



Standard Specification for Dimethyl Ether for Fuel Purposes¹

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1. Scope*

1.1 This specification covers dimethyl ether (DME) for use as a fuel in engines specifically designed or modified for DME and for blending with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). This specification is for use by manufacturers of dimethyl ether, by engine developers of purpose-built engines, in contracts for the purchase of DME for fuel purposes, and for the guidance of consumers of this type of fuel.

NOTE 1—The generation and dissipation of static electricity can create problems in the handling of DME. For more information on the subject, see Guide [D4865](#).

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

1.3 *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:²

- [D1265 Practice for Sampling Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases, Manual Method](#)
- [D1267 Test Method for Gage Vapor Pressure of Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases \(LP-Gas Method\)](#)
- [D1838 Test Method for Copper Strip Corrosion by Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases](#)
- [D2158 Test Method for Residues in Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases](#)
- [D2163 Test Method for Determination of Hydrocarbons in Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases and Propane/Propene Mixtures by Gas Chromatography](#)
- [D3700 Practice for Obtaining LPG Samples Using a Floating Piston Cylinder](#)

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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.

- [D4865 Guide for Generation and Dissipation of Static Electricity in Petroleum Fuel Systems](#)
- [D6667 Test Method for Determination of Total Volatile Sulfur in Gaseous Hydrocarbons and Liquefied Petroleum Gases by Ultraviolet Fluorescence](#)
- [D6897 Test Method for Vapor Pressure of Liquefied Petroleum Gases \(LPG\) \(Expansion Method\)](#)
- [D7756 Test Method for Residues in Liquefied Petroleum \(LP\) Gases by Gas Chromatography with Liquid, On-Column Injection](#)
- [D7828 Test Method for Determination of Residue Composition in Liquefied Petroleum Gas \(LPG\) Using Automated Thermal Desorption/Gas Chromatography \(ATD/GC\)](#)

2.2 Other Documents:

- [NFPA 77 Recommended Practice on Static Electricity³](#)
- [ISO/DIS 17196 Dimethyl ether \(DME\) for fuels—Determination of impurities—Gas chromatographic method⁴](#)
- [ISO 17197 Dimethyl ether \(DME\) for fuels—Determination of water content—Karl Fischer titration method⁴](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 Abbreviations:

- 3.1.1 *DME*—dimethyl ether, the chemical compound (CH_3OCH_3).
- 3.1.2 *LPG*—liquefied petroleum gas.

4. Hazards

4.1 *Warning*—Dimethyl ether is a highly flammable, colorless gas with a faint ether-like odor. It is shipped and stored in a pressurized, liquefied state, much like LPG. Unlike LPG, dimethyl ether has a wide flammability range and a low autoignition temperature. Further, dimethyl ether in this specification is intended for use in a diesel (compression-ignition) engine. Many users of diesel engines are familiar with the relative safety of storing and handling diesel fuel. However, dimethyl ether has significantly higher flammability hazards than diesel fuel. A leak of dimethyl ether could result in a

³ Available from National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471, <http://www.nfpa.org>.

⁴ Available from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 1, ch. de la Voie-Creuse, CP 56, CH-1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland, <http://www.iso.org>.

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

dangerous fire or explosive situation, but the intrinsic ether-like odor is mild and not alarming, as is the case with odorized natural gas or LP gases. Users of dimethyl ether are advised to determine proper odorization or alternative leak detection precautions.

4.2 Consult a Material Safety Data Sheet for dimethyl ether for additional hazards.

5. Chemical Composition and Other Requirements

5.1 The DME fuel for purpose-built engines and for blending with liquefied petroleum gas shall conform to the requirements prescribed in **Table 1**.

NOTE 2—Additional information on the physical and chemical properties of dimethyl ether, which are not considered necessary for fuel specification at this point, are in **Appendix X1** and are given for information of fuel suppliers, OEMs, and users.

5.2 The properties selected for limitation are chosen from other specifications for DME which have relevance to engine operation and to related experience (for example, LPG).

5.3 The maximum vapor pressure limit shown in **Table 1** is given to limit any high vapor pressure components such as gases [CO and CO₂] and also to ensure that the same containers (tanks, tank cars, and rail cars) designed for LPG can be used for DME.

