

CALIBRATION CONCEPT AND EQUIPMENT DRIFTING FACTORS: ITS APPLICATION IN GAS METERING FACILITIES

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Abstract

A rapid development in gas industry has caused gradual increase of natural gas demand in the Malaysian market, which indirectly has drawn people's attention to the price of natural gas and the accuracy of gas measuring devices. The price of natural gas is a matter of supply and demand, while the determination of the accuracy of gas measuring devices is a matter of technology that is to be discussed in this paper. The aspect of calibration is a paramount factor in determining the accuracy of any measuring device. Some fundamental concept of calibration will be discussed in this paper to further enhance necessary understanding of gas metering calibration. A calibration concept plays an important role in any gas metering facilities due to a high quality measure of accuracy assurance in any flow monitoring device. This paper introduces some common terms and parameters which plays an important role in any calibration system. Some necessary understanding of metering facilities and its operation principles will also be presented. The basic calibration procedures for typical transducers and gas meters will also be highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Gas measurement is as old as the gas industry itself. If we look at gas measurement in a recent gas industry, we have a wider choice of device when specifying a gas meter. Even progress has been tremendously made through the development of more convenient type of gas meter, the absolute accuracy of part in a thousand is still unobtainable.

As the gas industry in Malaysia begins to increase its pace in economical growth so does the need for an improved method of gas measurement. The improved gas measurement must also be substantiated with a calibration methodology that are traceable to a certified primary standard. Certified calibration methodology is important for custody transfer. Both buyers and sellers who are involved in custody transfer demand for more accurate custody transfer. In order to achieve a considerable accurateness in custody transfer of gas, calibration of measuring devices is an important criterion. To satisfy the needs of improved gas measurement and traceability in the wide range of gas and condition is a considerable task. Improvement in gas measurement should be interdisciplinary. A good meter design, good calibration methodology substantiated with a good human practice will surely produce a considerable result. The calibration facilities currently in use are described in this paper which emphasize the use of pressure and temperature calibrators. Basic concept of calibration terms commonly used in calibration industry will be discussed throughout the paper.

CALIBRATION CONCEPT

It is vital that the terminology of the subject is understood. Not only a matter of contradictions in the use of the same words by statisticians and engineers, but statisticians themselves sometimes differ in the words they use to describe the same thing.

Calibration is best described as a process that relates the standards to practical measurement. According to ANSI/ASQC M1-1987 calibration is defined as "The comparison of an ensemble of unverified uncertainty to a calibration ensemble of quantified uncertainty to detect or correct any deviation from required performance specifications". MIL-STD-45662A describe calibration as "The comparison of measurement and test equipment or measurement standard of unknown accuracy to a measurement standard of known accuracy in order to detect, correlate, report or eliminate by adjustment any variation in the accuracy of the instrument being compared".

Calibration is required in order to maintain and monitor instrument performance to as good as new level (GAN) and the credibility of measurement. It could also provide a safe operation monitoring and control of related process as well as maintaining quality of product at an anticipated cost.

Errors Versus Uncertainties

It is essential to distinguish between the *error* and the *uncertainty* in any result obtained from calibration process which normally be presented in most calibration certificates. Error could be easily defined as the difference between the measured and true values, and is unknown while the uncertainty is half the range within which the true value is expected to lie with a stated probability.¹ The uncertainty must never be quoted separately from the probability or confidence level with which it is associated since the two are interdependent.

Four kinds of error that can be present in any measurement are spurious errors, random errors, constant systematic errors and variable systematic errors. *Spurious errors* are a clear mistake that invalidates a result. *Random errors*, sometimes called precision or experimental errors are those which cause a variation in repeated measurements even when the value of the quantity being measured does not change. *Constant systematic errors*, sometime called bias errors are those which do not vary when measurements are made under the same conditions. They do not vary with time, but can vary with the value of the measurement. *Variable systematic errors* are arise from such things as progressive problem from parts in enclosed system, or due to the influence of environment and other contributing factor that variate with time limitation.

Accuracy

It is generally accepted that accuracy refers to the truthfulness of the instrument. An instrument of high accuracy more nearly gives a true reading than an instrument of low accuracy which indirectly reflect with a quality of particular instrument. Accuracy could also refer to the ability of an instrument to give a reading close to an absolute value referring to a standard established by world standard organization.

Repeatability and Reproducibility

Repeatability is a process that reflects ability of any measuring instrument performing a similar function of measurement at a short elapsed time under a similar measuring condition, where the probable difference of recorded measurement regarded as minimal. Reproducibility applies a similar concept of repeatability and only differs in an identifiable way such as location and time.

