



Standard Test Methods for Photovoltaic Modules in Cyclic Temperature and Humidity Environments¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E 1171; 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.

1. Scope

1.1 These test methods provide procedures for determining the ability of photovoltaic modules to withstand simulated temperature and humidity environments. Environmental testing is used to simulate aging of module materials on an accelerated basis.

1.2 Three individual environmental test procedures are defined by these test methods: a thermal cycling procedure, a humidity-freeze cycling procedure, and an extended duration damp heat procedure.

1.3 These test methods define mounting methods for modules undergoing environmental testing, and specify parameters that must be recorded and reported.

1.4 These test methods do not establish pass or fail levels. The determination of acceptable or unacceptable results is beyond the scope of these test methods.

1.5 Any of the individual environmental tests may be performed singly, or may be combined into a test sequence with other environmental or non-environmental tests, or both. Certain pre-conditioning tests such as annealing or light soaking may also be necessary or desirable as part of such a sequence. The determination of any such sequencing and pre-conditioning is beyond the scope of this test method.

1.6 There is no similar or equivalent ISO standard.

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:

- E 772 Terminology Relating to Solar Energy Conversion²
- E 1036 Methods of Testing Electrical Performance of Non-concentrator Terrestrial Photovoltaic Modules and Arrays Using Reference Cells²
- E 1328 Terminology Relating to Photovoltaic Solar Energy Conversion²

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² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 12.02.

E 1462 Test Methods for Insulation Integrity and Ground Path Continuity of Photovoltaic Modules²

E 1799 Practice for Visual Inspections of Photovoltaic Modules²

E 1830M Test Methods for Determining the Mechanical Integrity of Photovoltaic Modules²

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—definitions of terms used in this standard may be found in Terminology E 772 and in Terminology E 1328.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *ground fault*—a module fault where any portion of the module circuitry between the output terminals becomes electrically connected to the module grounding point.

3.2.2 *open circuit*—a module fault where any portion of the module circuitry between the output terminals becomes electrically discontinuous.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 The useful life of photovoltaic modules may depend on their ability to withstand repeated temperature cycling with varying amounts of moisture in the air. These test methods provide procedures for simulating the effects of cyclic temperature and humidity environments. An extended duration damp heat procedure is provided to simulate the effects of long term exposure to high humidity.

4.2 These test methods describe procedures for mounting test modules, conducting the environmental tests, and reporting the results.

4.2.1 Test modules are mounted so that they are electrically isolated from each other, and in such a manner to allow free air circulation around the front and back surfaces of the modules.

4.3 Data generated using these test methods may be used to evaluate and compare the effects of simulated environment on test specimens. These test methods require determination of both visible effects and electrical performance effects.

4.3.1 Effects on modules may vary from none to significant changes. Some physical changes in the module may be visible when there are no apparent electrical changes in the module. Similarly, electrical changes may occur with no visible changes in the module.

4.3.2 All conditions of measurement, effects of cycling, and any deviations from this test method must be described in the

report so that an assessment of their significance can be made.

4.4 If these test methods are performed as part of a combined sequence with other environmental or non-environmental tests, the results of the final electrical tests (7.2) and visual inspection (7.3) determined at the end of one test may be used as the initial electrical tests and visual inspection for the next test; duplication of these tests is not necessary unless so specified.

5. Apparatus

5.1 In addition to the apparatus required for Test Methods E 1036 and E 1462 the following apparatus is required.

5.2 *Environmental Chamber(s)*—A chamber or chambers in which modules are mounted during the environmental tests.

5.2.1 Air temperature throughout the working volume shall be within $\pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ of that specified.

5.2.2 Relative humidity shall be controlled within $\pm 5\%$ of that specified. For temperatures below 80°C , relative humidity control is not required.

5.2.3 Provisions for monitoring and recording the chamber temperature and relative humidity throughout the environmental testing shall be provided.

5.3 *Temperature Measurement Equipment*—An instrument or instruments used to measure module temperature during the environmental testing with a resolution of at least 0.1°C , and a total error of less than $\pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ of reading.

5.3.1 Temperature sensors suitable for the test temperature range, such as thermocouples or thermistors, shall be attached to the portions of the modules likely to exhibit the longest thermal time constant. For flat-plate modules, attach the sensors near the middle of the front or back surfaces of the modules.

5.3.2 If more than one module of identical design and construction is tested simultaneously, it is not necessary to monitor the temperature of all identical modules.

