



Standard Practice for Porosity in Gold and Palladium Alloy Coatings on Metal Substrates by Vapors of Sodium Hypochlorite Solution¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation B920; 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 This test practice covers equipment and methods for revealing the porosity of gold and palladium coatings, particularly electrodeposits and clad metals used on electrical contacts.

1.2 This test practice is suitable for coatings containing gold or 75 % by mass of palladium on substrates of copper, nickel, and their alloys, which are commonly used in electrical contacts.

1.3 A variety of full porosity testing methods is described in the literature.^{2,3} These porosity Test Methods are [B735](#), [B741](#), [B798](#), [B799](#), and [B809](#). An ASTM Guide to the selection of porosity tests for electrodeposits and related metallic coatings is available as Guide [B765](#).

1.4 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are for information only.

1.5 *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.* For specific hazards, see Section [6](#).

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:⁴

[B374 Terminology Relating to Electroplating](#)

[B542 Terminology Relating to Electrical Contacts and Their Use](#)

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee [B02](#) on Nonferrous Metals and Alloys and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee [B02.11](#) on Electrical Contact Test Methods.

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² For example see: Nobel, F. J., Ostrow, B. D., and Thompson, D. W., “Porosity Testing of Gold Deposits,” *Plating*, Vol 52, 1965, p. 1001.

³ Krumbien, S J., Porosity Testing of Contact Platings, Proceedings, Connectors and Interconnection Technology Symposium, Oct. 1987, p. 47.

⁴ 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.

[B735 Test Method for Porosity in Gold Coatings on Metal Substrates by Nitric Acid Vapor](#)

[B741 Test Method for Porosity In Gold Coatings On Metal Substrates By Paper Electrography \(Withdrawn 2005\)⁵](#)

[B765 Guide for Selection of Porosity and Gross Defect Tests for Electrodeposits and Related Metallic Coatings](#)

[B798 Test Method for Porosity in Gold or Palladium Coatings on Metal Substrates by Gel-Bulk Electrography](#)

[B799 Test Method for Porosity in Gold and Palladium Coatings by Sulfurous Acid/Sulfur-Dioxide Vapor](#)

[B809 Test Method for Porosity in Metallic Coatings by Humid Sulfur Vapor \(“Flowers-of-Sulfur”\)](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Many terms used in this practice are defined in Terminology [B542](#) and terms relating to metallic coatings are defined in Terminology [B374](#).

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *corrosion products, n*—those reaction products emanating from the pores that protrude from, or are otherwise attached to, the coating surface after a vapor test exposure.

3.2.2 *metallic coatings, n*—include platings, claddings, or other metallic layers applied to the substrate. The coatings can comprise a single metallic layer or a combination of metallic layers.

3.2.3 *porosity, n*—the presence of any discontinuity, crack, or hole in the coating that exposes a different underlying metal.

3.2.4 *underplate, n*—a metallic coating layer between the substrate and the topmost layer or layers. The thickness of an underplate is usually greater than 0.8 μm (30 $\mu\text{in.}$).

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 The test practice employs a solution of sodium hypochlorite, a material readily available as household bleach. The test is recommended primarily as a qualitative means for assessing the plating quality in electrical connectors and is desirable because it uses readily available reagents and equipment and is extremely inexpensive, simple, and fast. In the test,

⁵ The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

the coated parts to be evaluated are suspended above a solution of sodium hypochlorite in a vessel that is closed but not sealed. Paper towels extend from the solution in the bottom part of the way up the sides of vessel providing a wicking action for the solution. After exposure in this manner for 30 to 45 min, the parts are removed from the vessel, dried with hot air and examined for the presence of corrosion products that indicate porosity.

4.2 For more quantitative characterization of porosity it is better to use one of the previously mentioned porosity test standards. This practice is oftentimes used as an early predictor of the likelihood of failure in a full mixed flowing gas (MFG) test used as an accelerated environmental test.

4.3 Exposure periods may vary, depending upon the degree of porosity to be revealed. Reaction of the gas with a corrodable base metal at pore sites produces reaction products that appear as discrete spots on the gold or palladium surface. Individual spots may be counted with the aid of a loupe or low-power stereomicroscope.

