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**Plastics — Development and use of  
intermediate-scale fire tests for plastics  
products —**

**Part 1:  
General guidance**

*Plastiques — Développement et utilisation des essais au feu sur une  
échelle intermédiaire pour les produits plastiques —*

*Partie 1: Principes directeurs généraux*



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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 3.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this part of ISO 15791 may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 15791-1 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 61, *Plastics*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Burning behaviour*.

ISO 15791 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Plastics — Development and use of intermediate-scale fire tests for plastics products*:

- *Part 1: General guidance*
- *Part 2: Preparation and mounting of specimens*

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## Introduction

Products for many applications are made of or contain substantial proportions of plastics. The fire performance of a product depends on the materials from which it is made, the design of the product and its environment.

Industry needs to test products used for different applications for regulatory, quality control, development and pre-selection purposes.

Numerous regulations and regional, state and local codes make reference to combustibility tests and standards, and numerical material rankings derived from these tests are the most commonly available means of comparing the various combustion characteristics of products. More than one test and possibly intermediate- or full-scale tests may be necessary to qualify a plastic product for intended or proposed use or representative product end-use conditions.

It appears necessary to have a scaled-down test method as a screening or control test when this regulatory testing requires large apparatus with high cost.

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# Plastics — Development and use of intermediate-scale fire tests for plastics products —

## Part 1: General guidance

### 1 Scope

This document provides a framework guide for the development and use of intermediate-scale fire tests for products made of or containing plastics.

The guidance identifies typical applications of plastics products and possible fire scenarios that can arise involving products in these applications. The development and use of intermediate-scale tests is described to ensure their relevance to the end use of the product.

### 2 Normative references

The following normative documents contain provisions which, through reference in this text, constitute provisions of this part of ISO 15791. For dated references, subsequent amendments to, or revisions of, any of these publications do not apply. However, parties to agreements based on this part of ISO 15791 are encouraged to investigate the possibility of applying the most recent editions of the normative documents indicated below. For undated references, the latest edition of the normative document referred to applies. Members of ISO and IEC maintain registers of currently valid International Standards.

ISO 5658-4, *Reaction to fire tests — Spread of flame — Part 4: Intermediate-scale test of vertical spread of flame with vertically oriented specimen*

ISO 9705, *Fire tests — Full-scale room test for surface products*

ISO 10093, *Plastics — Fire tests — Standard ignition sources*

ISO/TR 13387-2, *Fire safety engineering — Part 2: Design fire scenarios and design fires*

ISO 13784-1, *Reaction-to-fire tests for industrial sandwich panels — Part 1: Intermediate-scale test*

ISO/IEC 13943, *Fire safety — Vocabulary*

ISO/TR 14696, *Reaction to fire tests — Determination of fire parameters of materials, products and assemblies using an intermediate-scale heat release calorimeter (ICAL)*

IEC 61034-2, *Measurement of smoke density of cables burning under defined conditions — Test procedure and requirements*

EN 13823, *Reaction to fire tests for building products — Building products excluding floorings exposed to the thermal attack by a single burning item*

### 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this part of ISO 15791, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC 13943 and the following apply.

#### 3.1

##### **material**

single substance or uniformly dispersed mixture, for example a polymer

#### 3.2

##### **test specimen**

representative piece of the product to be tested, together with any substrate or surface treatment

#### 3.3

##### **product**

manufactured article ready for end use

#### 3.4

##### **fire scenario**

detailed description of conditions for one or more of the stages from before ignition to the completion of combustion in an actual fire at a specific location

### 4 Types of plastics and typical products

#### 4.1 Generic types

All of the following types of plastics materials can be involved in a fire performance assessment:

- thermoplastics;
- thermosets;
- fibre-reinforced plastics;
- cellular plastics (both structural foams and low-density insulating foams).

#### 4.2 Typical applications

Some applications for plastics which present particular problems in small-scale tests for their fire performance assessment and which may require the use of intermediate-scale fire testing are:

- semi-finished products;
- housings for electrical appliances;
- profiled sheets, e.g. roofing, or panels for containers;
- profiles, e.g. conduits for electric cables, window-frames, extruded sections;
- weatherproof glazing for agricultural buildings;
- foam pipe-sections;
- pipes, e.g. rainwater drainage and discharge pipes;
- furniture, e.g. chairs;
- pipes for air ventilation systems in e.g. ships, trains, aircraft;

- containers for liquids (e.g. oil, kerosene);
- waste containers (for recycling materials or for rubbish).

