

Method 353.2, Revision 2.0: Determination of Nitrate-Nitrite Nitrogen by Automated Colorimetry

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**DETERMINATION OF NITRATE-NITRITE NITROGEN BY AUTOMATED
COLORIMETRY**

Edited by James W. O'Dell
Inorganic Chemistry Branch
Chemistry Research Division

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**ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING SYSTEMS LABORATORY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45268**

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DETERMINATION OF NITRATE-NITRITE NITROGEN BY AUTOMATED COLORIMETRY

1.0 SCOPE AND APPLICATION

- 1.1 This method covers the determination of nitrite singly, or nitrite and nitrate combined in drinking, ground, surface, domestic and industrial wastes.
- 1.2 The applicable range is 0.05-10.0 mg/L nitrate-nitrite nitrogen. The range may be extended with sample dilution.

2.0 SUMMARY OF METHOD

- 2.1 A filtered sample is passed through a column containing granulated copper-cadmium to reduce nitrate to nitrite. The nitrite (that was originally present plus reduced nitrate) is determined by diazotizing with sulfanilamide and coupling with N-(1-naphthyl)-ethylenediamine dihydrochloride to form a highly colored azo dye which is measured colorimetrically. Separate, rather than combined nitrate-nitrite, values are readily obtained by carrying out the procedure first with, and then without, the Cu-Cd reduction step.
- 2.2 Reduced volume versions of this method that use the same reagents and molar ratios are acceptable provided they meet the quality control and performance requirements stated in the method.
- 2.3 Limited performance-based method modifications may be acceptable provided they are fully documented and meet or exceed requirements expressed in Section 9.0, Quality Control.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 **Calibration Blank (CB)** -- A volume of reagent water fortified with the same matrix as the calibration standards, but without the analytes, internal standards, or surrogate analytes.
- 3.2 **Calibration Standard (CAL)** -- A solution prepared from the primary dilution standard solution or stock standard solutions and the internal standards and surrogate analytes. The CAL solutions are used to calibrate the instrument response with respect to analyte concentration.
- 3.3 **Instrument Performance Check Solution (IPC)** -- A solution of one or more method analytes, surrogates, internal standards, or other test substances used to evaluate the performance of the instrument system with respect to a defined set of criteria.

- 3.4 **Laboratory Fortified Blank (LFB)** -- An aliquot of reagent water or other blank matrices to which known quantities of the method analytes are added in the laboratory. The LFB is analyzed exactly like a sample, and its purpose is to determine whether the methodology is in control, and whether the laboratory is capable of making accurate and precise measurements.
- 3.5 **Laboratory Fortified Sample Matrix (LFM)** -- An aliquot of an environmental sample to which known quantities of the method analytes are added in the laboratory. The LFM is analyzed exactly like a sample, and its purpose is to determine whether the sample matrix contributes bias to the analytical results. The background concentrations of the analytes in the sample matrix must be determined in a separate aliquot and the measured values in the LFM corrected for background concentrations.
- 3.6 **Laboratory Reagent Blank (LRB)** -- An aliquot of reagent water or other blank matrices that are treated exactly as a sample including exposure to all glassware, equipment, solvents, reagents, internal standards, and surrogates that are used with other samples. The LRB is used to determine if method analytes or other interferences are present in the laboratory environment, the reagents, or the apparatus.
- 3.7 **Linear Calibration Range (LCR)** -- The concentration range over which the instrument response is linear.
- 3.8 **Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS)** -- Written information provided by vendors concerning a chemical's toxicity, health hazards, physical properties, fire, and reactivity data including storage, spill, and handling precautions.
- 3.9 **Method Detection Limit (MDL)** -- The minimum concentration of an analyte that can be identified, measured and reported with 99% confidence that the analyte concentration is greater than zero.
- 3.10 **Quality Control Sample (QCS)** -- A solution of method analytes of known concentrations that is used to fortify an aliquot of LRB or sample matrix. The QCS is obtained from a source external to the laboratory and different from the source of calibration standards. It is used to check laboratory performance with externally prepared test materials.
- 3.11 **Stock Standard Solution (SSS)** -- A concentrated solution containing one or more method analytes prepared in the laboratory using assayed reference materials or purchased from a reputable commercial source.

