Designation: D6341 – 16

Standard Test Method for Determination of the Linear Coefficient of Thermal Expansion of Plastic Lumber and Plastic Lumber Shapes Between –30 and 140°F (–34.4 and 60°C)[1]

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D6341; 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 covers the determination of the coefficient of linear thermal expansion for plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes to two significant figures. The determination is made by taking measurements with a caliper at three discrete temperatures. At the test temperatures and under the stresses imposed, the plastic lumber shall have a negligible creep or elastic strain rate, or both, insofar as these properties would significantly affect the accuracy of the measurements.

1.1.1 This test method details the determination of the linear coefficient of thermal expansion of plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes in their "as manufactured" form. As such, this is a test method for evaluating the properties of plastic lumber or shapes as a product and not a material property test method.

1.2 The thermal expansion of plastic lumber and shapes is composed of a reversible component on which it is possible to superimpose changes in length due to changes in moisture content, curing, loss of plasticizer or solvents, release of stresses, phase changes, voids, inclusions, and other factors. This test method is intended to determine the coefficient of linear thermal expansion under the exclusion of non-linear factors as far as possible. In general, it will not be possible to exclude the effect of these factors completely. For this reason, the test method can be expected to give a reasonable approximation but not necessarily precise determination of the linear coefficient of thermal expansion.

1.3 Plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes are currently made predominately with recycled plastics where the product is non-homogeneous in the cross-section. However, it is possible that this test method will also be applicable to similar manufactured plastic products made from virgin resins or other plastic composite materials.

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

NOTE 1—There is no known ISO equivalent to this standard.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*[2]

D883 Terminology Relating to Plastics

D4065 Practice for Plastics: Dynamic Mechanical Properties: Determination and Report of Procedures

D5033 Guide for Development of ASTM Standards Relating to Recycling and Use of Recycled Plastics (Withdrawn 2007)[3]

D6117 Test Methods for Mechanical Fasteners in Plastic Lumber and Shapes

E831 Test Method for Linear Thermal Expansion of Solid Materials by Thermomechanical Analysis

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 *plastic lumber, n*—a manufactured product made primarily from plastic materials (filled or unfilled), typically used as a building material for purposes similar to those of traditional lumber, which is usually rectangular in cross-section. (Terminology D883)

3.1.1.1 *Discussion*—Plastic lumber is typically supplied in sizes similar to those of traditional lumber board, timber and dimension lumber; however the tolerances for plastic lumber and for traditional lumber are not necessarily the same. (Terminology D883)

3.1.2 *plastic lumber shape, n*—a plastic lumber product which is generally not rectangular in cross-section.

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[1] This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D20 on Plastics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D20.20 on Plastic Lumber.

Current edition approved April 1, 2016. Published April 2016. Originally approved in 1998. Last previous edition approved in 2014 as D6341 - 14a. DOI: 10.1520/D6341-16.

[2] 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.

[3] The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

***A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard**

3.1.3 *resin, n*—a solid or pseudosolid organic material often of high molecular weight, which exhibits a tendency to flow when subjected to stress, usually has a softening or melting range, and usually fractures conchoidally. (Terminology D883)

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—In a broad sense, the term is used to designate any polymer that is a basic material for plastics. (1982)

3.2 Additional definitions of terms applying to this test method appear in Terminology D883 and Practice D5033.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 This test method is intended to provide a means of determining the coefficient of linear thermal expansion of plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes, which have the potential to contain inclusions and voids. This test method is a product test method, and not a materials test method. Furthermore, this test method is not designed to provide more than two significant figures of accuracy in the result. The test method involves using solid, full cross-sectioned members (see Note 2), as manufactured, of approximately 12 in. (300 mm) in length. In view of the low thermal conductivity of these materials it is impractical to make dynamic temperature variations in a reasonable length of time. Therefore, measurements are taken on each sample after conditioning 48 h or more at three discrete temperatures, –30, 73.4, and 140°F, ± 3.6°F (–34.4, 23, and 60°C, ± 2°C), no more than 1 min after removal from the temperature chamber. The measuring device used is a caliper capable of measuring to the nearest 0.001 in. (0.025 mm), and is utilized at ambient temperature.

