



## Extrusion Blow Molding With *Eastman* Copolyesters

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**EASTMAN**

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## Contents

Introduction	3
Extrusion Blow Molding	3
Drying Copolyesters	4
Equipment	5
Conditions	5
Moisture Measurement	8
Dryer Troubleshooting	8
Extruder	10
Extruder Setup	11
Regrind	12
Type of Head	13
Die Tooling Selection	13
Surface Finish Regulation	15
Mold Surface	16
Melt Fracture	16
Parison Programming	17
Parison Cutting	17
Mold and Container Design for <i>Eastar</i> Copolyesters	17
Shrinkage Rate	17
Mold Materials	17
Pinch Land Design	18
Deflashing	18
Mold Cooling Channels	18
Container Design	18
Pre-Delivery Evaluation	19
Typical Start-Up/Line-Out/Shutdown Procedure for Extruding <i>Eastman</i> Copolyesters	19
Preparation	19
Start-Up and Line-Out	20
Shutdown Procedure	20
Restarting Procedure	20
<i>Eastar</i> Copolyesters Extrusion Blow Molding Troubleshooting Guide	21

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## Introduction

*Eastman* copolyesters for extrusion blow molding (EBM) are amorphous (noncrystalline) thermoplastic polyesters of the PET [poly(ethylene terephthalate)] family. They meet the need for a clear, extrudable polyester for packaging and other applications.

*Eastman* copolyesters for extrusion blow molding are clear thermoplastic polymers having a glass-transition temperature ( $T_g$ ) of approximately 80°C to 84°C (176°F to 183°F). They are high-viscosity resins requiring low-work-input (low shear) extruder screws as well as nonrestrictive die, mandrel and head tooling for the best extrusion blow molding processing. Applications for *Eastman* copolyesters include extrusion blow molded containers, extruded film and sheet, and profiles. These materials offer the excellent gloss, clarity, and sparkle needed for clear, molded containers or other hollow articles. Extrusion blow molded containers molded from *Eastman* copolyesters are not suggested for use as pressurized containers, such as carbonated beverages.

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## Extrusion Blow Molding

This publication contains information regarding the processing of *Eastman* copolyesters by continuous and intermittent extrusion blow molding. Primary processing equipment includes commercial shuttle-press and wheel machine blow molding machines using the blow-pin method of thread-finish calibration and trimming, plus reciprocating screw and accumulator head machines for larger containers. Generally, machines set up to process polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polycarbonate (PC) resins have been found to be satisfactory for processing *Eastman* copolyesters. However, some screw and die changes are likely to be required to optimize the processing.

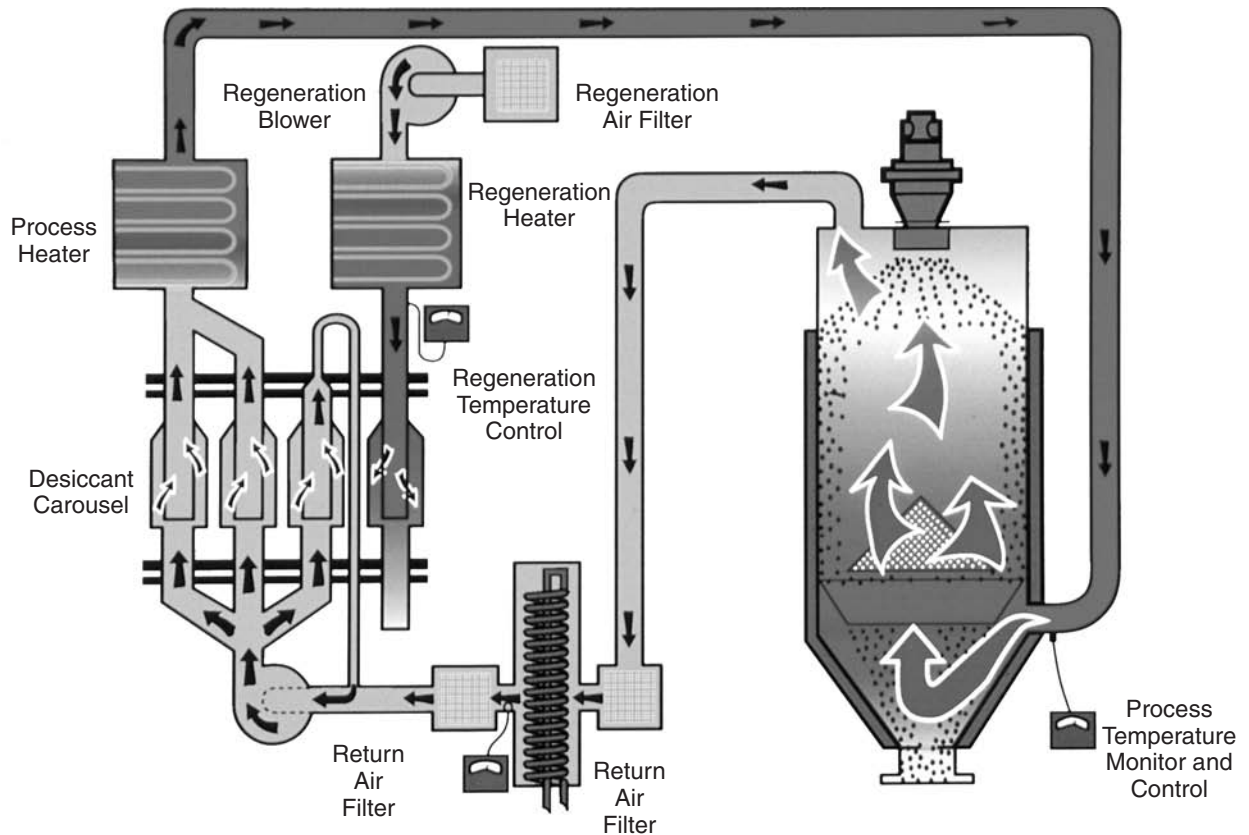
The following information is recommended as a guide and is based on internal experience as well as field trials with *Eastar* resins. Most applications should fall within the boundaries of the recommendations in this publication. Your actual optimum processing conditions may, in some cases, be outside the range of recommendations of this guide.