4.0 **INTERFERENCES**

- 4.1 Build up of suspended matter in the reduction column will restrict sample flow. Since nitrate and nitrite are found in a soluble state, samples may be pre-filtered.

- 4.2 Low results might be obtained for samples that contain high concentrations of iron, copper or other metals. EDTA is added to the samples to eliminate this interference.
- 4.3 Residual chlorine can produce a negative interference by limiting reduction efficiency. Before analysis, samples should be checked and if required, dechlorinated with sodium thiosulfate.
- 4.4 Samples that contain large concentrations of oil and grease will coat the surface of the cadmium. This interference is eliminated by pre-extracting the sample with an organic solvent.
- 4.5 Method interferences may be caused by contaminants in the reagent water, reagents, glassware, and other sample processing apparatus that bias analyte response.

5.0 SAFETY

- 5.1 The toxicity or carcinogenicity of each reagent used in this method have not been fully established. Each chemical should be regarded as a potential health hazard and exposure should be as low as reasonably achievable. Cautions are included for known extremely hazardous materials or procedures.
- 5.2 Each laboratory is responsible for maintaining a current awareness file of OSHA regulations regarding the safe handling of the chemicals specified in this method. A reference file of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) should be made available to all personnel involved in the chemical analysis. The preparation of a formal safety plan is also advisable.
- 5.3 The following chemicals have the potential to be highly toxic or hazardous, consult MSDS.
 - 5.3.1 Cadmium (Section 7.1)
 - 5.3.2 Phosphoric acid (Section 7.5)
 - 5.3.3 Hydrochloric acid (Section 7.6)
 - 5.3.4 Sulfuric acid (Section 7.8)
 - 5.3.5 Chloroform (Sections 7.10 and 7.11)

6.0 EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

- 6.1 Balance -- Analytical, capable of accurately weighing to the nearest 0.0001 g.
- 6.2 Glassware -- Class A volumetric flasks and pipets as required.

- 6.3 Automated continuous flow analysis equipment designed to deliver and react sample and reagents in the required order and ratios.
 - 6.3.1 Sampling device (sampler)
 - 6.3.2 Multichannel pump
 - 6.3.3 Reaction unit or manifold
 - 6.3.4 Colorimetric detector
 - 6.3.5 Data recording device

7.0 REAGENTS AND STANDARDS

- 7.1 Granulated cadmium: 40-60 mesh (CASRN 7440-43-9). Other mesh sizes may be used.
- 7.2 Copper-cadmium: The cadmium granules (new or used) are cleaned with dilute HCl (Section 7.6) and copperized with 2% solution of copper sulfate (Section 7.7) in the following manner:
 - 7.2.1 Wash the cadmium with HCl (Section 7.6) and rinse with distilled water. The color of the cadmium so treated should be silver.
 - 7.2.2 Swirl 10 g cadmium in 100 mL portions of 2% solution of copper sulfate (Section 7.7) for five minutes or until blue color partially fades, decant and repeat with fresh copper sulfate until a brown colloidal precipitate forms.
 - 7.2.3 Wash the copper-cadmium with reagent water (at least 10 times) to remove all the precipitated copper. The color of the cadmium so treated should be black.
- 7.3 Preparation of reduction column. The reduction column is a U-shaped, 35 cm length, 2 mm I.D. glass tube (Note 1). Fill the reduction column with distilled water to prevent entrapment of air bubbles during the filling operations. Transfer the copper-cadmium granules (Section 7.2) to the reduction column and place a glass wool plug in each end. To prevent entrapment of air bubbles in the reduction column, be sure that all pump tubes are filled with reagents before putting the column into the analytical system.

