



Standard Practice for Measuring the Change in Length of Fasteners Using the Ultrasonic Pulse-Echo Technique¹

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1. Scope*

1.1 This practice covers a procedure for measuring changes in length of threaded fasteners using conventional ultrasonic pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrumentation which has been properly calibrated.

1.2 This procedure is normally intended for metal bolting 6.3 mm or more in nominal diameter with effective length-to-diameter ratios of 2:1 or greater.

1.3 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.4 *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

E6 Terminology Relating to Methods of Mechanical Testing

E1316 Terminology for Nondestructive Examinations

E1544 Practice for Construction of a Stepped Block and Its Use to Estimate Errors Produced by Speed-of-Sound Measurement Systems for Use on Solids (Withdrawn 2012)³

2.2 ASME Standards:⁴

ASME B46.1–2009 Surface Texture (Surface Roughness, Waviness, and Lay)

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E28 on Mechanical Testing and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E28.13 on Residual Stress Measurement.

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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.

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

⁴ Available from American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), ASME International Headquarters, Two Park Ave., New York, NY 10016-5990, <http://www.asme.org>.

3. Terminology

3.1 The definitions in this practice are in accordance with Terminology E6 and Section I of Terminology E1316.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *change in length [L], n*—physical change in length of a threaded fastener due to a change in tension within the fastener.

3.2.2 *effective length [L], n*—the length of a bolt that is responsive to stress.

3.2.2.1 *Discussion*—This quantity lies somewhere between the overall length of the bolt and the grip length. It is usually estimated as the grip length plus one half the thickness of the head and one half the thickness of the nut.

3.2.3 *longitudinal wave, n*—those waves in which the particle motion of the material is in the same direction as the wave propagation.

3.2.4 *pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument*—an assembly of ultrasonic instruments designed specifically to measure changes in the lengths of bolts. See Appendix X1.

3.2.5 *reference length [L], n*—the ultrasonic time of flight in the test specimen multiplied by a reference propagation velocity.

3.2.6 *reference propagation velocity, [LT⁻¹], n*—the velocity of propagation of the ultrasonic wavefront in a calibration test block or in the bolts whose changes of length are being measured.

3.2.7 *time of flight, [T], n*—the measured time interval between the launching of an ultrasonic pulse at the start of a path of travel and the reception of the pulse at the end of the path.

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 This practice describes a procedure for determining the change in length of a threaded fastener due to a change in tension in the fastener. Measurements of the ultrasonic time of flight are made before and after the fastener tension is changed, and a calculation of the change in length is made from the change in the time of flight.

4.1.1 Brief bursts of ultrasound (pulses) are generated by applying high-voltage electrical signals to an electroacoustic

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

transducer having a resonant frequency in the 5 to 10-MHz range. The pulses enter the bolt through the transducer/bolt interface, travel to the far end of the bolt, and reflect back (echo) to the transducer. The time of flight required for the signal to make its round-trip is measured electronically. By measuring the change in the time of flight due to a change in tension within the bolt, the equipment can determine the change in the length of the bolt due to the change in tension. Compensation for the direct effect of stress on the propagation velocity in the bolt is automatically done by a computer or microprocessor within the equipment.

4.2 This procedure is used on fasteners as they are tightened within their elastic limits; or on previously tightened fasteners as they are loosened. The latter can have been tightened past yield.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 The techniques described provide for the indirect measurement of change in length of a fastener. Such measurements are made from one end of the specimen without requiring access to the rear surface.

5.2 The equipment is field portable and should be used in the manner prescribed by the manufacturer. Common uses include monitoring changes in length of fasteners and as a tool for industrial quality control. Current applications include fasteners used in turbines, petrochemical pressure vessels, aircraft, automotive manufacturing, general bolting within the nuclear industry, structural steel connections, laboratory testing, and so forth.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument*—For ultrasonic measurements of the change in length of bolts, any longitudinal-wave pulse-echo ultrasonic instrument capable of reporting calculated changes in length is acceptable provided that its accuracy and precision satisfy the requirements set forth in [Annex A1](#). The major components of suitable instruments are as follows:

6.1.1 *Pulser/transmitter*, a means of generating electrical pulses to excite an acoustic transducer.

6.1.2 *Receiver/detector*, a means of amplifying and detecting the returning back-wall echo.

6.1.3 *Time-base Controller*, a means of measuring changes in ultrasonic time of flight.

6.1.4 *Acoustic Transducer*, a means of sending and receiving ultrasonic waves. Experience has shown that transducers with resonances in the 5 to 10-MHz frequency range are usually satisfactory. In general, select an acoustic transducer having an element of the largest diameter available while not exceeding the minimum body diameter of the bolt.