Traceability

It is a declaration stating to which national (international) standard a certain instrument has been compared. Measurement devices form a kind of hierarchy with international and national standard on the top. There is a network comprising the industrialized part of the world, in which standards are compared to each other in order to make sure that measurement readings mean exactly the same everywhere. Traceability could also be expressed as a chain hanging down from the true value. The links represent International Standard, National Standard, Reference Standard and Working Standard (secondary standard). The true value is thus transferred with a certain accuracy.

Drifting Factors

It is a unique factor which is build up its own pattern from time to time in any kind of measuring or process instruments due to the variation in signal input, current or voltage input, resistance input and other kind of system interruption. The drift of the various measurings or process instruments requires periodical calibration. In order to maintain the accuracy of these instruments, they need to be verified against reliable calibration equipment (of higher accuracy classification than the instrument).

Any measuring instrument has attained certain accuracy level and granted with quality guarantee period in which it is prescribed by manufacturer as at time of purchased. The term normally used to refer quality maintenance method of this instrument is called "Good As New" (GAN), reflecting the highest attainable quality at which to be maintained throughout the instrument service life. Drifting factor of any instrument has to be monitored carefully within calibration scheduling period to identify the individual drifting characteristics developed by certain instrument that may vary from one instrument to another. In

order to ensure that those instruments are properly maintained at their GAN quality, the drifting factor has to be determined from time to time by their calibration history. It could be developed through a good calibration maintenance schedule which highly depending on the calibration procedures.

Quality Maintenance

In carrying out calibration service to a specific instrument certain approved procedure has to be followed. Calibration can be conducted either at field or laboratory bench depending on the availability and importance level of any particular instrument at its operation line. A basic example of this concept could be easily seen and practiced in most of gas metering facilities throughout gas system transmission and distribution. Pressure and temperature are the most common parameters commonly measured in this system by means of transmitter. Sensors used to probe the exact value of these parameters in which data obtained are transferred by means of input signal either in miliamperage (4-20 mA), voltage or resistance (ohm) into a particular transmitter. Pressure or temperature transmitter usually display values in a digital mode.

Transmitters will progressively drift its value from the original setting and requires calibration to be conducted periodically. It is important to plan a calibration scheduling so as to maintained the purchased quality at GAN level.

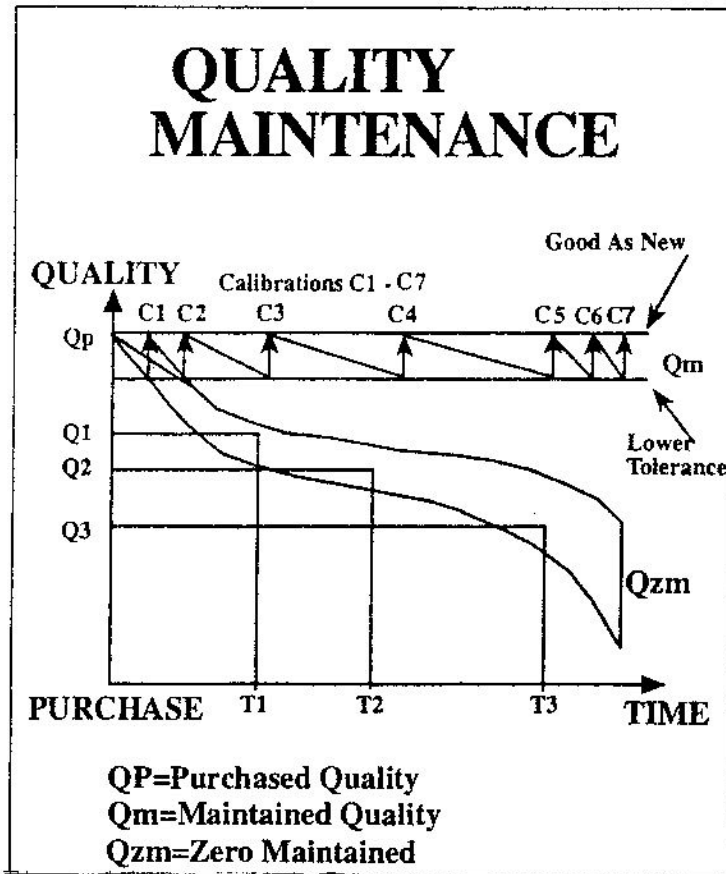


FIGURE 1.0: QUALITY MAINTENANCE OF INSTRUMENT

Conclusion

Accurate measurements are the base factors in determining the efficiency and reliability of any collected reading in comparison with the true value. The application of calibration in gas industry plays a significant role to ensure the validity of measurement in custody transfer between supplier and customer. A contractual term is commonly employed by this parties as to establish mutual agreement on calibration methodology and scheduling period which purposely has drawn up to maintain as purchased quality.

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