



AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE

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# API Recommended Practice 2003

## Protection Against Ignitions Arising Out of Static, Lightning, and Stray Currents

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This recommended practice (RP) presents the current state of knowledge and technology in the fields of static electricity, lightning, and stray currents applicable to the prevention of hydrocarbon ignition in the petroleum industry and is based on both scientific research and practical experience. Furthermore, the principles discussed in this RP are applicable to other operations where ignitable liquids and gases are handled. Their use should lead to improved safety practices and evaluations of existing installations and procedures. When the narrow limits of static electricity ignition are properly understood, fire investigators should be encouraged to search more diligently for the true ignition sources in instances where static ignition is unlikely or impossible.

Following this recommended practice is not required where:

- a) static discharges may occur, but flammable vapors are verified to be excluded by gas freeing or inerting the atmosphere in the area of discharge;
- b) product handling occurs in a closed system, and oxygen in that system is verified to be below the minimum concentration required to support combustion, such as in the handling of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG);
- c) the flammable concentration is verified to be above the upper flammable limit (UFL).

This document does not address electrostatic hazards relating to solids handling. Vehicle fueling (truck or passenger car) is also outside the scope of this document.

Hazards are situations or properties of materials with the inherent ability to cause harm. Flammability, toxicity, corrosivity, stored electrical, chemical, or mechanical energy all are hazards associated with various industrial materials or situations. Charge separation and the accumulation of a static charge are inherent properties of low conductivity hydrocarbon fluids.

Risk includes a consequence such as a hot surface or material that can cause thermal skin burns or a corrosive acid can cause chemical skin burns, but these can occur only if there is contact to the skin. An accumulated static charge can be a source of ignition only if exposed to a flammable fuel-air mixture under conditions where a discharge is possible. There is no risk when all the required elements do not exist; charge accumulation, flammable mixture, and spark discharge.

Determining the level of risk involves estimating the probability and severity of exposure of an event that could lead to harm. While the preceding examples relate hazards to the risk to people, the same principles are valid for evaluating risks to property and the environment. For instance, hydrocarbon vapors in a flammable mixture with air can ignite if exposed to a source of ignition (such as a static discharge) resulting in a fire which could injure people or damage property.

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## Contents

	Page
<b>1 Scope</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 General</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Concept of Hazard vs Risk</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3 Units of Measurement</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Normative References</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Terms, Definitions, Acronyms, and Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3.1 Terms and Definitions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3.2 Acronyms and Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4 Static Electricity Hazards</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4.1 General</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4.2 Tank Truck Loading</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>4.3 Tank Car Loading</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>4.4 Marine Operations</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>4.5 Storage Tanks</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>4.6 Miscellaneous Electrostatic Hazards</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>5 Lightning</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>5.1 General</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>5.2 Direct-stroke Lightning</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>5.3 Indirect Lightning Currents</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>5.4 Protection of Specific Equipment Against Lightning</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>5.5 Protection Against Direct-stroke Lightning</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>6 Stray Currents</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>6.1 General</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>6.2 Sources and Limitations</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>6.3 Protection of Specific Operations Against Stray Currents</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Annex A (informative) Fundamentals of Static Electricity</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Annex B (informative) Measurement and Detection of Static Electricity</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Annex C (informative) Direct Strike Lightning Protection Systems</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>Annex D (informative) Units of Measurement</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>Figures</b>	
<b>1 Fixed Spark Promoter</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2 Floating Spark Promoter</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>3 Approximate Relationship Between Temperature, Reid Vapor Pressure, and the Flammability Limits of Petroleum Products at Sea Level</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>4 Tank Truck Bonding for Top Loading</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>5 Loading and Unloading of Tank Trucks Through Closed Connections</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>6 Conversion Chart for Flow Rates and Velocities for Selected Pipe Sizes</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>7 Tank Car Bonding</b> .....	<b>27</b>

## Contents

	Page
<b>8 Charge Separation in a Filter . . . . .</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>9 Electrostatic Charge Generation During Tank Truck Loading Update Using Clear Copy . . . . .</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>10 Bonding During Container Filling . . . . .</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>11 Stray Current Bypass . . . . .</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>12 Isolating Spur Tracks from Main-line Stray Current Sources. . . . .</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>13 Bonding, Grounding, and Insulating at Marine Wharves . . . . .</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>A.1 Static Procedures . . . . .</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>A.2 Charge Separation in a Pipe. . . . .</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>A.3 Charge Movement Through a Liquid. . . . .</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>A.4 Charged and Uncharged Bodies Insulated from Ground. . . . .</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>A.5 Both Insulated Bodies Share the Same Charge . . . . .</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>A.6 Both Bodies are Grounded and Have No Charge . . . . .</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Tables</b>	
<b>1 Summary of Precautions for Tank Truck Loading. . . . .</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2 Charge Relaxation Precautions for Tank Truck Loading with Micropore Filtersh. . . . .</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3 Velocities and Flow Rates for Schedule 40 Pipe . . . . .</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>A.1 Conductivity and Relaxation Time Constant of Typical Liquids . . . . .</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>B.1 Effect of Temperature on Hydrocarbon Conductivity . . . . .</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>D.1 Conventional (English) to Metric (SI) Units of Measure . . . . .</b>	<b>74</b>