6.2 Other Apparatus:

6.2.1 *Couplant*—For longitudinal pulse-echo measurements, a liquid is required to couple ultrasound between the transducer and the fastener. Of the couplants commonly used, where applicable a 50/50 glycerine/water mix often provides optimal results. Light oil or standard commercially available ultrasonic couplants are also satisfactory.

6.2.2 *Oscilloscope*—For optimal adjustment of the apparatus, the use of an oscilloscope is necessary. The oscilloscope must have two input channels, two traces, external triggering, and a dual time base with delayed sweep capability. Its bandwidth should be at least 35 MHz or its equivalent.

6.2.2.1 Pulse-echo bolt-measuring instruments with built-in oscilloscope display capabilities must have sampling speeds equivalent to at least ten times the transducer frequency for satisfactory signal display.

6.2.3 *Standard Reference Blocks*, for periodic recalibration of the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument.

6.2.3.1 A glass or metallic reference block of known length and appropriate surface roughness, shape, thickness, and parallelism is recommended. Acceptable standards include a glass block, two metal bars of unequal length, and single bars of known acoustic velocity. The path length of the standard must be determined by a technique of higher accuracy. See [Practice E1544](#). The calibration of instruments and standards should be traceable to national standards, where systems of traceability exist.

7. Procedure

7.1 The performance of the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument should be verified or adjusted to a reference standard in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. See [Annex A2](#).

7.1.1 In noncritical applications, where uncertainties smaller than $\pm 15\%$ of the change in length are not required, an instrument calibrated on one bolt of a given material may be used on other bolts of the same material but having different shapes.

7.1.2 In critical, safety-related applications or where uncertainties of less than 3% are required, or both, the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument should be recalibrated on a statistically significant sample of each new lot of bolts.

7.2 *Fastener Preparation*—To ensure reliable ultrasonic measurements the finish and geometry of the fastener shall be suitable. One end shall be accessible for transducer placement. This end shall, for at least the diameter of the transducer, be flat and perpendicular to the axis of the bolt. A machined surface with a finish of $R_a=3.2\mu\text{m}$ or better is recommended, exclusive of indented grade markings. Remove raised grade markings. If the end is recessed it shall have a flat spot face. The surface of the reflector end of the fastener shall be flat and parallel to the other end. The amount of axial runout on the end depends on fastener size and the accuracy requirement. An area as small as 3 mm in diameter may be sufficient. The ends of bolts with through center holes may be prepared adjacent to the holes, with the transducer locations marked.

7.2.1 Do not remove grade markings indiscriminately. Document and maintain grade marking removals.

7.3 Measure average fastener temperature within 1°C, in accordance with instructions in the instrument operating manual.

7.4 Transducer Placement:

7.4.1 Apply a suitable acoustic couplant to allow adequate sound transmission. Glycerine or some other high-viscosity

couplant is recommended if the fastener has indented grade markings or if its surface has a few pits.

7.4.2 Wipe the coupling surface clean each time couplant is applied. The amount of couplant to be used should be sufficient to wet the transducer face but not excessive. Use consistent amounts for successive or repetitive readings.

7.4.3 Place the transducer on the flat surface of the bolt to be measured. To minimize possible impact damage to the wear-plate portion of the transducer, set it down on its edge and then carefully rotate it into a flat position. Seat the transducer by light, back-and-forth finger movements to squeeze out excess couplant and to obtain the shortest, most stable, length display, or the largest echo signal on the oscilloscope. Repeat this process several times to ensure repeatability.

7.4.4 To ensure repeatable readings always return the transducer to the same position during the measurement process. This location may be marked on the end of the fastener, and the identification/serial number may be noted for a relative position. See [Appendix X2](#).

7.5 Obtain the reference length of the fastener in either the untensioned or tensioned condition. Record the reference length for future comparisons. Ensure that the fastener in the untensioned condition is physically loose.

7.6 If the reference length was determined in the untensioned condition, tighten the fastener. If the reference length was determined in the tensioned condition, unload the fastener.

7.7 Measure the change in length of the fastener and record the value.

7.8 Additional measurements may be made at any time in the future by following [7.1](#), [7.3](#), [7.4](#), and [7.7](#), and using the reference length as measured in accordance with [7.5](#).

8. Report

8.1 If a report is required, the following data should be included:

8.1.1 Type of material measured.

8.1.2 The calibration factors in use by the test equipment. These must include the stress factor, the material velocity, and the temperature factor. See [Annex A2](#).

8.1.3 Transducer size, frequency, and serial number.

8.1.4 Model and serial numbers of the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument and reference blocks, if applicable.

8.1.5 Initial reference length (in millimetres) and the temperature at the time of measurement.

8.1.6 Change-in-length measurement (in millimetres) and the temperature at the time of measurement.

9. Keywords

9.1 bolts; change-in-length measurements; clamping force; fasteners; residual stress measurements; ultrasonics.