### 4.3 Composites

The following special composites should be considered:

- laminates, e.g. melamine-formaldehyde-covered chipboard;
- laminated film and sheet, e.g. weatherproofing membranes;
- moulded foams, e.g. for packaging;
- structural mouldings, e.g. for ships, lorries, coaches, trains;
- composite panels, e.g. rigid foams faced with metal sheets (especially steel or aluminium sheets) or inorganics (especially gypsum or plasterboard) for thermal insulation;
- fibre-reinforced products.

### 4.4 End-use conditions

Assessment of structural composite panels, thermoplastic glazing and similar plastics products, etc., can only be done by taking into account their end-use conditions and installations. Any change in specimen surface position will take the exposed specimen surface into a different heat exposure with regard to the applied ignition sources. For non-planar products, different parts of the specimen will be heated at different flux levels at any given time.

## 5 Fire scenarios

The fire scenario (see 3.4) should reproduce the conditions in which the hazard exists. Any additional assumptions, such as the environmental conditions, should be defined. Whether the focus of assessment is a material, product or system is determined by an investigation of the contribution to the assumed scenario and the stage of the fire.

An ignition source may pose a variety of risks dependent on the associated environmental conditions and on a number of characteristic fire test responses of materials, products or assemblies, including ease of ignition, flame spread, rate of heat release, smoke generation, toxicity of combustion products and ease of extinction.

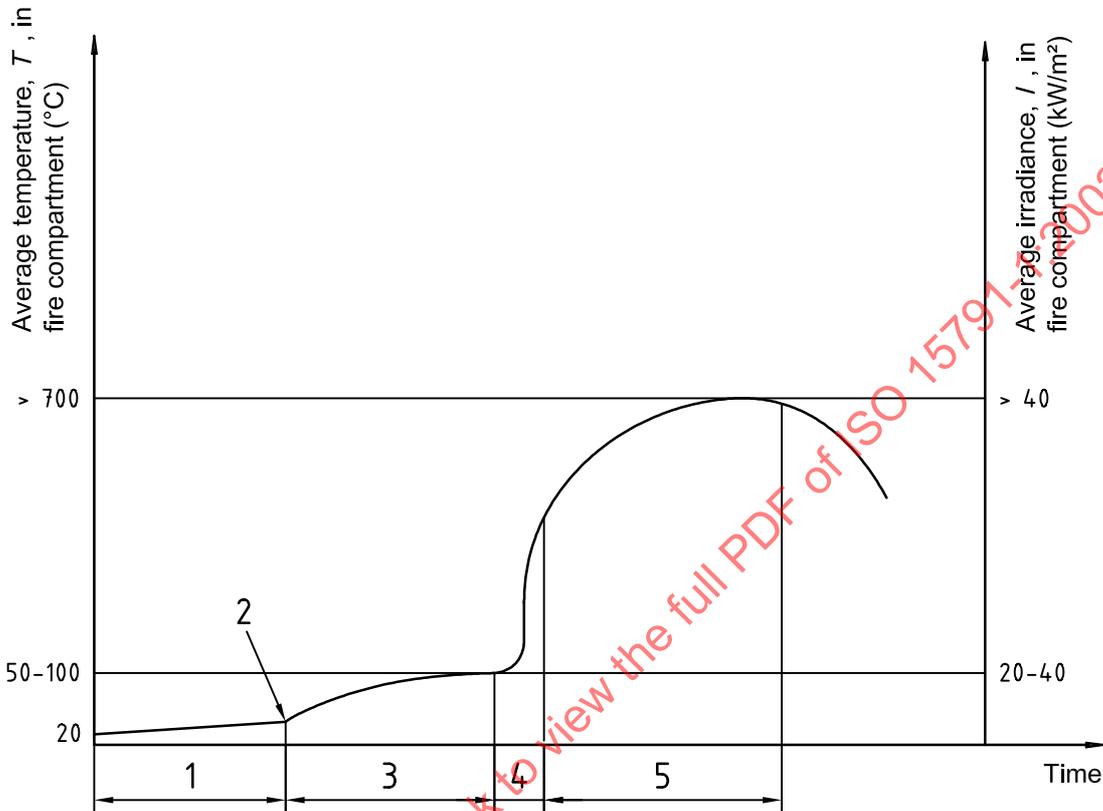
In small rooms, the typical primary ignition source is small, e.g. candles, matches, hot electrical wires. External irradiance is zero for the first ignited item. The relevant parameters for further assessing the fire risk are flame spread and rate of heat release. Combustible materials in the vicinity of the first ignited item are heated by convection and irradiance, and the oxygen content in the room air, almost 21 % initially, begins to decrease. After a certain time, flashover may occur, at which stage the room temperature can exceed 500 °C and the irradiance at floor level can typically exceed 25 kW/m<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 1). In such cases, the oxygen content in small rooms is not normally sufficient for complete combustion.

