Sea-Bird Electronics, Inc.
1808 136th Place NE
Bellevue, WA 98005
USA

Phone: (425) 643-9866
Fax: (425) 643-9954
E-mail: seabird@seabird.com
Web: www.seabird.com

APPLICATION NOTE NO. 2D **Revised July 2005**

Instructions for Care and Cleaning of Conductivity Cells

This application note presents new recommendations, based on our recent research, for cleaning and storing conductivity sensors. In the past, Sea-Bird had recommended cleaning and storing conductivity sensors with a Triton X-100 solution, and cleaning conductivity sensors with an acid solution. **Our latest research leads us to recommend adding the use of a dilute bleach solution to eliminate growth of bio-organisms, and eliminating the use of acid in most cases**.

The application note is divided into three sections:
- General discussion
- Rinsing, cleaning, and storage procedures
- Cleaning materials

General Discussion

Since any conductivity sensor's output reading is proportional to its cell dimensions, it is important to keep the cell clean of internal coatings. Also, cell electrodes contaminated with oil, biological growths, or other foreign material will cause low conductivity readings. A desire to provide better control of growth of bio-organisms in the conductivity cell led us to develop revised rinsing and cleaning recommendations.

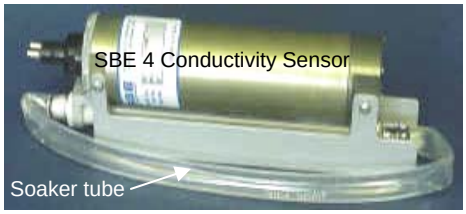
- A dilute bleach solution is extremely effective in controlling the growth of bio-organisms in the conductivity cell. Lab testing at Sea-Bird over the past year indicates no damaging effect from use of a dilute bleach solution in cleaning the conductivity cell. Sea-Bird now recommends cleaning the conductivity sensor in a bleach solution.
- Triton X-100 is a mild, non-ionic surfactant (detergent), valuable for removal of surface and airborne oil ingested into the CTD plumbing as the CTD is removed from the water and brought on deck. Sea-Bird had previously recommended, and continues to recommend, rinsing and cleaning the conductivity sensor in a Triton solution.
- Sea-Bird had previously recommended acid cleaning for eliminating bio-organisms or mineral deposits on the inside of the cell. However, bleach cleaning has proven to be effective in eliminating growth of bio-organisms; bleach is much easier to use and to dispose of than acid. Furthermore, data from many years of use shows that mineral deposits are an unusual occurrence. Therefore, Sea-Bird now recommends that, in most cases, acid should not be used to clean the conductivity sensor. ***In rare instances***, acid cleaning may still be required for mineral contamination of the conductivity cell. ***Sea-Bird recommends that you return the equipment to the factory for this cleaning if it is necessary***.

Sea-Bird had previously recommended storing the conductivity cell filled with water to keep the cell wetted, unless the cell was in an environment where freezing is a possibility (the cell could break if the water freezes). However, no adverse affects have been observed as a result of dry storage, if the cell is rinsed with fresh, clean water before storage to remove any salt crystals. This leads to the following revised conductivity cell storage recommendations:

- Short term storage (less than 1 day, typically between casts): If there is no danger of freezing, store the conductivity cell with a dilute bleach solution in Tygon tubing looped around the cell. If there is danger of freezing, store the conductivity cell dry, with Tygon tubing looped around the cell.
- Long term storage (longer than 1 day): Since conditions of transport and long term storage are not always under the control of the user, we now recommend storing the conductivity cell dry, with Tygon tubing looped around the cell ends. Dry storage eliminates the possibility of damage due to unforeseen freezing, as well as the possibility of bio-organism growth inside the cell. Filling the cell with a Triton X-100 solution for 1 hour before deployment will *rewet* the cell adequately.

Note that the Tygon tubing looped around the ends of the conductivity cell, whether dry or filled with a bleach or Triton solution, has the added benefit of keeping air-borne contaminants (abundant on most ships) from entering the cell.

Rinsing, Cleaning, and Storage Procedures



Note: See *Cleaning Materials* below for discussion of appropriate sources / concentrations of water, Triton X-100, bleach, and tubing.

