**Institute for
Interlaboratory Studies**

Results of Proficiency Test
Nickel release and
Surface determination
July 2024

Organized by: **Institute for Interlaboratory Studies**
Spijkenisse, the Netherlands

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1   INTRODUCTION

Nickel has always been used in various applications for example as a plated substance on another metal or as an alloy. Nickel applications usually do not give problems, but when Nickel comes to prolonged and direct contact with the human skin sensitization can occur. When a person becomes sensitive to Nickel even the smallest amounts can provoke an allergic reaction. Nickel is the most frequent cause of contact allergy in Europe. Both the contact itself, sometimes enhanced by damaged skin, and skin conditions as sweat can cause the body to be exposed to Nickel. Nickel containing items that are used in prolonged human contact are tested for Nickel release. This to avoid products on the market with too much Nickel release. With this regulation it prevents that more people become sensitized. Products, like jewelry in piercings (earrings), watches or clothes fasteners, are tested in compliance with entry No. 27 to Annex XVII of Regulation (CE) 1907/2006 (REACH).

Since 2014 the Institute for Interlaboratory Studies (iis) organizes a proficiency scheme for the determination of Nickel release and Surface Determination every year. During the annual proficiency testing program of 2024 it was decided to continue the proficiency test for the determination of Nickel release and Surface Determination.

In this interlaboratory study 94 laboratories in 25 countries registered for participation, see appendix 5 for the number of participants per country. In this report the results of the Nickel release and Surface determination proficiency test are presented and discussed.

2   SET UP

The Institute for Interlaboratory Studies (iis) in Spijkenisse, the Netherlands, was the organizer of this proficiency test (PT). Sample analyzes for fit-for-use and homogeneity testing were subcontracted to a laboratory that has performed the tests in accordance with for ISO/IEC17043 relevant requirements of ISO/IEC17025.
It was decided to send three identical non-coated metal plates labelled #24625 and one piece of a pendant labelled #24626 for Surface determination only. The participants were requested to report rounded and unrounded test results. The unrounded test results were preferably used for statistical evaluation.

2.1   QUALITY SYSTEM

The Institute for Interlaboratory Studies in Spijkenisse, the Netherlands, has implemented a quality system based on ISO/IEC17043:2010. This ensures strict adherence to protocols for sample preparation and statistical evaluation and 100% confidentiality of participant's data. Feedback from the participants on the reported data is encouraged and customer's satisfaction is measured on regular basis by sending out questionnaires.

2.2   PROTOCOL

The protocol followed in the organization of this proficiency test was the one as described for proficiency testing in the report 'iis Interlaboratory Studies: Protocol for the Organisation, Statistics and Evaluation' of June 2018 (iis-protocol, version 3.5). This protocol is electronically available through the iis website www.iisnl.com, from the FAQ page.

2.3　CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

All data presented in this report must be regarded as confidential and for use by the participating companies only. Disclosure of the information in this report is only allowed by means of the entire report. Use of the contents of this report for third parties is only allowed by written permission of the Institute for Interlaboratory Studies. Disclosure of the identity of one or more of the participating companies will be done only after receipt of a written agreement of the companies involved.

2.4　SAMPLES

For the determination of Nickel release a batch of Nickel containing metal was purchased from a local retailer. The batch consisted of square metal pieces with a hole in one of the corners. The pieces were solid metal, prepared from one alloy and non-coated. The dimensions of each item were approximately 2 x 2 x 0.2 cm and the hole had a diameter of approximately 0.5 cm. Three items were packed in a small plastic bag and vacuum sealed to avoid scratching of the items. In total 150 subsamples of three pieces each were prepared and labelled #24625.
The batch for sample #24625 was used in a previous proficiency test on Nickel release as sample #22575 in iis22V03. Therefore, homogeneity of the subsamples was assumed.

For the Surface determination a batch of metal pendants, with the shape of a guitar, was purchased from a local retailer. From this batch 130 small plastic bags were filled with one pendant. This small bag was placed in an outer bag and labelled #24626. No homogeneity tests were done over the subsamples because only surface determination has been requested for this sample. However, each guitar pendant was weighed in advance to make sure that no large differences exist in the surfaces.

To each of the participating laboratories one sample #24625 and one sample #24626 were sent on June 12, 2024.

2.5　ANALYZES

The participants were requested to determine Nickel release on sample #24625 and to determine the surface only on sample #24626.
The participants were informed that the metal plates of sample #24625 are non-coated and a simulation of accelerated wear and corrosion did not need to be conducted. Also, that on critical examination some small irregularities such as slight scratches on the surface of the sample may be observed. The influence of these irregularities on the nickel release is negligible. This was proven by testing prior to use in this PT.
It was requested to report if the laboratory was accredited for the determination of Nickel release and to report some analytical details.

It was explicitly requested to treat the samples as if they were routine samples and to report the test results using the indicated units on the report form and not to round the test results but report as much significant figures as possible. It was also requested not to report 'less than' test results, which are above the detection limit, because such test results cannot be used for meaningful statistical evaluations.

To get comparable test results a detailed report form and a letter of instructions are prepared. On the report form the reporting units are given as well as the reference test methods (when applicable) that will be used during the evaluation. The detailed report form and the letter of instructions are both made available on the data entry portal www.kpmd.co.uk/sgs-iis-cts/. The participating laboratories are also requested to confirm the sample receipt on this data entry portal. The letter of instructions can also be downloaded from the iis website www.iisnl.com.