NOTE 3—It is expected that additional requirements for specifying

TABLE 1 Detailed Requirements for Dimethyl Ether for Fuel Purposes

Property	Test Method	Requirement
Dimethyl Ether, mass %, min. ^A	D2163	98.5
Methanol, mass %, max.	D2163	0.05
Water, mass %, max.	ISO 17197	0.03
Methyl Formate, mass %	D2163	report
Sulfur, mg / kg, max. ^B	D6667	3
Vapor Pressure, kPa (psig), at 37.8 °C (100 °F), max.	D1267, D6897	758 (110)
Corrosion, Copper Strip, at 37.8 °C (100 °F), max.	D1838	No. 1
Residue	D2158	
Residue on evaporation of 100 mL, mL, max.		0.05
Oil stain observation		pass
Lubricity	—	^C

^A The required minimum ensures that DME for fuel purposes will have a minimum estimated cetane number of 55.

^B The sulfur limit does not include the sulfur from an odorant such as ethyl mercaptan that might be required by some regulatory agencies in some fuel applications. Note that addition of 1 pound of ethyl mercaptan per 10 000 US gallons will increase the sulfur content of DME by 14 milligrams sulfur per litre of DME or 21 milligrams sulfur per kilogram of DME.

^C Experience in both laboratory and full scale vehicle testing indicates pure DME has poor natural lubricity. Adequate precautions shall be taken to ensure the lubricity is sufficient to meet the needs of the end use application. At present, no industry accepted test method or limit value is available to define the lubricity of highly volatile liquid fuels such as DME. Until such a test is available, suppliers of DME intended for use as a fuel in compression-ignition engines shall consult the engine or vehicle manufacturer for guidance on appropriate lubricity requirements.

dimethyl ether for fuel applications could be required as purpose-built engines and other applications develop for DME and DME – LPG blends, and such additional requirements would be balloted for inclusion into this specification, based on need and technical data.

6. Workmanship, Finish, and Appearance

6.1 DME for fuel use in engines designed for DME and for blending with liquefied petroleum gas shall have a colorless appearance and not contain any components or contaminants that would be detrimental to the intended use of the material.

7. Sampling

7.1 Review all intended test methods prior to sampling to understand the importance and effects of sampling technique, proper containers, and special handling required for each test method.

7.2 Samples shall be representative of the batch of product and shall be collected from an appropriate storage container (typically an aboveground storage tank) or pipeline by a suitable sampling procedure such as Practice **D1265** or Practice **D3700**.

7.3 *Sample Size*—A minimum of 1 litre is recommended.

7.3.1 Follow the same safety procedures when sampling DME as when sampling LPG, and leave an ullage space of at least 20 % in a high pressure sampling cylinder.

8. Test Methods

8.1 The requirements of this specification shall be determined in accordance with the methods listed below. The scopes of some of the test methods listed below do not include dimethyl ether. Refer to the listed test methods to determine applicability or required modifications for use with dimethyl ether. The precision of these test methods can differ from the reported precisions when testing dimethyl ether.

8.2 *Composition*—Test Method **D2163**.

8.2.1 Laboratory experience has shown that Test Method **D2163** requires the use of a 150 metre methyl silicone column in order to analyze samples of DME.

8.3 *Water*—**ISO 17197**.

8.4 *Sulfur*—Test Method **D6667** should be used for sulfur determination.

8.5 *Vapor Pressure*—Test Methods **D1267** and **D6897** may be used for vapor pressure determination. In case of dispute, Test Method **D1267** shall be the referee test method.

8.6 *Corrosion*—Test Method **D1838**.

8.7 *Residue*—Test Method **D2158**.

9. Keywords

9.1 dimethyl ether; DME

APPENDIXES
(Nonmandatory Information)
X1. PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF DIMETHYL ETHER

X1.1 A selection of physical and chemical properties of dimethyl ether, as outlined in **Table X1.1**, has been assembled from a variety of sources. These are believed to be the best available data. The table will be updated as new or more reliable data is developed.

X1.2 Additional information on the properties of dimethyl ether can be found in the “DME Handbook Supplement” [English Edition] [ISBN 978-4-9903839-1-6], published October, 2011.⁵

⁵ Available from Japan DME Forum (JDF), 3F Shinsei Bldg. 6-5-5, Shinbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0004. Tel: +81-3-5403-0035, Fax: +81-3-5403-0038, Email: info@dmeforum.jp, Website: www.dmeforum.jp/

