

## **IN-PLACE DENSITY AND MOISTURE CONTENT OF SOIL AND SOIL-AGGREGATE BY NUCLEAR METHODS (SHALLOW DEPTH) FOP FOR AASHTO T 310**

### **Scope**

This procedure covers the determination of density, moisture content, and relative compaction of soil, aggregate, and soil-aggregate mixes in accordance with AASHTO T 310-22. This procedure provides a rapid, nondestructive technique for determining the in-place wet density and moisture content of soil, aggregate, and soil-aggregate mixes. This field operating procedure is derived from AASHTO T 310. The nuclear moisture-density gauge is used in the direct transmission mode.

### **Apparatus**

- Nuclear density gauge with the factory matched standard reference block.
- Drive pin, guide/scrapper plate, and hammer for testing in direct transmission mode.
- Transport case for properly shipping and housing the gauge and tools.
- Instruction manual for the specific make and model of gauge.
- Radioactive materials information and calibration packet containing:
  - Daily Standard Count Log.
  - Factory and Laboratory Calibration Data Sheet.
  - Leak Test Certificate.
  - Shippers Declaration for Dangerous Goods.
  - Procedure Memo for Storing, Transporting and Handling Nuclear Testing Equipment.
  - Other radioactive materials documentation as required by local regulatory requirements.
- Sealable containers and utensils for moisture content determinations.

### **Radiation Safety**

This method does not purport to address all of the safety problems associated with its use. This test method involves potentially hazardous materials. The gauge utilizes radioactive materials that may be hazardous to the health of the user unless proper precautions are taken. Users of this gauge must become familiar with the applicable safety procedures and governmental regulations. All operators will be trained in radiation safety prior to operating nuclear density gauges. Some agencies require the use of personal monitoring devices such as a thermoluminescent dosimeter or film badge. Effective instructions together with routine safety procedures such as source leak tests, recording and evaluation of personal monitoring device data, etc., are a recommended part of the operation and storage of this gauge.

## Calibration

Calibrate the nuclear gauge as required by the agency. This calibration may be performed by the agency using manufacturer's recommended procedures or by other facilities approved by the agency. Verify or re-establish calibration curves, tables, or equivalent coefficients every 12 months.

## Standardization

1. Turn the gauge on and allow it to stabilize (approximately 10 to 20 minutes) prior to standardization. Leave the power on during the day's testing.
2. Standardize the nuclear gauge at the construction site at the start of each day's work and as often as deemed necessary by the operator or agency. Daily variations in standard count shall not exceed the daily variations established by the manufacturer of the gauge. If the daily variations are exceeded after repeating the standardization procedure, the gauge should be repaired and/or recalibrated.
3. Record the standard count for both density and moisture in the Daily Standard Count Log. The exact procedure for standard count is listed in the manufacturer's Operator's Manual.

*Note 1:* New standard counts may be necessary more than once a day. See agency requirements.

## Overview

There are two methods for determining in-place density of soil / soil aggregate mixtures. See agency requirements for method selection.

- Method A Single Direction
- Method B Two Direction

## Procedure

1. Select a test location(s) randomly and in accordance with agency requirements. Test sites should be relatively smooth and flat and meet the following conditions:
  - a. At least 10 m (30 ft) away from other sources of radioactivity
  - b. At least 3 m (10 ft) away from large objects
  - c. The test site should be at least 150 mm (6 in.) away from any vertical projection.
  - d. Correct for trench wall effect according to manufacturer's correction procedures if the test site is closer than 600 mm (24 in.) to vertical projection. See Note 2.

*Note 2:* To perform moisture and density tests in a trench or against a large solid object, it is necessary to perform a trench offset correction to adjust the gauge, or it may read a falsely high moisture content. Moisture present in the walls can thermalize neutrons which return to the gauge and are read as moisture by the detector in the gauge.

