Measuring yield stress to correlate slump of concrete and cement paste

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Introduction

Concrete is the most widely used man-made material (measured by tonnage made) in the world. One of the most important characteristics of these materials is the so-called workability. The workability is the ability of a fresh (plastic) concrete mix to fill a given form/mold properly with the desired work (vibration) and without reducing the concrete's quality. Workability depends amongst other factors on water content, aggregate (shape and size distribution), cementitious content and age (level of hydration) and can be modified by adding chemical admixtures, like super plasticizer or raising water content. However, excessive water leads to increased bleeding (build-up of surface water) or creates segratation (when the cement and aggregates start to separate), with reduced quality in the resulting concrete (1).

Workability can be measured by the "concrete slump test", a simplistic measure of the plasticity of a fresh batch of concrete following ASTM C 143 (2) or EN 12350-2 (3) test standards. Slump is normally measured by filling an "Abrams cone" with a sample from a fresh batch of concrete. The cone is placed with the wide end down onto a level, non-absorptive surface. It is then filled in three layers of equal volume, with each layer being tamped with a steel rod to consolidate the layer. When the cone is carefully lifted off, the enclosed material slumps a certain amount, owing to gravity. However, it was shown in the past that determining the yield stress rheologically is a fast and easy method to correlate slump (4). As paste-like concrete is usually difficult to test when using conventional parallel plate or parallel plate cylinder geometries on rotational rheometers because of the possible wall slip and excessive sample disruption

Figure 1: HAAKE Viscotester iQ Rheometer with vane rotors.

during loading into narrow gaps, the use of vane geometries is recommended. When a vane rotor is fully immersed in the sample, the yield stress itself can then be calculated according to Boger (5):

$$\tau_0 = \frac{M_{max}}{K} \qquad (1)$$

With M_{max} being the maximum torque and K the vane parameter that depends on the height (H) and the diameter (D) of the paddle according to:

$$K = \frac{\pi \cdot D^3}{2}\left[\frac{H}{D} + \frac{1}{3}\right] \qquad (2)$$

Materials and methods

All tests were performed with the Thermo Scientific™ HAAKE™ Viscotester™ iQ Rheometer equipped with a universal container holder and an FL16 vane rotor with 4 blades, a diameter of 16 mm and a blade height 8.8 mm.

A standard Portland cement was mixed with water in a typical concentrations and then fine gravel was added at three different concentrations w/w. An overview of the sample compositions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of tested concrete samples.

Sample	Portland cement/g	Water/g	Fine gravel/g
1	275	75	0
2	275	75	125
3	275	75	75

After the samples have been formulated by thorough mixing they have been tested after 5 min. waiting time. The test was conducted as follows.

After the vane rotor has been fully immersed into the sample, a constant rotational speed Ω = 0.05 rpm was applied. The shear stress was then monitored as a function of measuring time.

Results and discussion

Initial purely elastic response in the sample the structure collapses and the shear stress is decreasing again. The maximum value in shear stress corresponds with the yield stress. Figure 2 shows the results for the three formulations 5 min. after mixing at 25 °C.

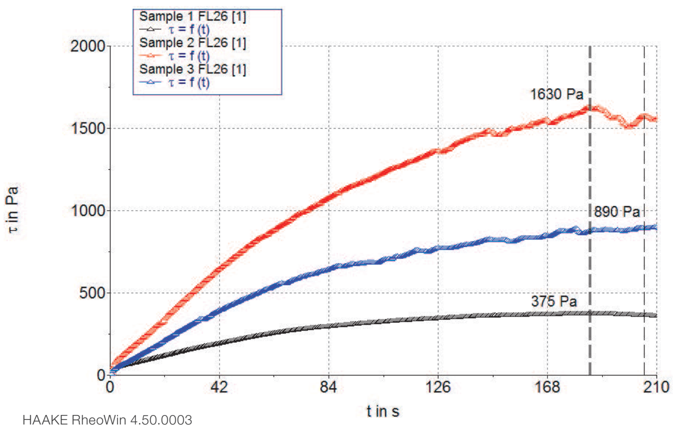

Figure 2: Shear Stress versus time for the three different concrete formulations at 25 °C after 5 min. waiting period after mixing.

As can be seen, the yield stress for the pure cement paste is 375 Pa compared to 890 Pa with 75 g of fine gravel and 1630 Pa with 125 g of fine gravel. Those easily determined yield stress values can now be transferred into the slump values (mm) determined with the ASTM Abrams cone according to the semi-empirical relationship by Hu et. al. (6):

$$s = 300 - 347\frac{(\tau_0 - 212)}{\rho} \qquad (3)$$

with s being the slump in mm, τ_0 being the yield stress and ρ being the density of the fluid.

Conclusion

The vane rotor method on the HAAKE Viscotester iQ Rheometer is a quick, simple and accurate approach to measure the yield stress of cement paste and concrete. Those values can then be easily transferred into slump values via semi-empirical relationships.

Reference

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