

# Fundamentals of Concrete

## Table of Contents

Course Description .....	3
Course Objectives .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Testing and Control of Concrete Quality .....	4
Slump Test .....	5
Air Content Tests .....	7
Measuring Air Content Using a Pressure Meter .....	8
Measuring Air Content by the Volumetric Method .....	8
Measuring Air Content by the Air Indicator Test .....	9
Measuring Air Content Using Density (Unit Weight) and Yield .....	9
Measuring Concrete Temperature .....	10
Creating Concrete Test Cylinders .....	11
Curing and Storing Test Cylinders .....	12
Evaluating Concrete Strength.....	12
ACI 318 Requirements for Strength Tests .....	13
Cylinder Specimen Tests.....	14
Core Tests .....	14
Nondestructive and In-place Test Methods.....	15
Pulse Velocity Test.....	15
Concrete Maturity Method.....	15
Rebound Hammer Test .....	16
Penetration Test .....	17
Pullout Test.....	17
Load Testing .....	17
Summary .....	18

## **Course Description**

This is a 4-hour continued education course for structural engineers on the Fundamentals of Concrete. This course outlines the procedures for testing concrete to ensure it aligns with project design specifications and meets compliance standards. Concrete is the foundation of most buildings, so it is important to know to test it for air bubbles and strength to guarantee structure stability and safety.

## **Course Objectives**

- 1) Outline the steps for sampling fresh concrete
- 2) Explain how to perform the slump test
- 3) Differentiate between the air content tests
- 4) Describe how to measure concrete temperature
- 5) List the steps for creating, curing, and protecting concrete cylinders
- 6) Understand the requirements for concrete strength tests
- 7) Distinguish between the different methods for evaluating concrete strength

## Introduction

When working with concrete, it's essential to conduct thorough control tests to verify its quality and adherence to project requirements. These tests primarily assess air content and strength and are typically performed by American Concrete Institute (ACI) Certified Field Testing Technicians. However, it's also valuable for structural engineers to understand how to carry out these tests to guarantee the concrete's integrity in construction endeavors.

These control tests play a critical role in construction projects. They help identify any potential issues with the concrete and ensure that it will perform as intended within the structure. This attention to detail not only safeguards the structural integrity of the project but also contributes to the safety and longevity of the construction. Therefore, it's crucial for all involved parties to be well-versed in the implementation and significance of these tests.

## Testing and Control of Concrete Quality

Concrete acceptance control tests, also known as acceptance tests or control tests, are performed on samples of concrete to ensure that it meets the requirements of the project specifications. These tests can include checks on both fresh and hardened concrete.

Tests on fresh concrete, such as the slump test, can measure consistency and workability. The slump test measures how easily the concrete flows before it sets. Other tests on fresh concrete may include air content, density, and temperature.

Tests on hardened concrete can measure strength and other durability properties. These tests are conducted using standardized procedures to determine if the concrete can develop the desired properties. Some methods for testing the strength of concrete include Rebound hammer or Schmidt hammer, penetration resistance test, ultrasonic pulse velocity, pullout test, drilled core, cast-in-place cylinders, and wireless maturity sensors.

If the concrete fails to meet these specifications, it can be rejected. To determine acceptance or rejection, these tests must be performed precisely according to the test standards. For instance, a slump test must be performed using a special steel tamping rod as specified. If an improper tool, like a piece of rebar or a wooden rod, is used, the test results are invalid, potentially leading to the rejection of the concrete.

Most concrete control tests are standardized by ASTM International (formerly known as American Society for Testing and Materials). Each test is identified by a specific number, year, and title. For example, ASTM C39/C39M-15a is the "Standard Test Method for Compressive Strength of Cylindrical Concrete Specimens." Here, the '15' indicates that the standard was issued or revised in 2015, and the 'a' signifies more than one revision in that year. ASTM revises test methods periodically and publishes these standards annually, both in print and online. Concrete and aggregate standards are found in Volume 04.02 (ASTM 2015). Several ASTM specifications are also included in the ACI Field Reference Manual (SP-15).

