

Standard Operating Procedure for the
Analysis of Ammonia in Fresh Waters
CCAL 30A.0

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March 2006

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1.0 Scope and Application

- 1.1 This method details the determination of ammonia in fresh waters by automated colorimetric analysis. The practical range of determination for this method is 0.01 to 2.0 mg/L Ammonia as N. Method detection limit for this analysis is 0.01 mg/L as N.

2.0 Summary of Method

- 2.1 An automated analysis method is used for the colorimetric determination of ammonia nitrogen in fresh water. Ammonia reacts with alkaline phenol and hypochlorite to form indophenol blue that is proportional to the ammonia concentration. The blue color is intensified with sodium nitroprusside to form a colored complex that absorbs at 660 nm (See Reference 16.1). Concentration of ammonia is determined by comparison of absorbance signal with calibration results obtained from prepared standards of varying concentrations.

3.0 Definitions

- 3.1 DI water: Water that has been through a deionization system to produce water similar to ASTM Type I reagent with 16.7 Mohms resistivity (ASTM) (Reference 16.3).
- 3.2 Method Detection Limit (MDL): The minimum concentration of an analyte that can be measured and reported with 99% confidence, based on a one-sided 99% confidence interval (t -value at a significance level of 0.01 and $n-1$ degrees of freedom) from at least seven repeated measurements of a low concentration standard measured within an analysis run.

$$\text{MDL} = ts$$

Where,

t = Student's t value at a significance level of 0.01 and $n-1$ degrees of freedom

s = standard deviation of at least seven repeated measurements of a low level standard

4.0 Interferences

- 4.1 Magnesium forms a precipitate at the high pH required for full color development ($\text{pH} > 12$), which can cause interference. Addition of EDTA reduces the problem. Color development is pH dependent, therefore variability in sample/reagent pH must be avoided.
- 4.2 Turbidity and color that persists in the sample after filtration may absorb at the 660 nm. Reanalyze samples without the color reagent as turbidity/color blanks. Any response from the turbidity/color blanks must then be subtracted from the initial analysis response.

5.0 Safety

- 5.1 The toxicity or carcinogenicity of each reagent has not been precisely determined; however, each chemical should be regarded as a potential health hazard. Exposure to these chemicals should be reduced to the lowest possible level. Cautions are included for known extremely hazardous materials.
- 5.2 The following chemicals have the potential to be highly toxic or hazardous. For detailed explanations, consult the MSDS.
 - 5.2.1 Sodium Hydroxide
 - 5.2.2 Phenol
 - 5.2.3 Sodium nitroferricyanide

6.0 Equipment and Supplies

Note: *Brand names, suppliers and part numbers are for illustrative purposes only. No endorsement is implied. Equivalent performance may be achieved using apparatus and materials other than those specified here, but demonstration of equivalent performance that meets the requirements of this method is the responsibility of the laboratory.*

- 6.1 Balance measuring to at least 0.1 mg
- 6.2 Glassware: including volumetric flasks and pipettes as required
- 6.3 Technicon Auto-Analyzer II

- 6.3.1 Multichannel proportioning pump
- 6.3.2 Colorimetric Detector
- 6.3.3 Data system
- 6.3.4 Alpkem manifold and method A116-D187-01

- 6.4 Safety glasses

- 6.5 Nitrile gloves

- 6.6 Lab coat or apron

- 6.7 Laboratory Exhaust Fume Hood

- 6.8 High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) bottles

7.0 Reagents and Standards

7.1 Preparation of Reagents

Solutions 7.1.3 through 7.1.6 need to be filtered through prewashed GF/F filters after preparation

- 7.1.1 *5N H₂SO₄ Air Scrubber Solution:*
Carefully add 139 mL conc H₂SO₄ to approximately 500 mL DI water. Cool to room temperature and dilute to 1 L.

- 7.1.2 *4N NaOH:*
Carefully add 16 g NaOH purified flake, to approximately 50 mL DI water. Cool to room temperature and dilute to 100 mL.

- 7.1.3 *Sodium phenate solution:*
Add 47.5 mL of liquid phenol ($\geq 88\%$) to 250 mL DI water with agitation. Add 100 mL 4 N NaOH, and bring to 500 mL with DI water. Reagent must be prepared at least one day before use to allow it to stabilize. Store refrigerated; allow reagent to come to room temperature before use. Reagent is stable up to 4-weeks.

- 7.1.4 *Sodium hypochlorite solution:*
Add 125 mL of bleach solution containing 5% NaOCl to 125 mL DI. Reagent is stable.