Note: Other reduction tube configurations, including a 0.081 I.D. pump tube, can be used in place of the 2 mm glass tube, if checked as in Section 10.1.
- 7.4 Reagent water: Because of possible contamination, this should be prepared by passage through an ion exchange column comprised of a mixture of both strongly acidic-cation and strongly basic-anion exchange resins. The

regeneration of the ion exchange column should be carried out according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- 7.5 Color reagent: To approximately 800 mL of reagent water, add, while stirring, 100 mL conc. phosphoric acid (CASRN 7664-38-2), 40 g sulfanilamide (CASRN 63-74-1) and 2 g N-1-naphthylethylenediamine dihydrochloride (CASRN 1465-25-4). Stir until dissolved and dilute to 1 L. Store in brown bottle and keep in the dark when not in use. This solution is stable for several months.
- 7.6 Dilute hydrochloric acid, 6N: Add 50 mL of conc. HCl (CASRN 7647-01-0) to reagent water, cool, and dilute to 100 mL.
- 7.7 Copper sulfate solution, 2%: Dissolve 20 g of $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (CASRN 7758-99-8) in 500 mL of reagent water and dilute to 1 L.
- 7.8 Wash solution: Use reagent water for unpreserved samples. For samples preserved with H_2SO_4 , use 2 mL H_2SO_4 (CASRN 7764-93-9), per liter of wash water.
- 7.9 Ammonium chloride-EDTA solution: Dissolve 85 g of reagent grade ammonium chloride (CASRN 12125-02-9) and 0.1 g of disodium ethylenediamine tetracetate (CASRN 6381-92-6) in 900 mL of reagent water. Adjust the pH to 9.1 for preserved or 8.5 for non-preserved samples with conc. ammonium hydroxide (CASRN 1336-21-6) and dilute to 1 L. Add 0.5 mL Brij-35 (CASRN 9002-92-0).
- 7.10 Stock nitrate solution: Dissolve 7.218 g KNO_3 (CASRN 7757-79-1) and dilute to 1 L in a volumetric flask with reagent water. Preserve with 2 mL of chloroform (CASRN 67-66-3) per liter. Solution is stable for six months. 1 mL = 1.0 mg $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$.
- 7.11 Stock nitrite solution: Dissolve 6.072 g KNO_2 in 500 mL of reagent water and dilute to 1 L in a volumetric flask. Preserve with 2 mL of chloroform and keep under refrigeration. 1.0 mL = 1.0 mg $\text{NO}_2\text{-N}$.
- 7.12 Standard nitrate solution: Dilute 1.0 mL of stock nitrate solution (Section 7.10) to 100 mL. 1.0 mL = 0.01 mg $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$. Preserve with .2 mL of chloroform. Solution is stable for six months.
- 7.13 Standard nitrite solution: Dilute 10.0 mL of stock nitrite (Section 7.11) solution to 1000 mL. 1.0 mL = 0.01 mg $\text{NO}_2\text{-N}$. Solution is unstable; prepare as required.

8.0 SAMPLE COLLECTION, PRESERVATION AND STORAGE

- 8.1 Samples should be collected in plastic or glass bottles. All bottles must be thoroughly cleaned and rinsed with reagent water. Volume collected should

- be sufficient to insure a representative sample, allow for replicate analysis (if required), and minimize waste disposal.
- 8.2 Samples must be preserved with H₂SO₄ to a pH <2 and cooled to 4°C at the time of collection.
- 8.3 Samples should be analyzed as soon as possible after collection. If storage is required, preserved samples are maintained at 4°C and may be held for up to 28 days.
- 8.4 Samples to be analyzed for nitrate or nitrite only should be cooled to 4°C and analyzed within 48 hours.

