

Spill-Resistant Alkali-Metal-Vapor Dispenser

This dispenser can be used in a gravitational or non-gravitational environment.

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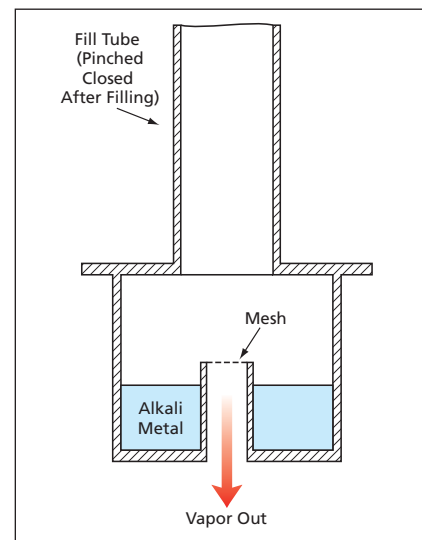
A spill-resistant vessel has been developed for dispensing an alkali-metal vapor. Vapors of alkali metals (most commonly, cesium or rubidium, both of which melt at temperatures slightly above room temperature) are needed for atomic frequency standards, experiments in spectroscopy, and experiments in laser cooling. Although the present spill-resistant alkali-metal dispenser was originally intended for use in the low-gravity environment of outer space, it can also be used in normal Earth gravitation: indeed, its utility as a vapor source was confirmed by use of cesium in a ground apparatus.

The vessel is made of copper. It consists of an assembly of cylinders and flanges, shown in the figure. The uppermost cylinder is a fill tube. Initially, the vessel is evacuated, the alkali metal charge is distilled into the bottom of the

vessel, and then the fill tube is pinched closed to form a vacuum seal.

The innermost cylinder serves as the outlet for the vapor, yet prevents spilling by protruding above the surface of the alkali metal, no matter which way or how far the vessel is tilted. In the event (unlikely in normal Earth gravitation) that any drops of molten alkali metal have been shaken loose by vibration and are floating freely, a mesh prevents the drops from drifting out with the vapor. Liquid containment of the equivalent of 1.2 grams of cesium was confirmed for all orientations with rubbing alcohol in one of the prototypes later used with cesium.

This work was done by William Klipstein of Caltech for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Further information is contained in a TSP (see page 1). NPO-40481



Molten Alkali Metal (or any other liquid, for that matter) does not pass through the outlet, no matter which way the vessel is tilted.

A Methodology for Quantifying Certain Design Requirements During the Design Phase

Requirements for safety, reliability, and maintainability are developed and balanced.

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A methodology for developing and balancing quantitative design requirements for safety, reliability, and maintainability has been proposed. Conceived as the basis of a more rational approach to the design of spacecraft, the methodology would also be applicable to the design of automobiles, washing machines, television receivers, or almost any other commercial product.

Heretofore, it has been common practice to start by determining the requirements for reliability of elements of a spacecraft or other system to ensure a given design life for the system. Next, safety requirements are determined by assessing the total reliability of the system and adding redundant components and subsystems necessary to attain safety goals. As thus described, common practice leaves the maintainability burden to fall to chance; therefore, there is no control of

recurring costs or of the responsiveness of the system. The means that have been used in assessing maintainability have been oriented toward determining the logistical sparing of components so that the components are available when needed.

The process established for developing and balancing quantitative requirements for safety (*S*), reliability (*R*), and maintainability (*M*) derives and integrates NASA's top-level safety requirements and the controls needed to obtain program key objectives for safety and recurring cost (see figure). Being quantitative, the process conveniently uses common mathematical models. Even though the process is shown as being worked from the top down, it can also be worked from the bottom up.

This process uses three math models: (1) the binomial distribution (greater-than-or-equal-to case), (2) reliability for a

series system, and (3) the Poisson distribution (less-than-or-equal-to case). The zero-fail case for the binomial distribution approximates the commonly known exponential distribution or "constant failure rate" distribution. Either model can be used. The binomial distribution was selected for modeling flexibility because it conveniently addresses both the zero-fail and failure cases. The failure case is typically used for unmanned spacecraft as with missiles.

As the first step of the process, the systems engineering designer begins with three inputs: (1) the desired number of missions the program is planning (*n*); (2) the minimum number of successful missions for duration of the program (*x*); and (3) the assurance (*A*) of obtaining *x* or more successes out of the *n* missions. In risk terms, $1 - A$ is the probability or likeli-