



Standard Test Method for Determining Subsurface Liquid Levels in a Borehole or Monitoring Well (Observation Well)¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This test method describes the procedures for measuring the level of liquid in a borehole or well and determining the stabilized level of liquid in a borehole.

1.2 The test method applies to boreholes (cased or uncased) and monitoring wells (observation wells) that are vertical or sufficiently vertical so a flexible measuring device can be lowered into the hole.

1.3 Borehole liquid-level measurements obtained using this test method will not necessarily correspond to the level of the liquid in the vicinity of the borehole unless sufficient time has been allowed for the level to reach equilibrium position.

1.4 This test method generally is not applicable for the determination of pore-pressure changes due to changes in stress conditions of the earth material.

1.5 This test method is not applicable for the concurrent determination of multiple liquid levels in a borehole.

1.6 The values stated in inch-pound units are to be regarded as the standard.

1.7 *This standard may involve hazardous materials, operations, and equipment. This standard does not purport to address all of the safety problems 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 Document

2.1 *ASTM Standard:*
D 653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids²

3. Terminology

3.1 *Descriptions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.1.1 *borehole*—a hole of circular cross-section made in soil or rock to ascertain the nature of the subsurface materials. Normally, a borehole is advanced using an auger, a drill, or casing with or without drilling fluid.

3.1.2 *earth material*—soil, bedrock, or fill.

3.1.3 *ground-water level*—the level of the water table surrounding a borehole or well. The ground-water level can be represented as an elevation or as a depth below the ground surface.

3.1.4 *liquid level*—the level of liquid in a borehole or well at a particular time. The liquid level can be reported as an elevation or as a depth below the top of the land surface. If the liquid is ground water it is known as water level.

3.1.5 *monitoring well (observation well)*—a special well drilled in a selected location for observing parameters such as liquid level or pressure changes or for collecting liquid samples. The well may be cased or uncased, but if cased the casing should have openings to allow flow of borehole liquid into or out of the casing.

3.1.6 *stabilized borehole liquid level*—the borehole liquid level which remains essentially constant with time, that is, liquid does not flow into or out of the borehole.

3.1.7 *top of borehole*—the surface of the ground surrounding the borehole.

3.1.8 *water table (ground-water table)*—the surface of a ground-water body at which the water pressure equals atmospheric pressure. Earth material below the ground-water table is saturated with water.

3.2 Definitions:

3.2.1 For definitions of other terms used in this test method, see Terminology D 653.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 In geotechnical, hydrologic, and waste-management investigations, it is frequently desirable, or required, to obtain information concerning the presence of ground water or other liquids and the depths to the ground-water table or other liquid surface. Such investigations typically include drilling of exploratory boreholes, performing aquifer tests, and possibly completion as a monitoring or observation well. The opportunity exists to record the level of liquid in such boreholes or wells, as the boreholes are being advanced and after their completion.

4.2 Conceptually, a stabilized borehole liquid level reflects the pressure of ground water or other liquid in the earth material exposed along the sides of the borehole or well. Under suitable conditions, the borehole liquid level and the ground-water, or other liquid, level will be the same, and the former can be used to determine the latter. However, when earth materials are not exposed to a borehole, such as material which is sealed off with casing or drilling mud, the borehole water levels may not accurately reflect the ground-water level. Consequently, the user is cautioned that the liquid level in a borehole does not necessarily bear a relationship to the ground-water level at the site.

4.3 The user is cautioned that there are many factors which can influence borehole liquid levels and the interpretation of borehole liquid-level measurements. These factors are not described or discussed in this test method. The

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² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 04.08.

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interpretation and application of borehole liquid-level information should be done by a trained specialist.

4.4 Installation of piezometers should be considered where complex ground-water conditions prevail or where changes in intergranular stress, other than those associated with fluctuation in water level, have occurred or are anticipated.