TABLE X1.1 Physical and Chemical Properties of Dimethyl Ether

Property	Value
Chemical Formula	CH ₃ OCH ₃
CAS No.	115-10-6
Molecular weight, g/mol	46.07
Melting point, °C	-141.5
Boiling point, °C	-25.1
Vapor pressure at 20 °C, kPa	510
Critical temperature, °C	126.85
Critical pressure, MPa	5.37
Critical volume, cm ³ /mol	178
Liquid density at 20 °C, g/cm ³	0.67
Specific Gravity of DME Vapor (versus Air)	1.59
Color	Colorless
Odor	Faint “ether” smell
Flammability Limits in Air, vol %	3.4 to 17
Estimated Cetane Number	55
Calorific Value, LHV, kcal/L, 20 °C (net heat of combustion)	4600
DME solubility in water, g/100 mL at 18 °C	7
Solubility parameter, (cal/cm ³) ^{0.5}	7.3
Wobbe Index, kJ/m ³	46198
Acentric factor	0.204

X2. SIGNIFICANCE OF ASTM SPECIFICATIONS FOR DIMETHYL ETHER FOR FUEL APPLICATIONS

X2.1 DME is a new fuel that could address environmental and fuel security issues. A fuel specification for DME is necessary for several reasons:

(1) To give manufacturers of DME, intended to be used as a fuel, a specification to meet;

(2) To give OEMs a standard specification they can use to design new, purpose-built engines and applications. Some heavy-duty vehicle manufacturers are actively developing engines specifically for DME and have announced their support for the development of a standard fuel specification.

(3) Since DME can be produced from biomethane, a specification encourages development of this as an initial biofuel for commercial and consumer uses in purpose-built engines.

(4) To establish a product specification for DME for use in a blend with LPG. DME is already being used in countries such as China in a blend with LPG, and this practice could expand.

(5) The California Department of Food and Agriculture, Division of Measurement Standards (CDFA) is a strong proponent of the development of a DME fuel standard. CDFA has jurisdiction within the State over fuel quality standards as they relate to vehicle performance and driveability. California law requires that all fuel sold or distributed within the State have a fuel specification established by a consensus organization, such as ASTM or SAE. This definition does not preclude the use of an ISO standard or ISO test methods.

X2.1.1 This initial specification is based on the best, but limited, available information about DME in fuel applications. This specification will allow development of purpose-built applications (such as diesel engines) using a consistent fuel, and it is expected that modifications could be proposed to this specification as new applications and equipment are developed.

X2.2 Composition

X2.2.1 *Dimethyl Ether*—Commercial production processes for converting natural gas or biomethane into dimethyl ether produce a high purity product. Therefore, setting the minimum composition of DME at 98.5 % by mass is a reasonable compromise between the higher cost of very high purity DME used for specialty chemical applications, such as aerosol propellants, and the lower manufacturing cost of DME (for example, no costly purification steps) that give a product suitable for fuel applications. Setting a high minimum concentration for DME ensures that DME for fuel purposes will have both a minimum concentration of contaminants and a minimum estimated 55 cetane number without the need to specify this requirement in [Table 1](#).

X2.2.2 *Methanol*—The concentration of methanol is limited due to concerns about potential corrosivity and material incompatibility.

X2.2.3 *Water*—The concentration of water is limited to minimize potential freezing problems in DME – LPG mixtures and concerns with hydrate formation.

X2.2.4 *Methyl Formate*—While methyl formate should not be present in DME based on its physical properties (much higher boiling point than DME), concerns have been expressed about potential corrosion and instability issues, so a report requirement is proposed.

X2.3 *Sulfur*—DME production processes require very low sulfur content to prevent poisoning production catalysts, so the sulfur limit is set very low to recognize the negligible sulfur in DME as produced, which is much lower than the sulfur limit in LPG.

X2.3.1 The sulfur limit does not include the sulfur from an odorant, such as ethyl mercaptan, that might be required by some regulatory agencies in some fuel applications. Note that addition of 1 pound of ethyl mercaptan per 10 000 US gallons will increase the sulfur content of DME by 14 milligrams sulfur per litre of DME or 21 milligrams sulfur per kilogram of DME.

X2.4 *Vapor Pressure*—The vapor pressure limit is set at the sum of the vapor pressures of DME and contaminants such as methanol, CO, CO₂, and 1 % propane (consistent with the draft ISO DME fuel specification) to limit gases and volatile contaminants. Since this pressure is much lower than the vapor pressure of propane, the same storage and transportation tanks and containers used for LPG can be used for DME.

X2.5 *Copper Corrosion*—While aggressive sulfur species are unlikely to be present in DME as produced, there is a risk of pick-up of sulfur species during distribution in LPG facilities, so this requirement, set at the same limit as for Special Duty Propane, is in the specification to protect customers' equipment against potential corrosion.

