

**U.S.EPA REGION 9 LABORATORY**  
**RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA**

**FIELD SAMPLING GUIDANCE DOCUMENT #1215**

**SEDIMENT SAMPLING**

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## 1.0 SCOPE AND APPLICATION

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is applicable to the collection of representative sediment samples. Analysis of sediment may determine whether concentrations of specific contaminants exceed established threshold action levels, or if the concentrations present a risk to public health, welfare, or the environment.

The methodologies discussed in this procedure are applicable to the sampling of sediment in both flowing and standing water. They are generic in nature and may be modified in whole or part to meet the handling and analytical requirements of the contaminants of concern, as well as the constraints presented by the sampling area. However, if modifications occur, they should be documented in the site logbook or report summarizing field activities.

For the purposes of this procedure, sediments are those mineral and organic materials situated beneath an aqueous layer. The aqueous layer may be either static, as in lakes, ponds, or other impoundments or flowing, as in rivers and streams.

## 2.0 METHOD SUMMARY

Sediment samples may be recovered using a variety of methods and equipment, depending on the depth of the aqueous layer, the portion of the sediment profile required (surface versus subsurface), the type of sample required (disturbed versus undisturbed) and the sediment type.

Sediment is collected from beneath an aqueous layer either directly, using a hand-held device such as a shovel, trowel, or auger, or indirectly using a remotely activated device such as an Eckman or Ponar dredge. Following collection, the sediment is placed into a container constructed of inert material, homogenized, and transferred to the appropriate sample containers. *The homogenization procedure should not be used if sample analysis includes volatile organics.*

## 3.0 SAMPLE PRESERVATION, CONTAINERS, HANDLING, AND STORAGE

- Chemical preservation of solids is generally not recommended. Cooling is usually the best approach, supplemented by the appropriate holding time.
- Wide-mouth glass containers with Teflon-lined caps are utilized for sediment samples. The sample volume is a function of the analytical requirements and will be specified in the work plan.
- Transfer sediment from the sample collection device to an appropriate sample container using a stainless steel or plastic lab spoon or equivalent. If composite samples are collected, place the sediment sample in a stainless steel, plastic or other appropriate composition (e.g.: Teflon) bucket, and mix thoroughly to obtain a homogeneous sample representative of the entire sampling interval. Then place the sediment sample into labeled containers.
- Samples for volatile organic analysis must be collected directly from the bucket, before

mixing the sample, to minimize loss due to volatilization of contaminants.

- All sampling devices should be decontaminated, then wrapped in aluminum foil. The sampler should remain in this wrapping until it is needed. Each sampler should be used for only one sample. Dedicated samplers for sediment samples may be impractical due to the large number of sediment samples which may be required and the cost of the sampler. In this case, samplers should be cleaned in the field using the decontamination procedure described in SOP#109, Sampling Equipment Decontamination.

#### **4.0 INTERFERENCES AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS**

Substrate particle size and organic content are directly related to water velocity and flow characteristics of a body of water. Contaminants are more likely to be concentrated in sediments typified by fine particle size and a high organic content. This type of sediment is most likely to be collected from depositional zones. In contrast, coarse sediments with low organic content do not typically concentrate pollutants and are found in erosional zones. The selection of a sampling location can, therefore, greatly influence the analytical results.

#### **5.0 EQUIPMENT/APPARATUS**

Equipment needed for collection of sediment samples includes:

- maps/plot plan
- safety equipment
- compass
- tape measure
- survey stakes, flags, or buoys and anchors
- camera and film
- stainless steel, plastic, or other appropriate composition bucket
- 4-oz, 8-oz, and one-quart, wide-mouth jars w/Teflon-lined lids
- Ziploc plastic bags
- logbook
- sample jar labels
- chain of custody forms, field data sheets
- cooler(s)
- ice
- decontamination supplies/equipment
- spade or shovel
- spatula
- scoop
- trowel
- bucket auger
- thin-walled auger
- extension rods
- T-handle
- sampling trier
- sediment coring device (tubes, points, drive head, drop hammer, “eggshell” check valve devices, acetate cores)

- Ponar dredge
- Eckman dredge
- nylon rope

## **6.0 REAGENTS**

Reagents are not used for preservation of sediment samples. Decontamination solutions are specified in SOP #109, Sampling Equipment Decontamination.

