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Standard Guide for Sampling Groundwater Monitoring Wells¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers procedures for obtaining valid, representative samples from groundwater monitoring wells. The scope is limited to sampling and “in the field” preservation and does not include well location, depth, well development, design and construction, screening, or analytical procedures.

1.2 This guide is only intended to provide a review of many of the most commonly used methods for sampling groundwater quality monitoring wells and is not intended to serve as a groundwater monitoring plan for any specific application. Because of the large and ever increasing number of options available, no single guide can be viewed as comprehensive. The practitioner must make every effort to ensure that the methods used, whether or not they are addressed in this guide, are adequate to satisfy the monitoring objectives at each site.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety problems, 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. Summary of Guide

2.1 The equipment and procedures used for sampling a monitoring well depend on many factors. These include, but are not limited to, the design and construction of the well, rate of groundwater flow, and the chemical species of interest. Sampling procedures will be different if analyzing for trace organics, volatiles, oxidizable species, or trace metals is needed. This guide considers all of these factors by discussing equipment and procedure options at each stage of the sampling sequence. For ease of organization, the sampling process can be divided into three steps: well flushing, sample withdrawal, and field preparation of samples.

2.2 Monitoring wells must be flushed prior to sampling so that the groundwater is sampled, not the stagnant water in the well casing. If the well casing can be emptied, this may be done although it may be necessary to avoid oxygen contact with the groundwater. If the well cannot be emptied, procedures must be established to demonstrate that the sample represents groundwater. Monitoring an indicative parameter such as pH during flushing is desirable if such a parameter can be identified.

2.3 The types of species that are to be monitored as well as the concentration levels are prime factors for selecting sampling devices **(1,2)**.² The sampling device and all materials and devices the water contacts must be constructed of materials that will not introduce contaminants or alter the analyte chemically in any way.

2.4 The method of sample withdrawal can vary with the parameters of interest. The ideal sampling scheme would employ a completely inert material, would not subject the sample to negative pressure and only moderate positive pressure, would not expose the sample to the atmosphere, or preferably, any other gaseous atmosphere before conveying it to the sample container or flow cell for on-site analysis.

2.5 The degree and type of effort and care that goes into a sampling program is always dependent on the chemical species of interest and the concentration levels of interest. As the concentration level of the chemical species of analytical interest decreases, the work and precautions necessary for sampling are increased. Therefore, the sampling objective must clearly be defined ahead of time. For example, to prepare equipment for sampling for mg/L (ppm) levels of Total Organic Carbon (TOC) in water is about an order of magnitude easier than preparing to sample for µg/L (ppb) levels of a trace organic like benzene. The specific precautions to be taken in preparing to sample for trace organics are different from those to be taken in sampling for trace metals. No final Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) protocol is available for sampling of trace organics. A short guidance manual **(3)** and an EPA document **(4)** concerning monitoring well sampling, including considerations for trace organics, are available.

2.6 Care must be taken not to cross contaminate samples or monitoring wells with sampling or pumping devices or materials. All samples, sampling devices, and containers must be protected from the environment when not in use. Water level measurements should be made before the well is flushed. Oxidation-reduction potential, pH, dissolved oxygen, and temperature measurements and filtration should all be performed on the sample in the field, if possible. All but temperature measurement must be done prior to any significant atmospheric exposure, if possible.

2.7 The sampling procedures must be well planned and all sample containers must be prepared and labeled prior to going to the field.

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D34 on Waste Management and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D34.01.02 on Sampling Techniques.

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² The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this guide.