



Designation: C780 – 20

Standard Test Method for Preconstruction and Construction Evaluation of Mortars for Plain and Reinforced Unit Masonry¹

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This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the U.S. Department of Defense.

INTRODUCTION

This test method provides a standard procedure for sampling and testing mortars for composition and plastic and hardened properties, either before or during actual construction. The procedures outlined in the Annexes are considered applicable for evaluating various combinations of portland cement, lime, and masonry cement for mortars common to plain and reinforced unit masonry construction.

The test procedures describe methods for the measurement of mortar composition and mortar properties. No attempt is made to claim or substantiate specific correlations between the measured properties and mortar performance in the masonry. However, data from these test methods can be combined with other information to formulate judgments about the quality of the masonry.

Testing using these procedures is limited to the preconstruction evaluation of masonry mortars within the laboratory, to the evaluation of masonry mortars at the construction site, and in establishing the degree of quality control exercised during mortar production at the construction site.

1. Scope*

1.1 This test method covers procedures for the sampling and testing of mortars for composition and for their plastic and hardened properties, either before or during their actual use in construction.

NOTE 1—Guide C1586 provides guidance on evaluating mortar and clarifies the purpose of both this test method and Specification C270.

NOTE 2—The testing agency performing this test method should be evaluated in accordance with Practice C1093.

1.2 *Preconstruction Evaluation*—This test method permits comparisons of mortars made from different materials under simulated field conditions. It is also used to establish baseline values for comparative evaluation of field mortars.

1.3 *Construction Evaluation*—Use of this method in the field provides a means for quality assurance of field-mixed mortar. It includes methods for verifying the mortar mix

proportions, comparing test results for field mortars to preconstruction testing, and determining batch-to-batch uniformity of the mortar.

1.4 The test results obtained under this test method are not required to meet the minimum compressive values in accordance with the property specifications in Specification C270.

1.5 The values stated in inch-pound units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are mathematical conversions to SI units that are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

1.6 The text of this standard references notes and footnotes that provide explanatory material. These notes and footnotes (excluding those in tables and figures) shall not be considered as requirements of the standard.

1.7 *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, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use. For specific hazards statements, see Section 8.*

1.8 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the*

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee C12 on Mortars and Grouts for Unit Masonry and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee C12.02 on Research and Methods of Test.

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

Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

- C39/C39M Test Method for Compressive Strength of Cylindrical Concrete Specimens
- C109/C109M Test Method for Compressive Strength of Hydraulic Cement Mortars (Using 2-in. or [50 mm] Cube Specimens)
- C128 Test Method for Relative Density (Specific Gravity) and Absorption of Fine Aggregate
- C173/C173M Test Method for Air Content of Freshly Mixed Concrete by the Volumetric Method
- C185 Test Method for Air Content of Hydraulic Cement Mortar
- C187 Test Method for Amount of Water Required for Normal Consistency of Hydraulic Cement Paste
- C231/C231M Test Method for Air Content of Freshly Mixed Concrete by the Pressure Method
- C270 Specification for Mortar for Unit Masonry
- C470/C470M Specification for Molds for Forming Concrete Test Cylinders Vertically
- C511 Specification for Mixing Rooms, Moist Cabinets, Moist Rooms, and Water Storage Tanks Used in the Testing of Hydraulic Cements and Concretes
- C617/C617M Practice for Capping Cylindrical Concrete Specimens
- C1093 Practice for Accreditation of Testing Agencies for Masonry
- C1180 Terminology of Mortar and Grout for Unit Masonry
- C1231/C1231M Practice for Use of Unbonded Caps in Determination of Compressive Strength of Hardened Cylindrical Concrete Specimens
- C1324 Test Method for Examination and Analysis of Hardened Masonry Mortar
- C1586 Guide for Quality Assurance of Mortars
- E11 Specification for Woven Wire Test Sieve Cloth and Test Sieves

3. Terminology

3.1 Terminology defined in Terminology C1180 shall apply for this test method.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *disturbed sample, n*—any plastic mortar test sample which is taken at some time after mixing and bulk sampling, that is further remixed or molded immediately prior to test, or both.

3.2.2 *undisturbed sample, n*—any plastic mortar test sample molded immediately after mixing and sampling that sits on a vibration-free surface until tested.

