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Aerosol particle number concentration — Calibration of condensation particle counters

*Densité de particules d'aérosol — Étalonnage de compteurs de
particules d'aérosol à condensation*



Reference number
ISO 27891:2015(E)

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ISO copyright office
Case postale 56 • CH-1211 Geneva 20
Tel. + 41 22 749 01 11
Fax + 41 22 749 09 47
E-mail copyright@iso.org
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Contents

	Page
Foreword	v
Introduction	vi
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	1
4 Symbols	5
5 Calibration using reference instruments — General principles	8
5.1 General principles.....	8
5.2 Objectives for the calibration aerosol.....	9
5.3 Setup overview.....	9
5.4 Components and their requirements.....	10
5.4.1 Primary aerosol source.....	10
5.4.2 Charge conditioner.....	11
5.4.3 DEMC.....	11
5.4.4 Make-up or bleed air.....	11
5.4.5 Mixing device, flow splitter and connection tubing.....	12
5.4.6 Reference instrument: FCAE or CPC.....	12
5.4.7 Other tools.....	14
5.5 Differences between FCAE and CPC as a reference instrument.....	14
6 Calibration using an FCAE as reference instrument	15
6.1 Overview of the setup and calibration procedure.....	15
6.2 Preparation.....	18
6.2.1 General preparation.....	18
6.2.2 Primary aerosol.....	18
6.2.3 Other equipment.....	18
6.2.4 DEMC.....	18
6.2.5 FCAE.....	19
6.2.6 Test CPC.....	20
6.2.7 Check of the complete setup.....	21
6.3 Calibration procedure of detection efficiency.....	23
6.3.1 General.....	23
6.3.2 DEMC diameter adjustment.....	23
6.3.3 Primary aerosol adjustment.....	23
6.3.4 Splitter bias β measurement.....	24
6.3.5 Test CPC efficiency measurement.....	24
6.3.6 Measurement of different particle concentrations.....	26
6.3.7 Measurement of different sizes.....	26
6.3.8 Repetition of first measurement point.....	26
6.3.9 Preparation of the calibration certificate.....	26
6.4 Measurement uncertainty.....	26
6.4.1 General.....	26
6.4.2 Particle size.....	27
6.4.3 Detection efficiency.....	27
6.4.4 Particle number concentration.....	28

Contents

Page

7	Calibration using a CPC as reference instrument	28
7.1	Overview of the setup and calibration procedure.....	28
7.2	Preparation.....	31
7.2.1	General preparation.....	31
7.2.2	Primary aerosol.....	31
7.2.3	Other equipment.....	31
7.2.4	DEMC.....	31
7.2.5	Reference CPC.....	32
7.2.6	Test CPC.....	33
7.2.7	Check of the complete setup.....	33
7.3	Calibration procedure of detection efficiency.....	35
7.3.1	General.....	35
7.3.2	DEMC diameter adjustment.....	35
7.3.3	Primary aerosol adjustment.....	36
7.3.4	Splitter bias β measurement.....	36
7.3.5	Test CPC efficiency measurement.....	37
7.3.6	Measurement of different particle concentrations.....	38
7.3.7	Measurement of different sizes.....	38
7.3.8	Repetition of first measurement point.....	38
7.3.9	Preparation of the calibration certificate.....	38
7.4	Measurement uncertainty.....	38
7.4.1	General.....	38
7.4.2	Particle size.....	39
7.4.3	Detection efficiency.....	39
7.4.4	Particle number concentration.....	40
8	Reporting of results	40
	Annex A (informative) CPC performance characteristics	42
	Annex B (informative) Effect of particle surface properties on the CPC detection efficiency	51
	Annex C (informative) Example calibration certificates	53
	Annex D (normative) Calculation of the CPC detection efficiency	62
	Annex E (informative) Traceability diagram	73
	Annex F (informative) Diluters	75
	Annex G (normative) Evaluation of the concentration bias correction factor between the inlets of the reference instrument and test CPC	78
	Annex H (informative) Extension of calibration range to lower concentrations	83
	Annex I (informative) Example of a detection efficiency measurement	90
	Annex J (normative) Volumetric flow rate calibration	106
	Annex K (normative) Testing the charge conditioner and the DEMC at maximum particle number concentration	108
	Annex L (informative) A recommended data recording method when using a reference FCAE	109
	Annex M (informative) Uncertainty of detection efficiency due to particle size uncertainty	111
	Annex N (informative) Application of calibration results	113
	Bibliography	116

