



Designation: E 459 – 97

Standard Test Method for Measuring Heat Transfer Rate Using a Thin-Skin Calorimeter¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This test method describes the design and use of a thin metallic calorimeter for measuring heat transfer rate (also called heat flux). Thermocouples are attached to the unexposed surface of the calorimeter. A one-dimensional heat flow analysis is used for calculating the heat transfer rate from the temperature measurements. Applications include aerodynamic heating, laser and radiation power measurements, and fire safety testing.

1.2 Advantages:

1.2.1 *Simplicity of Construction*—The calorimeter may be constructed from a number of materials. The size and shape can often be made to match the actual application. Thermocouples may be attached to the metal by spot, electron beam, or laser welding.

1.2.2 Heat transfer rate distributions may be obtained if metals with low thermal conductivity, such as some stainless steels, are used.

1.2.3 The calorimeters can be fabricated with smooth surfaces, without insulators or plugs and the attendant temperature discontinuities, to provide more realistic flow conditions for aerodynamic heating measurements.

1.2.4 The calorimeters described in this test method are relatively inexpensive. If necessary, they may be operated to burn-out to obtain heat transfer information.

1.3 Limitations:

1.3.1 At higher heat flux levels, short test times are necessary to ensure calorimeter survival.

1.3.2 For applications in wind tunnels or arc-jet facilities, the calorimeter must be operated at pressures and temperatures such that the thin-skin does not distort under pressure loads. Distortion of the surface will introduce measurement errors.

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 appro-*

priate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.

2. Summary of Test Method

2.1 This test method for measuring the heat transfer rate to a metal calorimeter of finite thickness is based on the assumption of one-dimensional heat flow, known metal properties (density and specific heat), known metal thickness, and measurement of the rate of temperature rise of the back (or unexposed) surface of the calorimeter.

2.2 After an initial transient, the response of the calorimeter is approximated by a lumped parameter analysis:

$$q = \rho C_p \delta \frac{dT}{d\tau} \quad (1)$$

where:

- q = heat transfer rate, W/m²,
- ρ = metal density, kg/m³,
- δ = metal thickness, m,
- C_p = metal specific heat, J/kg·K, and
- $dT/d\tau$ = back surface temperature rise rate, K/s.

3. Significance and Use

3.1 This test method may be used to measure the heat transfer rate to a metallic or coated metallic surface for a variety of applications, including:

3.1.1 measurements of aerodynamic heating when the calorimeter is placed into a flow environment, such as a wind tunnel or an arc jet; the calorimeters can be designed to have the same size and shape as the actual test specimens to minimize heat transfer corrections;

3.1.2 heat transfer measurements in fires and fire safety testing;

3.1.3 laser power and laser absorption measurements; as well as,

3.1.4 X-ray and particle beam (electrons or ions) dosimetry measurements.

3.2 The thin-skin calorimeter is one of many concepts used to measure heat transfer rates. It may be used to measure convective, radiative, or combinations of convective and radiative (usually called mixed or total) heat transfer rates. However, when the calorimeter is used to measure radiative or