3.2.3 *as-mixed samples, n*—mortar samples that are obtained after mixing and prior to use of the mortar in construction.

3.2.4 *mortar board samples, n*—mortar samples that are obtained from the mortar board after some established time period from the end of mixing, and before retempering.

3.2.4.1 *Discussion*—Retempered mortar board samples are those obtained from the mortar board after retempering. Since mortar on a mason's mortar board is disturbed by the activity of the mason, samples from a mason's mortar board shall be so identified to differentiate them from samples taken from a mortar board used exclusively for test purposes.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 Preconstruction evaluation of mortar systems involves the preparation of one or more trial batches which are mixed in the laboratory using mechanical batch mixers. These trial batches are sampled and used in establishing the plastic and hardened properties of the mixtures. Because all the trial mixtures are prebatched by weight, additional characteristics of the mortars may be calculated and used in an analysis of mortar performance.

4.2 During actual construction, evaluation of masonry mortars is possible by sampling the mortar at various stages of construction, and performing tests on both its plastic and hardened properties. The test results permit further verification of preconstruction testing, and reflect batch-to-batch variations introduced during mortar production and use at the construction site. More immediate corrective action for the mixing procedure is thereby attainable.

4.3 The following test methods may be singly or collectively incorporated into the testing to establish mortar composition, and mortar plastic and hardened properties:

4.3.1 **Annex A1**—Test Method for Consistency by Cone Penetration,

4.3.2 **Annex A2**—Test Method for Consistency Retention (Board Life) of Mortars for Unit Masonry Using a Cone Penetrometer,

4.3.3 **Annex A3**—Test Method for Initial Consistency and Consistency Retention (Board Life) of Masonry Mortars Using a Modified Concrete Penetrometer,

4.3.4 **Annex A4**—Test Method for Mortar Aggregate Ratio,

4.3.5 **Annex A5**—Test Method for Mortar Air Content, and

4.3.6 **Annex A6**—Test Method for Compressive Strength of Molded Masonry Mortar Cylinders and Cubes.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 During preconstruction and construction evaluations, use of these test methods establishes specific and overall performance characteristics for the mortar system.

5.2 Preconstruction testing of mortars prebatched by weight provides information for the selection of the individual mortar system best suited for the masonry to be constructed. The recommended tests and their significance are as follows:

5.2.1 Consistency determinations by cone penetration (**Annex A1**) allow gaging the water additions for all mortars included in the preconstruction test series. Even if the mortar

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.

consistency as measured at the construction site is at a different penetration value than those measured during the preconstruction tests, the cone preparation test serves to standardize water additions for mortars being considered as alternatives before construction. Additional testing of mortar water content-consistency relationships ([Annex A4](#)) will allow relating these two factors to batch-to-batch variations at the construction site.

5.2.2 Consistency retention by cone penetration ([Annex A2](#)) using disturbed or undisturbed mortar samples provides a means of establishing the early-age setting and stiffening characteristics of the mortars. Because laboratory testing is conducted under static climatic conditions, consistency retention test results reflect the relative performance of the mortar systems under test. The same general relationships are expected to hold during testing at the construction project, except as they are influenced by jobsite weather conditions.

5.2.3 Mortar water-content determinations ([Annex A4](#)) allow measurement of the water content of the mortar mixture. Mortars prebatched using moist masonry sand may be mathematically analyzed for mortar water content; however, this test, when used for preconstruction evaluation, establishes the effectiveness of the test method and serves as the control or base for tests performed at the construction site.

5.2.4 Mortar aggregate ratio testing ([Annex A4](#)) provides a method for determining the ratio of aggregate-to-cementitious materials. The sieving operation employed during this test is incapable of separating an individual cementitious material when more than one such material is used, but can accurately establish the aggregate-to-cementitious materials ratio of the mixture.

5.2.5 Mortar air-content testing ([Annex A5](#)) is useful in establishing the value of this component of the mortar. This test is of particular importance in evaluating mortars that contain air-entraining portland cement, air-entraining lime, masonry cement or any combination thereof.

