pH Adjustment of Samples: Algal Assay and Toxicity Bioassays

1. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

1.1. This method is based on EPA-600/9-78-018, *The* Selenastrum capricornutum *Printz Algal Assay Bottle Test*, EPA 1974, *Marine Algal Assay Bottle Test*, EPA/821-R-02-013 *Short-term Methods for Estimating the Chronic Toxicity of Effluent and Receiving Waters to Freshwater Organisms*, EPA/821-R-02-014 *Short-term Methods for Estimating the Chronic Toxicity of Effluent and Receiving Waters to Marine and Estuarine Organisms*, and EPA/821-R-02-012 *Methods for Measuring the Acute Toxicity of Effluents and Receiving Waters to Freshwater and Marine Organisms*. It is used to adjust the pH of samples to the appropriate range for testing. Tests conducted by this procedure are: AA-AGP, AA-AGP-SW, BSY-AS-FCD, BSY-AS-FFS, BSY-AS-MMY, BSY-AS-MFS, BSY-AD-FCD, BSY-AD-FFS, BSY-AD-MMY, BSY-AD-MFS, BSY-CS-FCD, BSY-CS-FFS, BSY-CS-MMY, BSY-CS-MFS, BSY-CD-FCD, BSY-CD-FFS, BSY-CD-MMY, and BSY-CD-MFS.

1.2. *Selenastrum capricornutum* is now known as *Raphidocelis subcapitata* but the name in the EPA method manuals has not changed.

2. SUMMARY OF THE METHOD

2.1. The pH of Algal Growth Potential (AGP) samples having initial pH values of < 6.0 or > 10.0 SU and the pH of bioassay samples having initial pH values of < 6.0 or > 9.0 SU are adjusted, by the addition of either hydrochloric acid or sodium hydroxide, to the specified test pH.

2.2. Warning: Both NaOH and HCl can cause serious injury. Follow laboratory safety procedures. Wear gloves, safety glasses or a face shield, and a lab coat.

3. EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

3.1. 1 mL and 2 mL graduated glass pipettes

3.1.1. For AGP samples (because of small volume), a clean graduated transfer pipette may be used if preferred. The volume of the adjusting solution is then recorded in drops.

3.2. Pipette pump to fit 2 mL pipet

3.3. Magnetic stirrer

3.4. Magnetic stir bar, 1 per sample

3.5. Magnetic stir bar retriever

3.6. 500 mL Beakers, 1 per AGP sample

3.7. 250 mL Graduated cylinder, 1 per sample

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3.8. 500 mL Erlenmeyer flask, 1 per AGP sample

3.9. 4000 mL Erlenmeyer flask, 1 per screening bioassay sample

3.10. 6000 mL Erlenmeyer flask, 1 per definitive bioassay sample

3.11. Squeeze bottle with DI water

3.12. 30 mL Specimen cup

3.13. Waste container

3.14. Fisherbrand™ accumet™ AB315 pH/mV Meter

3.14.1. Calibrated per SOP TA-06.43.

3.15. Digital thermometer

3.15.1. Calibrated per SOP TA-06.13.

3.16. Fume hood

3.17. Gloves

3.18. Safety glasses or face shield

3.19. Lab coat

3.20. *AGP Sample Log-in Record* logbook

3.21. *Bioassay Log-in* logbook

3.22. *Bioassay Bench Sheet* logbook

3.23. Computer with access to the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS)

4. REAGENTS AND STANDARDS

4.1. Sodium Hydroxide, NaOH, 1.0 N, prepared per SOP TA-10.10

4.2. Hydrochloric acid, HCl, 1.2 N, prepared per SOP TA-10.10

4.3. Deionized (DI) water

5. SAMPLE COLLECTION, PRESERVATION, AND HANDLING

5.1. See SOP FS 1000 for sample collection and preservation.

6. METHOD: ADJUSTING pH IN ALGAL GROWTH POTENTIAL SAMPLES

6.1. AGP sample pH is adjusted after the sample is prepared per SOP TA-08.01 and prior to pouring the samples into the test flasks. It is not uncommon for the pH of a sample to shift from outside of the test range to within the test range over the course of sample preparation.

6.2. Refer to the *AGP Sample Log-in Record* to determine which samples had initial values of pH < 6.0 or > 10.0 SU and may need to have their pH adjusted.

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6.3. Measure the pH of these samples per SOP TA-06.43. Adjust per the following:

6.3.1. If the sample is now within the range of 6.0 to 10.0 SU, proceed with the test set-up procedures per SOP TA-08.03 (as stated in Step 6.8.).

6.3.2. If the sample pH is < 6.0 SU, **NaOH** will be used to raise the pH. If the sample pH is > 10.0 SU, **HCl** will be used to lower the pH. Select the proper reagent and proceed with Step 6.4.

