

Application Note AN-PAN-1011

Online analysis of permanganate absorption number (PAN)

Caprolactam, a vital precursor to Nylon 6, is widely used in the production of various industrial fibers, textiles, and plastics. Maintaining consistent caprolactam purity is essential for ensuring the quality of these finished products. The permanganate absorption number (PAN) analysis serves as a key indicator of caprolactam purity within the production process, adhering to ISO 8660 standards.

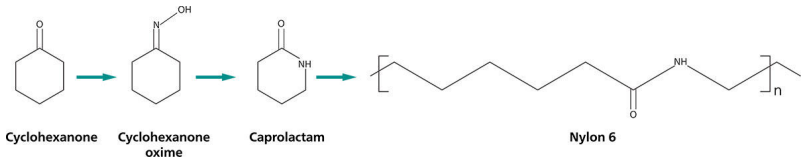
This Process Application Note describes the straightforward 24/7 monitoring of the permanganate absorption number (PAN) as a measure of the caprolactam purity in the corresponding process.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, global caprolactam production capacity was approximately 9 million tons [1], the majority of which went on to produce Nylon 6. Nylon 6 is mainly used to manufacture fibers for clothing, carpets, and industrial purposes. About 30% of produced Nylon 6 is used for resin production [1].

Caprolactam is primarily manufactured from cyclohexanone, cyclohexane, or toluene. The dominant industrial process involves converting cyclohexanone to cyclohexanone oxime, followed by Beckmann rearrangement to yield caprolactam with nearly 98% efficiency [2].

The industry standard Beckmann rearrangement process employs sulfuric acid (or oleum) as a catalyst to transform cyclohexanone oxime into caprolactam (Reaction 1). However, this method generates ammonium sulfate as a byproduct. While valuable for fertilizer production, its environmental impact has led to restrictions in certain regions.



Reaction 1. Reaction mechanism from cyclohexanone to form Nylon 6.

Maintaining caprolactam quality is crucial for its downstream applications like Nylon 6 production. This can be achieved by employing a specific test – permanganate absorption number (PAN) analysis.

This standardized procedure, detailed in international references like ISO 8660, measures the presence of oxidizable impurities within the caprolactam sample.

Essentially, PAN analysis measures the stability of caprolactam by evaluating its reaction with potassium permanganate. Lower PAN values indicate a purer caprolactam sample, leading to the production of better-quality Nylon 6.

Traditional laboratory analysis employing manual sampling is a viable option, but it presents certain drawbacks. The time-consuming nature of this approach misses real-time process variations. Analyzing multiple process streams concurrently becomes labor-intensive, and the use of sulfuric acid introduces safety concerns within the laboratory environment.

In light of these limitations, online process analyzers such as the 2060 TI Process Analyzer (Figure 2) have emerged as the preferred solution. This process analyzer exhibits cutting-edge technology and offers continuous, high-precision analysis of caprolactam impurities, ensuring the consistent production of top-quality Nylon 6.

APPLICATION

Oxidizable impurities are monitored in caprolactam according to ISO 8660 for online purposes, with precise time- and temperature-controlled colorimetric measurements. Metrohm Process Analytics offers a multiparameter process analyzer solution for precisely measuring PAN online according to ISO 8660: the 2060 TI Process Analyzer (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The 2060 TI Process Analyzer is suitable for monitoring PAN during caprolactam production.

Table 1. Typical range found for the permanganate absorption number in the caprolactam production process.

Parameter	Range
PAN	0–35

REMARKS

Since caprolactam absorbs moisture, employing a reliable technique for water content determination is also crucial. The 2060 *The* NIR Analyzer from Metrohm Process Analytics stands out as an excellent solution in this regard. It delivers accurate water content measurements within seconds, eliminates the need for sample preparation, and generates no chemical waste.

Other online applications are possible depending on the production process, including NH_4OH, NH_4NO_2, SO_3^{2-}, alkalinity, moisture, iron, high/low acidity in cyclohexanone (Anolon), $(NH_4)_2SO_3$, H_3PO_4, and other related components.

CONCLUSION

Continuous online monitoring of PAN in caprolactam is essential for optimizing downstream Nylon 6 production. The Metrohm Process Analyzer 2060 TI Process Analyzer delivers precise, real-time PAN analysis. This enhances efficiency, reduces costs, and improves product quality. Its versatility enables simultaneous monitoring of multiple process parameters for comprehensive process control.

REFERENCES

1. *Caprolactam Market Size, Share Analysis and Industry Forecast*. Prismane Consulting. https://prismaneconsulting.com/report/market-reports/global-caprolactam-market-study-report-2016-2032/23 (accessed 2025-12-03).
2. Ritz, J.; Fuchs, H.; Kieczka, H.; et al. Caprolactam. In *Ullmann's Encyclopedia of Industrial Chemistry*; Wiley-VCH, Ed.; Wiley, 2011. DOI:10.1002/14356007.a05_031.pub2

RELATED APPLICATION NOTES

AN-PAN-1041 Inline monitoring of free isocyanate (%NCO) content in polyurethane

AN-NIR-077 Moisture analysis in caprolactam

BENEFITS FOR ONLINE PROCESS ANALYSIS

- **Fully automated diagnostics** – automatic alarms for when samples are out of specification parameters.
- **Guarantee compliance** with global standards.
- **Avoid unnecessary costs** by measuring multiple parameters simultaneously in the process stream.
- **Enhanced control** over the caprolactam production process, enabling fine-tuning for **optimal purity and efficiency**.
- **Safer working environment** for employees (no handling of H_2SO_4).



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CONFIGURATION



2060 Process Analyzer

Le 2060 Process Analyzer est un appareil d'analyse par voie humide online adapté à un grand nombre d'applications. Cet appareil d'analyse de processus propose un nouveau concept de modularité reposant sur une plate-forme centrale, dénommée « armoire de base ».

Cette armoire de base se compose de deux parties. La partie supérieure contient un écran tactile et un PC industriel. La partie inférieure contient la partie humide flexible dans laquelle est logé le matériel nécessaire à l'analyse en elle-même. Si la capacité de base de la partie humide n'est pas suffisante pour résoudre un problème d'analyse, vous pouvez ajouter jusqu'à quatre armoires de partie humide supplémentaires à cette armoire de base afin de disposer de suffisamment d'espace pour résoudre les applications les plus difficiles. Les armoires supplémentaires sont configurables de manière à ce que chaque armoire pour partie humide puisse être combinée à une armoire à réactifs avec détection de niveau intégrée (sans contact) afin d'augmenter la disponibilité de l'appareil d'analyse.

Le 2060 Process Analyzer propose différentes techniques de chimie par voie humide : le titrage, le titrage Karl Fischer, la photométrie, la mesure directe et des méthodes d'addition standard.

Pour répondre à toutes les exigences de projet (ou à tous vos besoins), des systèmes de préconditionnement d'échantillons peuvent être fournis afin de garantir une solution analytique robuste. Nous pouvons pour ainsi dire fournir tout système de pré-conditionnement d'échantillon, tels que refroidissement ou chauffage, réduction de la pression, dégazage, filtration et bien plus encore.