

Tech Brief

CTI: The Comparative Tracking Index Test

The Comparative Tracking Index (CTI) is the maximum voltage, measured in volts, at which a material withstands 50 drops of contaminated water without tracking. Tracking is defined as the formation of conductive paths due to electrical stress, humidity, and contamination.

The CTI test provides an accelerated simulation of conditions of surface discharges and possible resulting tracking and failure (typically a “short”) in equipment using insulating materials. This test also provides a means to compare insulating materials performances under wet and contaminated conditions.

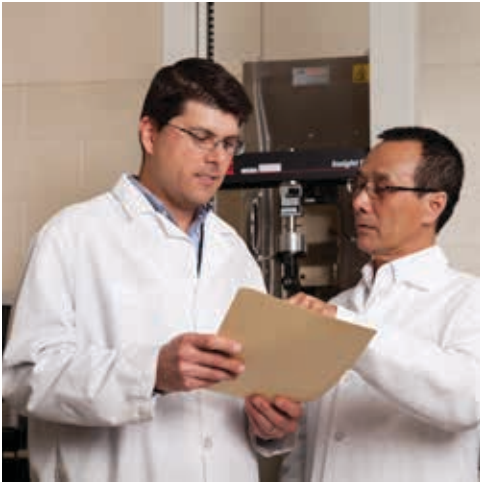
CTI requirements became important to manufacturers after the publication of the Underwriters Laboratories document UL 1950 in March 1992. UL 1950 is the UL Standard for Safety titled “Information Technology Equipment including Electrical Business Equipment.” Section 2.9 of this document outlines requirements for Creepage Distance, which is the shortest path between two conductive parts measured along the surface of the insulation.



Depending on the CTI of the insulating material used, the minimum creepage distance required will vary. The higher the CTI value, the lower the minimum creepage distance required. In practice, the higher the CTI of the insulating material used, the closer two conductive parts can be. The result is often a smaller part, increasingly desirable in technology and industry today. These values would be of particular interest to design engineers who must comply with UL requirements.

The original test method referred to in UL 1950 was IEC Publication 112. This method requires a 3-mm thick sample*, subjected to a voltage, while one drop of test electrolyte solution (0.1% ammonium chloride) falls every 30 seconds onto the sample surface. The test continues until either 50 drops fall or tracking occurs. Failure results if tracking occurs before 50 drops fall, generating enough amps to trip the tester’s built-in over-current relay. If the

*In order to meet the 3-mm thickness requirement, the electrical tapes must be carefully stacked one layer upon another until the thickness is achieved.



sample burns the test is inconclusive and should be repeated using a thicker sample. The maximum test voltage is 600 volts; if failure occurs voltage is typically decreased by 25 volts and the test repeated until a voltage is reached that the sample can pass.

The passing voltage must be repeated for a total of five test sites on the sample. The sample must, in addition, also pass 100 drops at 25 volts less than the original passing voltage.

When all conditions are met, a Material Group is determined for the insulating material based upon the passing voltage for the 50-drop test. Both the backing and adhesive sides of tapes are tested. Prior to 2008, the lower of the two voltage levels determined the Material Group assigned.

Material Groups are identified in UL 1950, Section 2.9:

(a) Material Group I	600 \leq CTI
(b) Material Group II	400 \leq CTI < 600
(c) Material Group IIIa	175 \leq CTI < 400
(d) Material Group IIIb	100 \leq CTI < 175

UL revised the requirements and references for Material Group Classifications after 2008, eliminating the Material Group IIIb rating. The current notes regarding CTI Material Groups state the following in the Online Certifications Directory:

(a) Material Group I	May be marked "Comparative Tracking Index (CTI) equal to or greater than 600V, PLC=0, UL840 Material Group I, when tested to IEC60112 on both sides of tape.
(b) Material Group II	May be marked "Comparative Tracking Index (CTI)) equal to or greater than 400V but less than 600V, PLC=1, UL840 Material Group II, when tested to IEC60112 on both sides of tape.
(c) Material Group IIIa	May be marked "Comparative Tracking Index (CTI) equal to or greater than 175V but less than 400V, PLC=2 or 3, UL840 Material Group IIIa, when tested to IEC60112 on both sides of tape.
(d) Material Group IIIa	May be marked "Comparative Tracking Index (CTI) 325(275) on Adhesive side, UL840, Material Group IIIa and/or CTI 225 on Film Side, Material Group IIIa or equivalent when tested to IEC60112, 4th Edition (2003).
UL Standard 840	Standard for Insulation Coordination Including Clearances and Creepage Distances for Electrical Equipment. UL 746A is referenced in UL840.
UL Standard 746A	Standard for Polymeric Materials - Short Term Property Evaluations.

The 3M Electrical Markets Division (EMD) Laboratory tested and determined a CTI value for more than 50 Electrical Insulating Tapes from 3M. Underwriters Laboratory has tested 37 insulating and conductive tapes from 3M to verify results. CTI testing at UL is optional.



The following table shows results for current 3M OEM Electrical Insulating Tapes:

3M™ Tape	CTI Value	Material Group (3M)	Material Group (UL)
1	600		I
5	600	I	
Super 10	600		I
11	600	I	
12	600	I	
16	600	I	
Super 20	600		I
27	600		I
28	600		I
44	600		I
44D	600		I
44T-A	600		I
46	475	II	
54	600		I
55	600	I	
56	600		I
57	600		I
58	600		I
60	600	I	
61	600	I	
62	600	I	
63	600	I	
69	600		I
74	600		I
75	600	I	
79	600	I	
90	600	I	
92	150	IIIb	
MR94	600	I	
MR94B			IIIa
1205	125	IIIb	
1276	600	I	

3M™ Tape	CTI Value	Material Group (3M)	Material Group (UL)
1291	600	I	
1298			II
1312	600		I
1318B-1	200	IIIa	
1318B-2	200	IIIa	
1318W-1	450	II	
1318W-2	450	II	
1318Y-1			I
1318Y-2	600		I
44HT	600	I	I
1318 Clear	600		I
1318-MW	600		I
1339	600	I	
1350B-1			IIIa
1350B-2			IIIa
1350W-1			IIIa
1350W-2			IIIa
1350Y-1			II
1350Y-2			IIIa
1350F-B-1			IIIa
1350F-B-2			IIIa
1350F-W-1			IIIa
1350F-W-2			IIIa
1350F-Y-1			II
1350F-Y-2			IIIa
1350T-1			II
1351T-1	600		I
1351-1	600		I
1351-2	600		I
1554	600	I	
1098-1	550		II
1098 Black	600		I