NOTE 2—It is acceptable to evaluate hollow cross-section products with this test method provided it can be shown that negligible dimensional changes occur in the prescribed measurement time interval.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 The coefficient of linear thermal expansion, α, between temperatures T_1 and T_2 for a specimen whose length is L_0 at the reference temperature, is given by the following equation:

$$\alpha = \frac{1}{L_0} \cdot \frac{L_2 - L_1}{T_2 - T_1} = \frac{1}{L_0} \cdot \frac{\Delta L}{\Delta T} \quad (1)$$

Where L_1 and L_2 are the specimen lengths at temperatures T_1 and T_2, respectively. α is, therefore, obtained by dividing the linear expansion per unit length by the change in temperature.

5.2 The nature of most plastics and the construction applications for which plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes are used, make –30 to 140°F (–34.4 to 60°C) a practical temperature range for linear thermal expansion measurements. Where testing outside of this temperature range or when linear thermal expansion characteristics of a particular plastic are not known through this temperature range, particular attention shall be paid to the factors mentioned in 1.2 and it is possible that special preliminary investigations by thermo-mechanical analysis, such as what is prescribed in Practice D4065 for the location of transition temperatures, will be required, in order to avoid excessive error. If such a transition point is located, a separate coefficient of expansion for a temperature range below and above the transition point shall be determined. For specification and comparison purposes (provided it is known that no transition exists in this range), the range from –30 to 140°F (–34.4 to 60°C) shall be used. (For reference, glass transition and melting point temperatures of typical resins used in plastic lumber products are given in Appendix X2 of this test method.)

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Conditioning Chamber,* capable of conditioning test specimens at temperatures in the range of –30 to 140°F, ± 1.8°F (–34.4 to 60°C, ± 1°C).

6.2 *Caliper,* capable of measuring the length of the specimen with an accuracy of 0.001 in. (0.025 mm). For a given test or test series, the same caliper shall be used for all measurements. The calipers shall be kept and used at room temperature (73.4°F (23°C)).

6.3 *Thermometer or Thermocouple,* capable of an accuracy of ±0.5°F (±0.3°C) when measuring the temperature of the conditioning chamber.

7. Test Specimen

7.1 Test specimens for determining thermal expansion of plastic lumber and plastic lumber shapes shall be cut from the "as manufactured" profile. Great care shall be taken in cutting and machining the ends so that smooth, flat, parallel surfaces and sharp, clean edges result and are parallel to within 1⁄300 of the specimen length perpendicular to the long axis of the specimen. Plastic lumber is generally non-uniform through the cross-section; machining operations other than those required to provide flat, parallel ends shall not be carried out. A line parallel to the length shall be marked with an indelible ink marker on an uncut surface along the full length of the specimen. Length measurements of the sample are to be carried out on the surfaces adjacent to the drawn lines (on the cut faces) at each end of the specimen, at a location very near the ends of the line.

7.2 The standard test specimen shall be in the form of a right cylinder or prism whose length is a minimum of 12 ± 0.25 in. (300 ± 6.4 mm) (see Note 3).

NOTE 3—It is acceptable to utilize this test method to determine the linear coefficient of thermal expansion for other sample directions (that is, width or thickness) if desired. However, the accuracy of the measurements will be significantly reduced due to the generally smaller linear dimension.

8. Conditioning

8.1 *Conditioning*—Condition the test specimens at –30, 73.4, and 140°F ± 3.6°F (–34.4, 23, and 60°C ± 2°C) for not less than 48 h at each temperature prior to testing, unless otherwise specified by the customer or product specification. In cases of disagreement, the tolerance shall be ±1.8°F (±1°C).

8.2 *Test Conditions*—Conduct measurements in a laboratory atmosphere of 73.4 ± 3.6°F (23 ± 2°C), within 1 min or less after removal from the conditioning environment unless otherwise specified by the customer or product specification. In cases of disagreement, the tolerance shall be ±1.8°F (±1°C).