5.2.6 Compressive strength testing ([Annex A6](#)) of molded mortar cylinders and cubes establishes one of the characteristics of hardened mortar. Mortar compressive strength test values are not representative of the actual compressive strength of mortar in the assembly and are not appropriate for use in predicting the compressive strength that would be attained by the mortar in the masonry assembly. The measured compressive strength of a molded mortar specimen is almost always lower than the strength of the same mortar in the wall, primarily as a result of differences in mortar water content and specimen shape. Mortar compressive strength is influenced by mortar water content at the time of set. Because molded mortar specimens are not in contact with absorptive masonry units and are not subjected to other mechanisms of water loss, they have higher water contents than mortar in the wall. Higher water contents almost always result in lower strengths. Specimen size and shape also affect compressive strength. Cylinders and cubes exhibit different strengths even when made from the same mortar mix. Both of these specimen configurations yield lower strengths than what would be attained if a specimen having the same size and configuration of a typical mortar joint could be reliably tested.

NOTE 3—When cube and cylinder test specimens from like mixtures are

to be compared, the cylinder compressive strength is approximately 85 % of the cube compressive strength.

5.3 Testing during the actual construction may employ one or more of the test methods described in [4.2](#). Repetitive testing using these test methods on consecutive or intermittent batches provides a method for measurement of batch-to-batch variations in the mortar production. Testing during actual construction may be referenced to laboratory testing and used to predict later age mortar characteristics. In addition to the comments in [5.2](#), the following test meanings may be obtained from construction project testing:

5.3.1 Consistency by cone penetration ([Annex A1](#)) is used as a quick reference for indicating batch-to-batch variations in mix ingredients and mixing time. Erratic consistency readings indicate poor control during batching and mixing, but they do not indicate if cement, sand, or water additions are improper. Other test methods must be used to isolate and identify the unsatisfactory proportioning or mixing procedure, for example, cement to aggregate, mortar water, or air content tests.

5.3.2 Consistency retention by cone penetration ([Annex A2](#)) tests establishes the early-age setting and stiffening characteristics of the mortar. These properties are influenced by mix proportions and ingredients, weather conditions, effects of chemical additives, and mixing time.

5.3.3 Individual and repeated evaluations of mortar water content ([Annex A4](#)) show the ability of the mixer operator to properly and consistently add water to the mixer.

5.3.4 Individual and repeated tests for mortar aggregate ratio ([Annex A4](#)) show the ability of the mixer operator to properly and consistently add the cementitious material and sand to the mixer, and will establish batch-to-batch variations in the composition of the mortar.

5.3.5 Individual and repetitive tests for mortar air content ([Annex A5](#)) show the changes caused by variations in mixing time, mixing efficiency and other factors.

5.3.6 Comparison of compressive strength tests ([Annex A6](#)) of field batched mortars to preconstruction mortar compression tests, each conducted in accordance with this test method, can be used to identify variations in mortar mix constituents and/or proportions. Variations in compressive strength values typically indicate changes in mix water content, mixing procedures, mix materials, material proportions, and environmental conditions.

NOTE 4—Variations in the measured compressive strengths of field-sampled mortar and between the measured compressive strengths of construction and pre-construction mortar samples should be expected. Many of these variations result from sampling mortar from the mixer or mortarboard and do not necessarily translate into significant mortar strength variations in the wall. Unit suction will remove water from the mortar in the wall and the curing conditions are different. However, significant variation between measured compression strength values should prompt evaluation of probable causes of this variation. Conducting companion mortar aggregate ratio tests would assist in determining if changes in mix constituents and proportions are the likely cause. (See [5.2.6](#) for additional information).

6. Test Method Limitations

6.1 During mortar aggregate ratio testing, no attempt has been made to establish the proportions of either portland cement to lime or portland cement to masonry cement in the

mixture. Additional testing could establish this proportioning, however, batching operations should be supervised to ensure the correct proportioning of these ingredients.

6.2 Due to the greater ability to weigh materials accurately, mix on a precise schedule, and control other factors relating to the production and testing of mortar under laboratory conditions as compared to field conditions, the principal purpose of this test method is to provide a means to identify, measure, evaluate, and control differences that exist between laboratory and jobsite mortars.