## Drying Copolyesters

*Drying is an absolute necessity to prepare polyester resins for processing.*

All polyester resins readily absorb moisture. Polymer dryers are used to dry the pellets prior to processing in the extrusion blow molding machine. A typical desiccant dryer is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Typical Desiccant Dryer



If pellets are not dried, the moisture will react with the molten polymer at processing temperatures, resulting in a loss of molecular weight. This loss leads to lowered physical properties such as reduced melt strength, tensile and impact strengths.

Check with specific dryer manufacturer for proper setup, operation, and troubleshooting.

## Equipment

**Multibed Desiccant Dryers.** These dryers have two or more desiccant beds and are used to properly dry the resin. Dryers having three or four beds typically have shorter start-up times because of quicker bed regeneration. Desiccant dryers are available from many suppliers. Work with your dryer vendor to select the optimum dryer for the molding job. Locating a drying hopper on the feed throat of the molding machine is preferred. However, a remote system with closed loop pellet transfer works well too. Planning should include consideration for throughput rate, ease of maintenance, reliability, and low variability of the four elements necessary for proper drying (drying temperature, drying time, dryness of air, and airflow, which are discussed in the section, “Elements Necessary for Proper Drying” on this page).

**Other Dryer Types.** Polymer drying systems other than regenerating desiccant designs are available. For example, compressed air resin drying systems are a viable option for drying copolyesters. Please consult with the specific manufacturer for suitability for amorphous copolyester pellet drying.

## Conditions

The typical drying conditions for amorphous *Eastar* copolyesters for extrusion blow molding are:

Temperature:  $65^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 3^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $150^{\circ}\text{F} \pm 5^{\circ}\text{F}$ )

Time: 6 hours, minimum

Dew Point:  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , minimum

Air Flow: 1 cfm/lb/hr ( $0.06 \text{ m}^3/\text{min}/\text{kg}/\text{hr}$ )

These conditions are normally adequate to achieve a polymer pellet moisture level that minimizes degradation of the polymer during processing. The target polymer moisture level is less than 500 ppm or 0.05% at the time of melting.

### *Elements Necessary for Proper Drying*

**Drying Temperature.** Air circulating through the hopper is heated by the process heater or afterheater. The *air temperature should be measured at the inlet to the hopper* and controlled at the recommended drying temperature for the resin. Exceeding this temperature can cause premature softening or melting of pellets to the point of sticking together, causing failure to feed freely to the bottom of the dryer for unloading. Drying at temperatures below the recommended set point will result in inadequate drying. When the controlling thermocouple is located away from the hopper, the set point may need to be raised to offset heat loss from the air during transport to maintain the desired hopper inlet temperature. Check the temperature over *several cycles* of the process heater. If the actual temperature overshoots the set point, adjust the set point accordingly to avoid overriding temperatures. Drying temperature should be held constant within  $\pm 3^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $\pm 5^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Insulated supply hoses and hoppers make drying much more effective and energy efficient.