Smouldering fires will not significantly increase room temperatures but may begin to deplete oxygen and cause smoke. Typical ignition sources for smouldering fires can be a cigarette on a mattress or a faulty electric blanket. Smouldering rates can be derived from experiments.

Another scenario is a flaming fire caused by primary ignition sources igniting, for example waste-paper baskets, curtains and mattresses. These sources can lead to secondary ignition of other combustible products.

Small ignition sources cause accelerated development of fire when stored combustible liquids result in flashover. In such cases, the heat release can be expressed as the hydrocarbon curve<sup>[17]</sup>. Relatively high ventilation is necessary for such development, and the CO<sub>2</sub>/CO ratio is about 100. Fires with low ventilation are likely to lead to temperatures in the range 600 °C to 900 °C.

In large and ultra-large rooms such as theatres, open-plan offices, warehouses, supermarkets and sports halls, fires are freely ventilated for a long time. In contrast to small rooms, there are hardly any interrelated effects and development of fire is directly dependent on the successive combustion of the burning items. The scenario can be compared with fires in the open air for a certain period of time. Flashover causes a rapid decrease in the CO<sub>2</sub>/CO ratio.



**Key**

- 1 Time to ignition
- 2  $T > 100\text{ °C}$ ,  $I > 25\text{ kW/m}^2$  close to ignited item
- 3 Developing fire
- 4 Flashover
- 5 Fully developed fire

**Figure 1 — Typical course of a fire in a room**

Evaluation of fire development is linked to the quantification of a design fire as described in ISO/TR 13387-2. It is necessary to define design fires and design fire scenarios because the course of real fires varies depending on the nature of the combustibles, the ignition source, the fire load and the conditions in the fire compartment. It is practically impossible to predict the real fire taking into account all these interactions and real boundary conditions.

There are two distinctly different methods of determining the design fire for a given scenario. One is based on knowledge of the amount, type and distribution of combustible materials in the compartment of fire origin. The other is based on knowledge of the type of occupancy, where very little is known about the details of the fire load.

A design fire may be needed for a wide range of design fire scenarios. These may be internal or external fire scenarios. Examples of typical design fire scenarios include:

- large/medium/small-room fires (corner, ceiling, floor, wall);
- corridor fires;

- roofing fires;
- cavity fires;
- staircase fires;
- fires in/on façades;
- single burning item fires (furniture, cable conduits, pipes).

Design fire specifications should be translated into characteristics of the fuel load environment near the initial fire.

These regimes are used to determine the growth of the initial fire as a function of time.

## 6 Thermal characteristics of ignition sources

Design fires are usually quantified in terms of the heat release rate of the assumed ignition source as a function of time. Once the heat release rate is known, the flame area and height can be estimated. The heating of a second object can then be predicted. Typical ignition source heat release rates are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 — Heat release rates for typical ignition sources**

Source	Heat output kW
Match	0,1
Waste-paper basket	10 to 40
Small chair	10 to 300
Upholstered furniture, large wood crib	> 300