- 7.1.5 *EDTA reagent:*
Place 6 pellets of NaOH in approximately 500 mL of DI water and dissolve completely. Add 50 g disodium ethylenediamine tetraacetate dihydrate. Dissolve completely and dilute to 1 L. Reagent is stable.

7.1.6 *Sodium nitroprusside solution :*

Dissolve 0.5 g $\text{Na}_2(\text{NO})\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_5 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ in 1 L DI water. Reagent is stable.

7.2 Preparation of Standards

7.2.1 A 1000 mg/L ammonia nitrogen stock standard is prepared from 3.819 g ammonium chloride (oven dried at 80°C) diluted to 1 L with DI water. A 20 mg/L intermediate standard is prepared by dilution with DI water. Working standards in concentrations of 0.200, 0.100, and 0.050 mg/L ammonia nitrogen are prepared from the intermediate stock standard.

8.0 Sample Handling and Storage

8.1 Unfiltered samples are filtered upon receipt through glass fiber filters into clean HDPE bottles and stored at 4°C in the dark. Samples are analyzed within 48 hours to ensure sample integrity. If samples must be held prior to analysis, they are stored frozen at -18°C.

9.0 Quality Control

- 9.1 Preparation of stock standards is recorded on worksheets and documented by weight of standard added to a given flask before dilution to volume with DI water. All records of certification are kept on file at CCAL Laboratory.
- 9.2 Blank: DI water run after the calibration and before and after each check standard.
- 9.3 Quality Control Check Standard: Calibration standards run in rotation every ten samples to monitor stability and validate the calibration.
- 9.4 Method Detection Limit (MDL): Established for each analyte. Based on a one-sided 99% confidence interval (t-value) from at least seven repeated measurements of a low concentration standard. The t-distribution value is multiplied by the standard deviation of the population (n-1) to obtain the MDL.
- 9.5 Analytical Duplicate: Separate analysis from the same sample aliquot. Run a minimum of once every ten samples.

10.0 Calibration and Standardization

- 10.1 Balances: calibrated yearly by external vendor.
- 10.2 Pipette delivery checked by weight to within 2% of theoretical weight of aliquot volume.
- 10.3 Calibration curve with $r^2 \geq 0.995$. (See 17.2 for calibration data set-up.)
- 10.4 Calibration verification with check standards, monitored throughout the run. If measurement exceeds +/- 15% of the theoretical value, the analysis should be terminated and the instrument recalibrated. The calibration must be verified before continuing analysis.

11.0 Procedure

- 11.1 Calibration and Analysis Procedure
 - 11.1.1 Prepare reagents and standards as outlined in Section 7.
 - 11.1.2 Set up manifolds as shown in Section 17.1.
 - 11.1.3 Samples are injected into the reaction path at a fixed time interval, determined by the cam timing set in the auto-sampler. Setup or confirm data system parameters as detailed in Section 17.2.
 - 11.1.4 Pump DI water through all reagent and sample lines. Check for leaks and stable bubble pattern (smooth flow). Activate in-line heater. Pump reagents through all lines until the system equilibrates (minimum of one hour).
 - 11.1.5 Record sample id's in the data template.
 - 11.1.6 Calibrate the instrument with standards. Calibration regression equations must have $r^2 \geq 0.995$.
- 11.2 System Notes
 - 11.2.1 Allow time for the ammonia channel heating unit to warm up to 50°C.
 - 11.2.2 If the baseline is excessively noisy, clean the manifold using the following procedure:
 - Place all reagent and carrier lines in rinse water and pump to clear reagents.
 - Place all lines in 1.2N HCl solution for several minutes.
 - Place lines in DI water and pump until thoroughly rinsed.
 - 11.2.3 If baseline has a large number of air spikes, check pump tubes for excessive wear and replace as necessary.

- 11.2.4 Excessively noisy baseline may be the result of old sodium hypochlorite solution. Prepare fresh and flush system thoroughly.
- 11.2.5 Elevated laboratory temperatures may cause phenate reagent to degrade rapidly. Prepare fresh and delay analysis until the following day.
- 11.2.6 To minimize the potential for microbial growth in the ammonium chloride reagent, rinse the reagent bottle thoroughly with DI water between mixes.
- 11.2.7 Turbidity and color that persists in the sample after filtration may absorb at the 660 nm. Reanalyze samples without the color reagent as turbidity/color blanks. Any response from the turbidity/color blanks must then be subtracted from the initial analysis response.