NOTE 4—Experience indicates that the linear coefficient of thermal expansion of plastic lumber products is not affected by humidity.

8.3 If products are tested for which the linear coefficient of thermal expansion is known or believed to be potentially affected by humidity then humidity control settings shall be as agreed upon by the contractual parties.

9. Number of Test Specimens

9.1 A sample size of five shall be used. Each specimen shall be tested at each of the three measurement temperatures.

10. Procedure

10.1 Prepare and mark each specimen to be tested in accordance with 7.1 and 7.2. Condition the specimens at –30 ± 3.6°F (–34.4 ± 2°C) in accordance with 8.1.

10.2 Measure the length of each of the conditioned specimens within 1 min of removal from the conditioning chamber at room temperature to the nearest 0.001 in. (0.025 mm) with the caliper (see 6.2 and Note 5). Record the actual conditioning temperature to the nearest 0.2°F (0.1°C) to obtain T_1, and the caliper reading. Average the caliper readings and report this value as L_1.

NOTE 5—To minimize errors due to the formation of ice or condensation on the surface of specimens whose temperature is below the dew point, wipe off the surfaces to be measured with an absorbent cotton rag just prior to making the measurements.

10.3 Repeat the steps described in 10.1 and 10.2 at a conditioning temperature of 73.4 ± 3.6°F (23 ± 2°C) to obtain T_2 and L_2.

10.4 Repeat the steps described in 10.1 and 10.2 at a conditioning temperature of 140 ± 3.6°F (60 ± 2°C) to obtain T_3 and L_3.

11. Calculation

11.1 Calculate the coefficient of linear thermal expansion over the temperature range used as follows:

$$\alpha = \frac{1}{L_2} m \tag{2}$$

where:

α = coefficient of linear thermal expansion,
L_2 = length of test specimen at room temperature, 73.4 ± 3.6°F, and
m = slope of the best fit line to the data points (L_1, T_1), (L_2, T_2), (L_3, T_3), (representing $\Delta L/\Delta T$) determined by the least squares criterion, and is given by:

$$m = \frac{3\left(\sum L_i T_i\right) - \left(\sum L_i\right)\left(\sum T_i\right)}{3\left(\sum T_i^2\right) - \left(\sum T_i\right)^2} \text{ for } I = 1 \text{ to } 3 \tag{3}$$

where:

L_i = the sample length at temperature, T_i.

NOTE 6—The following relationship will prove most useful to those designing with these materials (an example calculation is provided in Appendix X3:

$$\Delta L = L_0 \left(\alpha \Delta T\right) \tag{4}$$

where:

α = Coefficient of linear thermal expansion in (in./in.)/°F ((cm/cm)/°C)),
ΔL = change in length of test specimen, in in. (cm) due to heating or to cooling,
L_0 = length of test specimen in in. (cm) at a reference temperature, T_0 (usually ambient temperature), and
ΔT = temperature difference, in °F (°C), over which the change in the length, ΔL, of the specimen is measured.

12. Report

12.1 Report the following information:

12.1.1 Complete identification of the material tested, including type, source, manufacturer's code number, form, principal dimensions, and previous history,

12.1.2 Laboratory name,

12.1.3 Date of test,

12.1.4 Method of preparing test specimens,

12.1.5 Type of test specimen and dimensions,

12.1.6 Conditioning procedure used, if non-standard conditioning has been employed,

12.1.7 Atmospheric conditions in test room, if non-standard conditioning has been employed,

12.1.8 Measurement temperatures if other than or in addition to the temperatures specified in this test method,

12.1.9 Number of specimens tested, and

12.1.10 Average coefficient of linear thermal expansion for the specimens tested.

13. Precision and Bias

13.1 *Repeatability*—A 2014 study was undertaken by the Plastic Lumber Trade Association at PFS Laboratory (in Cottage Grove, WI) to assess the repeatability of the determination of thermal expansion (in units of inches per inch per °F), in accordance with this test method.