## Sampling Fresh Concrete

When conducting control tests on concrete, it's important that the samples taken accurately represent the entire batch. For ready-mixed and stationary mixer concrete, at least two samples should be taken from the middle of the batch, with no more than 15 minutes elapsing between the first and last sample. The combined sample size should be at least one cubic foot if strength test specimens are to be made. The following additional sampling procedures should be followed:

- Combine and remix the individual samples using a shovel.
- Start tests for slump and air content within five minutes of obtaining the last portion of the sample.
- Begin molding specimens for strength tests within 15 minutes of mixing the composite sample.

Note that if the concrete is pumped, additional checks at the point of deposit may be necessary as pumping can change the concrete's slump or air content.

## Slump Test

The slump test measures the consistency of concrete and indicates how easily the concrete can be placed and finished. It involves filling a cone-shaped mold with concrete, lifting the mold, and measuring the height of the concrete column. The height indicates how much water has been used in the mix and how easily the concrete flows and compacts. Changes in the slump can be due to alterations in the following:

- The amount of water in the mixture
- Properties of the aggregate (gravel, sand, etc.)
- Temperature
- Hydration

Being consistent in the setting time and bleed period is essential for achieving a good finish. Any variations can affect the overall quality of the concrete.

To perform a slump test, you need the following materials:

- Slump cone: A metal cone that is 12 inches (300 mm) high, with a top opening of four inches (100 mm) in diameter and a bottom opening of eight inches (200 mm) in diameter
- Tamping rod: A straight steel rod that is 5/8 inch (16 mm) in diameter and 24 inches (600 mm) long, with one end rounded
- Scoop: Any convenient size to fill the cone with concrete
- Ruler: To measure the slump

Follow these directions to perform a slump test:

1. Preparation:
  - Make the inside of the slump cone damp.
  - Put the cone on a rigid, flat, damp, nonabsorbent horizontal surface.
2. Filling the cone:
  - Fill the cone with concrete in three layers of equal volume.
  - Compact each layer by tapping it 25 times with the tamping rod.
  - For the first layer, pierce through to the bottom of the layer with the rod.
  - For each layer that follows, tap through the new layer and one inch (25 mm) into the previous layer.
3. Finishing:
  - Remove excess concrete from the top of the cone to make it level.
  - Clear away any concrete around the base of the cone.
4. Measuring the slump:
  - Slowly and steadily, lift the cone vertically (take about 5 seconds).
  - Invert the cone next to the slumped concrete.
  - Measure the vertical distance between the top of the cone and the center of the slumped concrete to the nearest 1/4 inch (5 mm).

While performing a slump test, consider the following:

1. Retesting:
  - If the concrete slumps significantly to one side, repeat the test.
  - If the second test also fails, the concrete may not be cohesive enough.
2. Interpreting results:
  - Changes in slump can indicate an alteration in water content or reflect changes in air content, aggregate gradation, sand content, temperature, hydration rate, setting time, or admixture misdosages.
3. Variability:
  - A single slump test result should not lead to concrete rejection due to potential variations.
  - Ensure testing conditions are consistent (e.g., avoid jarring the base or using a dry base).
4. Acceptable tolerances:
  - If a specific slump is required (e.g., 5 inches or 125 mm), a tolerance of  $\pm 1$  inch (25 mm) is typically acceptable (i.e., 4 to 6 inches or 100 to 150 mm).
  - Specifications might state a maximum slump value. In this case, slumps up to 2.5 inches (65 mm) lower than the specified value may be acceptable, but exceeding the specified value is not permitted.
5. Reference:
  - For detailed standards and tolerances for concrete, refer to ACI 117.

By following these steps and considerations, you can accurately measure the slump and consistency of concrete to ensure proper quality and workability.

## Air Content Tests

Air entrainment in concrete is the intentional creation of numerous minuscule air bubbles. A cubic inch (25 x 25 x 25 mm) of air-entrained concrete with 4-6% air can contain millions of these bubbles.

The inclusion of air bubbles offers several advantages:

- Enhanced workability: The air bubbles function as frictionless ball bearings, thereby facilitating the manipulation of fresh concrete.
- Improved freeze-thaw resistance: In cold conditions, the moisture within the concrete can freeze and expand. Without air bubbles, this expansion may exert high pressure and result in concrete cracking. Air bubbles provide channels for the expanding water to occupy, thus alleviating pressure and preventing damage.