ANNEXES

(Mandatory Information)

A1. INSTRUMENT RESOLUTION

A1.1 Pulse-echo bolt-measuring instruments are designed to measure and report the change in a fastener's length to the nearest 0.0025 or 0.00025 mm. To do this it must be able to

resolve 0.0012 or 0.00012 mm. This degree of precision is required because a typical bolt tightened to its yield point will stretch only about 0.003 mm/mm of grip length.

A2. INSTRUMENT CALIBRATION

A2.1 Calibration is essential for the correct use of a pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument, and this involves a number of steps. First, determine the ability of the instrument to measure times of flight accurately by using it to measure several dimensions on a reference block.

length of the sample the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument and with another calibrated instrument such as the extensometer on the testing machine. If the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument will be used on fasteners at various temperatures, conduct additional tests in an oven or cold chamber.

A2.2 Next, a sample (one in routine applications, several for critical applications) of the actual fasteners whose changes in length are to be measured is loaded in a tensile testing machine or tightened in a load cell. Measure the resulting change in

A2.3 In order to calibrate a pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument, three factors must be used to change the actual measured time of flight to a bolt elongation measurement. These factors depend on the properties of the bolt material.

A2.3.1 *Stress Factor*—The elongation (or delta length) must be corrected for the effect of stress on sound velocity. (Sound speed decreases through a metal bolt when it is elongated by an axial load.) The correction factor is commonly termed the stress factor and may be expressed in units of m/s/Pa.

A2.3.2 *Material Velocity*—The time of flight is converted to a length measurement using the longitudinal wave velocity in the unstressed material. This is commonly called the material velocity and may be expressed in units of m/s.

A2.3.3 *Temperature Factor*—The change in length of a bolt is also affected by temperature, and this is accommodated by

using a ratio that corrects for both the physical and the ultrasonic length changes. This ratio is commonly called the temperature factor and may be expressed in units of m/s/°C.

A2.3.3.1 Different commercial pulse-echo bolt-measuring instruments use different techniques to compensate for these effects. The manufacturer’s calibration procedures should be used. Once the calibration factors have been established for a given fastener material and shape the instrument may be recalibrated for that fastener using reference blocks only.

APPENDIXES

(Nonmandatory Information)

X1. PULSE-ECHO BOLT-MEASURING INSTRUMENT VERSUS PULSE-ECHO THICKNESS GAGE

X1.1 There are some similarities between a pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument and the more common pulse-echo thickness gage, but some important differences make the thickness gage inappropriate for fastener measurements. The time of flight of the ultrasonic wavefront is affected not only by the change in length of a fastener as it is tightened but, even more, by the change in stress level within the fastener (which affects the ultrasonic velocity). A computer or microprocessor within the pulse-echo bolt-measuring instrument, using the instrument calibration and application data (that is, the effective length), can compensate for the change in the time of flight

caused by the increase in path length of the fastener. Thickness gages do not have this capability.

X1.2 The bolt-measuring instrument is also designed to ignore echoes from the underside of a bolt head or the bolt threads. Further, it is designed to measure the change in length of a fastener with the precision typically required in automotive, aerospace, or similar applications (that is, bolts having lengths of a 100 mm or less). See [Annex A1](#) for further information.

X2. TROUBLE SHOOTING

X2.1 *Non-Repeatable Initial Length Readings*—The causes are usually associated with improper coupling of the transducer and fastener.

X2.1.1 Fastener surface finish irregularities.

X2.1.2 Lack of parallelism between the ends of the fastener.

X2.1.3 Too much or too little couplant has been used, or excess couplant has not been squeezed out of the transducer-fastener interface (see [7.4.2](#)).

X2.1.4 Dirt on the transducer face.

X2.1.5 Loose cable connections or a bad cable, usually the ground wire.

X2.1.6 Transducer not being returned to the same location.

X2.1.7 Fastener temperature changes not automatically compensated.

X2.2 *Non-Repeatable Change-in-Length Readings*—The causes are usually related to bolt bending or weakening of the signal strength due to stress.

X2.2.1 Bolt bending is related to nonparallelism of the head and nut bearing surfaces.

X2.2.2 Weakening of signal strength is related to a stress-induced increase in the acoustic attenuation of the material. As the signal diminishes, the gate may jump from peak to peak or may be entirely lost. This will show on the oscilloscope or the instrument’s built-in display screen.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Committee E28 has identified the location of selected changes to this standard since the last issue (E1685–00(2006)) that may impact the use of this standard.

- (1) Inch-pound units were removed from the standard.
- (2) Revised-Section 3, Terminology; Section 6, Apparatus; Section 7, Procedure; Section 8, Report; Annex A1; Annex A2; and Appendix X1.

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