## **7.0 PROCEDURES**

### **7.1 Preparation**

1. Determine the extent of the sampling effort, the sampling methods to be employed, and which equipment and supplies are required.
2. Obtain necessary sampling and monitoring equipment.
3. Decontaminate or preclean equipment, and ensure that it is in working order.
4. Prepare schedules, and coordinate with staff, client, and regulatory agencies, if appropriate.
5. Perform a general site survey prior to site entry in accordance with the site-specific health and safety plan.
6. Use stakes, flags, or buoys to identify and mark all sampling locations. Specific site characteristics, including flow regime, basin morphometry, sediment characteristics, depth of overlying aqueous layer, and extent and nature of contaminant should be considered when selecting sample location. If required, the proposed locations may be adjusted based on site access, property boundaries, and surface obstructions.

### **7.2 Sample Collection**

Selection of a sampling device is most often contingent upon: (1) depth of water at the sampling location, and (2) the physical characteristics of the medium to be sampled.

#### **7.2.1 Sampling Surface Sediments with a Trowel or Scoop from Beneath a Shallow Aqueous Layer**

If the surface water body is wadeable, the easiest way to collect a sediment sample is by using a stainless steel scoop or spoon. The sampling method is accomplished by wading into the surface water body and while facing upstream (into the current), scooping the sample along the bottom of the surface water body in the upstream direction. Excess water may be removed from the scoop or spoon. However, this may result in the loss of some fine particle size material associated with the bottom of the surface water body.

This method can be used to collect consolidated sediments but is limited somewhat by the depth of the aqueous layer. Accurate, representative samples can be collected with this procedure depending on the care and precision demonstrated by the sample team member. In surface water bodies that are too deep to wade, but less than eight feet deep, a stainless steel scoop or spoon attached to a piece of conduit can be used either from the banks if the surface water body is narrow or from a boat. The sediment is

placed into a glass pan and homogenized.

A stainless steel or plastic scoop or lab spoon will suffice in most applications. Care should be exercised to avoid the use of devices plated with chrome or other materials. Plating is particularly common with garden trowels.

Follow these procedures to collect sediment samples with a scoop or trowel:

1. Using a precleaned stainless steel scoop or trowel, remove the desired thickness of sediment from the sampling area.
2. Transfer the sample into an appropriate sample or homogenization container.

### **7.2.2 Sampling Surface Sediments with a Thin-Wall Tube Auger from Beneath a Shallow Aqueous Layer**

This system consists of an auger, a series of extension rods, and a “T” handle. The auger is driven into the sediment and used to extract a core. A sample of the core is taken from the appropriate depth.

Use the following procedure to collect sediment samples with a thin-walled auger:

1. Insert the auger into the material to be sampled at a 0° to 45° angle from vertical. This orientation minimizes spillage of the sample from the sampler. Extraction of samples may require tilting of the sampler.
2. Rotate the auger once or twice to cut a core of material.
3. Slowly withdraw the auger, making sure that the slot is facing upward.
4. An acetate core may be inserted into the auger prior to sampling, if characteristics of the sediments or body of water warrant. By using this technique, an intact core can be extracted.
5. Transfer the sample into an appropriate sample or homogenization container.

### **7.2.3 Sampling Deep Sediments with Augers and Thin-Wall Tube Samplers From Beneath a Shallow Aqueous Layer**

This system uses an auger, a series of extension rods, a “T” handle, and a thin-wall tube sampler. The auger bores a hole to a desired sampling depth and then is withdrawn. The auger tip is then replaced with a tube core sampler, lowered down the borehole, and driven into the sediment at the completion depth. The core is then withdrawn and the sample collected. This method can be used to collect consolidated sediments, but is somewhat limited by the depth of the aqueous layer.

Several augers are available which include bucket and posthole augers. Bucket augers are better for direct sample recovery, are fast, and provide a large volume of sample. Posthole augers have limited utility for sample collection, as they are designed more for their ability to cut through fibrous, rooted, swampy areas.