It's important to regularly check the air content in concrete. If there's too little air, the concrete might not be able to withstand freezing and thawing. On the other hand, too much air can reduce the strength of the concrete. There are different methods for measuring air content:

Pressure Meter:

- Works well for most types of concrete
- Might not give accurate results for lightweight or porous aggregate concretes

Volumetric Method:

- Accurate, but it's complex and time-consuming

Air Indicator Test:

- Provides a quick estimate, but it's not standardized
- Should not be used for compliance checks as per ACI 212.3R

Unit Weight Test:

- Useful for making estimates when precise measurement is not necessary

Several factors can affect the amount of air in concrete. These include differences in the materials used (like air-entraining admixture, sand, and cement) and changes during placement (especially when using a concrete pump).

Understanding these factors will help you make sure that air-entrained concrete is both easy to work with and long-lasting, especially in places where the weather causes freezing and thawing. It's important to keep an eye on the air content regularly and choose the right way to measure it to maintain the quality of the concrete.

## Measuring Air Content Using a Pressure Meter

A pressure meter measures the amount of air by watching for changes in air pressure and volume. The bowl of the air meter is filled with concrete and consolidated. There are different ways to pour and consolidate the concrete depending on the slump.

- For slumps less than one inch (25 millimeters), consolidation is done by vibration and the bowl is filled in two equal layers.
- For slumps more than three inches (75 millimeters), consolidation is done by rodding and the bowl is filled in three equal layers.
- For slumps between one and three inches (25-75 millimeters), consolidation is done using either vibration or rodding.

To measure air content using a pressure meter, follow this procedure:

- 1) Fill the bowl with concrete.
- 2) Level and smooth the surface.
- 3) Attach the cover to the bowl.
- 4) For water-based meters, fill the cover with water to a specific level and seal it with a cap, pump air into the space above the water until a set pressure is reached, and measure the drop in water level to determine air content.

OR

For air-based meters, pump air into a chamber to an initial pressure, open a valve between the chamber and the bowl, and measure the drop in pressure to indicate the air content of the concrete.

By following these steps, you can accurately measure the air content in concrete using a pressure meter. This helps ensure the concrete's quality and durability, especially in freeze-thaw conditions.

## Measuring Air Content by the Volumetric Method

The volumetric method, also known as the roll-a-meter test, is used especially for lightweight concrete. The volumetric air meter consists of a bowl and a top section. To perform a roll-a-meter test, follow the procedure:

- 1) Fill the bowl:
  - Fill the bowl with concrete in two equal layers.
  - Rod each layer 25 times with a tamping rod (similar to a slump test).
  - Tap the sides of the bowl 10-15 times to release trapped air and fill any voids left by the tamping rod.
  - Smooth the top layer.
- 2) Assemble the meter:
  - Attach the top section of the meter to the bowl.
  - Carefully fill the top section with a mixture of water and isopropyl alcohol up to the zero mark.



- Screw on the top cap.
- 3) Remove air:
    - Roll and agitate the air meter to remove all air from the concrete.
    - The drop in the liquid level indicates the air content.

Note: If the liquid level doesn't settle within six minutes or if there's too much foam (more than 2% air), the test is invalid. Repeat the test using more isopropyl alcohol to reduce foam and obtain accurate results.

By following these steps, you can accurately measure the air content in concrete using the roll-a-meter test (particularly for lightweight concrete).

## Measuring Air Content by the Air Indicator Test

You can quickly estimate the air content in concrete using a pocket-sized air indicator. However, this method is for approximation only and not for formal compliance testing.

Follow these steps to estimate the air content in concrete using an air indicator:

- 1) Prepare the sample:
  - Fill the brass cup with a representative sample of mortar (no aggregate particles larger than 1/10 inch or 2.5 mm).
- 2) Set up the test:
  - Insert the rubber stopper and cup into the glass tube.
  - Fill the tube with alcohol up to the zero mark.
- 3) Shake the tube:
  - Cover the open end of the tube with your thumb and shake the tube to remove air from the mortar (paste).
- 4) Read the results:
  - Read the drop in the alcohol level and estimate the air content using a chart.

Please note: This test is a fast simple way to estimate air content, but it has not been approved for formal compliance testing. It's important to know the mortar content of the concrete for accurate estimation of the air content.

## Measuring Air Content Using Density (Unit Weight) and Yield

The yield of freshly mixed concrete is the volume produced from known quantities of its components. Calculating the yield is important for determining the actual cement content, confirming batch volume against observed volume, and checking the water-to-cement ratio (w/cm) when the total water quantity is known.