13.1.1 The study utilized five different commercial plastic lumber deck board materials, which will be identified as materials A through E below.

NOTE 7—The materials used in this repeatability study were also used in a repeatability study for Test Method D6117.

13.1.2 The sizes of all the board specimens used for the tests were nominally 2 in. thick by 6 in. wide by 24 in. long (approximately 51 mm thick by 152 mm wide by 610 mm long). The deck board samples were cut to 12 in. long (approximately 305 mm long) and marked before testing. The lengths of the test specimens were measured after being equilibrated at ambient temperature, cold temperature, and high temperature for at least 48 hours. The temperatures used as cold, ambient and high temperature were –28.5°F (–33.6°C), 72.0°F (22.2°C), and 140.0°F (60.0°C) respectively. Five replicate tests were conducted with each material. The results, the average values and the coefficients of variation (COV) are shown in Table 1.

13.1.3 Do not apply the data given in Table 1 to accept or reject materials, as this data is specific to the materials tested and is not necessarily representative of other lots, conditions, materials, or laboratories. It is important that users of this test method conduct experiments, based on statistically appropriate procedures specific to their material and the laboratories involved, to determine repeatability and/or reproducibility limits for their material. The values obtained in this repeatability study are intended exclusively to assess the precision of the test method.

13.2 No information is presented on the bias of the procedure in this test method because correct values of the thermal

TABLE 1 Repeatability Study to Investigate the Coefficient of Variation of the Average Thermal Expansion

Sample Number	Length at Cold Temperature (–28.5°F) - (in.)	Length at Ambient Temperature (72.0°F) - (in.)	Length at High Temperature (140.0°F) - (in.)	Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)
		Material A - Nominal 2 by 6-in.		
1	11.872	11.838	11.889	2.549E-05
2	11.869	11.833	11.880	2.350E-05
3	11.875	11.840	11.885	2.249E-05
4	11.873	11.824	11.883	2.949E-05
5	11.877	11.843	11.887	2.199E-05
	Average Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)			2.459E-05
	COV %			12.4
		Material B - Nominal 2 by 6-in.		
1	11.867	11.785	11.894	5.451E-05
2	11.874	11.788	11.899	5.548E-05
3	11.796	11.721	11.827	5.333E-05
4	11.875	11.793	11.900	5.347E-05
5	11.867	11.783	11.894	5.551E-05
	Average Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)			5.446E-05
	COV %			1.9
		Material C - Nominal 2 by 6-in.		
1	11.880	11.791	11.920	6.444E-05
2	11.878	11.786	11.920	6.695E-05
3	11.868	11.778	11.910	6.601E-05
4	11.880	11.791	11.925	6.694E-05
5	11.881	11.789	11.922	6.644E-05
	Average Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)			6.616E-05
	COV %			1.6
		Material D - Nominal 2 by 6-in.		
Evolve 1	11.832	11.756	11.883	6.370E-05
2	11.872	11.793	11.926	6.649E-05
3	11.834	11.755	11.888	6.670E-05
4	11.910	11.835	11.973	6.876E-05
5	11.876	11.800	11.939	6.946E-05
	Average Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)			6.702E-05
	COV %			3.4
		Material E - Nominal 2 by 6-in.		
1	11.870	11.833	11.887	2.700E-05
2	11.864	11.825	11.881	2.801E-05
3	11.876	11.841	11.892	2.549E-05
4	11.873	11.836	11.889	2.649E-05
5	11.867	11.829	11.882	2.651E-05
	Average Thermal Expansion (in./in./°F)			2.670E-05
	COV %			3.4

expansion of plastic lumber shapes can be defined only in terms of a test method. Within this limitation, this test method has no known bias and is acceptable as a reference method.

