

# Application Note

## Mercury Determination in Groundwater, ERM®-CA615, EPA Method 245.7 using the CETAC QuickTrace™ M-7600 CVAAS

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### INTRODUCTION

Groundwater analysis is a crucial part of environmental monitoring. Groundwater is one of the most vital natural resources. It is an essential source of drinking water; therefore its safety is critical. However, it can present many obstacles for the analyst. It is a powerful tool used to gather information regarding the ecosystem. Contamination, interferences and sample preparation are a few of the major obstacles that can arise when monitoring mercury at this level. Mercury is prevalent through point source contamination that often comes from industry and bio-accumulation. The purpose of this application note is to validate the capabilities of the CETAC QuickTrace™ M-7600 Cold Vapor Atomic Absorbance Analyzer in the trace ng/L range. This was carried out by quantitation of mercury in groundwater. The QuickTrace™ M-7600 Mercury Analyzer was validated by developing a performance-based method following US EPA Method 245.7, Revision 2.0: Mercury in Water Cold Vapor Atomic Fluorescence Spectrometry. The standard reference material that was used was ERM®-CA615, Groundwater.

### INSTRUMENTATION

The QuickTrace™ M-7600 is an independent stand-alone analyzer that uses Cold Vapor Atomic Absorbance (CVAAS) spectrometry for obtaining reliable quantitative data from simple to complex matrices. The working range for the QuickTrace™ M-7600 Mercury Analyzer is from < 0.5 ng/L to > 500 µg/L. This dynamic quantitative range allows mercury concentrations to be determined in broad range of sample substrates without dilution or pre-concentration. The QuickTrace™ M-7600 is accompanied with an autosampler that allows for hands-free sample

batch analysis. The QuickTrace™ M-7600 has a four-channel peristaltic pump that ensures consistent sample uptake into the analyzer and allows for sample/reagent reduction online in a closed system. The reduced sample then flows into the non-foaming Gas-Liquid Separator (GLS), and argon is purged through the sample as elemental mercury is liberated and enters into the system. The mercury is then passed through the Perma Pure® drying cartridge and into the sample cell where it is measured at 253.7 nm. Software instrument controls include but are not limited to argon flow, lamp, pump control, smart rinse threshold, and over range protection. Optimizing these parameters allows for increased or decreased sensitivity.



**Figure 1. CETAC QuickTrace™ M-7600 Cold Vapor Atomic Absorbance Spectrometry Mercury Analyzer**

## EXPERIMENTAL

The QuickTrace™ M-7600 is operated by the QuickTrace™ software and provides method specific control of the system. Parameter optimization allows for the quantitation of mercury in the trace ng/L range. The goal of this application is to optimize instrument parameters using EPA Method 245.7 Rev. 2.0 to quantitate mercury at the trace ng/L level using the CETAC QuickTrace™ M-7600 Mercury Analyzer. Groundwater samples were digested from standard reference material ERM®-CA615, groundwater, which was purchased from the Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements. The certified reference material was collected from a locked well located in Bree, North-East Limburg, Belgium. The reference material was stored in a 100 mL flame sealed borosilicate glass ampoule. The outside of the bottle was rinsed with mercury-free ultra-pure de-ionized water to remove any contaminants that may have adhered to the outer surface. The samples were digested and analyzed in 50 mL polypropylene co-polymer centrifuge tubes. Samples were preserved in the sample vials with hydrochloric acid and digested with 0.1N potassium bromide/potassium bromate solution, followed by reduction with 12% (w/v) hydroxylamine hydrochloride (HCl) and deionized (DI) water. Reduction of the inorganic mercury to elemental mercury was carried out by excess online addition of 10% (w/v) stannous chloride and DI water, in 7% (v/v) hydrochloric acid and DI water, at a rate of 4.8 mL/min at 80% pump speed. Seven replicates were analyzed along with the appropriate quality control checks to validate the instrument. Sample uptake was 28 seconds at 80% pump speed with 65 seconds of rinse to give a total sample analysis time of 93 using approximately 6 mL of sample. The integration mode was set to peak height utilizing 4 replicates at 1.0 seconds per replicate. A seven-point calibration curve was analyzed, which included five non-zero standards and two blanks. Total analysis time was approximately 45 minutes.