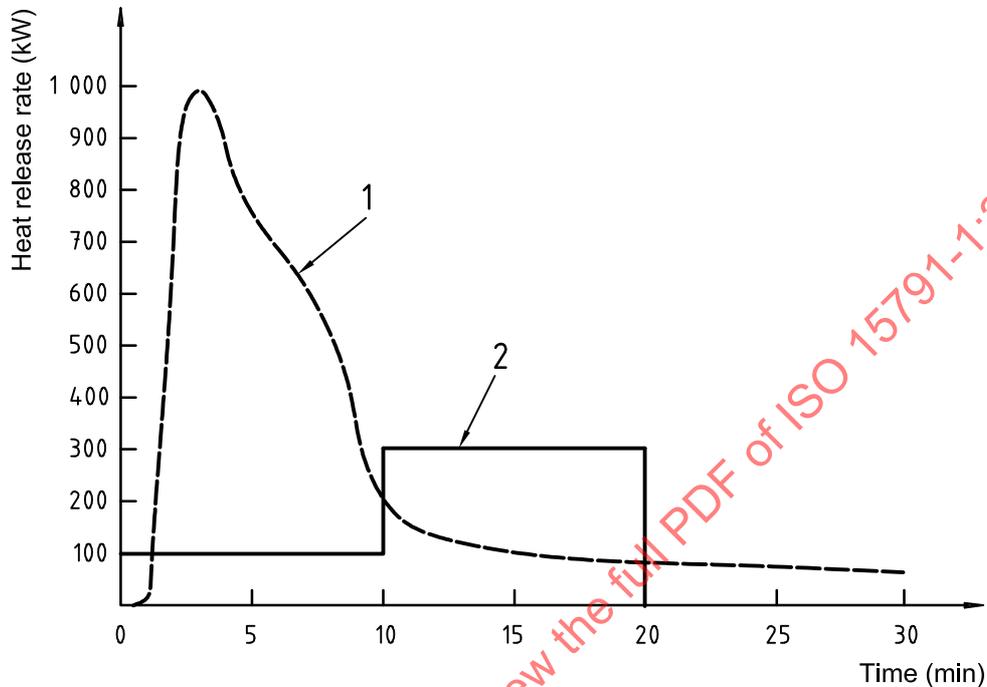
If the net heat flux from the surface of actual ignition sources is known, these ignition sources can be simulated by radiant panels. Typical fluxes are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 — Typical heat fluxes**

Source	Heat flux kW/m <sup>2</sup>
Match flame	18 to 20
Developing fire	20 to 40
Paper bag, wood crib	25 to 50
Oxidative pyrolysis with oxygen concentration of 5 % to 21 %	< 25
Small gas-diffusion flame	30 to 40
Fully developed low-ventilation fire	40 to 70
Premixed-gas burner	50 to 70
Fully developed high-ventilation fire	50 to 150
Premixed-gas blow torch	140 to 150
Peak value for hydrocarbon-fire resistance test	200
Jet fire	350
Theoretical maximum for organic fire	1 500

When gas burners or radiant panels are used as ignition sources, it should be recognized that the thermal shock created by these heating regimes may influence especially the charring and melting behaviour and have an influence on the performance of many plastics products.

Figure 2 shows typical characteristics of a natural source (i.e. a 35 kg wood crib) and a gas burner source as defined in ISO 9705.



**Key**

- 1 35 kg wood crib
- 2 Propane burner (as specified in ISO 9705)

**Figure 2 — Comparison of heat release characteristics of a natural source and a gas burner**

National and international standards (see Figures 3 and 4 and Tables 3 and 4) provide a variety of ignition sources (a range of such ignition sources is described in ISO 10093). These include gas burners with different flame heights up to 250 mm, glowing wires and fuels used for testing and classifying products. Fire statistics indicate that a much higher proportion of fires are caused by ignition sources such as burning paper, which is often used in malicious fires.