5. Apparatus

5.1 Apparatus conforming to one of the following shall be used for measuring borehole liquid levels:

5.1.1 *Weighted Measuring Tape*—A measuring tape with a weight attached to the end. The tape shall have graduations that can be read to the nearest 0.01 ft. The tape shall not stretch more than 0.05 % under normal use. Steel surveying tapes in lengths of 50, 100, 200, 300, and 500 ft (20, 30, 50 or 100 m) and widths of 1/4 in. (6 mm) are commonly used. A black metal tape is better than a chromium-plated tape. Tapes are mounted on hand-cranked reels up to 500 ft (100 m) lengths. Mount a slender weight, made of lead, to the end of the tape to ensure plumbness and to permit some feel for obstructions. Attach the weight to the tape with wire strong enough to hold the weight but not as strong as the tape. This permits saving the tape in the event the weight becomes lodged in the well or borehole. The size of the weight shall be such that its displacement of water causes less than a 0.05-ft (15-mm) rise in the borehole water level, or a correction shall be made for the displacement. If the weight extends beyond the end of the tape, a length correction will be needed in measurement Procedure C (see 7.2.3).

5.1.2 *Electrical Measuring Device*—A cable or tape with electrical wire encased, equipped with a weighted sensing tip on one end and an electric meter at the other end. An electric circuit is completed when the tip contacts water; this is registered on the meter. The cable may be marked with graduations similar to a measuring tape (as described in 5.1.1).

5.1.3 *Other Measuring Devices*—A number of other recording and non-recording devices may be used. See Ref. (1) for more details.³

6. Calibration and Standardization

6.1 Calibrate measuring apparatus in accordance with the manufacturers' directions.

7. Procedure

7.1 Liquid-level measurements are made relative to a reference point. Establish and identify a reference point at or near the top of the borehole or a well casing. Determine and record the distance from the reference point to the top of the borehole (land surface). If the borehole liquid level is to be reported as an elevation, determine the elevation of the reference point or the top of borehole (land surface). Three alternative measurement procedures (A, B, and C) are described.

NOTE 1—In general, Procedure A allows for greater accuracy than B or C, and B allows for greater accuracy than C; other procedures have a

variety of accuracies that must be determined from the referenced literature (2-5).

7.2 Procedure A—Measuring Tape:

7.2.1 Chalk the lower few feet of tape by drawing the tape across a piece of colored carpenter's chalk.

7.2.2 Lower a weighted measuring tape slowly into the borehole or well until the liquid surface is penetrated. Observe and record the reading on the tape at the reference point. Withdraw the tape from the borehole and observe the lower end of the tape. The demarcation between the wetted and unwetted portions of the chalked tape should be apparent. Observe and record the reading on the tape at that point. The difference between the two readings is the depth from the reference point to the liquid level.

NOTE 2—Submergence of the weight and tape may temporarily cause a liquid-level rise in wells or boreholes having very small diameters. This effect can be significant if the well is in materials of very low hydraulic conductivity.

NOTE 3—Under dry surface conditions, it may be desirable to pull the tape from the well or borehole by hand, being careful not to allow it to become kinked, and reading the liquid mark before rewinding the tape onto the reel. In this way, the liquid mark on the chalked part of the tape is rapidly brought to the surface before the wetted part of the tape dries. In cold regions, rapid withdrawal of the tape from the well is necessary before the wet part freezes and becomes difficult to read. The tape must be protected if rain is falling during measurements.

NOTE 4—In some pumped wells, or in contaminated wells, a layer of oil may float on the water. If the oil layer is only a foot or less thick, read the tape at the top of the oil mark and use this reading for the water-level measurement. The measurement will not be greatly in error because the level of the oil surface in this case will differ only slightly from the level of the water surface that would be measured if no oil was present. If several feet of oil are present in the well, or if it is necessary to know the thickness of the oil layer, a water-detector paste for detecting water in oil and gasoline storage tanks is available commercially. The paste is applied to the lower end of the tape that is submerged in the well. It will show the top of the oil as a wet line and the top of the water as a distinct color change.