It is also important to maintain an air temperature of at least 205°C (400°F) in the regeneration loop of desiccant dryers. The regeneration loop is a separate system from the process loop, so the presence of hot air in the process loop does not guarantee that the regeneration loop is functioning.

**Drying Time.** Actual drying time is dependent on initial resin moisture level and efficiency of the drying system. Generally, 6 hours of drying time is adequate. However, higher pellet moisture and/or inefficient drying systems can require a longer drying time.

Pellets to be dried need to be in the hopper at the conditions shown on the data sheets for each specific polymer. If the dryer is turned on from a cold start, it must warm up to the proper temperature and the dew point of the air must be reduced to -20°C (-4°F) or below before drying time can be counted. Check dryer manual for recommended warm up times.

Choosing the hopper size is critical; only when the hopper size is adequate for the rate of processing will the proper residence time in the hopper be possible. For example, if a 454-g (1-lb) part is being molded at a 1-minute cycle, then 27.2 kg (60 lb) of dry material will be needed each hour. If 6 hours is required for drying, then at least 164 kg (360 lb) of material must be in the hopper continuously [ $27.2 \text{ kg/h} \times 6 \text{ h}$ ]. The hopper should be built so that plastic pellets in all parts of the hopper will move uniformly downward as material is removed from the bottom. Funneling of pellets down the center of the hopper while pellets near the outside move more slowly will result in inadequate drying.

In routine operation, drying time is maintained by keeping the hopper full. If the hopper level is allowed to run low, residence time of the plastic in the hopper will be too short and the material will not be adequately dried. For this reason, and to compensate for less-than-perfect plug flow through the dryer, the hopper should be larger than the exact size calculated. Also, addition of regrind decreases the bulk density of the resin, thus requiring a larger dryer hopper to achieve the required residence time.

**Dryness of Air.** With desiccant bed regeneration drying systems, dry air comes from the desiccant beds in the closed air circulation loop of the dryer/hopper system. Desiccant beds must be heated and regenerated before they can dry incoming process air. After regeneration, it is beneficial to cool down the regenerated bed with closed loop (previously dried) air as opposed to ambient air.

Process air returning from the top of the pellet hopper is filtered before it is blown through the desiccant bed and on to the heater and hopper. Dryers used for amorphous copolyesters should be equipped with aftercoolers to cool the returning process air. Air temperature should be below 65°C (150°F) to increase the desiccant's affinity for moisture, thus improving efficiency.

The desiccant in the beds is typically a very fine claylike material in pea-size pellets. It slowly loses its usefulness and must be replaced periodically—usually about once a year. Use of plastic with a high dust content (such as regrind) or materials containing certain additives will reduce the life of the desiccant by coating the pellets or saturating them with a nonvolatile material. Good filters can help extend the life of the bed and the heater elements.

Air dryness can be checked by dew point meters, either portable or installed in-line in the dryer. These meters give a direct reading of the dew point of the air tested. When the dryer has rotating beds, the meter must run long enough for all beds to be checked. Each bed can normally be on-line for 20 to 40 minutes or longer; a new bed should rotate into position before the dew point rises above  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). (Also see the discussion on “Moisture Measurement” on page 8.)

**NOTE: Once pellets are dried, they must not be exposed to moist air in conveying or at the machine hopper. Otherwise, the pellets may reabsorb enough moisture to lower physical properties, reduce melt strength, or create bubbles in the extrudate.**

**Airflow.** The usual airflow rate requirement for drying is 0.06 cubic meter of hot dry air per minute for each kilogram of material processed per hour ( $0.06\text{ m}^3/\text{min}$  per kg/h) or 1 cubic foot of hot dry air per minute for each pound of material processed per hour (1 cfm per lb/h). For example, if 109 kg (240 lb) of material is used per hour, airflow should be at least  $6.7\text{ m}^3/\text{min}$  (240 cfm). Minimum airflow to ensure good air distribution is usually about  $2.8\text{ m}^3/\text{min}$  (100 cfm) for smaller dryers.

Airflow can be checked by in-line airflow meters, by portable meters, or much less accurately by disconnecting a hose going into the hopper and feeling the airflow—basically a yes/no on airflow.

If there are dust filters in the circulation loop, these should be cleaned or replaced periodically to avoid reduction in the airflow rate.

