



Standard Test Methods for Determination of Trace Elements in Coal, Coke, and Combustion Residues from Coal Utilization Processes by Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Emission Spectrometry, Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry, and Graphite Furnace Atomic Absorption Spectrometry¹

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1. Scope

1.1 These test methods pertain to the determination of antimony, arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, lead, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, vanadium, and zinc in coal and coke. These test methods can also be used for the analysis of residues from coal combustion processes.

NOTE 1—These test methods may be applicable to the determination of other trace elements.

1.2 The values stated in SI units shall be regarded as the standard.

1.3 *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

[D121 Terminology of Coal and Coke](#)

[D346 Practice for Collection and Preparation of Coke Samples for Laboratory Analysis](#)

[D1193 Specification for Reagent Water](#)

[D2013 Practice for Preparing Coal Samples for Analysis](#)

[D3173 Test Method for Moisture in the Analysis Sample of Coal and Coke](#)

[D3180 Practice for Calculating Coal and Coke Analyses from As-Determined to Different Bases](#)

¹ These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D05 on Coal and Coke and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D05.29 on Major Elements in Ash and Trace Elements of Coal.

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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.

[D7448 Practice for Establishing the Competence of Laboratories Using ASTM Procedures in the Sampling and Analysis of Coal and Coke](#)

[D7582 Test Methods for Proximate Analysis of Coal and Coke by Macro Thermogravimetric Analysis](#)

[E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method](#)

2.2 *Other Documents:*

EPA/600/4-91/010 Methods for the Determination of Metals in Environmental Samples³

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Definitions applicable to these test methods are listed in Terminology [D121](#).

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 The coal or coke to be analyzed is ashed under controlled conditions, digested by a mixture of aqua-regia and hydrofluoric acid, and finally dissolved in 1 % nitric acid. Combustion residues are digested on an as-received basis. The concentration of individual trace elements is determined by either inductively coupled atomic emission spectrometry (IC-PAES) or inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICPMS). Selected elements that occur at concentrations below the detection limits of ICPAES can be quantitatively analyzed by graphite furnace atomic absorption spectrometry (GFAA).

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Coal contains several elements whose individual concentrations are generally less than 0.01 %. These elements are commonly and collectively referred to as trace elements. These elements primarily occur as part of the mineral matter in coal. The potential release of certain trace elements from coal combustion sources has become an environmental concern.

³ Available from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

5.2 The ash prepared in accordance with these provisional test methods quantitatively retains the elements listed in 1.1 and is representative of their concentrations in the coal or coke.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Emission Spectrometer (ICPAES)*—The spectrometer system may be either simultaneous or sequential, vacuum or purged, but must include computer-controlled background correction.

6.1.1 *Argon Gas Supply*—High purity (99.99 %).

6.1.2 *Mass Flow Controllers*—A mass-flow controller to regulate the nebulizer gas is required. Mass flow controllers on the intermediate and outer torch gas flows are recommended.

6.2 *Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer (ICPMS)*—The spectrometer system must be capable of scanning the mass range of the elements to be analyzed.

6.2.1 *Argon Gas Supply*, high purity (99.99 %).

6.2.2 The use of a variable speed peristaltic pump for delivering sample solution to the nebulizer, a mass-flow controller on the gas supply to the nebulizer, and a water-cooled spray chamber are highly recommended.

6.3 *Atomic Absorption Spectrometer with Graphite Furnace (GFAA)*, having background correction capable of removing nonspecific absorbance.

6.3.1 *Single-Element Hollow Cathode or Single-Element Electrodeless Discharge Lamps*.

6.3.2 *Single-Output Device*, capable of recording and evaluating peak area and peak shape.

6.3.3 *Pyrolytic Coated Graphite Tubes and Platforms*.

6.3.4 *Argon Gas Supply*, high purity (99.99 %).

6.3.5 *Autosampler*—Although not specifically required, the use of an autosampler is highly recommended.

6.4 *Muffle Furnace*, with temperature control and with air circulation as specified in 9.1.

6.5 *Analytical Balance*, capable of weighing to 0.1 mg.

6.6 *Teflon Beakers*, 100- or 200-mL capacity.

6.7 *Hot Plate*, capable of regulating temperature between 90 to 150°C.

6.8 *Volumetric Flasks*, 100- and 10-mL capacity.

6.9 *HDPE Bottles*, 100-mL capacity.