Warning: Both NaOH and HCl can cause serious injury. Follow laboratory safety procedures. Wear gloves, safety glasses or a face shield, and a lab coat.

6.3.3. For an **AGP** sample, pour 200 mL of AGP sample into a 500 mL flask. For an **AGP sample with a lab duplicate**, pour 400 mL of AGP sample into a 500 mL flask

6.3.3.1. These volumes are slightly more than the volume needed for each test.

6.4. Place a stir bar in the flask and place the flask on the stirrer. Adjust stirrer speed to gently stir the sample.

6.5. Suspend the pH meter probe (pre-rinsed with DI water) in the flask ensuring that the tip of the probe is in the sample.

6.5.1. The pH will be continuously monitored from this step until the pH adjustment is complete.

6.5.2. Alternately, aliquots of the sample can be poured off and brought to the pH meter to check, but this will slow down the process significantly. More sample should be adjusted to account for the multiple aliquots that will need to be poured off.

6.6. Use plastic transfer pipette to place one drop of the appropriate adjusting solution into the sample flask. Allow the sample to mix. Turn off the stirrer and allow the sample to become stationary. Measure the pH of the sample per SOP TA-06.43. Make note of the pH shift to estimate the number of drops it may take to raise or lower the pH to within the range of 6.0 to 10.0 SU.

6.6.1. Samples with pH < 6.0 should be adjusted to within proper range but remaining as close to pH 6.0 as possible (target 6.0 ± 0.2).

6.6.2. Samples with pH > 10.0 should be adjusted to within proper range but remaining as close to pH 10.0 as possible (target 9.8 ± 0.2).

6.6.3. If the adjusting solution appears to be too strong (i.e., one drop produces a large shift or a shift beyond the correct pH range), a weaker adjusting solution can be made. In a 50 mL flask, mix 1 mL of pH adjusting solution with 9 mL of unadjusted sample, swirl to mix, and continue the adjustment procedure using this weaker solution.

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6.6.3.1. Sample is used as the diluent to keep the test solution as undiluted as possible.

6.6.3.2. The pH reading is more accurate when the probe and the liquid are stationary (per manufacturer's instructions).

6.7. If the desired pH is exceeded by more than 0.2 SU, repeat Step 6.6. until the pH of the sample is in the proper range of the target pH. Record the total number of drops of solution needed to adjust the pH and the adjusted pH value in the *AGP Sample Log-in Record*.

6.8. Continue test set-up procedures per SOP TA-08.03.

7. METHOD: ADJUSTING pH OF BIOASSAY SAMPLE

7.1. Refer to the *Bioassay Log-in* book to determine which samples had initial values of pH < 6.0 or > 9.0 SU and therefore may need to have their pH adjusted. All other sample adjustments such as initial aeration or salinity adjustment should have been completed.

7.1.1. Freshwater samples are adjusted to pH 7.0 ± 0.2 SU.

7.1.2. Saltwater samples are adjusted to pH 8.0 ± 0.2 SU.

7.2. Measure the pH of these samples per SOP TA-06.43. Adjust per the following:

7.2.1. If the sample is now within the range of 6.0 to 9.0 SU, the pH no longer needs adjusting. Proceed with the test set-up procedures in the SOP appropriate to the toxicity test.

7.2.2. If the sample pH is < 6.0 SU, **NaOH** will be used to raise the pH. If the sample pH is > 9.0 SU, **HCl** will be used to lower the pH. Select the proper pH adjusting solution and proceed with Step 7.3.

7.2.2.1. Both NaOH and HCl can cause serious injury. Follow laboratory safety procedures. Wear gloves, safety glasses or a splash shield, and a lab coat.

7.3. For a **screening bioassay**, pour 2200 mL of sample into a 4000 mL flask. For a **definitive (0.5 dilution) bioassay**, pour 4000 mL of sample into a 6000 mL flask.

7.3.1.1. These volumes provide sufficient sample so that parameters can be taken on the pH-adjusted sample.

7.4. Place the 50 mm stir bar in the flask and place the flask on the stirrer. Adjust stirrer speed to gently stir the sample.

7.5. Suspend the pH meter probe (pre-rinsed with DI water) in the flask ensuring that the tip of the probe is in the sample.

7.5.1. The pH will be continuously monitored from this step until the pH adjustment is complete.

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7.5.2. Alternately, aliquots of the sample can be poured off and brought to the pH meter to check, but this will slow down the process significantly. More sample should be adjusted to account for the multiple aliquots that will need to be poured off.

