Designation: D 4750 – 87 (Reapproved 2001)

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

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D 4750; 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 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 does not purport to address all of the safety problems, 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:*

D 653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids[2]

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions 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

[1] This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D18 on Soil and Rock and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.21 on Ground Water and Vadose Zone Investigations.

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

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 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 ¼ 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

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

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.

7.3.2 Dry the tip. Slowly lower the tip into the borehole or well until the meter indicates that the tip has contacted the surface of the liquid.

7.3.3 For devices with measurement graduations on the cable, note the reading at the reference point. This is the liquid-level depth below the reference point of the borehole or well.

7.3.4 For measuring devices without graduations on the cable, mark the cable at the reference point. Withdraw the cable from the borehole or well. Stretch out the cable and measure and record the distance between the tip and the mark on the cable by use of a tape. This distance is the liquid-level depth below the reference point.

7.3.5 A second or third check reading should be taken before withdrawing the electric tape from the borehole or well.

7.3.6 Decontaminate the submerged end of the electric tape or cable after measurements in each well.

NOTE 6—The length of the electric line should be checked by measuring with a steel tape after the line has been used for a long time or after it has been pulled hard in attempting to free the line. Some electric lines, especially the single line wire, are subject to considerable permanent stretch. In addition, because the probe is usually larger in diameter than the wire, the probe can become lodged in a well. Sometimes the probe can be attached by twisting the wires together by hand and using only enough electrical tape to support the weight of the probe. In this manner, the point of probe attachment is the weakest point of the entire line. Should the probe become "hung in the hole," the line may be pulled and breakage will occur at the probe attachment point, allowing the line to be withdrawn.

7.4 *Procedure C—Measuring Tape and Sounding Weight*:

7.4.1 Lower a weighted measuring tape into the borehole or well until the liquid surface is reached. This is indicated by an audible splash and a noticeable decrease in the downward force on the tape. Observe and note the reading on the tape at the reference point. Repeat this process until the readings are consistent to the accuracy desired. Record the result as the liquid-level depth below the reference point.

NOTE 7—The splash can be made more audible by using a "plopper," a lead weight with a concave bottom surface.

7.4.2 If the liquid level is deep, or if the measuring tape adheres to the side of the borehole, or for other reasons, it may not be possible to detect the liquid surface using this method. If so, use Procedure A or Procedure B.

8. Determination of a Stabilized Liquid Level

8.1 As liquid flows into or out of the borehole or well, the liquid level will approach, and may reach, a stabilized level. The liquid level then will remain essentially constant with time.

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:

$$h_o = \frac{{y_1}^2}{y_1 - y_2} \quad (1)$$

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).

BOREHOLE OR WELL SCHEDULE FORM

Date ....., 19..... Field No. .....
Record by ..... Office No. .....
Source of data .....

1. *Location:* State ..... County .....
   Map .....
   ..... ¼ ..... ¼ sec. ..... T ..... N/S R ..... E/W
2. *Owner:* ..... Address .....
   Tenant ..... Address .....
   Driller ..... Address .....
3. *Topography* .....
4. *Elevation* ..... ft. above/below .....
5. *Type:* Dug, drilled, driven, bored, jetted ..... 19.....
6. *Depth:* Rept. ..... ft. Meas. ..... ft.
7. *Casing:* Diam. ..... in., to ..... in., Type .....
   Depth ..... ft., Finish .....
8. *Chief Aquifer* ..... From ..... ft. to ..... ft.
   Others .....
9. *Water level* ..... ft. rept./meas. ..... 19..... above/below .....
   ..... which is ..... ft. above/below surface
10. *Pump:* Type ..... Capacity ..... G. M. .....
    Power: Kind ..... Horsepower .....
11. *Yield:* Flow ..... G. M., Pump ..... G. M., Meas., Rept. Est. .....
    Drawdown ..... ft. after ..... hours pumping ..... G. M.
12. *Use:* Dom., Stock, PS., RR., Ind., Irr., Obs. .....
    Adequacy, permanence .....
13. *Quality* ..... Temp ..... °F.
    Taste, odor, color ..... Sample Yes/No .....
    Unfit for .....
14. *Remarks:* (Log, Analyses, etc.) .....

FIG. 1 Example of a Borehole or Well Schedule Form

LIQUID LEVEL MEASUREMENT FORM

Field No. .....
Owner ..... Office No. .....
Location ..... Project .....
Measuring Point .....
Elevation of Measuring Point .....