CAUTIONS:

- The conductivity cell is primarily glass, and can break if mishandled. Use the correct size Tygon tubing; using tubing with a smaller ID will make it difficult to remove the tubing, and the cell end may break if excessive force is used. **The correct size tubing for use in cleaning / storing all conductivity cells produced since 1980 is 7/16" ID, 9/16" OD**. Instruments shipped prior to 1980 had smaller retaining ridges at the ends of the cell, and 3/8" ID tubing is required for these older instruments.
- **Do not put a brush or object (e.g., Q-Tip) inside the conductivity cell to clean it or dry it.** Touching and bending the electrodes can change the calibration; large bends and movement of the electrodes can damage the cell.
- **If an SBE 43 dissolved oxygen (DO) sensor is plumbed to the CTD** - Before soaking the conductivity cell for more than 1 minute in Triton X-100 solution, **disconnect the tubing between the conductivity cell and DO sensor** to prevent extended Triton contact with the DO sensor membrane (extended Triton contact can damage the membrane). See *Application Note 64* for rinsing, cleaning, and storage recommendations for the SBE 43.

Active Use (after each cast)

1. Rinse: Remove the plumbing (Tygon tubing) from the exhaust end of the conductivity cell. **Flush** the cell with a **0.1% Triton X-100** solution. **Rinse** thoroughly with **fresh, clean water** and drain.
   - If not rinsed between uses, salt crystals may form on the conductivity cell platinized electrode surfaces. When the instrument is used next, sensor accuracy may be temporarily affected until these crystals dissolve.
2. Store: The intent of these storage recommendations is to keep contamination from aerosols and spray/wash on the ship deck from harming the sensor's calibration.
   - ***No danger of freezing***: **Fill** the cell with a **500 – 1000 ppm bleach** solution, using a length of Tygon tubing attached to each end of the conductivity sensor to close the cell ends.
   - ***Danger of freezing***: Remove larger droplets of water by blowing through the cell. **Do not use compressed air**, which typically contains oil vapor. Attach a length of Tygon tubing to each end of the conductivity cell to close the cell ends.

Routine Cleaning (no visible deposits or marine growths on sensor)

1. **Agitate** a **500 – 1000 ppm Bleach** solution warmed to 40 °C through the cell in a washing action (this can be accomplished with Tygon tubing and a syringe kit – see *Application Note 34*) for **2 minutes**. **Drain and flush** with warm (not hot) fresh, clean water for **5 minutes**.
2. **Agitate** a **1%-2% Triton X-100** solution warmed to 40 °C through the cell many times in a washing action (this can be accomplished with Tygon tubing and a syringe kit). Fill the cell with the solution and let it **soak** for **1 hour**. **Drain and flush** with warm (not hot) fresh, clean water for **5 minutes**.

Cleaning Severely Fouled Sensors (visible deposits or marine growths on sensor)

Repeat the *Routine Cleaning* procedure up to 5 times.

Long-Term Storage (after field use)

1. Rinse: Remove the plumbing (Tygon tubing) from the exhaust end of the conductivity cell. **Flush** the cell with a **0.1% Triton X-100** solution. **Rinse** thoroughly with **fresh, clean water** and drain. Remove larger droplets of water by blowing through the cell. **Do not use compressed air**, which typically contains oil vapor.
2. Store: Attach a length of Tygon tubing to each end of the conductivity cell to close the cell ends. The loop prevents any contaminants from entering the cell.
   - Storing the cell dry prevents the growth of any bio-organisms, thus preserving the calibration.
3. When ready to deploy again: **Fill** the cell with a **0.1% Triton X-100** solution for **1 hour** before deployment. Drain the Triton X-100 solution; there is no need to rinse the cell.

Cleaning Materials

Water

De-ionized (DI) water, commercially distilled water, or fresh, clean, tap water is recommended for rinsing, cleaning, and storing sensors.

- On ships, **fresh water is typically made in large quantities by a distillation process, and stored in large tanks. This water may be contaminated with small amounts of oil, and should not be used for rinsing, cleaning, or storing sensors**.

Where fresh water is in extremely limited supply (for example, a remote location in the Arctic), you can substitute **clean seawater** for rinsing and cleaning sensors. If not immediately redeploying the instrument, follow up with a **brief fresh water rinse** to eliminate the possibility of salt crystal formation (salt crystal formation could cause small shifts in calibration).

- **The seawater must be extremely clean, free of oils that can coat the conductivity cell. To eliminate any bio-organisms in the water, Sea-Bird recommends boiling the water or filtering it with a 0.5 micron filter.**

Triton X-100

Triton X-100 is Octyl Phenol Ethoxylate, a mild, non-ionic surfactant (detergent). Triton X-100 is included with every CTD shipment and can be ordered from Sea-Bird, but may be available locally from a chemical supply or lab products company. It is manufactured by J. T. Baker (see *http://www.jtbaker.com/distrib/distrib.asp?seg=lab* for local distributors). Other liquid detergents can probably be used, but scientific grades (with no colors, perfumes, glycerins, lotions, etc.) are required because of their known composition. It is better to use a non-ionic detergent, since conductivity readings taken immediately after use are less likely to be affected by any residual detergent left in the cell.