When using the density (unit weight) method, it is crucial to adhere to the standard ASTM C138/C138M. The test requires an accurate scale, a sturdy cylindrical measure (container), and a standard tamping rod.

Follow this process when measuring air content using density and yield:

- 1) Fill and consolidate the container:
  - Depending on the consolidation method (rodding or vibration), fill the container (three or two equal layers) with concrete.
    - Slump >3 inches (75 millimeters): Fill with three layers and consolidate it by the rodding method. Rod each layer 25 times using a tamping rod.
    - Slump <1 inch (25 millimeters): Fill with two layers and consolidate it by the vibration method. Vibrate each layer adequately.
    - Slump 1-3 inches (25-75 millimeters): Use either method.
- 2) Level and clean:
  - Level the top surface and smooth it out.
  - Clean the sides of the container.
- 3) Weigh:
  - Weigh the full container to the nearest 1/10 lb (45 g) or within 0.3% of the measured mass.
  - Subtract the mass of the empty container to get the net mass of the concrete.
- 4) Calculate density:
  - Divide the net mass of the concrete by the volume of the container.
  - Changes in density usually indicate changes in air content but can also reflect changes in materials or mixture proportions.
- 5) Calculate yield:
  - When the total mass of materials in a batch is known, calculate the yield by dividing the total mass by the density (unit weight) of the concrete.
- 6) Additional calculations:
  - ASTM C138/C138M provides equations for calculating cement content and air content in the tested mixture.

By following these steps, you can accurately determine the yield and density of freshly mixed concrete, ensuring the correct proportions and quality of the concrete mix.

## Measuring Concrete Temperature

Concrete work is affected by temperature. To measure concrete temperature, use a thermometer that meets ASTM C1064/C1064M standards. The thermometer should be accurate to  $\pm 1^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) within a range of  $30^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $120^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Commonly used thermometers are dial type metal thermometers ranging from  $30^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $120^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Infrared guns can also be used, but their accuracy can be affected by sunlight, angle of the infrared beam, and concrete color.

When measuring concrete temperature, follow these steps:

- 1) Insert the thermometer into a representative sample of concrete, making sure it is at least three inches (75 mm) deep.

- 2) Record the temperature after two minutes, but no later than five minutes after insertion. It's recommended to take an average of two or more readings for accuracy.

Following these guidelines will help you accurately measure the temperature of concrete, ensuring proper handling and performance during construction.

## Creating Concrete Test Cylinders

To obtain a precise indication of concrete strength, the results of multiple cylinder tests are averaged. Additional backup cylinders (hold cylinders) may be necessary if the primary cylinders are damaged or do not meet strength criteria.

Concrete test cylinders in the United States are commonly 6 x 12 inches (150 x 300 millimeters) or 4 x 8 inches (100 x 200 millimeters). As per ACI 318, each strength test requires two 6 x 12 inch cylinders and three 4 x 8 inch cylinders. For tests at three different ages, a minimum of six 6 x 12 inch cylinders and nine 4 x 8 inch cylinders are needed.

There are lots of materials that make up cylinder molds. Materials may include heavy steel, sheet metal (tin can), plastic, and waxed cardboard. Tin cans, cardboard, and some plastic molds are for single use. On the other hand, heavy steel and some sheet metal and plastic molds can be reused and should be cleaned and oiled after each use. Each mold must follow ASTM C470/C470M standards.

The following procedure is followed for creating concrete test cylinders:

- 1) Clean and oil reusable molds if necessary.
- 2) Position molds on a stable, level surface (e.g., concrete slab).
- 3) Fill and consolidate the molds:
  - a. For slumps less than 1 inch (25 millimeters):
    - Fill the mold in two equal layers.
    - Utilize an internal vibrator (insert at one, two, or three locations based on cylinder size: 4 x 8 in., 6 x 12 in., or 9 x 18 in.).
    - Allow air to escape, lift the vibrator slowly, and lightly tap the sides.
  - b. For slumps greater than or equal to 1 inch (25 millimeters):
    - Consolidate by rodding or vibrating.
    - Place concrete in two, three, or four layers based on cylinder size (4 x 8 in., 6 x 12 in., or 9 x 18 in.) and use the appropriate tamping rod: 3/8 in. (10 mm) for 4 x 8 in. cylinders or 5/8 in. (16 mm) for 6 x 12 in. and 9 x 18 in. cylinders.
    - Rod each layer 25 times (4 x 8 in. and 6 x 12 in. cylinders) or 50 times (9 x 18 in. cylinders).
- 4) Level the top surface and smooth it out.
- 5) Protect the top surface from moisture loss.
- 6) Approximately 24 hours after molding, within 30 minutes of removal from molds, label each cylinder with project-specific information.