Initial calibration verification and initial calibration blank were analyzed to validate the accuracy of the calibration. Calibration standards and control standards were prepared in hydrochloric acid, potassium bromide/potassium bromate solution, ultra-pure deionized water and hydrox-

ylamine. Appropriate aliquots of 1000 ng/L working standard were used to prepare the calibration curve that consisted of two blanks and five non-zero standards that ranged from 5 ng/L to 100 ng/L. Mercury is detected at wavelength 253.7 nm. ERM®-CA615 total mercury is certified at 0.037 µg/L with an uncertainty of ± 0.004 µg/L.

The screenshot displays the 'Conditions' section of the software interface. The parameters are as follows:

Parameter	Value
Gas Flow (ml/min)	80
Pump speed (%)	80
Sipper depth (mm)	145
ASX Rinse Pump Speed (%)	80
Sample uptake time (s)	28
Rinse time (s)	65
Read delay time (s)	43
Replicate read time (s)	1
Replicates	4
Auto adjust replicate read time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Profile Replicate %RSD	0.00%
Abort on Over Range	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over Range Abort Threshold	10000000 µAbs

Figure 2. Method Parameters

## CALIBRATION STANDARDIZATION

Calibration standards were prepared with aliquots of a 1000 ng/L working standard that was prepared from serial dilutions of a 1000 mg/L certified standard. Standards were prepared using a final calculated volume of 25 mL. Aliquot volumes of 0.125 mL, 0.25 mL, 0.625 mL, 1.25 mL, and 2.50 mL of 1000 ng/L working standard were added to the ultra-pure deionized water with 2.5 mL 1:1 trace metal grade hydrochloric acid already added. Calibration standard concentrations were 5.0, 10.0, 25.0, 50.0, and 100.0 ng/L. The calibration standards were matrix-matched by the addition of 0.5 mL of 0.1N potassium bromide/potassium bromate solution and 0.05 mL of 12% (w/v) hydroxylamine HCl and DI water. Calibration stand-

ards were analyzed beginning with two matrix blanks and then proceeded from lowest concentration standard to highest concentration standard. Each peak was integrated for a total of 4 seconds. The concentration and the calibration factor were calculated.

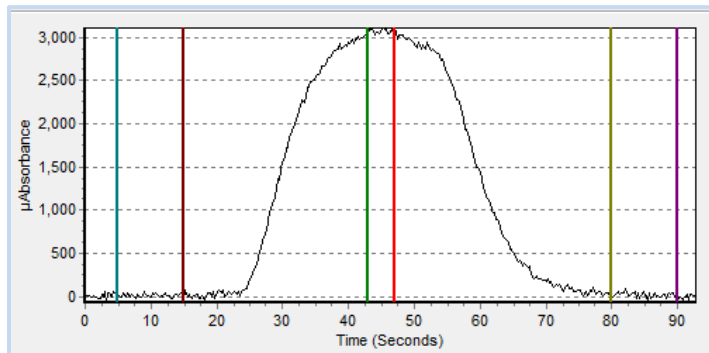


Figure 3. Peak Profile of 100 ng/L Standard

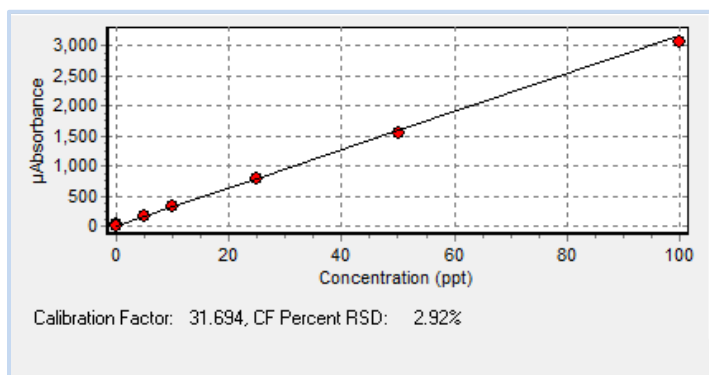


Figure 4. 245.7 Calibration

## PROCEDURE

10 mL of ERM®-CA615, groundwater was pipetted directly into a 50 mL polypropylene centrifuge tube that contained 2.5 mL of deionized water and 2.5 mL of 1:1 trace metal grade hydrochloric acid to preserve the sample. The sample was then diluted to 25 mL using deionized water. The sample was then oxidized using 0.5 mL of 0.1N potassium bromide/potassium bromate solution. The vial was sealed and inverted to homogenize the sample and allowed to sit for approximately 30 minutes, ensuring that the solution remained yellow and that all organics were oxidized. The sample was then reduced by manually adding 0.05 mL of 12% (w/v) hydroxylamine HCl and DI water, sealed and inverted, and allowed to sit for five minutes. This gave a total volume of 25.55 mL. The sample vials were then placed on the autosampler tray and analyzed. Inorganic