5.4 *Ground Fault and Open Circuit Monitoring Equipment*—An electrical circuit attached to all test modules which can detect ground faults and open circuits. The equipment must monitor and record the state of the module circuitry throughout the environmental testing. An acceptable apparatus is described in Annex A1 of Test Methods E 1830M.

5.4.1 Modules that lack a grounding terminal identified by the module manufacturer are not required to be monitored for ground faults.

5.5 *Test Frame*—A frame inside the environmental chamber which adequately supports the test modules during the test procedures.

5.5.1 It is not required to mount the test modules at an angle such as when modules are installed as part of an array; they may be mounted vertically to facilitate testing multiple modules inside the environmental chamber.

5.5.2 The test modules shall be mounted in a manner that allows free air circulation around the modules.

5.5.3 The test frame should be constructed such that corrosion of the test frame during the environmental testing does not adversely affect the test modules.

6. Procedure

6.1 *Sample Selection and Test Sequence*—Although the

temperature cycling, humidity-freeze cycling, and damp heat procedures may be performed individually, the requirements of any test sequence (see 1.5 and 4.4) may determine the order in which the environmental tests are performed, and also may impose restrictions on which test modules are to be subjected to individual procedures. The sequencing may also specify when modules undergo electrical testing (see 6.2) and visual inspections (see 6.3).

6.1.1 A typical combined thermal and humidity-freeze cycling sequence is illustrated in Fig. 1.

6.2 *Electrical Tests*—Perform the following electrical tests before and after each of the test procedures.

6.2.1 *Electrical Performance*—Measure and record the electrical performance of each module. A suitable method for nonconcentrator modules is Test Methods E 1036.

6.2.2 *Ground Path Continuity*—Test any module with a grounding terminal identified by the module manufacturer to determine the maximum resistance between the grounding terminal or lead and any accessible conductive part using 7.3 of Test Methods E 1462.

6.2.3 *Insulation Integrity*—Subject each module to a test of the electrical isolation capability according to 7.1 and 7.2 of Test Methods E 1462.

6.2.3.1 The test voltage shall be equivalent to twice the specified maximum system voltage (typically open-circuit voltage at 0°C cell temperature) plus 1000 Vdc. If the maximum system voltage is less than 30 Vdc, employ a test voltage of 500 Vdc.

6.3 *Visual Inspection*—Visually inspect each module before and after each of the environmental test procedures to determine the presence or absence of anomalies or defects according to Practice E 1799.

6.4 *Instrumentation:*

6.4.1 Attach one or more temperature sensors to the exterior of the module following the requirements of 5.3.

6.4.2 Attach the ground fault and open circuit monitoring equipment specified in 5.4.

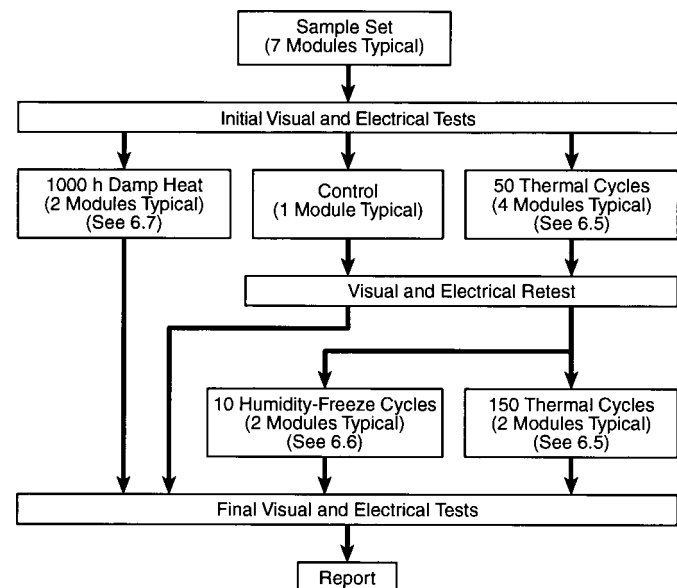


FIG. 1 Typical Environmental Test Sequence

6.5 Thermal Cycling Procedure:

6.5.1 Mount the test modules inside the environmental chamber according to the requirements of 5.5.

6.5.2 Subject the module to a -40°C to $+90^{\circ}\text{C}$ thermal cycling test in accordance with the profile shown in Fig. 2 and the following requirements.

6.5.2.1 The temperature shall vary approximately linearly with time at a rate not exceeding $100^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{h}$ and with a period not greater than 6 h per cycle (from ambient to -40°C to $+90^{\circ}\text{C}$ to ambient).