- 7) Cure specimens with water consistently at  $73.5^{\circ}\text{F} \pm 3.5^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $23.0^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2.0^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) using water storage tanks or moist rooms.

By following these steps, you can ensure accurate preparation of concrete test cylinders, resulting in reliable compressive strength outcomes.

## Curing and Storing Test Cylinders

Cylinders are made and tested for two main reasons:

- 1) To check if the concrete meets the required strength for its intended use.
- 2) To make sure that the concrete has the strength needed to support structures or be put into use.

The cylinders made for design strength check should be stored in a damp environment at room temperature ( $60\text{-}80^{\circ}\text{F}$  or  $16\text{-}27^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) for up to 48 hours. They should be kept moist at  $70\text{-}77^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $21\text{-}25^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) until testing. If dealing with strong concrete (mixtures with specified strength of 6,000 pounds per square inch or greater), be extra careful about the temperature. When transporting the cylinders (at least eight hours after they are set), make sure they stay in their molds and stay damp until they get to the lab. It's important to handle them gently during transport and protect them from losing moisture, especially in cold weather. Transportation time should not exceed four hours. Once the cylinders arrive at the lab, take them out of the molds and let them sit in standard conditions until it's time to test them. It's essential to follow these guidelines to make sure the test results are accurate and reflect the real strength of the concrete.

Cylinders created for construction site control should be stored differently than those made for checking design strength. They should be kept at the same temperature as the construction site and given the same curing as the concrete they represent. Cylinders made to figure out when a structure can be put into use should be taken out of the molds when the formwork is removed. Note that these cylinders are tested in the moisture condition resulting from being stored at the construction site. It's important to handle and transport these cylinders carefully for testing as well.

## Evaluating Concrete Strength

Concrete strength assessment involves creating a specimen and testing its compressive and flexural strength. Laboratory-cured specimens, such as cylinders, are made in the field as described in the previous section and in accordance with ASTM C31/C31M. They are then cured and tested in a laboratory following ASTM C39/C39M. Flexural strength tests of beam-shaped specimens are sometimes required in paving work.

Field-cured specimens may also be required and serve the purpose of checking the adequacy of concrete curing and protection within the structure. They are commonly applied in high-rise construction to determine if the structure is sufficiently strong for formwork or shoring removal.

Moisture content plays a crucial role in concrete strength. Saturated specimens exhibit lower compressive strength but higher flexural strength compared to dry specimens.

Testing precision is paramount. Adherence to ASTM testing methods is essential for obtaining valid and accurate strength readings.

By following these established guidelines and standards, construction professionals can reliably assess the strength of concrete, ensuring it meets required specifications and is safe for use in structures.

## ACI 318 Requirements for Strength Tests

According to ACI 318, compression tests of laboratory-cured specimens are required for all structural concrete unless the amount of a particular concrete type is less than 50 cubic yards (38 cubic meters). Even in this case, proof of satisfactory strength needs to be provided and approved by the building official.

Samples should be taken at least once per day, not less than once for every 150 cubic yards (110 cubic meters) of concrete placed, and at least once for every 5,000 square feet (460 square meters) of slab and wall surface area.

In a typical strength test, one averages the strength of two 6 x 12 inch (150 x 300 millimeter) cylinders or three 4 x 8 inch (100 x 200 millimeter) cylinders. Note that the cylinders must be made from the same sample and tested at the same designated age, which is usually 28 days.

The criteria for concrete strength is as follows:

- The average of all sets of three consecutive strength tests must equal or exceed the specified compressive strength ( $f'_c$ ). The  $f'_c$  is the minimum strength of the concrete after 28 days (usually around 3,000 to 4,000 psi).
- If  $f'_c$  is 5,000 pounds per square inch (35 megapascals) or less, then no individual strength test (average of two 6 x 12 inch or three 4 x 8 inch cylinders) should be more than 500 pounds per square inch (3.5 megapascals) below  $f'_c$ .
- If  $f'_c$  is more than 5,000 pounds per square inch (35 megapascals), then no individual strength test (average of two 6 x 12 inch or three 4 x 8 inch cylinders) should be more than 0.10 times  $f'_c$ .