Regrind with high levels of flakes and fines can reduce the normal airflow and efficiency of the drying system. Frequent filter cleaning or replacement may be necessary.

## Moisture Measurement

Dew point meters measure only the dryness of the air, not the dryness of the plastic pellets in the hopper. Use of the dew point meter along with measurements of temperature, airflow, and time can give an accurate indication of whether the plastic pellets are being dried properly.

A moisture level in the range of 0.05% (500 ppm) to 0.02% (200 ppm) or less is desired. This can be determined using analytical means such as Karl Fischer titration method or weight loss moisture meters that measure the moisture inside pellets. These meters can give a general indication of the effectiveness of the drying system in reducing the moisture level in the plastic pellets.

## Dryer Troubleshooting

**Dryers require routine maintenance and performance checks.** A good maintenance staff that understands dryers and has the time and support to maintain them is needed. The following information is provided to help give that understanding. Dryer suppliers can help also to provide specific information on their drying systems.

### *Common Desiccant Dryer Problems*

- Poor airflow caused by clogged filters.
- Air passing through the middle of the hopper load rather than dispersing through the pellets caused by under-filled hopper.
- Supply/return dry air lines leaks allowing ambient “wet” air to contaminate dry air.
- Ambient, “wet” air contamination through loader on top of hopper.
- Lack of cooldown on air returning to the desiccant bed in absorption process. Air should be cooled below 65°C (150°F) to increase the desiccant’s affinity for moisture, thus improving efficiency. An aftercooler is required when drying some resins.
- Reduced desiccant effectiveness caused by worn-out or contaminated desiccant.
- Nonfunctioning regeneration heater and/or process heater.
- Blower motor turning backwards.
- Airflow not being shifted when controls call for bed change; one bed stays in process continuously.

*Dryer Troubleshooting Guide*

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Possible Cause</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
High Dew Point (Wet Air)	Desiccant worn out or saturated.	Dry cycle machine or replace desiccant.
	Incorrect desiccant type.	Replace desiccant with type and size recommended by dryer manufacturer.
	Regeneration heaters burned out.	Replace heaters.
	Regeneration filter plugged.	Clean or replace filter.
	Regeneration blower reversed.	Reverse electrical connections.
	Air leaks.	Check and repair auto loader seal and/or hoses to hopper.
	Beds not changing at the proper time.	Reset or repair controller.
	Return air too hot.	Add or repair aftercooler.
Low Airflow	Dirty air filter.	Clean or replace filter.
	Fan motor reversed.	Reverse electrical connections.
	Hoses reversed between inlet and outlet.	Connect dryer outlet to inlet at the bottom of the hopper.
	No hose clamps. Hose disconnected.	Connect and clamp hoses.
	Hose smashed or cut.	Repair or replace hose.
Short Residence Time	Hopper too small.	Use larger hopper.
	Hopper not full.	Keep hopper full.
	Tunneling.	Remove clumped material or install proper spreader cones.
Temperature High or Low [or Varying More Than ~3°C (~5°F)]	Incorrect temperature setting.	Set correct temperature.
	Temperature controller malfunction.	Calibrate or replace temperature controller.
	Dryer not designed to maintain correct range.	Repair or replace dryer.
	Thermocouple loose or malfunction.	Repair or replace thermocouple.
	Heater malfunction.	Repair or replace heater.

## Extruder

*Eastman* amorphous copolyesters are viscous polymers and require a low-work (low shear) screw to prevent melt temperature override. Best results are obtained when using a low-shear barrier screw designed to generate a homogenous target melt temperature at the required output for the process.

Barrel cooling is highly recommended using either fans or circulating oil through copper coil. If the cooling medium is oil then a temperature of approximately 120°C (250°F) is suggested for cooling when extruding *Eastman* copolyesters. The melt temperature should be within the ranges provided in typical processing conditions for good processing (Table 1). Temperatures on the low side of the range provide better melt strength while temperatures on the high side provide a better surface finish.

Table 1

### Typical Processing Temperature Ranges for *Eastman* Copolyesters for EBM

Relative to the screw design, output and process setup, *Eastar* copolyesters 6763, GN071, and GN077 will generally be lower in the processing temperature range and *Eastar* copolyesters GN046 and EB062 will be higher in the range. Adjust process set temperatures to achieve a homogenous melt temperature that is optimized for your process.