mercury was reduced to elemental mercury with online excess addition of 10% (w/v) stannous chloride and DI water in 7% (v/v) hydrochloric acid and DI water at 4.8 mL/min at 80% pump speed. Peak height of each sample was integrated for 4 seconds. Initial calibration verification, initial calibration blank, initial precision and recovery, ongoing precision and recovery, continuing calibration verification, lab fortified blank, lab reagent blank, matrix spike and matrix spike duplicate were analyzed to validate the instrument stability and to identify any method inconsistencies. Initial calibration verification was prepared with a 0.625 mL aliquot of the 1000 ng/L working standard into a matrix-matched solution to give a concentration of 25 ng/L. Each quality control was prepared in the same manner.

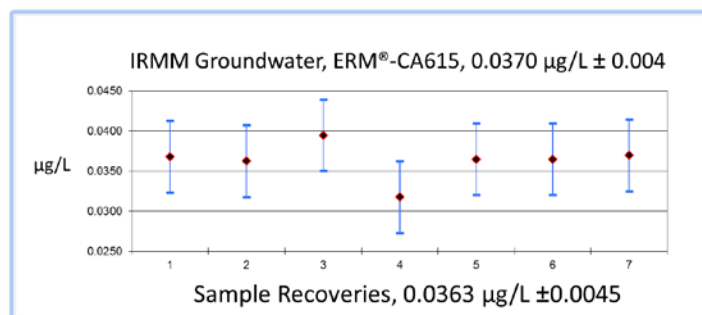
## RESULTS

Using the QuickTrace™ M-7600 for measurement of mercury at trace levels is an effective analytical technique used for obtaining reliable quantitative data. Optimizing carrier gas flow, pump speed, sample uptake and rinse time allows for analysis of a calibration, quality controls, and samples over a broad dynamic range. Minimal sample analysis time reduces laboratory costs, analyst time and effort along with minimizing instrument maintenance, while giving reliable, quantitative data. Total mercury in groundwater at trace ng/L level was easily recovered by utilizing the various instrument settings of the QuickTrace™ M-7600 Mercury Analyzer. Method development using QuickTrace™ Software included calibration, quality controls, and spike recovery. A separate MDL study was performed in accordance to CFR 40 Part 136 appendix B resulting in an ultra-trace MDL of 0.661 ng/L for the instrument settings associated with this application note. As a result, total mercury can be determined as accurately quantitated. Seven replicates of the digested standard reference material were analyzed and total mercury concentration was recorded and mean concentration and standard deviation were calculated. The results of  $0.0363 \mu\text{g/L} \pm 0.0045$  are shown in figures 5 and 6.

IRMM Groundwater, ERM®-CA615, 0.0370 µg/L ± 0.004	
Digest	µg/L
1	0.0368
2	0.0363
3	0.0395
4	0.0318
5	0.0365
6	0.0365
7	0.0370
Mean = 0.0363	
Uncertainty = 0.0045	
n = 7 Replicates	STDEV = 0.002      RSD% = 6.284

**Figure 5. Results**

ERM®-CA615 has a certified concentration of 0.0370 µg/L with an uncertainty of ±0.004 µg/L. The standard reference material value is the un-weighted mean of six values, with each value being the mean of a set of results obtained from a different laboratory or method. Uncertainty values correspond to a level of confidence at 95%, and was calculated for seven replicates of the standard reference material that were analyzed on the QuickTrace™ M-7600 using four peak height replicate readings for each of the 7 samples.



**Figure 6. Results with Uncertainties**

EPA 245.7 Quality Control		
Quality Control (ng/L)	% recovery	RPD%
OPR (10)	100-104	
CCV (25)	98-100	
ICV (25)	99	
LFB (10)	101	
MS (15)	95	
MSD (15)	99	2.39

**Figure 7. Quality Control Chart**

Contamination at trace to ultra-trace levels can present many problems and can lead to inaccurate results. Therefore careful attention was given to minimize contamination in reagents, acids, and deionized water. Through method development, parameter optimization, and sample preparation, the QuickTrace™ M-7600 Mercury Analyzer quantitates total mercury at the trace ng/L level giving reliable quantitative data.

**REFERENCES**

US EPA. *Method 245.7, Mercury in Water by Cold Vapor Atomic Fluorescence Spectrometry*