2. Remove all loose and disturbed material and remove additional material as necessary to expose the top of the material to be tested.
3. Prepare a flat area sufficient in size to accommodate the gauge. Plane the area to a smooth condition so as to obtain maximum contact between the gauge and the

material being tested. For Method B, the flat area must be sufficient to permit rotating the gauge 90 or 180 degrees about the source rod.

4. Fill in surface voids beneath the gauge with fines of the material being tested passing the 4.75 mm (No. 4) sieve or finer. Smooth the surface with the guide plate or other suitable tool. The depth of the filler should not exceed approximately 3 mm (1/8 in.).
5. Make a hole perpendicular to the prepared surface using the guide plate and drive pin. The hole shall be at least 50 mm (2 in.) deeper than the desired source rod depth and shall be aligned such that insertion of the source rod will not cause the gauge to tilt from the plane of the prepared area. Remove the drive pin by pulling straight up and twisting the extraction tool.
6. Place the gauge on the prepared surface so the source rod can enter the hole without disturbing loose material.
7. Lower the source rod into the hole to the desired test depth using the handle and trigger mechanism.
8. Seat the gauge firmly by partially rotating it back and forth about the source rod. Ensure the gauge is seated flush against the surface by pressing down on the gauge corners and making sure that the gauge does not rock.
9. Pull gently on the gauge to bring the side of the source rod nearest to the scaler / detector firmly against the side of the hole.
10. Perform one of the following methods, per agency requirements:
  - a. Method A Single Direction: Take a test consisting of the average of two, one-minute readings, and record both density and moisture data. The two wet density readings should be within  $32 \text{ kg/m}^3$  ( $2.0 \text{ lb/ft}^3$ ) of each other. The average of the two wet densities and moisture contents will be used to compute dry density.
  - b. Method B Two Direction: Take a one-minute reading and record both density and moisture data. Rotate the gauge 90 or 180 degrees, pivoting it around the source rod. Reseat the gauge by pulling gently on the gauge to bring the side of the source rod nearest to the scaler/detector firmly against the side of the hole and take a one-minute reading. (In trench locations, rotate the gauge 180 degrees for the second test.) Some agencies require multiple one-minute readings in both directions. Analyze the density and moisture data. A valid test consists of wet density readings in both gauge positions that are within  $50 \text{ kg/m}^3$  ( $3.0 \text{ lb/ft}^3$ ). If the tests do not agree within this limit, move to a new location. The average of the wet density and moisture contents will be used to compute dry density.
11. If required by the agency, obtain a representative sample of the material, 4 kg (9 lb) minimum, from directly beneath the gauge full depth of material tested. This sample will be used to verify moisture content and / or identify the correct density standard. Immediately seal the material to prevent loss of moisture.

The material tested by direct transmission can be approximated by a cylinder of soil approximately 300 mm (12 in.) in diameter directly beneath the centerline of the

radioactive source and detector. The height of the cylinder will be approximately the depth of measurement. When organic material or large aggregate is removed during this operation, disregard the test information, and move to a new test site.

12. To verify the moisture content from the nuclear gauge, determine the moisture content with a representative portion of the material using the FOP for AASHTO T 255/T 265 or other agency approved methods. If the moisture content from the nuclear gauge is within  $\pm 1$  percent, the nuclear gauge readings can be accepted. Moisture content verification is gauge and material specific. Retain the remainder of the sample at its original moisture content for a one-point compaction test under the FOP for AASHTO T 272, or for gradation, if required.

*Note 2:* Example: A gauge reading of 16.8 percent moisture and an oven dry of 17.7 percent are within the  $\pm 1$  percent requirement. Moisture correlation curves will be developed according to agency guidelines. These curves should be reviewed and possibly redeveloped every 90 days.