Follow these procedures to collect sediment samples with a hand auger:

1. Attach the auger bit to a drill extension rod, then attach the “T” handle to the drill

- extension rod.
2. Clear the area to be sampled of any surface debris.
  3. Begin augering, periodically removing any accumulated sediment from the auger bucket.
  4. After reaching the desired depth, slowly and carefully remove the auger from boring. (When sampling directly from the auger, collect sample after the auger is removed from boring and proceed to Step 10.)
  5. Remove auger tip from drill rods and replace with a precleaned thin-wall tube sampler. Install proper cutting tip.
  6. Carefully lower tube sampler down borehole. Gradually force tube sampler into sediment. Care should be taken to avoid scraping the borehole sides. Also avoid hammering of the drill rods to facilitate coring, since the vibrations may cause the boring walls to collapse.
  7. Remove tube sampler and unscrew drill rods.
  8. Remove cutting tip and remove core from device.
  9. Discard top of core (approximately 1 inch), as this represents material collected by the tube sampler before penetration of the layer of concern.
  10. Transfer sample into an appropriate sample or homogenization container.

#### **7.2.4 Sampling Surface Sediments From Beneath a Deep Aqueous Layer with an Eckman or Ponar Dredge**

The Eckman dredge has only limited usefulness. It performs well where the bottom material is unusually soft, as when covered with organic sludge or light mud. It is unsuitable, however, for sandy, rocky, and hard bottoms and is too light for use in streams with high velocities. It should not be used from a bridge that is more than a few feet above the water, because the spring mechanism which activates the sampler can be damaged by the messenger if dropped from too great a height.

Follow these procedures for collecting sediment with an Eckman dredge:

1. Thread a study nylon or stainless steel cable through the bracket, or secure the extended handle to the bracket with machine bolts.
2. Attach springs to both sides. Arrange the Ekman dredge sampler so that the jaws are in the open position and trip cables are positioned over the release studs.
3. Lower the sampler to a point just above the sediment surface.
4. Drop the sampler sharply onto the sediment.
5. Trigger the jaw release mechanism by lowering a messenger down the line, or by depressing the button on the upper end of the extended handle.
6. Raise the sampler and slowly decant any free liquid through the top of the sampler. Be careful to retain fine sediments
7. Open the dredge and transfer the sediment into a stainless steel or plastic bucket. Continue to collect additional sediment until sufficient material has been secured. Thoroughly mix sediment to obtain a homogeneous sample, and then transfer to the appropriate sample container.
8. Samples for volatile organic analysis must be collected directly from the bucket before mixing the sample to minimize volatilization of contaminants.

The Ponar dredge has a modification yet it is similar in size and weight. It has been modified by the addition of side plates and a screen on the top of the sample compartment. The screen over the sample compartment permits water to pass through the sampler as it descends thus reducing turbulence around

the dredge. The Ponar dredge is easily operated by one person in the same fashion as the Eckman dredge. Lower it slowly as it approaches bottom, since it can displace and miss fine particle size sediment if allowed to drop freely. The Ponar dredge is one of the most effective samplers for general use on all types of substrates.

The "mini" Ponar dredge is a smaller, much lighter version of the Ponar dredge. It is used to collect smaller sample volumes when working in industrial tanks, lagoons, ponds, and shallow water bodies. It is a good device use when collecting sludge and sediment containing hazardous constituents because the size of the dredge makes it more amenable to field cleaning.

Follow these procedures for collecting sediment with a Ponar dredge:

1. Attach a sturdy nylon or steel cable to the hook provided on top of the dredge.
2. Arrange the Ponar dredge sampler in the open position, setting the trip bar so the sampler remains open when lifted from the top.
3. Slowly lower the sampler to a point just above the sediment.
4. Drop the sampler sharply into the sediment, then pull sharply up on the line, thus releasing the trip bar and closing the dredge.
5. Raise the sampler to the surface and slowly decant any free liquid through the screens on top of the dredge. Be careful to retain fine sediments.
6. Open the dredge and transfer the sediment to a stainless steel or plastic bucket. Continue to collect additional sediment until sufficient material has been gained. Thoroughly mix sediment to obtain a homogeneous sample, and then transfer to the appropriate sample container.
7. Samples for volatile organic analysis must be collected directly from the bucket before mixing the sample to minimize volatilization of contaminants.