100% Triton X-100 is supplied by Sea-Bird; dilute the Triton as directed in *Rinsing, Cleaning, and Storage Procedures.*

Bleach

Bleach is a common household product used to whiten and disinfect laundry. Commercially available bleach is typically 4 % - 7% (40,000 – 70,000 ppm) sodium hypochlorite (Na-O-Cl) solution that includes stabilizers. Some common commercial product names are Clorox (U.S.) and eau de Javel (French).

Dilute to 500 – 1000 ppm. For example, if starting with 5% (50,000 ppm) sodium hypochlorite, diluting 50 to 1 (50 parts water to 1 part bleach) yields a 1000 ppm (50,000 pm / 50 = 1000 ppm) solution.

Tygon Tubing

Sea-Bird recommends use of Tygon tubing, because it remains flexible over a wide temperature range and with age. Tygon is manufactured by Saint-Gobain (see *www.tygon.com*). It is supplied by Sea-Bird, but may be available locally from a chemical supply or lab products company.

Keep the Tygon in a clean place (so that it does not pick up contaminants) while the instrument is in use.

Acid

In rare instances, acid cleaning is required for mineral contamination of the conductivity cell. ***Sea-Bird recommends that you return the equipment to the factory for this cleaning***. Information below is provided if you cannot return the equipment to Sea-Bird.

CAUTIONS:

- **SBE 37-IMP, 37-SMP, or 37-SIP MicroCAT; the SBE 49 FastCAT; or other instruments with an integral, internal pump - Do not perform acid cleaning.** Acid cleaning may damage the internal, integral pump. Return these instruments to Sea-Bird for servicing if acid cleaning is required.
- **SBE 9*plus* or SBE 25 CTD** – Remove the SBE 4 conductivity cell from the CTD and remove the TC Duct before performing the acid cleaning procedure.
- **All instruments which include AF24173 Anti-Foulant Devices** – Remove the AF24173 Anti-Foulant Devices before performing the acid cleaning procedure. See the instrument manual for details and handling precautions when removing AF24173 Anti-Foulant Devices.

WARNING! Observe all precautions for working with strong acid. Avoid breathing acid fumes. Work in a well-ventilated area.

The acid cleaning procedure for the conductivity cell uses approximately 50 - 100 cc of acid. Sea-Bird recommends using a 20% concentration of HCl. However, acid in the range of 10% to full strength (38%) is acceptable.

If starting with a strong concentration of HCl that you want to dilute:
For each 100 cc of concentrated acid, to get a 20% solution, mix with this amount of water -

Water = [(conc% / 20%) – 1] * [100 + 10 (conc% / 20%)] cc

Always add acid to water; never add water to acid.

Example -- concentrated solution 31.5% that you want to dilute to 20%:
[(31.5% / 20%) – 1] * [100 + 10 (31.5% / 20%)] = 66.6 cc of water.
So, adding 100 cc of 31.5% HCl to 66.6 cc of water provides 166.6 cc of the desired concentration.
For 100 cc of solution:
100 cc * (100 / 166.6) = 60 cc of 31.5% HCl
66.6 cc * (100 / 166.6) = 40 cc of water

For acid disposal, dilute the acid heavily or neutralize with bicarbonate of soda (baking soda).

1. Prepare for cleaning:
   A. Place a 0.6 m (2 ft) length of Tygon tubing over the end of the cell.
   B. Clamp the instrument so that the cell is vertical, with the Tygon tubing at the bottom end.
   C. Loop the Tygon tubing into a U shape, and tape the open end of the tubing in place at the same height as the top of the glass cell.
2. Clean the cell:
   A. Pour **10% to 38% HCl** solution into the open end of the tubing until the cell is nearly filled. **Let it soak for 1 minute only.**
   B. Drain the acid from the cell and flush for 5 minutes with warm (not hot), clean, de-ionized water.
   C. Rinse the exterior of the instrument to remove any spilled acid from the surface.
   D. Fill the cell with a **1% Triton X-100** solution and let it stand for 5 minutes.
   E. Drain and flush with warm, clean, de-ionized water for 1 minute.
   F. Carefully remove the 0.6 m (2 ft) length of Tygon tubing.
3. Prepare for deployment, **or** follow recommendations above for storage.