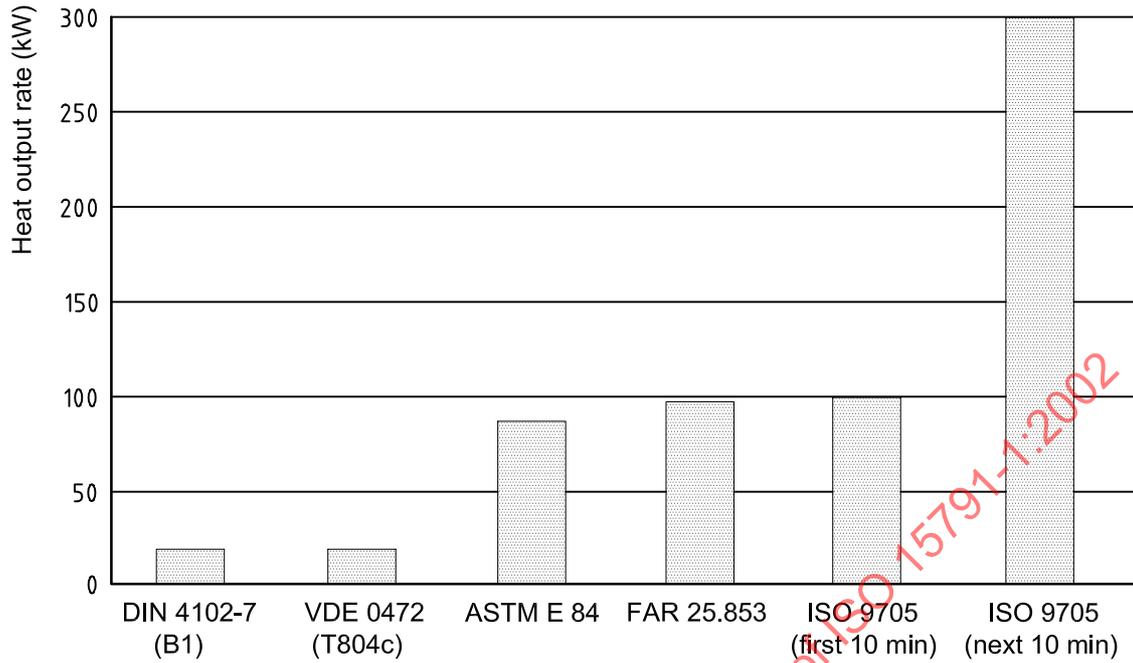


Figure 3 — Power of standardized gas burners

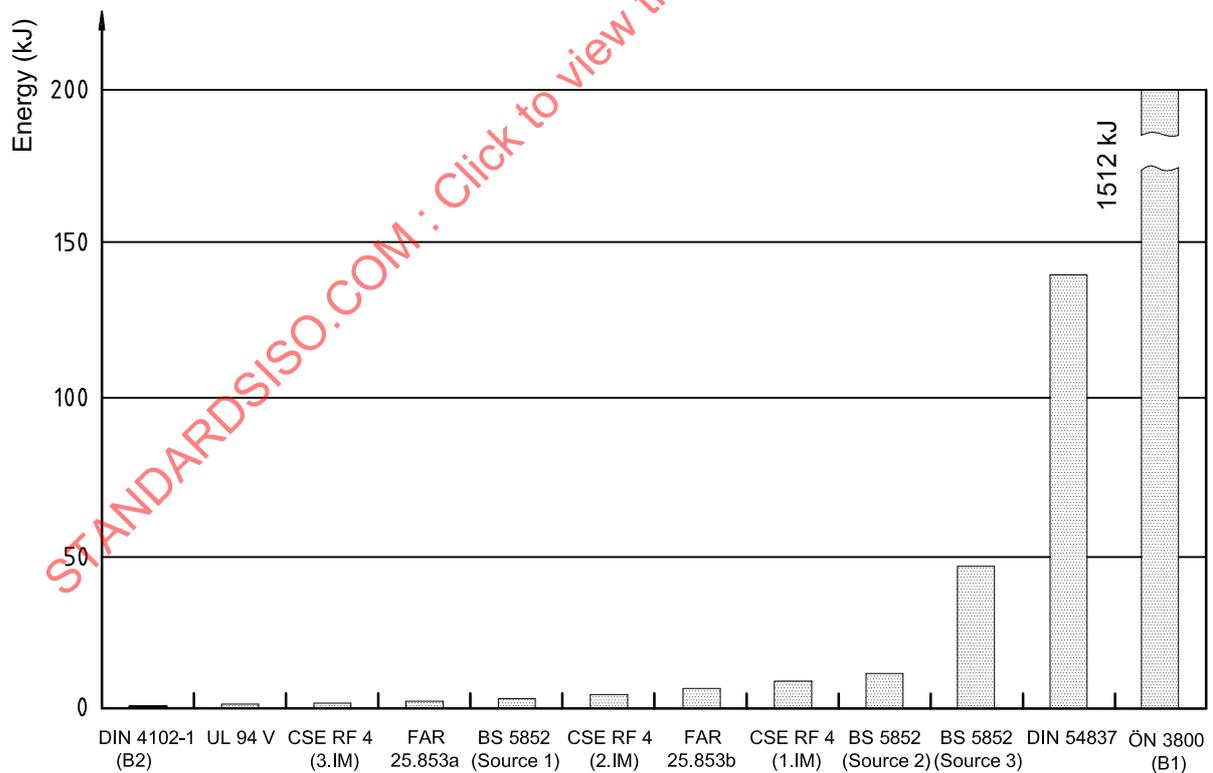


Figure 4 — Energy of standardized ignition sources

Table 3 — Wood and paper ignition sources

Standard	Description	Mass g	Power kW	Duration s	Energy kJ
BS 5852	Wood crib 4	8,5	1	200	200
BS 5852	Wood crib 5	17	1,4	200	280
BS 5852	Wood crib 6	60	3	340	1 020
BS 5852	Wood crib 7	126	6	370	2 220
—	Paper cushion	20	2	120	240
DIN 54341	Paper cushion	100	8	180	1 440
DIN 4102-7	Wood-wool basket	600	23	450	10 350
NT 007	Wood crib	40	3	190	570

Table 4 — Thermal characteristics of ignition sources

Application	Standard	Flow rate (gases) or mass (solids)	Power kW	Duration s	Energy kJ
Electrotechnical	VDE 0304/3	—	0,4	180	72
	IEC 60695-11-10	0,11 l/min methane	0,05	20	1,0
	IEC 60695-11-20	0,97 l/min methane	0,5	25	12,5
Transport	FAR 25.853a	0,2 l/min natural gas	0,1	12	1,2
	FAR 25.853b	0,2 l/min natural gas	0,1	60	6,0
	DIN 54837	0,5 l/min propane	0,8	180	144
	DIN 54341	100 g paper	8	180	1 440
	FAR 25.853	0,142 l/min kerosene	99	120	11 880
Furniture	Match	0,1 g	0,1	15	1,5
	DIN 4102-1	0,025 l/min propane	0,04	15	0,6
	CEN/TC 207	20 g paper	2	120	240
	BS 5852, crib 5	17 g wood	1	200	200
	DIN 54341	100 g paper	8	180	1 440
	BS 5852, crib 7	126 g wood	9	370	3 330
Building	ÖN 3800, B1	1,08 l/min propane	2	900	1 800
	DIN 4102-7	600 g wood wool	23	450	10 350
	DIN 4102-1	0,025 l/min propane	0,04	15	0,6
	DIN 4102-1, -15	35 l/min methane	21	600	12 600
	—	1 kg wood	26	600	15 840
	—	5 kg wood	88	900	79 200
	—	10 kg wood	130	1 200	156 000

## 7 Design requirements

The main reaction-to-fire parameters used in most global classification systems for risk-oriented evaluation of materials and products are based on ignitability and fire growth.

Anticipated correlation with real fire performance is a function of the scale of the simulated fire. The purpose of an intermediate-scale fire test is to generate information on the fire growth stage.