9.0 QUALITY CONTROL

- 9.1 Each laboratory using this method is required to operate a formal quality control (QC) program. The minimum requirements of this program consist of an initial demonstration of laboratory capability and the periodic analysis of laboratory reagent blanks, fortified blanks, and other laboratory solutions as a continuing check on performance. The laboratory is required to maintain performance records that define the quality of the data that are generated.
- 9.2 INITIAL DEMONSTRATION OF PERFORMANCE
- 9.2.1 The initial demonstration of performance is used to characterize instrument performance (determination of LCR and analysis of QCS) and laboratory performance (determination of MDLs) prior to performing analyses by this method.
- 9.2.2 Linear Calibration Range (LCR) -- The LCR must be determined initially and verified every six months or whenever a significant change in instrument response is observed or expected. The initial demonstration of linearity must use sufficient standards to insure that the resulting curve is linear. The verification of linearity must use a minimum of a blank and three standards. If any verification data exceeds the initial values by ±10%, linearity must be reestablished. If any portion of the range is shown to be nonlinear, sufficient standards must be used to clearly define the nonlinear portion.
- 9.2.3 Quality Control Sample (QCS) -- When beginning the use of this method, on a quarterly basis or as required to meet data-quality needs, verify the calibration standards and acceptable instrument performance with the preparation and analyses of a QCS. If the determined concentrations are not within ±10% of the stated values, performance of the determinative step of the method is unacceptable. The source of the problem must be identified and corrected before either proceeding with the initial determination of MDLs or continuing with on-going analyses.

- 9.2.4 Method Detection Limit (MDL) -- MDLs must be established for all analytes, using reagent water (blank) fortified at a concentration of two to three times the estimated instrument detection limit.⁽⁶⁾ To determine MDL values, take seven replicate aliquots of the fortified reagent water and process through the entire analytical method. Perform all calculations defined in the method and report the concentration values in the appropriate units. Calculate the MDL as follows:

$$\text{MDL} = (t) \times (S)$$

where, t = Student's t value for a 99% confidence level and a standard deviation estimate with n-1 degrees of freedom [t = 3.14 for seven replicates]
 S = standard deviation of the replicate analyses

MDLs should be determined every six months, when a new operator begins work, or whenever there is a significant change in the background or instrument response.

9.3 ASSESSING LABORATORY PERFORMANCE

- 9.3.1 Laboratory Reagent Blank (LRB) -- The laboratory must analyze at least one LRB with each batch of samples. Data produced are used to assess contamination from the laboratory environment. Values that exceed the MDL indicate laboratory or reagent contamination should be suspected and corrective actions must be taken before continuing the analysis.
- 9.3.2 Laboratory Fortified Blank (LFB) -- The laboratory must analyze at least one LFB with each batch of samples. Calculate accuracy as percent recovery (Section 9.4.2). If the recovery of any analyte falls outside the required control limits of 90-110%, that analyte is judged out of control, and the source of the problem should be identified and resolved before continuing analyses.
- 9.3.3 The laboratory must use LFB analyses data to assess laboratory performance against the required control limits of 90-110%. When sufficient internal performance data become available (usually a minimum of 20-30 analyses), optional control limits can be developed from the percent mean recovery (\bar{x}) and the standard deviation (S) of the mean recovery. These data can be used to establish the upper and lower control limits as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{UPPER CONTROL LIMIT} &= \bar{x} + 3S \\ \text{LOWER CONTROL LIMIT} &= \bar{x} - 3S\end{aligned}$$

The optional control limits must be equal to or better than the required control limits of 90-110%. After each five to ten new recovery

measurements, new control limits can be calculated using only the most recent 20-30 data points. Also, the standard deviation (S) data should be used to establish an on-going precision statement for the level of concentrations included in the LFB. These data must be kept on file and be available for review.

- 9.3.4 Instrument Performance Check Solution (IPC) -- For all determinations the laboratory must analyze the IPC (a mid-range check standard) and a calibration blank immediately following daily calibration, after every 10th sample (or more frequently, if required), and at the end of the sample run. Analysis of the IPC solution and calibration blank immediately following calibration must verify that the instrument is within $\pm 10\%$ of calibration. Subsequent analyses of the IPC solution must verify the calibration is still within $\pm 10\%$. If the calibration cannot be verified within the specified limits, reanalyze the IPC solution. If the second analysis of the IPC solution confirms calibration to be outside the limits, sample analysis must be discontinued, the cause determined and/or in the case of drift, the instrument recalibrated. All samples following the last acceptable IPC solution must be reanalyzed. The analysis data of the calibration blank and IPC solution must be kept on file with the sample analyses data.