4.4 This porosity test involves corrosion reactions in which the products delineate defect sites in coatings. Since the chemistry and properties of these products may not resemble those found in natural or service environments this test is not recommended for prediction of the electrical performance of contacts unless correlation is first established with service experience.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Palladium and gold coatings are often specified for the contacts of separable electrical connectors and other devices. Electrodeposits are the form of gold that is most used on contacts, although it is also employed as inlay or clad metal and as weldments on the contact surface. The intrinsic nobility of gold and palladium alloys enables it to resist the formation of insulating oxide films that could interfere with reliable contact operation.

5.2 In order for these coatings to function as intended, porosity, cracks, and other defects in the coating that expose base-metal substrates and underplates must be minimal or absent, except in those cases where it is feasible to use the contacts in structures that shield the surface from the environment or where corrosion inhibiting surface treatments for the deposit are employed. The level of porosity in the coating that may be tolerable depends on the severity of the environment to the underplate or substrate, design factors for the contact device like the force with which it is mated, circuit parameters, and the reliability of contact operation that it is necessary to maintain. Also, when present, the location of pores on the surface is important. If the pores are few in number and are outside of the zone of contact of the mating surfaces, their presence can often be tolerated.

5.3 Methods for determining pores on a contact surface are most suitable if they enable their precise location and numbers to be determined. Contact surfaces are often curved or irregular in shape, and testing methods should be suitable for them. In addition, the severity of porosity-determining tests may vary

from procedures capable of detecting all porosity to procedures that detect only highly porous conditions.

5.4 The present test practice is capable of detecting virtually all porosity or other defects that could participate in corrosion reactions with the substrate or underplate. In addition, it can be used on contacts having complex geometry such as pin-socket contacts (although with deep recesses it is preferred that the contact structures be opened to permit reaction of the vapors with the interior significant surfaces).

5.5 The relationship of porosity levels revealed by particular tests to contact behavior must be made by the user of these tests through practical experience or by other forms of testing. Thus, absence of porosity in the coating may be a requirement for some applications, while a few pores in the contact zone may be acceptable for others. The acceptable number, sizes and locations of the pore corrosion products shall be as specified on the appropriate drawing or specification.

5.6 This test is considered destructive in that it reveals the presence of porosity by contaminating the surface with corrosion products and by undercutting the coating at pore sites or at the boundaries of the unplated areas. Any parts exposed to this test shall not be placed in service.

5.7 The test is simple and inexpensive. The cost associated with the test is very low, using standard basic equipment found in an industrial laboratory. There are minimal waste disposal issues associated with the procedure. The test is very popular because of its very quick means of assessing the likelihood of plating quality problems, prior to the performance of accelerated environmental testing on the 1 to 2 week scale at much greater expense.

6. Safety Hazards

6.1 Carry out this test procedure in a clean, working fume hood. The vapor emitted is toxic, corrosive, and irritating.

6.2 Because the test is conducted in a reaction vessel using a loose-fitting cover, it is desirable to insure that the drafts often found in hoods are not so high as to adversely effect the reproducibility of the test within the reaction vessel.

6.3 Observe good laboratory practices when handling the sodium hypochlorite (household bleach) solution. In particular, wear eye protection completely enclosing the eyes, and make eye wash facilities readily available.

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Test Glassware*, a vessel of sufficient size such that the sodium hypochlorite solution at least 1 cm in depth can be placed in the bottom of the vessel without interfering with the samples. The vessel (see [Figs. 1 and 2](#)) shall be made of glass or plastic not having a gastight lid, such as a glass beaker with a watch glass cover or desiccator.

7.2 *Specimen Holders or Supports*, may be made of glass, polytetrafluoroethylene, or other inert materials. It is essential that the specimens be arranged so as not to impede circulation of the gas. Specimens shall not be closer than 12 mm (0.5 in.) from the wall or paper towels and 25 mm (1 in.) from the