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Foreword

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The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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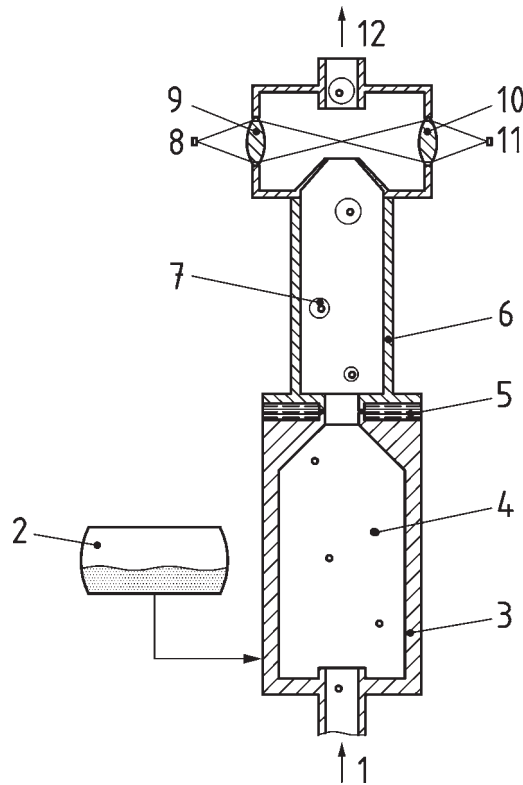
For an explanation on the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the WTO principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see the following URL: [Foreword — Supplementary information](#).

The committee responsible for this document is ISO/TC 24, *Particle characterization including sieving*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Particle characterization*.

Introduction

A condensation particle counter (CPC) is a measuring device for the number concentration of small aerosol particles. The common principle of all different CPC types is that condensation of supersaturated vapours is used to grow ultra-fine and nanoparticles to droplets of sizes that can be detected optically. [44] The counting of the droplets is performed via optical light scattering. The droplet passes through a detection area where it is illuminated by a focused light beam and a portion of the scattered light is detected with a photodetector. The frequency of this event leads, with the known volume of sampled air, to the particle number concentration. At low concentrations, the CPC counts individual particles and allows an absolute determination of particle number concentration.

Commercially available CPCs employ different working fluids to generate the vapour, e.g. 1-butanol, 2-propanol, or water. Moreover, different principles are in use to achieve the needed supersaturation in the sample air. The most common CPC uses laminar flow and diffusional heat transfer. The diffusion constant of the working fluid determines the needed heating or cooling steps to initiate condensation and hence, the principle design of a laminar flow CPC. Less common are turbulent mixing CPCs: in these CPCs, the supersaturation is achieved by turbulently mixing the sample air with a particle free gas flow saturated with the working fluid. Figure 1 shows a schematic of the probably most common CPC type with a laminar flow through a heated saturator and a cooled condenser.



Key

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1 aerosol inlet | 7 droplet |
| 2 working fluid reservoir | 8 light source |
| 3 heated saturator | 9 illumination optics |
| 4 nanoparticle | 10 receiving optics |
| 5 thermoelectric cooling and heating device | 11 photodetector |
| 6 condenser | 12 aerosol outlet |

Figure 1 — Principle of a laminar flow CPC

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The accuracy of CPC measurements, however, depends on various influences. For example, if the flow rate had an error, the concentration would have an error. Coincidence error at very high concentration, inefficient activation of particle growth at very small sizes, and losses of particles during transport from the inlet to the detection section are other possible sources of errors. For accurate measurement, the CPC shall be calibrated.

“Calibration” of the CPC is usually done using a Faraday-cup aerosol electrometer (FCAE) as reference instrument.[33][36] In many cases, the purpose of the “calibration” is to determine the limit of particle detection at very small size. The FCAE has been used as the reference since the detection efficiency of the FCAE was considered to be unity at any size. The detection efficiency of a CPC is determined as the ratio of the concentration indicated by the CPC under calibration to that by the FCAE, while aerosols of singly charged, size-classified particles of the same number concentration are supplied simultaneously to both instruments.

This International Standard sets out two distinct methods of CPC calibration: the characterization of a CPC by comparison with an FCAE, which is the same as the traditional approach described above; and by comparison with a reference CPC. An FCAE that has a reputable calibration certificate, covering the relevant particle number concentrations, sizes, and composition, can be used. In the latter case, the reference CPC is one that has a reputable calibration certificate, again covering the relevant particle number concentrations, sizes, and composition. A reputable calibration certificate shall mean either one that has been produced by a laboratory accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 or an equivalent standard, where the type and range of calibration is within the laboratory’s accredited scope, or a European Designated Institute or a National Metrology Institute that offers the relevant calibration service and whose measurements fulfil the requirements of ISO/IEC 17025.

Two major sources of errors are known in CPC calibration: the presence of multiply charged particles and the bias of the particle concentrations between the inlet of the CPC under calibration and that of the reference instrument. Evaluation of these factors and corrections for them shall be included in the calibration procedure, the methods of which are specified in this International Standard.

This International Standard is aimed at

- users of CPCs (e.g. for environmental or vehicle emissions purposes) who have internal calibration programmes,
- CPC manufacturers who certify and recertify the performance of their instruments, and
- technical laboratories who offer the calibration of CPCs as a service, which can include National Metrology Institutes who are setting up national facilities to support number concentration measurements.