9.4 ASSESSING ANALYTE RECOVERY AND DATA QUALITY

- 9.4.1 Laboratory Fortified Sample Matrix (LFM) -- The laboratory must add a known amount of analyte to a minimum of 10% of the routine samples. In each case, the LFM aliquot must be a duplicate of the aliquot used for sample analysis. The analyte concentration must be high enough to be detected above the original sample and should not be less than four times the MDL. The added analyte concentration should be the same as that used in the laboratory fortified blank.
- 9.4.2 Calculate the percent recovery for each analyte, corrected for concentrations measured in the unfortified sample, and compare these values to the designated LFM recovery range 90-110%. Percent recovery may be calculated using the following equation:

$$R = \frac{C_s - C}{s} \times 100$$

where, R = percent recovery
C_s = fortified sample concentration
C = sample background concentration
s = concentration equivalent of analyte added to sample

- 9.4.3 If the recovery of any analyte falls outside the designated LFM recovery range and the laboratory performance for that analyte is shown to be in control (Section 9.3), the recovery problem encountered with the LFM is judged to be either matrix or solution related, not system related.
- 9.4.4 Where reference materials are available, they should be analyzed to provide additional performance data. The analysis of reference samples is a valuable tool for demonstrating the ability to perform the method acceptably.

10.0 CALIBRATION AND STANDARDIZATION

- 10.1 Prepare a series of at least three standards, covering the desired range, and a blank by diluting suitable volumes of standard nitrate solution (Section 7.12). At least one nitrite standard should be compared to a nitrate standard at the same concentration to verify the efficiency of the reduction column.
- 10.2 Set up manifold as shown in Figure 1. Care should be taken not to introduce air into the reduction column.
- 10.3 Place appropriate standards in the sampler in order of decreasing concentration and perform analysis.
- 10.4 Prepare standard curve by plotting instrument response against concentration values. A calibration curve may be fitted to the calibration solutions concentration/response data using computer or calculator based regression curve fitting techniques. Acceptance or control limits should be established using the difference between the measured value of the calibration solution and the "true value" concentration.
- 10.5 After the calibration has been established, it must be verified by the analysis of a suitable quality control sample (QCS). If measurements exceed $\pm 10\%$ of the established QCS value, the analysis should be terminated and the instrument recalibrated. The new calibration must be verified before continuing analysis. Periodic reanalysis of the QCS is recommended as a continuing calibration check.

Note: Condition column by running 1 mg/L standard for 10 minutes if a new reduction column is being used. Subsequently wash the column with reagents for 20 minutes.

11.0 PROCEDURE

- 11.1 If the pH of the sample is below 5 or above 9, adjust to between 5 and 9 with either conc. HCl or conc. NH_4OH .
- 11.2 Set up the manifold as shown in Figure 1. Care should be taken not to introduce air into reduction column.

- 11.3 Allow system to equilibrate as required. Obtain a stable baseline with all reagents, feeding reagent water through the sample line.
- 11.4 Place appropriate nitrate and/or nitrite standards in sampler in order of decreasing concentration and complete loading of sampler tray.
- 11.5 Switch sample line to sampler and start analysis.

12.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND CALCULATIONS

- 12.1 Prepare a calibration curve by plotting instrument response against standard concentration. Compute sample concentration by comparing sample response with the standard curve. Multiply answer by appropriate dilution factor.
- 12.2 Report only those values that fall between the lowest and the highest calibration standards. Samples exceeding the highest standard should be diluted and reanalyzed.
- 12.3 Report results in mg/L as nitrogen.

13.0 METHOD PERFORMANCE

- 13.1 Three laboratories participating in an EPA Method Study analyzed four natural water samples containing exact increments of inorganic nitrate, with the following results:

Increment as Nitrate Nitrogen <u>mg N/L</u>	Precision as Standard Deviation <u>mg N/L</u>	Accuracy as	
		<u>Bias,</u> %	<u>Bias,</u> <u>mg N/L</u>
0.29	0.012	+ 5.75	+ 0.017
0.35	0.092	+ 18.10	+ 0.063
2.31	0.318	+ 4.47	+ 0.103
2.48	0.176	- 2.69	- 0.067

- 13.2 The interlaboratory precision and accuracy data in Table 1 were developed using a reagent water matrix. Values are in mg NO₃-N/L.
- 13.3 Single laboratory precision data can be estimated at 50-75% of the interlaboratory precision estimates.