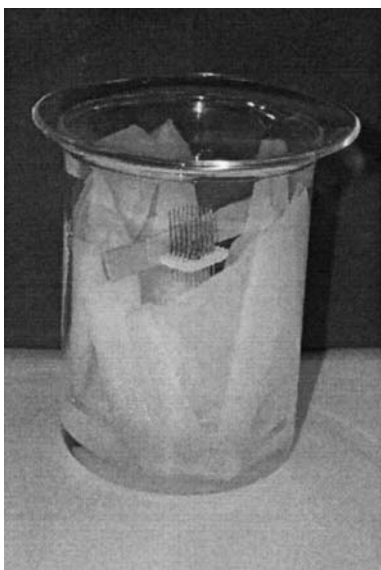


FIG. 1 Test Apparatus Using 400 mL Beaker

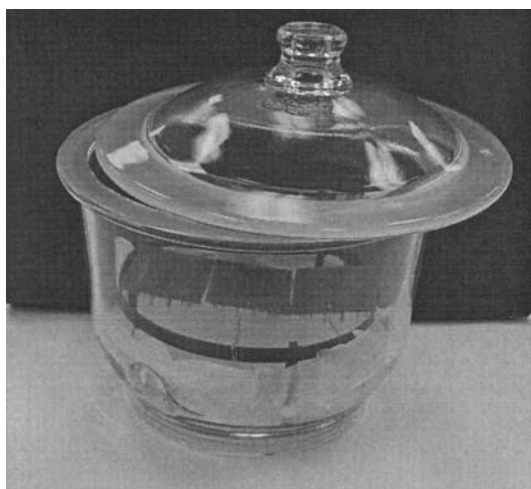


FIG. 2 Test Apparatus Using Large Dessicator

solution surface. Also, the measurement areas of the specimens shall be at least 12 mm (0.5 in.) from each other.

7.3 Do not use a porcelain plate or any other structure that would cover more than 30 % of the liquid surface cross-sectional area. This is to insure that movement of air and vapor within the vessel will not be restricted during the test.

7.4 *Stereomicroscope*, having at least 20× magnification shall be used for pore examination is recommended. In addition, a movable source of illumination capable of providing oblique lighting on the specimen surface is required. It is further recommended that a graduated reticle be inserted into one of the eyepieces of the microscope.

7.5 *Hot Air Dryer*.

8. Reagents

8.1 *Sodium Hypochlorite Solution*, 5.25 % nominal, (without additives). Acquire this material locally to ensure freshness.

8.2 *Plain Paper Towels*, or suitable non-reactive paper product which will retain its shape following exposure.

9. Procedure

9.1 Handle specimens as little as possible, using only tweezers, microscope-lens tissue, or clean, soft cotton gloves. Prior to the test, inspect the samples under 20× magnification for evidence of particulate matter. If present, such particles shall be removed by blowing them with clean, oil-free air. If this is not successful discard the sample. Then, clean the samples with solvents or solutions that do not contain chlorinated hydrocarbons, CFC's or other known ozone-destroying compounds. The procedure outlined in **Note 1** has been found to give satisfactory results for platings with mild to moderate surface contamination.

NOTE 1—Suggested Cleaning Procedure: (1) Keep individual contacts separated if there is a possibility of damage to the measurement areas during the various cleaning steps; (2) Dip in methanol if desired to aid in the removal of organic residues; (3) Clean samples for 5 min in an ultrasonic cleaner, which contains a hot (65 to 85°C) 2 % aqueous solution of a mildly alkaline (pH 7.5 to 10) detergent (such as Micro or Sparkleen); (4) After ultrasonic cleaning, rinse samples under warm running tap water for at least 5 s; (5) Rinse samples ultrasonically for 2 min in fresh deionized water to remove the last detergent residues; (6) Immerse in fresh methanol or isopropanol, and ultrasonically “agitate” for at least 30 s in order to remove the water from the samples; (7) Remove and dry samples until the alcohol has completely evaporated. If an air blast is used as an aid to drying, the air shall be oil free, clean, and dry; (8) Do not touch surface measurement area of the samples with bare fingers after cleaning; (9) Re-inspect samples (under 20× magnification) for particulate matter on the surface. If particulates are found, repeat the cleaning steps. Surface cleanliness is extremely important; contaminants, such as plating salts, organic films, and metal filings or flakes may give erroneous indications of defects, and are unacceptable.

NOTE 2—Omit the cleaning steps for samples having corrosion-inhibiting, or lubricant coatings, or both, if it is desired to determine the efficacy of these coatings in the test atmosphere.