3   RESULTS

During five weeks after sample dispatch, the test results of the individual laboratories were gathered via the data entry portal www.kpmd.co.uk/sgs-iis-cts/. The reported test results are tabulated per determination in appendices 1 and 2 of this report. The laboratories are presented by their code numbers.

Directly after the deadline, a reminder was sent to those laboratories that had not reported test results at that moment. Shortly after the deadline, the available test results were screened for suspect data. A test result was called suspect in case the Huber Elimination Rule (a robust outlier test) found it to be an outlier. The laboratories that produced these suspect data were asked to check the reported test results (no reanalyzes). Additional or corrected test results are used for data analysis and the original test results are placed under 'Remarks' in the result tables in appendices 1 and 2. Test results that came in after the deadline were not taken into account in this screening for suspect data and thus these participants were not requested for checks.

3.1   STATISTICS

The protocol followed in the organization of this proficiency test was the one as described for proficiency testing in the report 'iis Interlaboratory Studies: Protocol for the Organisation, Statistics and Evaluation' of June 2018 (iis-protocol, version 3.5).
For the statistical evaluation the *unrounded* (when available) figures were used instead of the rounded test results. Test results reported as '<…' or '>…' were not used in the statistical evaluation.

First, the normality of the distribution of the various data sets per determination was checked by means of the Lilliefors-test, a variant of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and by the calculation of skewness and kurtosis. Evaluation of the three normality indicators in combination with the visual evaluation of the graphic Kernel density plot, lead to judgement of the normality being either 'unknown', 'OK', 'suspect' or 'not OK'. After removal of outliers, this check was repeated. If a data set does not have a normal distribution, the (results of the) statistical evaluation should be used with due care.

The assigned value is determined by consensus based on the test results of the group of participants after rejection of the statistical outliers and/or suspect data.

According to ISO13528 all (original received or corrected) results per determination were submitted to outlier tests. In the iis procedure for proficiency tests, outliers are detected prior

to calculation of the mean, standard deviation and reproducibility. For small data sets, Dixon (up to 20 test results) or Grubbs (up to 40 test results) outlier tests can be used. For larger data sets (above 20 test results) Rosner's outlier test can be used. Outliers are marked by D(0.01) for the Dixon's test, by G(0.01) or DG(0.01) for the Grubbs' test and by R(0.01) for the Rosner's test. Stragglers are marked by D(0.05) for the Dixon's test, by G(0.05) or DG(0.05) for the Grubbs' test and by R(0.05) for the Rosner's test. Both outliers and stragglers were not included in the calculations of averages and standard deviations.

For each assigned value the uncertainty was determined in accordance with ISO13528. Subsequently the calculated uncertainty was evaluated against the respective requirement based on the target reproducibility in accordance with ISO13528. In this PT the criterion of ISO13528, paragraph 9.2.1, was met for all evaluated tests. Therefore, the uncertainty of all assigned values may be negligible and need not be included in the PT report.

Finally, the reproducibilities were calculated from the standard deviations by multiplying them with a factor of 2.8.

3.2 GRAPHICS

In order to visualize the data against the reproducibilities from literature, Gauss plots were made, using the sorted data for one determination (see appendix 1). On the Y-axis the reported test results are plotted. The corresponding laboratory numbers are on the X-axis. The straight horizontal line presents the consensus value (a trimmed mean). The four striped lines, parallel to the consensus value line, are the +3s, +2s, -2s and -3s target reproducibility limits of the selected reference test method. Outliers and other data, which were excluded from the calculations, are represented as a cross. Accepted data are represented as a triangle.

Furthermore, Kernel Density Graphs were made. This is a method for producing a smooth density approximation to a set of data that avoids some problems associated with histograms. Also, a normal Gauss curve (dotted line) was projected over the Kernel Density Graph (smooth line) for reference. The Gauss curve is calculated from the consensus value and the corresponding standard deviation.

3.3 Z-SCORES

To evaluate the performance of the participating laboratories the z-scores were calculated. As it was decided to evaluate the performance of the participants in this proficiency test (PT) against the literature requirements (derived from e.g. ISO or ASTM test methods), the z-scores were calculated using a target standard deviation. This results in an evaluation independent of the variation in this interlaboratory study.

The target standard deviation was calculated from the literature reproducibility by division with 2.8. In case no literature reproducibility was available, other target values were used, like Horwitz or an estimated reproducibility based on former iis proficiency tests.

When a laboratory did use a test method with a reproducibility that is significantly different from the reproducibility of the reference test method used in this report, it is strongly advised

to recalculate the z-score, while using the reproducibility of the actual test method used, this in order to evaluate whether the reported test result is fit-for-use.

The z-scores were calculated according to:

$z_{(target)}$ = (test result - average of PT) / target standard deviation

The $z_{(target)}$ scores are listed in the test result tables in appendix 1.

Absolute values for z<2 are very common and absolute values for z>3 are very rare. Therefore, the usual interpretation of z-scores is as follows:

$$|z| < 1 \quad \text{good}$$
$$1 < |z| < 2 \quad \text{satisfactory}$$
$$2 < |z| < 3 \quad \text{questionable}$$
$$3 < |z| \quad \text{unsatisfactory}$$

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