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Active Temperature-Controlled Systems: Qualification Guidance

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Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1	4.6.1 Temperature Monitoring	19
1.1 Purpose and Scope.....	1	4.6.1.1 Bracketing Load Development.....	20
1.2 Aircraft Cargo Compartments	1	4.6.1.2 Mapping Product Temperatures vs. Air Temperatures.....	20
2.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS	2	4.6.1.3 Locating Warm and Cold Spots	20
2.1 Acronyms	4	4.6.1.4 Duration of Mapping Studies.....	21
3.0 OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE SYSTEM OPERATING CHARACTERISTICS	5	4.6.2 Periodic Review of Qualifications.....	21
3.1 Temperature Control Unit System Components... 5		4.6.3 Leased Assets	21
3.1.1 Cooling and Heating Cycle: How it all works.....	5	4.6.4 A Family Approach	22
3.2 Operating Characteristics Affecting Qualification	6	4.6.4.1 Defining an Active System Family.....	22
3.2.1 Insulation.....	6	4.6.4.2 Process Controls	23
3.2.2 Airflow.....	6	4.6.4.3 Qualification of Active Temperature-Controlled Transportation System Families.....	23
3.2.3 Thermal Integrity	7	4.7 Comparisons of Similarities/Differences of the Four Active Transportation Systems.....	25
3.2.4 Capacity for Heat Exchange.....	7	5.0 TEMPERATURE-CONTROLLED TRUCKS AND TRAILERS	27
3.2.5 Temperature Monitoring Systems.....	7	5.1 System Description	27
3.2.6 Alarms.....	8	5.2 Qualification.....	28
3.3 Temperature Control Accuracy.....	8	5.2.1 Approach.....	28
3.4 Risk and Criticality Assessment of Systems ... 8		5.2.2 Design Qualification/Vendor Selection ...	28
3.4.1 Risk Assessment.....	9	5.3 Installation Qualification	28
4.0 QUALIFICATION OF ACTIVE TEMPERATURE- CONTROLLED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS	11	5.3.1 Procedure Verification	28
4.1 Approach: Protocol Development.....	12	5.3.1.1 Trucks Used for Courier Routes	29
4.2 Design Qualification	13	5.4 Operational Qualification.....	29
4.3 Installation Qualification	13	5.4.1 Power Loss/Recovery and Redundant System Testing.....	29
4.3.1 Document Verification	14	5.5 Performance Qualification	29
4.3.2 Equipment Installation Verification.....	14	5.5.1 Static vs. In-Transit Studies During Performance Qualification.....	29
4.3.3 Preventative Maintenance	14	6.0 TEMPERATURE-CONTROLLED OCEAN CONTAINERS	31
4.3.4 Calibration Verification	15	6.1 How Intermodal Temperature-Controlled Containers Work.....	31
4.4 Operational Qualification	15	6.1.1 Process Review and Qualification.....	32
4.4.1 Power Failure Recovery Testing	16	6.2 Qualification of Technology.....	33
4.4.2 Alarm Testing	16	6.3 Processes Affecting Container Performance .. 33	
4.4.3 SCP Verification.....	16	6.3.1 Pretrip Inspection	34
4.4.4 Temperature Controls Verification.....	16	6.3.2 Loading and Transport to Sea Port.....	34
4.4.5 Configurable Parameter Verification.....	17	6.3.3 Unloading at the Sea Port, Staging and Customs Clearance.....	35
4.5 Repeatability and Consistency Considerations.....	17	6.3.4 In-Transit	35
4.6 Acceptance Criteria.....	17	6.3.5 Port of Arrival – Unloading, Customs Clearance, and Delivery	36
4.7 Reporting Criteria.....	18	5.4 A Note on Insurance Liability and Security.....	36
4.8 Performance Qualification.....	18		
4.5.1 Product Tests.....	18		
4.5.2 Loaded Unit Temperature Uniformity	18		
4.5.3 Open Door Recovery.....	18		
4.6 Additional Considerations.....	19		

7.0 ACTIVE ULDs.....	37
7.1 Design	37
7.1.1 Thermal Integrity	37
7.1.2 Sufficient Heating/Cooling Capacity.....	37
7.1.3 Airflow.....	37
7.1.4 Temperature Control Accuracy	38
7.1.5 Monitoring and Alarming Capability.....	38
7.1.6 Redundant Capability.....	38
7.1.7 Power Loss and Open Door Recovery.....	38
7.1.8 Alarms.....	39
7.2 Process Control of Active ULDs	39
8.0 TEMPERATURE-CONTROLLED STORAGE WAREHOUSES/ROOMS	40