9.2 The test temperature shall be $23 \pm 3^\circ\text{C}$, unless otherwise specified, and the relative humidity in the immediate vicinity of the test chamber shall be no greater than 60 %. If the relative humidity is greater than 60 %, results can be unpredictable and therefore the test is not acceptable.

NOTE 3—Procedure to be Performed in Hood or Well-Ventilated Area: (1) Obtain a clean, dry beaker or other vessel (sufficient in size to accommodate your sample size), a cover glass and a specimen support strip, made of an inert material, for example, polyethylene or glass; (2) Attach the contacts to be tested to the support strip, by any suitable means such as the use of two-sided adhesive tape so that the areas of interest on the contact extend beyond the edge of the support, and the fumes freely access the surfaces; (3) Place strips of paper towel on the inside surface of the vessel, so as to provide a wick for the bleach, and sufficient material for reaction with the solution. (This is important, since the bleach alone will not generate sufficient chlorine to cause a reaction in a short time-frame.); (4) Pour in sufficient bleach such that a depth of approximately 1 cm is obtained after the paper towel has been made completely wet. Recap the bottle tightly after use; (5) Suspend the contacts 2 to 3 cm above the surface of the bleach, and place the cover on the vessel; (6) Expose the contacts to the gas fume environment generated for a period of 30 to 45 min; (7) Remove samples from the vessel, and immediately dry by using a hot air dryer; (8) Examine samples under 20× stereomicroscope to determine extent of porosity or plating discontinuity.

10. Quantitative Examination (Not Required)

10.1 Examine individual pore-corrosion products at 20× magnification, using collimated incandescent illumination at an

oblique angle below 15°. They are delineated by the presence of corrosion products protruding from the pore sites. The solids may be transparent, especially in the case of gold or palladium alloy plated nickel; exercise great care in counting, particularly for rough or curved surfaces.

NOTE 4—It may be desirable to quantitatively report the extent of pore decoration by counting. The following hints may be useful as an aid to counting: (1) Count only corrosion products that protrude above the surface. Stains are not considered porosity within the scope of this specification; (2) Loose contamination that can easily be removed by a gentle blowing of air should not be considered corrosion products; (3) Move sample around under the light to vary the angle when unsure of a pore. Burnished gold can give the appearance of black spots; (4) A corrosion product should be measured and counted when at least one half of the corrosion product falls within the targeted measurement area. Unless otherwise specified, corrosion products which initiate outside the measurement area but fall within it, and which are irregular in shape should not be counted. However, for small measurement areas, or where the migrating pore-corrosion product covers a significant portion of this area, the presence of such products should be recorded.

10.2 Pore size shall be defined by the longest diameter of the corrosion product. Unless otherwise specified, corrosion products less than 0.05 mm (0.002 in.) in diameter shall not be counted. A graduated reticle in the microscope eyepiece is useful as an aid to counting and sizing.

NOTE 5—A useful sizing technique is to tabulate the pore-corrosion products in accordance with three size ranges. These are (approximately): (1) 0.12 mm diameter (0.005 in.) or less, (2) between 0.12 and 0.40 mm diameter (0.005 and 0.015 in.), and (3) greater than 0.40 mm diameter (0.015 in.).

11. Qualitative Examination

11.1 The following remarks are made based on reports based on the use of this test practice. If parts were wet or splashed with the hypochlorite solution during the test, corrosion products may be found which appear as solid white/green patches and often take on a crusty appearance. If this condition is seen and it is attributed to direct liquid contact, then the test should be disregarded and repeated on new test specimens.

11.2 Palladium and alloy plated products may react to produce gross condensation (wetting) on the surface which will appear as a brown color in appearance. For these parts, the test should be re-run, and if the complete wetting persists, a different porosity test must be used.

11.3 The following pore corrosion products are oftentimes seen in qualitative examination (20×). As a general guideline as to the source of these corrosion products it is generally believed that porosity to nickel- generates uncolored clear corrosion products, porosity to copper- generates green, black, or combined white/green blooms, and finally porosity due to palladium and its alloys such as palladium-nickel- generates a brown tobacco juice appearance, sometimes black.

12. Keywords

12.1 electrical contacts; gold coatings; gold platings; hypochlorite; palladium coatings; palladium platings; plated contacts; plating porosity; pore corrosion test; pore counting; porosity screen testing; porosity testing

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