14. Keywords

14.1 coefficient of expansion; linear expansion; plastic lumber; recycled plastics; thermal expansion

APPENDIXES

(Nonmandatory Information)

X1. RATIONALE

X1.1 This test method has been developed to determine the coefficient of thermal expansion of full cross-sectioned pieces of plastic lumber profiles. These products are new, and an existing test method which addressed the issues of this new products did not exist. These products are known to possibly contain gaseous voids and inclusions of a variety of materials, held together in a matrix of a predominantly polymer resin. Test methods which rely upon testing a small portion of the cross-section will not have the averaging effects on thermal expansion which will occur in this mixture of materials. Test methods which rely upon short pieces of full-cross-sections will be more limited in their accuracy of measurement. This test method was developed to allow the builder of structures with these materials to estimate the magnitude of thermal expansion mismatches among building materials so that this can be allowed for in the structural design.

X2. TRANSITION TEMPERATURES

X2.1 See Table X2.1 for transition temperatures for polymers typically found in plastic lumber.[4]

[4] *Modern Plastics Encyclopedia*, 1996, McGraw Hill, NY.

TABLE X2.1 Transition Temperatures for Polymers Typically Found in Plastic Lumber

Polymer Type	Glass Transition Temperature, T_g, °F (°C)	Melting Point Temperature, T_m, °F (°C)
Polyethylene terephthalate	154–176 (68–80)	414–509 (212–265)
High-density polyethylene	–193 (–125)	266–279 (130–137)
Low-density polyethylene	–13 (–25)	208–239 (98–115)
Polypropylene	–4 (–20)	320–347 (160–175)
Polystyrene	165–221 (74–105)	. . .
Rigid poly(vinyl chloride)	167–221 (75–105)	. . .

X3. SAMPLE CALCULATION FOR CHANGE OF LENGTH

X3.1 The following is an example calculation regarding change of length of a plastic lumber board.

X3.1.1 Suppose that a 12-ft (3.66-m) long board where to be installed at 73.4°F (23°C), in a location where the lowest typical winter temperatures are –4°F (–20°C), and the hottest typical summer temperatures are 122°F (50°C). Also consider that the thermal expansion coefficient, α, as determined by this test method is indicated as $3.3 \cdot 10^{-5}$ per °F ($6 \cdot 10^{-5}$ per °C). The designer is interested in what the length will be at the extreme temperatures, with no stress imparted to the board to change its length. First, consider the low temperature extreme, and then the higher temperature extreme.

X3.1.2 *Low Temperature Extreme*—Referring to Eq 4 of the test method, at –4°F (–20°C), the change in temperature is $T_2 – T_1$, or (–4) – (73.4) = –77.4°F ((–20) – (23) = –43°C). L_0 is 12 ft (3.66 m). The change in length of the board is, therefore, $(3.3 \cdot 10^{-5}) \cdot (12 \text{ ft}) \cdot (–77.4) = –0.031$ ft $(6 \cdot 10^{-5}) \cdot (3.66 \text{ m}) \cdot (–43) = (–0.0094$ m)). The total length is 12 ft + (–0.031 ft) = 11.97 ft (3.66 m + (–0.0094 m) = 3.65 m). The board is expected to reduce its length due to low temperature extremes by 0.031 ft or approximately ⅜ in. (0.0094 m).

X3.1.3 *High Temperature Extremes*—Again, referring to Eq 4, at 122°F (50°C), the change in temperature is $T_2 – T_1$, or (122) – (73.4) = 48.6°F (50– 23 = 27°C). The change in length is $(3.3 \cdot 10^{-5}) \cdot (12 \text{ ft}) \cdot (48.6) = 0.019$ ft $((6 \cdot 10^{-5}) \cdot (3.66 \text{ m}) \cdot (27) = (0.0059$ m)). The total length is 12 ft + 0.019 ft = 12.019 ft (3.66 m + 0.0059 m = 3.67 m). The board is, therefore, expected to increase its length due to high temperature extremes by 0.019 ft or approximately 15⁄64 in. (0.0059 m).

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Committee D20 has identified the location of selected changes to this standard since the last issue (D6341 – 14a) that may impact the use of this standard. (April 1, 2016)

(1) Revised the section on precision and bias and added information on a repeatability study.