7.2.3 As a standard of good practice, the observer should make two measurements. If two measurements of static liquid level made within a few minutes do not agree within about 0.01 or 0.02 ft (generally regarded as the practical limit of precision) in boreholes or wells having a depth to liquid of less than a couple of hundred feet, continue to measure until the reason for the lack of agreement is determined or until the results are shown to be reliable. Where water is dripping into the hole or covering its wall, it may be impossible to get a good water mark on the chalked tape.

7.2.4 After each well measurement, in areas where polluted liquids or ground water is suspected, decontaminate that part of the tape measure that was wetted to avoid contamination of other wells.

7.3 Procedure B—Electrical Measuring Device:

7.3.1 Check proper operation of the instrument by inserting the tip into water and noting if the contact between the tip and the water surface is registered clearly.

NOTE 5—In pumped wells having a layer of oil floating on the water, the electric tape will not respond to the oil surface and, thus, the liquid level determined will be different than would be determined by a steel tape. The difference depends on how much oil is floating on the water. A miniature float-driven switch can be put on a two-conductor electric tape that permits detection of the surface of the uppermost fluid.

³ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.

SITE NO.

BORHOLE OR WELL SCHEDULE FORM

Recorded by _____

Date _____

Check One English Metric Units

GENERAL SITE DATA (01)

Site Ident No. 5 RG Number R-01 Transaction 7-A D M V
 Site-Type Z-C D E H I M D P S T W X Reliability 3-C U Reporting Agency 4-
 Project No. 5- District 6- State 7-I County 8-
 Latitude 9- Longitude 10- Lat-Long Accuracy 11-S F T M
 Local Number 12- Land Use 13-S
 Location Map 14- Scale 15-
 Altitude 16- Method of Measurement 17-A L M Accuracy 18-
 Topo Setting 19-A B C D E F G H K L M O P S T U V W Hydrologic Unit (OW/D) 20-
 Use of Site 23-A C D E G H M O P R S T U W X Z Secondary Site Use 301- Tertiary Site Use 302-
 Use of Water 24-A B C D E F H I J K M N P Q R S T U Y Z
 Secondary Water Use 25- Tertiary Use of Water 26- Depth of Hole 27- Depth of Well 28- Source of Depth Data 29-
 Water Level 30- Data Measured 31- Source 33-
 Method of Measurement 34-A B C E G H L M N R S T V Z
 Site Status 37-D E F G H I J N O P R S T V W X Z
 Source of Geohydrologic Data 35- Pump Used 35- Date of First Construction 21- Completion 21-

OWNER IDENTIFICATION (1)

R-158 T-A D M Date of Ownership 159-
 Name: Last 161- First 162- Middle Initial 163-

OTHER SITE IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS (1)

R-189 T-A D M Ident 190- Assigner 191-
 New Card Same R & T Ident 190- Assigner 191-

SITE VISIT DATA (1)

R-186 T-A D M Date of Visit 187- Name of Person 188-

FIELD WATER QUALITY MEASUREMENTS (1)

R-192 T-A D M Date 193- Geohydrologic Unit 195-
 New Card Same R thru 195
 Temperature 198-0,0,0,1,0 Degrees C 197-
 Conductance 196-0,0,0,9,5 uMhos 197-
 Other (STORET) Parameter 196- Value 197-
 Other (STORET) Parameter 196- Value 197-

FOOT NOTES

Source of Data Codes
 A O G L M O R S Z
 other data without tag means owner other reporting other
 gov't

FIG. 3 Example of a Borehole or Well Schedule Form

NOTE 8—The time required to reach equilibrium can be reduced by removing or adding liquid until the liquid level is close to the estimated stabilized level.

8.2 Use one of the following two procedures to determine the stabilized liquid level.

8.2.1 *Procedure 1*—Take a series of liquid-level measurements until the liquid level remains constant with time. As a minimum, two such constant readings are needed (more readings are preferred). The constant reading is the stabilized liquid level for the borehole or well.

NOTE 9—If desired, the time and level data could be plotted on graph paper in order to show when equilibrium is reached.