6.10 *Crucibles*, 50-mL quartz or high silica.

7. Reagents

7.1 *Purity of Reagents*—All acids used in these test methods must be trace metal purity grade or equivalent. Redistilled acids are acceptable.

7.2 *Purity of Water*—The purity of the water used in these test methods shall be equivalent to ASTM Type II reagent water of Specification **D1193**.

7.3 *Aqua Regia Solution*—Mix one part concentrated nitric acid (HNO₃, sp. gr. 1.42) and three parts concentrated hydrochloric acid (HCl, sp. gr. 1.9).

7.4 *Hydrofluoric Acid*—Concentrated (HF, sp. gr. 1.15).

7.5 *ICP Calibration Standards*—Aqueous multielement solutions made up in 1 % HNO₃ are used for calibration of ICPAES and ICPMS systems. The standards may be purchased or prepared from high-purity grade chemicals or metals.

7.5.1 *GFAA Stock Standard Solution (1000 ppm)*—Single-element standards either purchased or prepared from high-purity grade chemicals or metals.

7.5.2 *GFAA Intermediate Stock Standard Solution (1 ppm)*—Add 0.1 mL of stock standard solution (7.5.1) and 1 mL of concentrated nitric acid to a 100-mL volumetric flask. Dilute to volume with water.

7.6 *Magnesium Nitrate Solution*—Matrix modifier (106-g/L Mg(NO₃)₂ · 6H₂O) for the determination of arsenic and antimony, equivalent to 10 000-ppm magnesium.

7.6.1 A matrix modifier is used to minimize GFAA interference effects by selective volatilization of either the analyte or the matrix components. Other matrix modifiers such as nickel nitrate or palladium nitrate can be used. The analyst should compare modifiers to establish optimum performance as outlined in 10.1.

7.7 *Blank Solutions*—All of the test methods in this standard require two types of blank solutions. A calibration blank that is used to establish the analytical calibration curve and a method blank which is used to evaluate possible contamination and assess spectral background.

7.7.1 *Calibration Blank*—A 1 % nitric acid solution. When using matrix modifiers of GFAA, the calibration blank shall also contain the same equivalent concentration.

7.7.2 *Method Blank*—Consists of all the reagents in the same volumes as used in preparing the samples. The method blank shall be processed through the entire sample digestion scheme.

8. Analysis Sample

8.1 Samples of coal and coke shall be prepared in accordance with Practice **D2013** or Practice **D346**.

8.2 Standard practices for the sampling and preparation of residues from coal utilization processes have not been established. Some of these materials are highly abrasive. The use of high speed pulverizers for size reduction shall be avoided. The use of jaw crushers followed by final preparation in an agate mortar and pestle is recommended to prevent contamination of the sample.

8.3 Analyze separate test portions for moisture content in accordance with Test Methods **D3173** and **D7582** so that calculations to other bases can be made.

9. Procedure

9.1 *Ashing*—Weigh to the nearest 0.1 mg enough of the coal or coke sample that will yield approximately 0.5 g of ash into an open 50-mL quartz or high-silica crucible. Place the crucible in a cold muffle furnace. Adjust the temperature control so that the furnace reaches a temperature of 300°C in 1 h and then 500°C in the second hour. Maintain the furnace temperature at 500°C for a minimum of 2 h, stirring the sample occasionally. Ashing is complete when no visible evidence of carbonaceous material remains. Cool the samples to room temperature under conditions that minimize the absorption of water. Grind the ash to pass a 150-µm (No. 100) U.S.A. standard sieve in an agate mortar then reignite at 500°C for 1 h. Cool the ash and store in a desiccator. Determine the percentage of ash by analyzing under the same conditions a separate portion of the analysis sample.

NOTE 2—If all the ash from 9.1 is quantitatively transferred for digestion in 9.2, it is not necessary to sieve and grind the ash. Results from 11.2.3, 12.3, or 13.1.4.8 are then ppm of the element in the as-determined sample.