12.0 Data Analysis and Calculations

- 12.1 The data system prepares a calibration curve by plotting response of injected standards versus known standard concentration. The resulting regression equation is used to calculate the sample concentration.
- 12.2 All results and sample information are filed in the analysis data system by analysis run. Details specific to the instrumental analysis are noted in the Instrument Run Log created and maintained for the AAIL. Analytical results are entered into electronic format and entries are verified by a second person.

13.0 Method Performance

- 13.1 This method was validated through inter-laboratory studies. The CCAL participates in the USGS Standard Reference Water QA program.

14.0 Pollution Prevention

- 14.1 The chemicals used in this method pose little threat to the environment when properly managed.
- 14.2 All standards and reagents should be prepared in volumes consistent with laboratory use to minimize the volume of disposable waste.
- 14.3 For further information on pollution prevention consult *Less is better: Laboratory Chemical Management for Waste Reduction*, available from

the American Chemical Society's Department of Government Relations and Science Policy, 1155 16th Street NW, Washington D.C. 20036, (202) 872-4477.

15.0 Waste Management

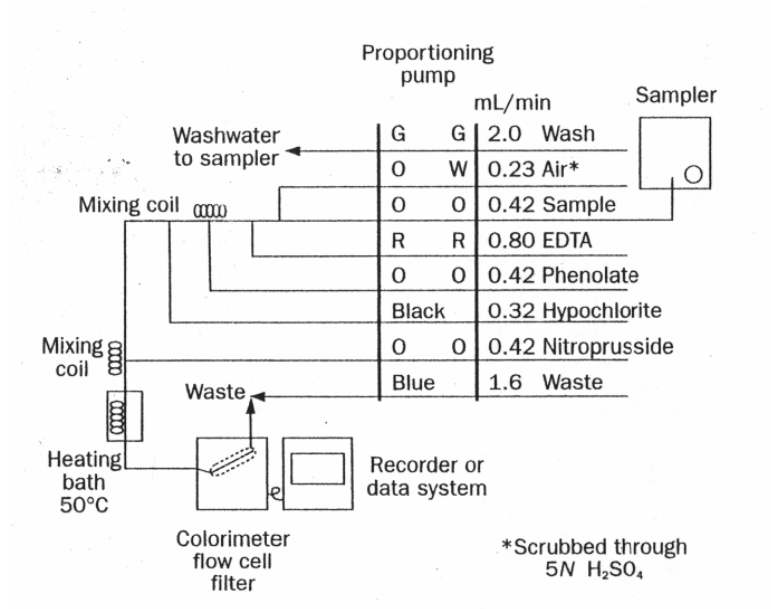
- 15.1 It is the laboratory's responsibility to comply with all federal, state and local regulations governing waste management, and to protect the environment by minimizing and controlling all releases from fume hoods and bench operations. Compliance with all sewage discharge permits and regulations is required.
- 15.2 For further information on waste management, consult "The Waste Management Manual for Laboratory Personnel", and "Less is Better: Laboratory Chemical Management for Waste Reduction", both available from the American Chemical Society's Department of Government Relations and Science Policy, 1155 16th Street NW, Washington DC, 20036.

16.0 References

- 16.1 Standard Methods For The Examination of Water and Wastewater, Method 4500-NH₃, Ammonia Nitrogen Automated Phenate Method. American Public Health Association. 21st Edition, 2005.
- 16.2 Code of Federal Regulations. Protection of Environment. Section 40, Appendix B to Part 136. Definition and procedure for the determination of the method detection limit. Revision 1.11. Revised July 1, 1990. Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records.
- 16.3 ASTM. American Society for Testing and Materials. Standard Specifications for Reagent Water. D1193-77 (Reapproved 1983). Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol. 11.01. ASTM: Philadelphia, PA, 1991.

17.0 Tables, Diagrams, Flowcharts, and Validation Data

- 17.1 Ammonia Nitrogen Reaction Manifold



Ammonia Manifold Specifications

Carrier is EDTA reagent

Interference Filter is 660 nm

Pump tubing is Tygon

Manifold tubing is 0.030 mm i.d.

Mixing coils are 20 turn with mid injection fitting

50 mm x 2 mm flow cell

Heating bath set at 50°C

17.2 Data System Parameters

Cycle throughput: 30 samples/hr

Cycle Period: 120 s

Analyte Data:

Concentration Units mg N/L

Calibration Data:

Level	1	2	3
Concentration mg/L	0.200	0.100	0.050

Calibration Fit Type: Linear Regression

Sampler Timing:

Minimum Probe in Wash Period: 30 s

Probe in Sample Period: 90 s