If any of these requirements are not met, changes must be made to the concrete to improve the strength for future batches. This is only applicable where the 28-day strength test results are available.

By following these guidelines, professionals can ensure the structural concrete meets the required strength standards and correct it if necessary.

## Cylinder Specimen Tests

Compressive strength of concrete is frequently measured using cylinder specimens with the following procedure:

- 1) Prepare cylinder specimens according to the guidelines of ASTM C39/C39M. The cylinders should have a diameter of at least three times the size of the grain in the concrete, and a length as close to twice the diameter as possible.
- 2) Prepare the samples by grinding or capping the ends to ensure smooth, even surfaces. The caps should be as thin as possible.
- 3) Cure the concrete cylinders for 28 days.
- 4) Place the cylinders in a calibrated testing machine. Apply a load uniformly to the flat ends of the cylinders until they fail.
- 5) Calculate the concrete strength by dividing the maximum load by the area of the flat surface.

Following these steps will help accurately determine the compressive strength of concrete, ensuring that it meets the required strength for the project.

## Core Tests

When the cylinder test fails or there's a concern about weak concrete in a building, a building official or engineer might ask for samples of the concrete cores to be tested. When testing the core, follow this procedure:

- 1) Take the samples: Use a special drill to take out small samples (cores) from the concrete. ASTM C42/C42M requires that concrete core specimens have a height-to-diameter ratio that is between 1.9 and 2.1, but it also provides correction factors with ratios between 1 and 2. It is imperative to be careful when taking the samples. Wait until the concrete is ready to be tested without damaging it and avoid drilling through any metal bars inside the concrete. Refer to standard ASTM C42/C42M for additional guidance on taking wet and dry samples.
- 2) Test the samples: The samples are then tested to check how strong they are. Look at the samples closely to see if there are any cracks.
- 3) Check the results: Compare the test results to a standard to see if the concrete is strong enough. The concrete is adequate if the average strength of three cores is at least 85% of  $f'_c$  and if no single core is less than 75% of  $f'_c$ . If it's not, do additional testing.

Take these steps to make sure the concrete in a building is strong enough to keep everyone safe.

## Nondestructive and In-place Test Methods

Nondestructive and in-place test methods are valuable for checking the quality of large concrete projects. These tests can be used to assess concrete strength as long as there have been studies showing the correlation between the test being used and traditional testing methods.

Some common nondestructive tests include the ultrasonic pulse velocity test and the maturity test. Some common in-place tests include:

- **Rebound Hammer Test:** This test measures how hard the surface of the concrete is to give an idea of its strength. It leaves a small mark on the surface.
- **Penetration Test:** This involves poking the concrete to estimate its strength. It leaves a small hole and might cause some minor cracking.
- **Pullout Test:** This measures how much force is needed to pull something out of the concrete to check its strength. It leaves a small cone-shaped hole that needs to be fixed.
- **Dynamic or Vibration Tests:** These tests use vibrations to figure out how strong the concrete is. They don't damage the surface but need to be done very carefully.

Here are some important things to remember about these tests:

- Make sure the tests are done by a trusted lab to get accurate results.
- Building officials need to approve these tests to make sure the structure is strong enough.
- Some tests might cause a little damage to the surface, so it might need to be fixed afterwards.

By following these guidelines and making sure the test results match up with traditional strength tests, we can learn a lot about how strong and reliable concrete structures are.

### Pulse Velocity Test

The ultrasonic pulse velocity method (ASTM C597) is a way to check the quality of concrete by measuring how fast sound travels through it. If the sound travels quickly, the concrete is likely to be strong and in good condition. If the sound travels slowly, it could mean that the concrete is not in good shape. This method is mainly used to compare the strength of different concrete samples and to find any nonuniformities.

### Concrete Maturity Method

The concrete maturity method (ASTM C1074) is a technique used to estimate the strength of concrete as it develops over time by using temperature data. It involves a few key components:

- 1) There is the reference temperature, which serves as the baseline temperature (usually - 10°C or 14°F) below which concrete strength gain is minimal.