9.2 *Dissolution*—Weigh 0.2000 to 0.5000 g of the thoroughly blended ash prepared according to 9.1 into a 100- or 200-mL Teflon beaker. Add 20 mL of aqua regia and 20 mL of concentrated hydrofluoric acid to the beaker. Place the beaker on a hot plate that has been adjusted to 130 to 150°C. Heat the mixture to dryness, but do not bake. After the solution has evaporated, rinse the beaker walls with deionized water and heat this solution to dryness, again being careful not to bake the sample. Remove the beaker from the hot plate and cool to room temperature. Add 1 mL of concentrated nitric acid and 20 mL of deionized water to the beaker. Heat the contents on a hot plate at 90 to 100°C until the sample is in solution. If a residue remains after 1 h of heating, it may be ignored. The trace elements are considered to be quantitatively extracted at this point. Remove the beaker from the hot plate and allow the solution to cool to room temperature. Transfer the cool solution to a 100-mL volumetric flask and dilute to volume with deionized water. If the solution is not to be analyzed immediately, transfer to a HDPE bottle to avoid adsorption of lead during storage. Prepare a method blank (7.7.2) with each batch of samples to be analyzed.

NOTE 3—To minimize contamination, clean laboratory ware in a 1:1 solution of HNO₃ followed by a 1:1 solution of HCl then rinse thoroughly with deionized water.

10. Analysis

10.1 Because of the differences between various makes and models of instruments, all instrumental operating instructions cannot be provided. Instead, the analyst shall refer to the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the particular instrument. Sensitivity, instrumental detection limit, linear dynamic range, interference effects, and appropriate background correction shall be investigated and established for each individual analyte on that particular instrument.

11. Test Method A—Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Emission Spectroscopy

11.1 Table 1 shows the elements listed in 1.1 along with some suggested wavelengths for inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectrometry (ICPAES). Other wavelengths may be substituted if they can provide the needed sensitivity and are treated according to the provisions of 10.1. Also shown are estimated detection limits.

11.2 *Calibration Procedure*—Calibrate the instrument according to the procedure recommended by the manufacturer using a calibration blank and aqueous multielement standards made up in 1 % trace metal grade HNO₃. All calibration solutions must also contain an internal standard (see Note 4). Records for all calibrations must be in accordance with Guide D7448.

NOTE 4—An internal standard is needed to compensate for:

1. Differences in physical properties (such as viscosity) between the calibration standard and the test samples and
2. Drift caused by thermal changes in the laboratory which will affect the instrument optics.

TABLE 1 Suggested Wavelengths for ICPAES

Element	Wavelength, nm	Estimated Detection Limit, µg/L ^A
As ^B	189.042, 228.812, 193.759	53
Be	313.042	0.3
Cd ^B	226.502	4
Co	228.616	7
Cr	267.716, 205.552	7
Cu	324.754	6
Mn	257.610	30
Mo	202.030, 203.844	8
Ni	231.604	15
Pb	220.353	42
Sb ^B	217.581, 206.833	32
V	292.402, 292.464	8
Zn	213.856	2

^ADetection limits are given for informational purposes only and represent the lowest concentration that produces a instrumental response statistically different from an aqueous blank solution. Detection limits should not be confused with quantitation limits. Detection limits are sample and matrix dependent. They will vary from instrument to instrument and should be established by each user of these test methods. These values (3 sigma) are based on data contained in EPA/600/4-91/010, Method 200.7 Revision 5.4 (1994).

^BAs, Cd, and Sb are typically present in coal at concentrations that are below the detection limits of ICPAES.

An appropriate internal standard element should:

- (i) not be naturally present in the test samples in appreciable concentrations,
- (ii) not present spectral interferences with any analyte,
- (iii) be a strong emitter so that its relative concentration can be kept low, and
- (iv) be as chemically similar to the analyte as possible.

11.2.1 *Initial Calibration Verification*—Before analyzing test samples, analyze the method blank and verify the proper calibration of the instrument by analyzing a reference material that has traceability to an internationally recognized certifying agency such as NIST. Results for the reference material must be within the stated uncertainty limits or the calibration procedure must be repeated.

11.2.2 *Periodic Calibration Verification and Recalibration*—In accordance with Guide D7448, analyze a control sample such as NIST on a periodic basis. Results obtained for the control sample must be within 10 % of the stated value or all results obtained since the last successful control check of that element must be rejected and the calibration procedure repeated.

11.2.3 *Calculation*—Calculate the concentration of the element in the ash as follows:

$$C = (A \times df)/(W \times 100) \quad (1)$$

where:

- C = weight percent of the element in the ash,
 df = dilution factor,
 A = ppm of the element in solution, and
 W = weight of the sample in grams.

12. Test Method B—Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry

12.1 Table 2 shows the elements listed in 1.1, the isotope, and its abundance used for ICPMS determinations. Also shown are some potential molecular interferents.