Date	Hour	Depth to Water	Elev. of Water Surface	Meas. by	Remarks (Nearby wells pumping, etc.)

FIG. 2 Example of a Liquid Level Measurement Form

11. Keywords

11.1 borehole; electrical measuring device; ground water; liquid level; measuring tape; well

SITE NO.

BOREHOLE OR WELL SCHEDULE FORM

Recorded by _____ Date _____

Check One ____ English ____ Metric Units

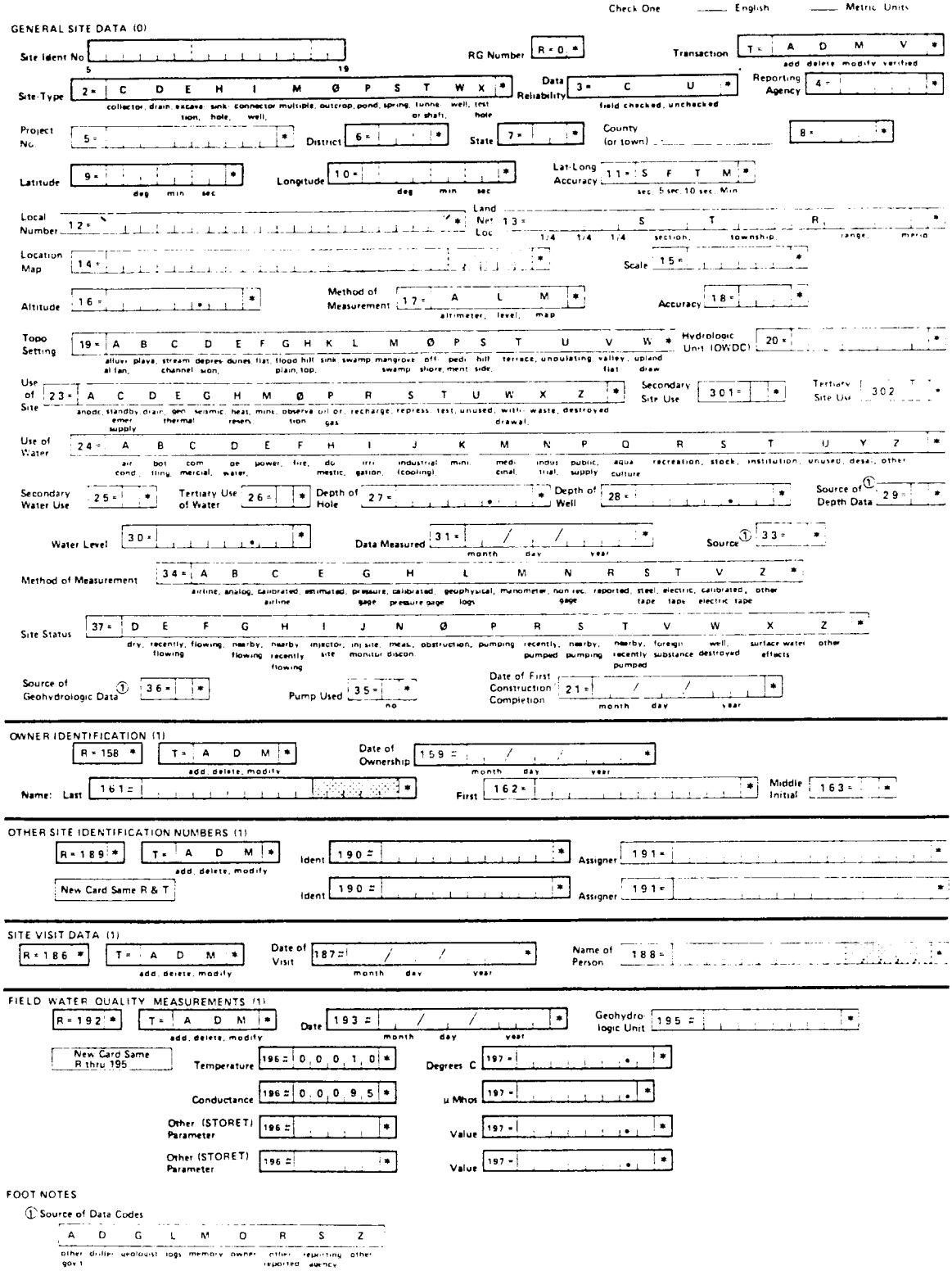

FIG. 3 Example of a Borehole or Well Schedule Form

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 *SubsurfaceExploration 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.