7.6. Use a glass pipette with a pipette pump to place one drop of the appropriate adjusting solution into the sample flask. Allow the sample to mix, then turn off the stirrer, and allow the sample to become stationary. Measure the pH of the sample per SOP TA-06.43. Make note of the pH shift to estimate the number of drops it may take to raise or lower the pH to the proper pH).

7.6.1. **Freshwater** samples of pH < 6.0 or pH > 9.0 should be adjusted to within the proper range but remaining as close to pH 7.0 as possible (target 7.0 ± 0.2).

7.6.2. **Saltwater** samples of pH < 6.0 or pH > 9.0 should be adjusted to within the proper range but remaining as close to pH 8.0 as possible (target 8.0 ± 0.2).

7.6.3. If the adjusting solution appears to be too strong, (i.e., one drop produces a large shift or a shift beyond the correct pH range), a weaker adjusting solution can be made. In a 50 mL flask, mix 1 mL of the pH-adjusting solution with 9 mL of unadjusted sample, swirl to mix, and continue the adjustment procedure substituting the weaker solution for the stronger solution.

7.6.3.1. Sample is used as the diluent to keep the test solution as undiluted as possible.

7.7. Repeat Step 7.6. until the pH of the sample is in the proper range. Record the total number of drops or milliliters of solution needed to adjust the pH and the adjusted pH value on the appropriate *Bioassay Bench Sheet*.

7.8. Continue test set-up per the appropriate toxicity test SOP.

8. DATA ARCHIVAL

8.1. DEP Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS)

8.1.1. LIMS Entry for Laboratory Parameters SOP TA-06.42

8.2. *AGP Sample Log-in Record*

8.3. *Bioassay Log-in* logbook

8.4. *Bioassay Bench Sheet*

8.5. Use a black, waterproof pen for all bench sheets and logbooks.

8.6. To correct raw data entries, place a single line through the incorrect or illegible entry, write the corrected entry near the error, date and initial the correction. Do not overwrite entries.

8.6.1. The corrected entry is written as near as possible to the error or in the comment box on the appropriate bench sheet.

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8.6.2. If the correction requires an explanation, write a comment and reference the error. Initial and date the explanation. Do not attempt to put all information (correction and comments) into a small space.

8.6.3. Use sequential alphabetical annotation to identify errors and corresponding comments (use A for first error and use A for corresponding explanatory comment; use B for second error, etc.).

9. QUALITY CONTROL

9.1. Refer to the DEP Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual for corrective action and handling out-of-control data.

9.2. If a problem occurs during sample processing, a nonconformance report (NCR) is submitted describing the problem and the corrective action.

9.2.1. To create NCR: open LIMS and go to Laboratory/Administrative/Non-Conformance Report. Refer to FS1000 for sample collection and preservation, and the Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual for corrective action and handling out-of-control data.

10. SAFETY/HAZARDOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT

10.1. Proper laboratory protection, including lab hood or ventilation system, lab coat, gloves, and safety glasses, is required when working with chemicals and unprocessed samples.

10.2. Refer to the DEP Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual.

10.3. Refer to the Laboratory Health and Safety Manual.

10.4. Read MSDS information for reagent handling and disposal.

11. REFERENCES

11.1. DEP Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual

11.2. Laboratory Health and Safety Manual

11.3. EPA-600/9-78-018, The *Selenastrum capricornutum* Printz Algal Assay Bottle Test

11.4. AGP-MARINE-1974, Marine Algal Assay Procedure: Bottle Test

11.5. EPA/821-R-02-012, Methods for Measuring the Acute Toxicity of Effluents and Receiving Waters to Freshwater and Marine Organisms

11.6. EPA/821-R-02-013, Short-term Methods for Estimating the Chronic Toxicity of Effluent and Receiving Waters to Freshwater Organisms

11.7. EPA/821-R-02-014, Short-term Methods for Estimating the Chronic Toxicity of Effluent and Receiving Waters to Marine and Estuarine Organisms

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11.8. FS1000, General Sampling

11.9. DEP SOP TA-06.13, Thermometer Accuracy Check and Use

11.10. DEP SOP TA-06.42, LIMS Entry for Laboratory Parameters

11.11. DEP SOP TA-06.43, Calibration and Use of Fisherbrand™ accumet™ AB315 pH/mV Meter

11.12. DEP SOP TA-08.01, Initial Algal Assay Sample Handling

11.13. DEP SOP TA-08.03, Set-Up and Inoculation of Algal Assay Tests

11.14. DEP SOP TA-10.10, Preparation of Stock HCl (Acid) and NaOH (Base) Solutions

11.15. MSDS Data Sheets

APPENDIX OF CHANGES:

06/11/2008	Added Scope of Application, Summary of the Method, References and Appendix of Changes.
01/28/2015	Formatted for 508 compliance.
02/23/2021	Updated based on universal language.

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