### **7.2.5 Sampling Subsurface Sediments from Beneath a Deep Aqueous Layer with a Sample Coring Device**

Core samplers are used to sample vertical columns of sediment. They are particularly useful when a historical picture of sediment deposition is desired since they preserve the sequential layering of the deposit, and when it is desirable to minimize the loss of material at the sediment-water interface. Many types of coring devices have been developed depending on the depth of water from which the sample is to be obtained, the nature of the bottom material, and the length of core to be collected. They vary from hand push tubes to weight or gravity driven devices.

Coring devices are particularly useful in pollutant monitoring because turbulence created by descent through the water is minimal, thus the fines of the sediment-water interface are only minimally disturbed; the sample is withdrawn intact permitting the removal of only those layers of interest; core liners manufactured of glass or Teflon® can be purchased, thus reducing possible sample contamination; and the samples are easily delivered to the lab for analysis in the tube in which they were collected.

The disadvantage of coring devices is that a relatively small surface area and sample size is obtained often necessitating repetitive sampling in order to obtain the required amount of material for analysis.

Follow these procedures when using a sample coring device to collect subsurface sediments. It consists of a coring device, handle, and acetate core utilized in the following procedure:

1. Assemble the coring device by inserting the acetate core into the sampling tube.
2. Insert the “eggshell” check valve mechanisms into the tip of the sampling tube with the convex surface positioned inside the acetate core.
3. Screw the coring point onto the tip of the sampling tube.
4. Screw the handle onto the upper end of the sampling tube and add extension rods as needed.
5. Place the sampler in a perpendicular position on the material to be sampled.
6. This sampler may be used with either a drive hammer for firm consolidated sediments, or a “T” handle for soft sediments. If the “T” handle is used, place downward pressure on the device until the desired depth is reached. Rotate the sampler to shear off the core of the bottom, retrieve the device and proceed to Step 15.
7. If the drive hammer is selected, insert the tapered handle (drive head) of the drive hammer through the drive head.
8. With left hand holding the tube, drive the sampler into the material to the desired depth. Do not drive the tube further than the tip of the hammer’s guide.
9. Record the length of the tube that penetrated the sample material, and the number of blows required to obtain this depth.
10. Remove the drive hammer and fit the keyhole-like opening on the flat side of the hammer onto the drive head. In this position, the hammer serves as a handle for the sampler.
11. Rotate the sampler at least two revolutions to shear off the sample at the bottom.
12. Lower the sampler handle (hammer) until it just clears the two ear-like protrusions on the drive head, and rotate about 90° .
13. Withdraw the sampler by pulling the handle (hammer) upwards and dislodging the hammer from the sampler.
14. Unscrew the coring point and remove the “eggshell” check valve.
15. Slide the acetate core out of the sampler tube. The acetate core may be capped at both ends. The sample may be used in this fashion, or the contents transferred to a stainless steel or plastic bucket and mixed thoroughly to obtain a homogeneous sample representative of the entire sampling interval.

Samples for volatile organic analysis must be sub-sampled and collected directly from the core before mixing the sample to minimize volatilization of contaminants.

## **8.0 CALCULATIONS**

This section is not applicable to this SOP.

## **9.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE/QUALITY CONTROL**

There are no specific quality assurance activities which apply to the implementation of these procedures. However, the following QA/QC procedures apply:

- All data must be documented on field data sheets or within site logbooks.
- All instrumentation must be operated in accordance with operating instructions as supplied by the manufacturer, unless otherwise specified in the work plan. Equipment checkout and calibration activities must occur prior to sampling/operation, and they must be

documented.

**10.0 DATA VALIDATION**

This section is not applicable to this SOP.

**11.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY**

When working with potentially hazardous materials, follow U.S. EPA, OSHA and specific health and safety procedures.

More specifically, when sampling sediment from bodies of water containing known or suspected hazardous substances, adequate precautions must be taken to ensure the sampler's safety. The team member collecting the sample should not get too close to the edge of the water, where bank failure may cause him or her to lose their balance. To prevent this, the person performing the sampling should be on a lifeline, and be wearing adequate protective equipment. If sampling from a vessel is necessary, implement appropriate protective measures.