8.2.2 *Procedure 2*—Take at least three liquid-level measurements at approximately equal time intervals as the liquid level changes during the approach to a stabilized liquid level.

8.2.2.1 The approximate position of the stabilized liquid level in the well or borehole is calculated using the following equation:

$$h_o = \frac{y_1^2}{y_1 - y_2}$$

where:

h_o = distance the liquid level must change to reach the stabilized liquid level,

y_1 = distance the liquid level changed during the time interval between the first two liquid-level readings, and

y_2 = distance the liquid level changed during the time interval between the second and the third liquid level readings.

8.2.2.2 Repeat the above process using successive sets of three measurements until the h_o computed is consistent to the accuracy desired. Compute the stabilized liquid level in the well or borehole.

NOTE 10—The time span required between readings for Procedures 1 and 2 depends on the permeability of the earth material. In material with comparatively high permeability (such as sand), a few minutes may be sufficient. In materials with comparatively low permeability (such as clay), many hours or days may be needed. The user is cautioned that in clayey soils the liquid in the borehole or well may never reach a stabilized level equivalent to the liquid level in the earth materials surrounding the borehole or well.

9. Report

9.1 For borehole or well liquid-level measurements, report, as a minimum, the following information:


- 9.1.1 Borehole or well identification.
- 9.1.2 Description of reference point.
- 9.1.3 Distance between reference point and top of borehole or land surface.
- 9.1.4 Elevation of top of borehole or reference point (if the borehole or well liquid level is reported as an elevation).
- 9.1.5 Description of measuring device used, and graduation.
- 9.1.6 Procedure of measurement.
- 9.1.7 Date and time of reading.
- 9.1.8 Borehole or well liquid level.
- 9.1.9 Description of liquid in borehole or well.
- 9.1.10 State whether borehole is cased, uncased, or contains a monitoring (observation) well standpipe and give description of, and length below top of borehole of, casing or standpipe.
- 9.1.11 Drilled depth of borehole, if known.
- 9.2 For determination of stabilized liquid level, report:
 - 9.2.1 All pertinent data and computations.
 - 9.2.2 Procedure of determination.
 - 9.2.3 The stabilized liquid level.
- 9.3 *Report Forms*—An example of a borehole or well-schedule form is shown in Fig. 1. An example of a liquid-level measurement form, for recording continuing measurements for a borehole or well, is shown in Fig. 2. An example of a borehole or well schedule form designed to facilitate computer data storage is shown in Fig. 3.

10. Precision and Bias

10.1 Borehole liquid levels shall be measured and recorded to the accuracy desired and consistent with the accuracy of the measuring device and procedures used. Procedure A multiple measurements by wetted tape should agree within 0.02 ft (6 mm). Procedure B multiple measurements by electrical tape should agree within 0.04 ft (12 mm). Procedure C multiple measurements by tape and sounding weight should agree within 0.04 ft (12 mm). Garber and Koopman (2) describe corrections that can be made for effects of thermal expansion of tapes or cables and of stretch due to the suspended weight of tape or cable and plumb weight when measuring liquid levels at depths greater than 500 ft (150 m).

REFERENCES

- (1) "National Handbook of Recommended Methods for Water Data Acquisition—Chapter 2—Ground Water", Office of Water Data Coordination, Washington, DC, 1980.
- (2) Garber, M. S., and Koopman, F. C., "Methods of Measuring Water Levels in Deep Wells," *U.S. Geologic Survey Techniques for Water Resources Investigations*, Book 8, Chapter A-1, 1968.
- (3) Hvorslev, M. J., "Ground Water Observations," in *Subsurface Exploration and Sampling of Soils for Civil Engineering Purposes*, American Society Civil Engineers, New York, NY, 1949.
- (4) Zegarra, E. J., "Suggested Method for Measuring Water Level in Boreholes," *Special Procedures for Testing Soil and Rock for Engineering Purposes*, ASTM STP 479, ASTM, 1970.
- (5) "Determination of Water Level in a Borehole," CSA Standard A 119.6 - 1971, Canadian Standards Association, 1971.

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