The fire scenario influences the generation of heat, smoke, and toxic and corrosive effluents.

Small-scale tests that evaluate these parameters require all the specimens to be exposed to the conditions used in the test. This cannot easily simulate the range of thermal, ventilation and other physical conditions experienced by products during the fire growth phase where fire boundary conditions will be constantly changing. Actual conditions of ventilation and temperature should be simulated in intermediate-scale tests as far as possible.

Large-scale tests with larger specimens are often required to effectively model the effects of thermal deformation, delamination, fixation failure, substrates, joints, etc., on product performance. Many such tests require extensive combustion product handling facilities in order to cope with the test effluent from the large specimens. This makes them expensive and mainly useful as type approval tests. It is therefore desirable to develop flexible intermediate-scale tests that can effectively quantify the relevant parameters.

Fire risk assessment should primarily identify the safety objectives to be achieved, and intermediate-scale tests should take into account the following considerations:

- a) the specimen should be of such a size that it can be accommodated in a laboratory;
- b) the apparatus should not be excessively difficult to house or install and the test should be designed for efficient testing and easy specimen handling;
- c) the test should have simple and commonly available instrumentation;
- d) the ignition source should be of such a size that it can be accommodated in a laboratory;
- e) ventilation conditions should reflect realistic fire conditions as far as possible;
- f) the test configuration should allow open, semi-open or closed conditions;
- g) intermediate-scale tests should be capable of being validated by carrying out large-scale tests;
- h) precision data for the test methods should be available.