- 2) Temperature monitoring involves placing sensors in the concrete to measure its temperature over time, with devices recording these temperature readings at regular intervals.

The concrete maturity method begins with calibration in the laboratory, where tests are conducted on the concrete mix to understand the relationship between temperature and strength. Then, in the field application, sensors are placed in the concrete at the construction site to monitor temperature, and the temperature-time data is used to calculate the concrete strength.

This method offers several benefits, including non-destructive estimation of concrete strength, real-time monitoring of strength development, and improved project scheduling by determining the best time for construction activities. However, it's important to consider that the method requires specific mix calibration for each concrete mix used and assumes uniform temperature distribution within the concrete, which may not always be the case.

Overall, the concrete maturity method is a useful tool for estimating concrete strength by considering the effects of temperature over time. It provides more accurate predictions of concrete strength development, helping make better decisions in construction projects.

## Rebound Hammer Test

The rebound hammer test (ASTM C805/C805M) uses an impact rebound hammer, also known as a Schmidt hammer, to check how hard the surface of concrete is and estimate how strong it is.

A rebound hammer bounces when it hits the concrete. The bounce distance (rebound number) is then measured and gives us an idea of how hard the concrete surface is. A higher bounce usually means the concrete is stronger, but only when comparing similar types of concrete made from the same materials and at about the same time.

The rebound hammer test is easy to perform, but it does have the following limitations:

- The test can be affected by how smooth the concrete surface is, the size and shape of the concrete, its age, how wet it is, the type of material in it, amongst other factors.
- The hammer needs to be calibrated for the specific materials in the concrete.
- The test doesn't give an exact measure of strength.
- It's easy to get misleading results.

Even though the rebound hammer test has limitations, it can be a useful tool for checking how strong and consistent concrete is.



## Penetration Test

The penetration test (C803/C803M) is a method used to quickly check how strong concrete is. It involves driving a hardened pin into the concrete to measure its resistance. It's useful for deciding when to remove the molds used to shape the concrete.

The results for the penetration test are dependent on the smoothness of the concrete as well as the size and shape of its aggregates. To get accurate results, it's important to use a specific calibration table for the type of concrete being tested and to be aware that the test results may vary a bit.

Overall, the penetration test is a valuable way to assess how strong concrete is and how quickly it's getting stronger, especially in the early stages of development.

## Pullout Test

The pullout test (ASTM C900) is a method used to measure the strength of concrete. Technically, it measures shear strength, which can be converted to equivalent compressive strength using correlation and calibration data specific to the concrete mixture and test insert being used. It involves pulling a specially shaped insert from hardened concrete and measuring the force required to do so. A dynamometer is used to measure the force.

This test is useful for assessing early-age strength development and determining when formwork can be removed safely. However, it requires careful planning, as ASTM C900 regulates the number, location, and spacing of pullouts. Also, the concrete needs surface repair after the test is completed.

Following best practices, such as using specific calibration data and planning the insert placement in advance, ensures accurate and reliable results.

## Load Testing

If there are concerns about whether a building or part of a building is safe, an engineer or building official may order load tests. This is usually done if there are worries about the quality of materials used, if construction methods are thought to be below standard, or if the structure doesn't meet building code requirements. Load tests are typically carried out after the structure is at least 56 days old, but they can be done earlier if the owner, contractor, design professional, and other involved parties all agree.

During the test, a load is applied to the structure in stages and left in place for 24 hours, unless any signs of problems are seen. Water tanks or heavy construction materials are often used to provide the load. The load is removed once all the necessary measurements have been taken.

If the structure passes the test, there should be no visible signs of damage like cracks, spalling, or excessive bending. Instead, the recovery of any bending after the load is removed is used to determine if the structure is strong enough.

## **Summary**

Concrete quality is ensured through precise testing based on ASTM standards, such as the slump test for consistency, as well as air content tests for workability and freeze-thaw resistance. Sampling should accurately represent the batch. These tests require specific tools and procedures to ensure validity. Air content is measured using methods like the pressure method and volumetric method. Temperature of concrete is measured using thermometers. Strength tests, such as core tests, determine the compressive strength. Nondestructive tests, like the rebound hammer test, provide additional strength assessments. Proper handling, curing, and testing protocols are crucial for reliable results, ensuring concrete meets required standards for construction safety and durability.