Extrusion Set Temperatures	°C (°F)
Barrel Zone 1	193–216 (380–420)
2	202–232 (385–450)
3	193–232 (380–450)
4	193–232 (380–450)
Adapter	193–232 (380–450)
Head	193–232 (380–450)
Die Bushing	193–232 (380–450)
Melt Temperature	200–244 (390–460)
Mold Temperature	10–38 (50–100)

Internal cooling of the first 4 to 5 flights of screws at the feed zone enhances pellet feeding, especially when using low temperature additives. Internal cooling of the screw length, such as is common with PVC, is not necessary and can lead to feeding or surging problems. An exception is when a little air cooling of the screw-tip is used when extruding multiparisons.

Depending on the screw design, the 2d rear zone temperature can be raised to relieve excessive motor load. In fact, it is sometimes desirable to use a reverse temperature profile (rear zones hotter than front zones). Cooling on the front zones can then be used to lower the melt temperature. Alternately, after processing has been established, the barrel temperature profile can be reduced to achieve a melt temperature that optimizes processing.

High-compression screws designed for high-density polyethylene are not ideally suited for *Eastar* copolyesters, because they tend to generate excessive melt temperature which results in decreased melt strength. Screw designs with intensive mixing can also cause increased shear heating that reduces the melt strength of the material. However, these types of screw designs may be used if the output is low enough to reduce shear heating and the parison is short, requiring less melt strength. Generally, the extruder setup suggested for extrusion blow molding of PVC and PC can be used with *Eastman* copolyesters.

## Extruder Setup

For best extrusion blow molding results with *Eastar* copolyesters, start with a clean machine. Heat-sensitive resins can leave degraded resin (usually burned or charred) plated on the screw and die surfaces, which disperse from the equipment and contaminate the product.

On extrusion start-up, the barrel temperatures can usually be set within the ranges of typical extrusion conditions (Table 1). The barrel temperatures may then be adjusted to provide a suitable melt temperature. Refer to the typical extrusion blow molding conditions given in Table 2. The actual setup for your system will depend on the screw and head design. Temperature profiles need to be adjusted to achieve an optimal melt temperature for your process.

All extrusion head components, especially adapters, should be adequately heated prior to starting the extruder to prevent damage to the head, adapter, or flange. Allow approximately one hour after controller set temperature is reached for internal components to achieve the desired process temperatures. The screw and internal components of the head will require longer time to achieve steady state operating temperature.

The shutdown procedure is relatively simple when extruding *Eastman* copolyesters. The material can be left in the die because it has good thermal stability and will not burn or char under normal start-up or emergency shutdown conditions. The first step in the shutdown procedure is to turn off the feed from the hopper and allow the extruder to run until molten plastic flow has stopped. Extruder heating and cooling can then be switched off. This will eliminate bridging in the rear sections of the screw during the next start-up. The machine can then be started with standard start-up procedures.

Table 2

## Typical Extrusion Blow Molding Processing Conditions

Machine <sup>a</sup>						
Material	6763	GN077	GN046	GN046	EB062	EB062
Mold Size	38 fl oz	10 fl oz	10 fl oz	46 fl oz <sup>b</sup>	64 fl oz <sup>b</sup>	4 liter
Die Type (designed for PVC)	Dual BKD 51/140	RVP	RVP	S1-110	S1-110	S1-110
Bushing ID, mm (in.)	23.1 (0.91)	17.8 (0.70)	17.8 (0.70)	90 (3.54)	70 (2.76)	70 (2.76)
Mandrel OD, mm (in.)	18.2 (0.72)	14.2 (0.56)	14.2 (0.56)	88 (3.46)	68 (2.68)	68 (2.68)
Thread Finish, mm	28	24	24	30	38	38
Extrusion Set Temperatures, °C (°F)						
Barrel Zone 1	205 (400)	195 (385)	205 (400)	196 (385)	196 (385)	200 (392)
2	230 (450)	210 (410)	225 (437)	202 (395)	210 (410)	210 (410)
3	170 (340)	195 (385)	215 (419)	202 (395)	193 (380)	210 (410)
4	165 (325)	195 (385)	215 (419)	202 (395)	193 (380)	210 (410)
Adapter	170 (340)	195 (385)	215 (419)	202 (395)	193 (380)	210 (410)
Head	175 (350)	195 (385)	215 (419)	205 (400)	193 (380)	210 (410)
Die Bushing	210 (410)	190 (374)	225 (437)	220 (430)	193 (380)	210 (410)
Melt Temperature (probe)	220 (430)	205 (400)	235 (455)	232 (450)	235 (455)	241 (455)
Screw Speed, rpm	25	6	5	7	28 <sup>c</sup>	28 <sup>c</sup>
Bottle Weight, g	65	25	25	70	75	150
Mold Coolant Temp., °C (°F)	10 (50)	10 (50)	10 (50)	10 (50)	24 (75)	24 (75)
Overall Cycle, s	7.25	8.3	8	19.5	15	16