Applications of products should be investigated taking into account the intended use:

- a) is the product likely to be the source of ignition?
- b) is the product likely to be the second ignited item?
- c) is the product a potentially significant fuel source even if it is not the first or second ignited item?
- d) is the effluent likely to cause a hazard to life and/or the environment?
- e) what is the potential way in which the product could contribute to the hazard?

## 8 Examples of intermediate-scale test facilities

### 8.1 General

Almost all tests focus on the vertical specimen orientation. Few International Standards are available for assessing the reaction to fire of horizontally oriented products (see however ISO 9239-1).

### 8.2 ISO 9705: Small-room test

ISO 9705 may provide a fundamental configuration for the development of procedures for the intermediate-scale testing of plastics. The ISO 9705 apparatus consists of a small room measuring  $(3,6 \times 2,4 \times 2,4)$  m with a single door-sized opening. In the standardized procedure, wall and ceiling linings are fixed and tested within the room and the fire effluent escaping from the room is collected by a large hood and duct exhaust system of cross-sectional area  $(3 \times 3)$  m located above the door. The heating regime is 100 kW for 10 min which is then raised to 300 kW for another 10 min (see Figure 3). The combustion products may be monitored to measure heat, smoke and gas release rates.

As an alternative to the standard, the rig may be adapted for the testing of plastics products which could be tested either in the room or directly under the calorimeter hood. This gives opportunities to create different ventilation scenarios and also facilitates testing of a wide variety of configurations. This approach has already been taken in some countries for testing products such as chairs and pipe insulation (e.g. Nordtest 036). ISO 13784-1 was developed to test industrial sandwich panels in a corresponding configuration.

There are many ISO 9705 room/exhaust facilities installed in fire laboratories throughout the world. The utilization of these facilities, including the instrumentation and software which is in place for ISO 9705, would allow intermediate-scale plastics tests to be performed.

### 8.3 IEC 61034-2: 3 m cube test

IEC has developed IEC 61034-2. The equipment comprises a cubic enclosure with inside dimensions of  $(3 \pm 0,03)$  m. One side has a door, with a glass inspection window. The walls of the enclosure include orifices at ground level to ensure pressure equalization inside the chamber. These orifices can also serve to introduce additional monitoring equipment, e.g. thermocouples to measure temperature changes during the test. Transparent sealed windows on two opposite sides permit the transmission of a light beam from a horizontal photometric system. The standardized ignition source is  $(1,00 \pm 0,01)$  litres of alcohol with the composition ethanol  $(90 \pm 1)$  %, methanol  $(4 \pm 1)$  % and water  $(6 \pm 1)$  %.

### 8.4 ISO 5658-4: Vertical flame spread test

ISO/TC 92, *Fire Safety*, has developed the intermediate-scale test ISO 5658-4. The test is applicable to the measurement and description of vertical surface spread of flame over products or assemblies in response to radiant heat in the presence of a pilot flame (to ignite effluent gases) under controlled laboratory conditions. It is suitable for taking into account end-use conditions such as joints. Other specimen configurations may be installed in the test apparatus for different purposes, and a measure of lateral spread of flame may also be obtained.

The apparatus basically consists of a radiant panel measuring  $(0,480 \pm 0,005)$  m  $\times$   $(0,280 \pm 0,005)$  m, the heat from which impinges on the flat surface of a test specimen. The heat flux along a calibration board varies from a minimum of  $(13 \pm 3)$  kW/m<sup>2</sup> to a maximum of  $(40 \pm 3)$  kW/m<sup>2</sup>. The specimen is  $(1,525 \pm 0,025)$  m high by  $(1,025 \pm 0,025)$  m wide by end-use thickness.

### 8.5 ISO/TR 14696: Intermediate-scale calorimeter

Under the auspices of ASTM, an intermediate-scale calorimeter (ICAL) test, ISO/TR 14696, was developed using a hood with opening dimensions of 2,44 m by 2,44 m. The test was developed to give realistic data from 1 m by 1 m specimens. Although the test is limited to the vertical specimen orientation, the instrumentation and exhaust gas collecting system may also be used for other purposes.