8.1 System Description	40
8.2 Qualification	41
8.2.1 Temperature Mapping	41
8.2.2 Load Used During Qualification.....	41
8.2.3 Controlling Devices.....	42
8.2.4 SOPs and Training.....	42
8.2.5 Summary.....	42

9.0 CONCLUSIONS	47
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10.0 REFERENCES.....	49
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11.0 ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS.....	50
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FIGURES AND TABLES INDEX

Figure 3.1.1-1 Cooling and Heating Cycle.....	5
Table 3.4.1-1 Risk-Based Qualification Planning with Typical Assessment Categories.....	9
Figure 3.4.1-1 Risk-Based Qualification Approach to Determine Testing Requirements with Impact Assessment Triage	10
Table 3.4.1-2 Sample Assessment of Temperature Control System Impact and Component Criticality	11
Figure 4.2-1 Design Qualification Steps	13
Table 4.6.4.1-1 Examples of Critical Factors for Temperature-Controlled Truck Systems	22
Table 4.6.4.2-1 Critical Process Controls.....	23
Table 4.7-1 Typical Properties of the Four Active Transportation Systems.....	25
Table 4.7-2 Temperature Control Properties	26

Figure 6.1.1-1 Airflow in an Integral Refrigerated Container.....	31
Figure 6.1.2-1 Ocean Shipping Transport Phases	33
Figure 7.0-1 An Active ULD	37
Figure 7.1.3-1 Airflow within an Active ULD	38
Figure 8.2.2-1 Cold Room Distribution Thermocouple or Stand-alone Recording Device Placement Diagram	42
Figure 8.2.5-1 Cold Room Penetration Thermocouple or Stand-alone Recording Device Placement Diagram	43
Table 8.2.5-1 Thermocouple or Stand-alone Recording Device Distribution List	44
Table 8.2.5-2 Penetration Thermocouple or Stand-alone Recording Device Data Worksheet.....	45

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope

Fundamental to any temperature-controlled process is the expectation that materials that are stored and shipped within a controlled environment are maintained within a defined temperature range. Typically, this temperature range is within the recommended product storage requirements derived from stability data. The temperature within a temperature-controlled vehicle; temperature-controlled ocean container; active unit load device (ULD); or walk-in, temperature-controlled stores (e.g., a cold room, refrigerator, freezer, or standalone unit) is expected to be maintained:

- Reliably and consistently through the period in which the product is stored within the controlled environment (i.e., over time)
- In compliance with the product requirements for temperature at all locations in which the product might be stored (i.e., temperature and location or storage boundary)

The qualification process proves that the transportation system can consistently meet product temperature requirements. Strategies for conducting qualification studies should be based on the product's temperature and stability requirements as well as the transportation and storage process for that product.

Qualification is part of a validation program with a validation master plan (VMP) for the transportation system in question that defines the design qualification (DQ), installation qualification (IQ), operational qualification (OQ) and performance qualification (PQ) requirements. The VMP is discussed in more detail in **Section 4.0**.

This guidance discusses the process of qualifying actively controlled spaces that are designed to maintain a stable and uniform temperature around the cargo for the duration of transportation or storage at any temperature range. Specifically, this guidance addresses best practices for qualifying temperature-controlled trucks or trailers (hereafter referred to simply as “trucks”), temperature-controlled ocean containers, active ULDs, and walk-in temperature-controlled stores that are used to quarantine, hold, or store raw materials, intermediates, and products. It provides details on selected temperature-controlled units and their qualification testing, and it identifies best practices for performing and documenting the qualification activities, including temperature mapping studies, that are part of an overall validation program, whether that program is conducted by the pharmaceutical shipper or a service provider.

1.2 Aircraft Cargo Compartments

The environment of packages or freight in aircraft cargo compartments can be influenced by the transportation process. Transportation processes can be combined with other temperature-controlled packaging processes (active or passive) to help reduce the extremes of temperature for commodities during transport. In marketing their aircraft equipment and procedural controls, some air carriers are claiming that the aircraft cargo hold can serve as an active temperature-controlled system for cargo that is less sensitive to temperature variations (e.g., for products that are stable in a controlled room temperature range of 15°C to 25°C with allowable excursions). Although the temperature inside many current aircraft compartments can be regulated, aircraft themselves are not designed as temperature control systems. Thus, they are not discussed as such in this guidance.

Pharmaceutical shippers with cargo that is sufficiently stable to withstand the rigors of air travel without additional protection by an active container or passive packaging system should perform shipping temperature studies to ensure that process controls are sufficient to protect the product within the air planes used. Such studies are outside the scope of this guidance.