the nonpolar column in 6.3.2. Any column with equivalent or better chromatographic efficiency and selectivity to that described in 6.3.1.1 can be used. The column shall perform at the same temperature as required for the column in 6.3.2, except if located in a separate auxiliary oven as in 6.1.2.3.