6.3 Test Method **C1324** is available for examination and analysis of hardened masonry mortars. There is no ASTM method for determining compressive strength of hardened mortar from samples taken from a structure.

7. Apparatus

7.1 The apparatus required for this test, along with the apparatus for sampling (see Section 9) are given in the individual tests included in the annexes.

8. Hazards

8.1 During any period that the alcohol used in the mortar aggregate ratio test is exposed to the atmosphere, and particularly when the test sample is being dried, the tester should be aware that alcohol is a very flammable material. Prior to drying the sample in an oven, place the sample in a shallow pan and flash off the alcohol by intentional ignition in an open, well-ventilated area.

9. Sampling

9.1 This section deals with the sampling of individual mortar ingredients and of the mortar itself for preconstruction evaluation in the laboratory and construction evaluation at the jobsite.

9.2 Complete the sampling of materials as follows:

9.2.1 Bagged material, such as portland cement, lime, and masonry cement, shall be of the type and brand that will be used or is being considered for use in the actual construction. Obtain full-bag lots in sufficient quantity for completing the desired tests.

9.2.2 Aggregate for test purposes shall be from the same source and of the same description as will be used or is being considered for use in the actual construction. Obtain a representative sample of sufficient quantity to complete the desired tests.

9.2.3 Water for test purposes need not be the same as that to be used in construction, except when it is known or suspected that the properties of the water available for mortar production at the construction site will have a measurable effect upon the mortar properties. In normal testing, clean, potable water shall be acceptable for test purposes.

9.3 Obtain plastic mortar samples both in the laboratory and at the construction project by taking uniformly distributed incremental samples, and mixing them to form a bulk sample from which the quantity of mortar required for a specific test or specimen can be randomly taken. When preconstruction testing

is performed, the sampling method used in construction testing shall be the same as that used during preconstruction testing.

NOTE 5—Many factors, including sampling, can affect the characteristics of fresh mortar. Sampling should be done in a consistent manner. Care should be taken to ensure that the same sampling procedure is used when comparing test results throughout the course of a project. Unless specific time-dependent properties of the mortar are being evaluated, sampling should be done in accordance with 9.3.1.

9.3.1 Take as-mixed samples as follows: When mixing is performed in a mixer, obtain samples either during the discharge of the mixer or after the mortar has been discharged into the mortar receptacle. If samples are taken during the discharge of the mixer, they shall be taken at any time except for the first and last 10 % of the batch. Samples of the mortar taken after discharge from the mixer shall be representative of the entire batch. When mixing is not performed in a mixer, obtain samples following the procedure in 9.3.

9.3.2 Take mortar for mortar board tests in accordance with 9.3.1, and place upon mortar boards typical of those used or to be used at the project. For construction site testing, expose the test mortar on the board(s) to climatic conditions typical of those on the jobsite. When mortar from a mason's mortar board is used for test purposes, identify it further to reflect this exception for proper data interpretation. Thoroughly hand-mix mortar selected for testing with a trowel immediately before sampling for tests or specimens. Record the lapsed time from the end of mixing as part of the test data.

9.3.3 Take retempered mortar board samples from the mason's mortar board at recorded time periods after mixing and retempering. Thoroughly hand-mix all mortar on the board with a trowel before sampling.

9.4 Time to Test:

9.4.1 The test for cone penetration (**Annex A1**) shall be started within five minutes after obtaining the final portion of the sample.

9.4.2 The initial readings for consistency retention (**Annex A2 and Annex A3**) shall be started within five minutes after obtaining the final portion of the sample.

9.4.3 The mortar samples for mortar-aggregate ratio (**Annex A4**) shall be introduced into the containers with alcohol within five minutes after obtaining the final portion of the sample.

9.4.4 The test for air content (**Annex A5**) shall be started within five minutes after obtaining the final portion of the sample.

9.4.5 Molding of specimens for compressive strength (**Annex A6**) shall be started within 15 minutes after obtaining the final portion of the sample.

9.5 Record sampling procedures to include the date, time, place, and method of sampling. When applicable, note and record the climatic conditions.

10. Test Specimens

10.1 During preconstruction evaluation of masonry mortars, measure plastic mortar properties using a single test specimen for each part of the tests. For determining hardened mortar properties, prepare three test specimens for each test age and property.