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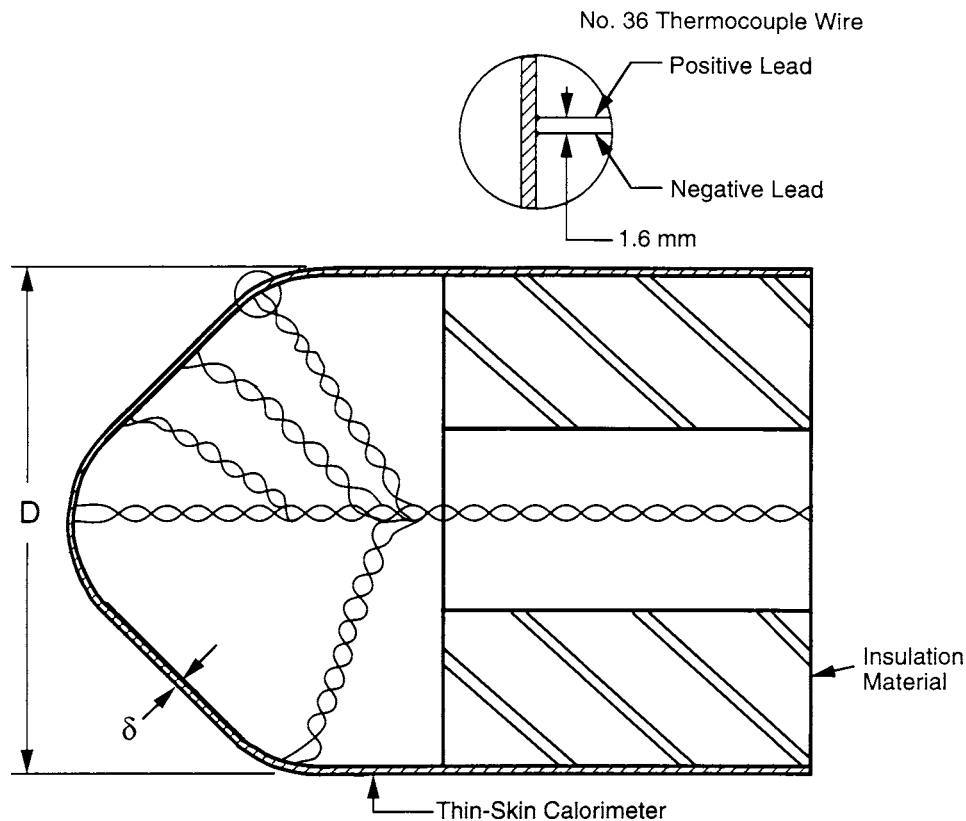


FIG. 1 Typical Thin-Skin Calorimeter for Heat Transfer Measurement

mixed heat transfer rates, the absorptivity and reflectivity of the surface should be measured over the expected radiation wavelength region of the source.

3.3 In 4.6 and 4.7, it is demonstrated that lateral heat conduction effects on a local measurement can be minimized by using a calorimeter material with a low thermal conductivity. Alternatively, a distribution of the heat transfer rate may be obtained by placing a number of thermocouples along the back surface of the calorimeter.

3.4 In high temperature or high heat transfer rate applications, the principal drawback to the use of thin-skin calorimeters is the short exposure time necessary to ensure survival of the calorimeter such that repeat measurements can be made with the same sensor. When operation to burnout is necessary to obtain the desired heat flux measurements, thin-skin calorimeters are often a good choice because they are relatively inexpensive to fabricate.

4. Apparatus

4.1 *Calorimeter Design*—Typical details of a thin-skin calorimeter used for measuring aerodynamic heat transfer rates are shown in Fig. 1. The thermocouple wires (0.127 mm OD, 0.005 in., 36 gage) are individually welded to the back surface of the calorimeter using spot, electron beam, or laser techniques. This type of thermocouple joint (called an intrinsic thermocouple) has been found to provide superior transient response as compared to a peened joint or a beaded thermo-

couple that is soldered to the surface (1,2).² The wires should be positioned approximately 1.6 mm apart along an expected isotherm. The use of a small thermocouple wire minimizes heat conduction into the wire but the calorimeter should still be rugged enough for repeated measurements. However, when the thickness of the calorimeter is on the order of the wire diameter to obtain the necessary response characteristics, the recommendations of Sobolik, et al. [1989], Burnett [1961], and Kidd [1985] (2-4) should be followed.

4.2 When heating starts, the response of the back (unheated) surface of the calorimeter lags behind that of the front (heated) surface. For a step change in the heat transfer rate, the initial response time of the calorimeter is the time required for the temperature rise rate of the unheated surface to approach the temperature rise rate of the front surface within 1 %. If conduction heat transfer into the thermocouple wire is ignored, the initial response time is generally defined as:

$$\tau_r = 0.5 \frac{\rho C_p \delta^2}{k} \quad (2)$$

where:

τ_r = initial response time, s, and

k = thermal conductivity, W/m·K.

As an example, the 0.76 mm (0.030 in.) thick, 300 series stainless steel calorimeter analyzed in Ref (4) has an initial

² The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.