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Standard Practice for Safeguarding Against Embrittlement of Hot-Dip Galvanized Structural Steel Products and Procedure for Detecting Embrittlement¹

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This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the Department of Defense.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers procedures that can be followed to safeguard against the possible embrittlement of steel hot-dip galvanized after fabrication, and outlines test procedures for detecting embrittlement. Conditions of fabrication may induce a susceptibility to embrittlement in certain steels which can be accelerated by galvanizing. Embrittlement is not a common occurrence, however, and this discussion does not imply that galvanizing increases embrittlement where good fabricating and galvanizing procedures are employed. Where history has shown that for specific steels, processes and galvanizing procedures have been satisfactory, this history will serve as an indication that no embrittlement problem is to be expected for those steels, processes, and galvanizing procedures.

1.2 The values stated in inch-pound units are to be regarded as the standard.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Terminology

2.1 Definition:

2.1.1 *embrittlement*—the loss or partial loss of ductility in a steel. An embrittled product characteristically fails by fracture without appreciable deformation. Types of embrittlement usually encountered in galvanized steel are related to aging phenomena, cold working, and absorption of hydrogen.

3. Factors in Embrittlement

3.1 Embrittlement or loss of ductility in steel is often associated with strain-aging. Strain-aging refers to the delayed increase in hardness and strength, and loss of ductility and impact resistance which occur in susceptible steels as a result of the strains induced by cold working. The aging changes proceed slowly at room temperature, but proceed at an accelerated rate as the aging temperature is raised and may occur rapidly at the galvanizing temperature of approximately 850°F (455°C).

3.2 Hydrogen embrittlement may also occur due to the possibility of atomic hydrogen being absorbed by the steel. The susceptibility to hydrogen embrittlement is influenced by the type of steel, its previous heat treatment, and degree of previous cold work. In the case of galvanized steel, the acid pickling reaction prior to galvanizing presents a potential source of hydrogen. However, the heat of the galvanizing bath partially expels hydrogen which may have been absorbed. In practice hydrogen embrittlement of galvanized steel is usually of concern only if the steel exceeds approximately 150 ksi (1100 MPa) in ultimate tensile strength, or if it has been severely cold worked prior to pickling.

3.3 Loss of ductility of cold-worked steels is dependent on many factors including the type of steel (strength level, aging characteristics), thickness of steel, and degree of cold work, and is accentuated by areas of stress concentration such as caused by notches, holes, fillets of small radii, sharp bends, etc.

3.4 Low temperatures increase the risk of brittle failure of all plain carbon steels including steel that has been galvanized. The rate at which this temperature loss of ductility occurs varies for different steels. The expected service temperature should thus be taken into account when selecting the steel.

4. Steels

4.1 Open-hearth, basic-oxygen, and electric-furnace steels shall be used for galvanizing.

5. Cold Working and Thermal Treatment

5.1 For intermediate and heavy shapes, plates, and hardware, cold bend radii should not be less than that which is

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee A-5 on Metallic Coated Iron and Steel Products and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee A05.13 on Structural Shapes and Hardware Specifications.

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