13. Determine the dry density by one of the following.
  - a. From nuclear gauge readings, compute by subtracting the mass (weight) of the water ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^3$  or  $\text{lb}/\text{ft}^3$ ) from the wet density ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^3$  or  $\text{lb}/\text{ft}^3$ ) or compute using the percent moisture by dividing wet density from the nuclear gauge by 1 plus the moisture content expressed as a decimal.
  - b. When verification is required and the nuclear gauge readings cannot be accepted, the moisture content is determined by the FOP for AASHTO T 255/T 265 or other agency approved methods. Compute dry density by dividing wet density from the nuclear gauge by 1 plus the moisture content expressed as a decimal.

## Percent Compaction

- Percent compaction is determined by comparing the in-place dry density as determined by this procedure to the appropriate agency density standard. For soil or soil-aggregate mixes, these are moisture-density curves developed using the FOP for AASHTO T 99/T 180. When using maximum dry densities from the FOP for AASHTO T 99/T 180 or FOP for AASHTO T 272, it may be necessary to use the Annex in the FOP for T 99/T 180 to determine corrected maximum dry density and optimum moisture content.

For coarse granular materials, the density standard may be density-gradation curves developed using a vibratory method such as AKDOT&PF's ATM 212, ITD's T 74, WAQTC TM 15, or WFLHD's Humphres.

See appropriate agency policies for use of density standards.

## Calculation

Calculate the dry density as follows:

$$\rho_d = \left( \frac{\rho_w}{w + 100} \right) \times 100 \quad \text{or} \quad \rho_d = \frac{\rho_w}{\frac{w}{100} + 1}$$

Where:

$\rho_d$  = Dry density, kg/m<sup>3</sup> (lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

$\rho_w$  = Wet density, kg/m<sup>3</sup> (lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

w = Moisture content from the FOP's for AASHTO T 255 / T 265, as a percentage

Calculate percent compaction as follows:

$$\% \text{ Compaction} = \frac{\rho_d}{\text{Agency density standard}} \times 100$$

Where:

$\rho_d$  = Dry density, kg/m<sup>3</sup> (lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

Agency density standard = Corrected maximum dry density  
from the FOP from T 99/T 180 Annex

## Example:

Wet density readings from gauge: 1948 kg/m<sup>3</sup> (121.6 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

1977 kg/m<sup>3</sup> (123.4 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

Avg: 1963 kg/m<sup>3</sup> (122.5 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

**Moisture readings from gauge: 14.2% and 15.4% = Avg 14.8%**

Moisture content from the FOP's for AASHTO T 255/ T 265: 15.9%

*Moisture content is greater than 1 percent different so the gauge moisture cannot be used.*

**Calculate the dry density as follows:**

$$\rho_d = \left( \frac{1963 \text{ kg/m}^3 \text{ or } 122.5 \text{ lb/ft}^3}{15.9 + 100} \right) \times 100 \text{ or } \rho_d = \frac{1963 \text{ kg/m}^3 \text{ or } 122.5 \text{ lb/ft}^3}{\frac{15.9}{100} + 1}$$
$$= 1694 \text{ kg/m}^3 \text{ or } 105.7 \text{ lb/ft}^3$$

Given:

$$\rho_w = 1963 \text{ kg/m}^3 \text{ or } 122.5 \text{ lb/ft}^3$$

$$w = 15.9\%$$

**Calculate percent compaction as follows:**

$$\% \text{ Compaction} = \frac{105.7 \text{ lb/ft}^3}{111.3 \text{ lb/ft}^3} \times 100 = 95\%$$

Given:

$$\text{Agency density standard} = 111.3 \text{ lb/ft}^3$$

## Report

- On forms approved by the agency
- Sample ID
- Location of test, elevation of surface, and thickness of layer tested
- Visual description of material tested
- Make, model and serial number of the nuclear moisture-density gauge
- Wet density to the nearest 0.1 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>
- Moisture content as a percent, by mass, of dry soil mass to the nearest 0.1 percent
- Dry density to the nearest 0.1 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>
- Density standard to the nearest 0.1 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>
- Percent compaction the nearest 1 percent
- Name and signature of operator