

## <1005> ACOUSTIC EMISSION

### INTRODUCTION

Ultrasound techniques can be categorized into two distinct types: acoustic emission (passive mode) and ultrasound spectroscopy (active mode). Both of these techniques have many applications.

The technique of acoustic emission is based on the detection and analysis of sound produced by a process or system. This is essentially equivalent to listening to the process or system, although these sounds are often well above the frequencies that can be detected by the human ear. Generally, frequencies up to about 15 kHz are audible.

In the case of ultrasound spectroscopy, the instrument is designed to generate ultrasound waves across a defined frequency range. These waves travel through the sample and are measured using a receiver. An analogy can be drawn with UV-visible or IR spectroscopy in that the detected ultrasound spectrum reflects changes in velocity or sound attenuation due to the interaction with a sample across a range of frequencies. However, as the scope of this chapter is limited to acoustic emission, ultrasound spectroscopy will not be discussed further.

Acoustic emission is well-known in the study of fracture mechanics and therefore is used extensively by material scientists. It is also widely used as a nondestructive testing technique and is applied routinely for the inspection of aircraft wings, pressure vessels, load-bearing structures, and components. Acoustic emission is also used in the engineering industry for the monitoring of machine tool wear.

In terms of pharmaceutical applications, the dependence of the acoustic emission measurement on physical properties such as particle size, mechanical strength, and cohesivity of solid materials allows the technique to be used for the control and end-point detection of processes such as high shear granulation, fluid bed drying, milling, and micronization.

### General Principles

Acoustic emissions can propagate by a number of modes. In solids, compressional and shear or transverse modes are important. Compressional modes have the highest velocity and thus reach the acoustic detector (or acoustic emission transducer) first. However, in most process applications of acoustic emission, there are many sources—each producing short bursts of energy—and, consequently, the different modes cannot easily be resolved. The detected signal, for example on the wall of a vessel, is a complex mixture of many overlapping waveforms resulting from many sources and many propagation modes.

At interfaces, depending on the relative acoustic impedance of the two materials, much of the energy is reflected back towards the source. In a fluidized bed, for example, acoustic emissions will only be detected from particles directly impacting the walls of the bed close to the transducer.

A convenient method of studying acoustic emission from processes is to use the “average signal level”. A root mean square-to-direct current (RMS-to-DC) converter may be used to convert the amplitude-modulated (AM) carrier into a more slowly varying DC signal. This is referred to as the average signal level (ASL). The ASL can then be digitally sampled (typically at a sampling frequency of about 50 Hz) and stored electronically for further signal processing.

The simplest way of studying the acoustic data is to examine changes in the ASL. However, other information can be derived from examining the power spectrum of the ASL. The power spectrum is calculated by taking the complex square of the amplitude spectrum and can be obtained by performing a Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) on the digitized raw data record. Power spectra may be averaged to produce a reliable estimate of power spectral density or to give a “fingerprint” of a particular process regime. Interpretation of the power spectrum is complicated by the fact that the acoustic signal originating in the system is distorted by several factors including transmission, reflection, and signal transfer characteristics.

The shape of the power spectrum of the ASL record is a function of the process dynamics. Periodic processes (e.g., mechanical stirring or periodic bubbling of a fluidized bed) show high power at certain discrete frequencies. Random processes show either flicker type properties, where power is inversely proportional to frequency, or white noise type properties in which power is independent of frequency. The amplitude of the power spectrum is also affected by the energy of the acoustic emissions produced by the process. For example, if hard material is being processed, the acoustic emission produced by particle impact will be greater than that produced by soft material.

### INSTRUMENTATION

Generally, piezoelectric sensors are used to detect and quantify the acoustic signals produced by a process. Piezoelectric transducers are constructed from piezoelectric crystalline solids connected to transducer control circuitry by electrical leads. When configured as a detector, an acoustic wave that impinges on the piezoelectric element is transformed into an electrical signal in the transducer control circuitry. When configured as an acoustic generator, an electrical signal applied to the piezoelectric element by the control circuitry creates an acoustic wave that can propagate into the medium to which the transducer is attached. Typically, this means that acoustic emission detectors can also be operated as acoustic wave generators and this feature is used to ensure good sensor performance as described later (see *Qualification and Verification of Acoustic Emission Instruments*).