6.5.2.2 Relative humidity in the chamber shall not exceed 50 % when temperatures are above 25°C .

6.5.2.3 Minimum holding time at the temperature extremes shall be 0.5 h.

6.5.3 Continue the thermal cycling until the required number of cycles is completed.

6.5.3.1 The temperature cycling may be interrupted and the chamber be opened at 50 cycle intervals for optional visual or electrical retest, or both, during the time the module temperature is at $25 \pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$.

6.5.4 Remove the modules from the environmental chamber.

6.6 Humidity-Freeze Cycle Procedure:

6.6.1 Mount the test modules inside the environmental chamber according to the requirements of 5.5.

6.6.2 Subject the modules to a humidity-freeze cycling test in accordance with the profile shown in Fig. 3.

6.6.3 Continue the humidity-freeze cycling until the required number of cycles is completed.

6.6.4 Remove the modules from the environmental chamber.

6.7 Damp Heat Exposure Procedure:

6.7.1 Mount the test modules inside the environmental chamber according to the requirements of 5.5.

6.7.2 Raise the chamber air temperature to $85 \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and the relative humidity to $85 \pm 5\%$.

6.7.3 Continue the exposure for a total of 1000 h.

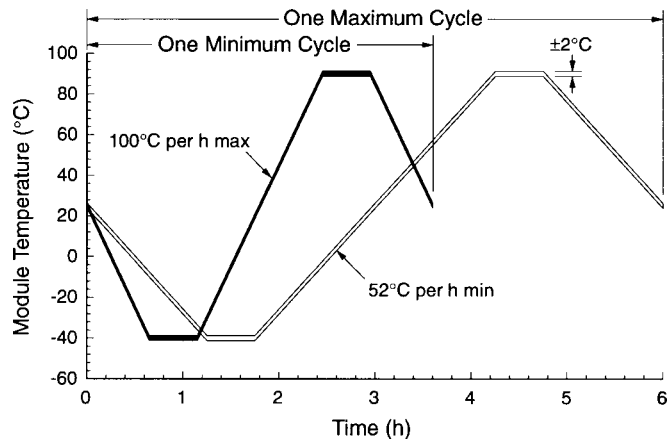


FIG. 2 One Thermal Cycle

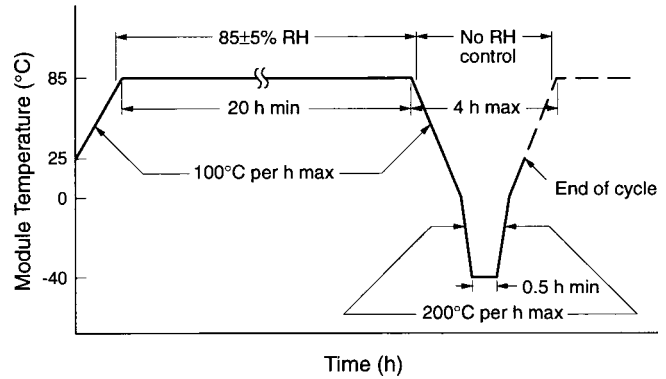


FIG. 3 One Humidity-Freeze Cycle

6.7.4 Remove the modules from the environmental chamber.

6.7.5 Perform the post-exposure insulation integrity test (see 6.2.3) within 3 ± 1 h after the modules are removed from the chamber. To satisfy this requirement, the exposure duration may be increased by a maximum of 60 h.

7. Report

7.1 In addition to the reporting requirements of Test Methods E 1036 and E 1462, and Practice E 1799, report as a minimum the following data and information:

7.1.1 Module manufacturer and complete test specimen identification.

7.1.2 Description of module construction.

7.1.3 A line drawing or photograph of the modules showing the orientation during exposure and the location of temperature sensors.

7.1.4 Description of electrical measurement equipment (including continuity and insulation integrity apparatus), and measurement conditions or parameters.

7.1.5 A brief description of the chamber used, the exact number of cycles performed, and the number of hours of damp heat exposure.


7.1.6 Any deviations from this test method such as interruptions in the test cycle.

8. Precision and Bias

8.1 The environmental exposures described by this test method do not produce numeric results that would be subject to ASTM procedures for evaluating the precision and bias of this test method. However, the precision and bias of the electrical performance measurements, when performed in accordance with Test Methods E 1036 and E 1462, are subject to the provisions of those test methods.

9. Keywords

9.1 Damp Heat Exposure; Environmental Testing; Humidity-Freeze Cycling; Modules; Photovoltaics; Solar Energy; Thermal Cycling

 **E 1171**

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