14.0 POLLUTION PREVENTION

- 14.1 Pollution prevention encompasses any technique that reduces or eliminates the quantity or toxicity of waste at the point of generation. Numerous opportunities for pollution prevention exist in laboratory operation. The EPA has established a preferred hierarchy of environmental management techniques that places pollution prevention as the management option of first choice. Whenever feasible, laboratory personnel should use pollution prevention

techniques to address their waste generation. When wastes cannot be feasibly reduced at the source, the Agency recommends recycling as the next best option.

- 14.2 The quantity of chemicals purchased should be based on expected usage during its shelf life and disposal cost of unused material. Actual reagent preparation volumes should reflect anticipated usage and reagent stability.
- 14.3 For information about pollution prevention that may be applicable to laboratories and research institutions, consult "Less is Better: Laboratory Chemical Management for Waste Reduction", available from the American Chemical Society's Department of Government Regulations and Science Policy, 1155 16th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 872-4477.

15.0 WASTE MANAGEMENT

- 15.1 The Environmental Protection Agency requires that laboratory waste management practices be conducted consistent with all applicable rules and regulations. Excess reagents, samples, and method process wastes should be characterized and disposed of in an acceptable manner. The Agency urges laboratories to protect the air, water, and land by minimizing and controlling all releases from hoods and bench operations, complying with the letter and spirit of any waste discharge permit and regulations, and by complying with all solid and hazardous waste regulations, particularly the hazardous waste identification rules and land disposal restrictions. For further information on waste management consult the "Waste Management Manual for Laboratory Personnel", available from the American Chemical Society at the address listed in Section 14.3.

16.0 REFERENCES

1. Fiore, J., and O'Brien, J.E., "Automation in Sanitary Chemistry - Parts 1 & 2: Determination of Nitrates and Nitrites", *Wastes Engineering* **33**, 128 & 238 (1962).
2. Armstrong, F.A., Stearns, C.R., and Strickland, J.D., "The Measurement of Upwelling and Subsequent Biological Processes by Means of the Technicon AutoAnalyzer and Associated Equipment", *Deep Sea Research* **14**, pp. 381-389 (1967).
3. Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Part 31, "Water", Standard D1254, p. 366 (1976).
4. Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater, 17th Edition, pp. 4-91, Method 4500-NO₃ F (1992).
5. Chemical Analyses for Water Quality Manual, Department of the Interior, FWPCA, R.A. Taft Engineering Center Training Program, Cincinnati, Ohio 45226 (January, 1966).

6. Code of Federal Regulations 40, Ch. 1, Pt. 136, Appendix B.

17.0 **TABLES, DIAGRAMS, FLOWCHARTS AND VALIDATION DATA**

TABLE 1. INTERLABORATORY PRECISION AND ACCURACY DATA

Number of Values Reported	True Value (T)	Mean (X)	Residual for X	Standard Deviation (S)	Residual for S
163	0.250	0.2479	0.0007	0.0200	-0.0001
183	0.451	0.4441	-0.0039	0.0289	-0.0002
213	0.650	0.6479	0.0012	0.0398	0.0017
170	0.950	0.9537	0.0074	0.0484	-0.0031
163	1.90	1.8987	0.0037	0.0918	-0.0024
172	2.20	2.1971	0.0025	0.1164	0.0087
183	2.41	2.3732	-0.0312	0.1273	0.0102
214	3.20	3.2042	0.0109	0.1456	-0.0070
172	6.50	6.4978	0.0089	0.3156	0.0148
213	8.00	7.9814	-0.0055	0.3673	-0.0008
170	8.50	8.5135	0.0273	0.3635	-0.0271
214	10.0	9.9736	-0.0106	0.4353	-0.0227

REGRESSIONS: $X = 0.999T + 0.002$, $S = 0.045T + 0.009$