X2.6 *Residue*—The limit on residue is set at the same limit as required in Special Duty / HD-5 propane. While contamination of DME by residues is not anticipated in current production processes, there is a risk of pick-up of heavier contaminants during distribution in LPG facilities, so this requirement is in the specification to protect customers' equipment. Test Methods [D7756](#) and [D7828](#) are gas chromatographic procedures for measurement of heavier soluble residues that could be present in LPG, and these procedures could be useful for evaluating residues in DME.

X2.7 [Table X2.1](#) shows limits for properties that have been suggested by engine manufacturers as requiring limitation; however, no technical justification has been provided for

specifying these limits. Therefore, they are not included as requirements in the specification.

TABLE X2.1 Optional Requirements for DME for Fuel Purposes

Property	Test Method	Requirement
Hydrocarbons (up to C4)	ISO/DIS 17196 D2163	report
Carbon dioxide (CO ₂), mass %	ISO/DIS 17196 D2163	report
Carbon monoxide (CO), mass %	ISO/DIS 17196 D2163	report
Ethyl methyl ether, mass %	ISO/DIS 17196	report

X3. RECOMMENDED SAFETY MEASURES FOR DIMETHYL ETHER FOR FUEL APPLICATIONS

X3.1 Compatible Materials—DME is stored, handled, and transferred as a liquefied gas under pressure. Materials used in the storage, handling, and transfer of DME have to be compatible with, and unaffected by, DME. The following materials have been found to be compatible with DME: Nitrile (NBR, BUNA-N), Hydrogenated NBR (HNBR), Silicone (VMQ), Fluorosilicone (FVMQ), Perfluoroelastomer (FFKM), polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), and stainless steel. See **Table X3.1** for various elastomer compatibilities. The material compatibility information was obtained from a variety of sources and is used within the DME industry but has not been verified for listing in this Appendix.

X3.2 Electrical Grounding—Grounding and bonding transfer equipment and the container which is being filled are essential. This can be accomplished in one of several ways, but the simplest method is to install a stationary grounding cable at the bulk tank/pump system and a portable or stationary grounding system for the container to be filled. This protects both sides of the point of transfer to ensure that the static charge, which is by nature generated by transferring DME, is dissipated. Refer to pamphlet **NFPA 77**, Recommended Practice on Static Electricity and Guide **D4865**. Electrical equipment for DME should be rated for Class 1 Div 1, Group C.

X3.3 Additional information on seal material compatibilities with dimethyl ether can be found in Section 6.7 of the

TABLE X3.1 Elastomer Compatibility with DME

Elastomer	Compatibility Rating for DME Use ^A
Natural Rubber (NR), Isoprene	4
Butadiene Styrene (SBR, Buna S), Butadiene (BR)	4
Butyl (HR)	4
Ethylene Propylene (EPR, EPDM, EP)	4
Nitrile (NBR, BUNA-N)	1
Hydrogenated Nitrile Butadiene Rubber (HNBR)	1
Polychloroprene (Neoprene, CR)	3
Chlorosulfonated Polyethylene (CSM)	3
Polyacrylate (ACM)	4
Polysulfide (T)	2
Silicone (VMQ)	1
Fluorosilicone (FVMQ)	1
Fluoroelastomer – Dipolymer	4
Fluoroelastomer – Terpolymer	4
Perfluoroelastomer (FFKM)	1
Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE)	1

^ARating legend (all ratings are for room temperature:
 1 Little to minor Effect, 0 to 5 % volume swell
 2 Minor to moderate Effect, 5 to 10 % volume swell
 3 Moderate to severe Effect, 10 to 20 % volume swell
 4 Not recommended

“DME Handbook” [English Edition] [ISBN 978-4-9903839-0-9 C3050], published October, 2007.⁶

⁶ Available from the International DME Association (IDA), 1425 K Street, N.W., Suite 350, Washington, D.C. 20005. Tel: 202-587-5760, Email: secretariat@aboutdme.org, Website: www.aboutdme.org.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Subcommittee D02.H0 has identified the location of selected changes to this standard since the last issue (D7901 – 14a) that may impact the use of this standard. (Approved Oct. 15, 2014.)

(1) Added new Section 4, Hazards.

(2) Revised subsection 5.2.

Subcommittee D02.H0 has identified the location of selected changes to this standard since the last issue (D7901 – 14) that may impact the use of this standard. (Approved June 1, 2014.)

(1) Added entry for lubricity and table footnote “C” to **Table 1**.

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