<sup>a</sup>Machine: 80 mm (3.1 in) diameter, 24:1 L/D, low shear barrier screw

<sup>b</sup>Handware

<sup>c</sup>Simulated 2d side processing with single-sided shuttle machine

For a short shutdown time (2 hours or less), it is not necessary to turn the heaters off, but it is desirable to do so for longer shutdown periods. The best procedure is to empty screw by shutting off pellet feed to extruder and allowing the screw to empty of unmelted pellets.

Do not use a PVC purging material because PVC will char, causing black flakes to appear in the copolyester melt during subsequent extrusion start-up.

## Regrind

A significant percentage of the total parison weight becomes trim scrap in the extrusion blow molding process; economics therefore require that as much of this scrap as possible be reused. The excellent thermal stability of *Eastman* copolyesters permit the complete reuse of all clean, dry regrind.

However, care must be taken to prevent contamination of the regrind by other plastics, dust, dirt, paper, labels, caps, purgings, etc., in the scrap handling equipment; otherwise, clarity and toughness of blow molded items could be reduced. Degraded purged extrudate should be discarded and not reused. Typical grinder screens have openings of  $\frac{5}{16}$  in. to  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. Grinder blades should be sharp to reduce fines. Dry all good, clean regrind at the conditions recommended for the base resin.

## Type of Head

The high viscosity of EBM copolyesters requires the use of low-restriction heads to avoid excessively high head pressures and melt temperatures.

*Eastar* copolyesters have been successfully extruded using the same die heads currently used for PVC resins: streamlined, low-restriction dies, usually of the torpedo or spider type, made of plain tool steel, stainless steel, or chrome-plated steel. Most reciprocating screw and accumulator head machines process copolyesters well. Use standard operating procedures to optimize actual melt temperatures.

Unheated die adapters are a common problem encountered in extrusion blow molding. Adequate heating capacity should be provided for the adapter and die neck areas to prevent cold spots, which can lead to an unstable parison as well as excessive head pressure and possible head damage.

## Die Tooling Selection

The die tooling is selected to provide the correct parison diameter and wall thickness for efficient blow molding and to give the specified container weight without capturing the container neck. For containers formed with a presqueeze device, adjust tooling size with blow up ratio to optimize container wall thickness.

The die tooling (bushing and mandrel) for *Eastman* copolyesters will be relatively large because of the very low swell factor of this polymer. A rule of thumb is to provide a bushing with an inside diameter (I.D.) approximately 90% of the “E” dimension (root diameter) of the bottle to be molded. This, of course, applies only to machines that use the blow-pin method of forging the bottle finish. The die opening will generally range from 0.5 to 2.5 mm (0.02 to 0.100 in.), depending on the bottle sidewall requirement and blow-up ratio.

The die bushings should be selected only after an allowance has been made for the anticipated parison die swell. Since *Eastman* copolyesters exhibit very little swell, the die size will be somewhat larger than that for some other resins, such as PVC and HDPE.

Table 3 provides suggested die bushing sizes to be used with *Eastar* copolyesters 6763, GN077, and GN071, based on experience and calculations using the following formula. GN046 and EB062 will exhibit slightly greater die swell at the same melt temperature, and will require a slightly smaller die tool.

$$M = \sqrt{B^2 - \frac{W}{15.45H(1 + S_w)(1 - S_g)^2}}$$

Where:

M = Outside diameter of mandrel  
in inches

B = Inside diameter of bushing in inches

W = Bottle weight in grams

H = Bottle height in inches

$S_w$  = Parison swell

$S_g$  = Parison sag

Estimate of  $S_w$  and  $S_g$  for:

Quart bottle:  $S_w = 0.10$ ,  $S_g = 0.14$

10-ounce bottle:  $S_w = 0.20$ ,  $S_g = 0.08$

Estimate of bottle weight:

$W = 15.45H(1 + S_w)^2(1 - S_g)^2(B^2 - M^2)$

The sizes shown in Table 3 provide adequate diameter to fit the thread finish “E” dimension (root diameter). If the parison is smaller than the root diameter, it will not cut off consistently and may slide into the mold.

**Table 3**

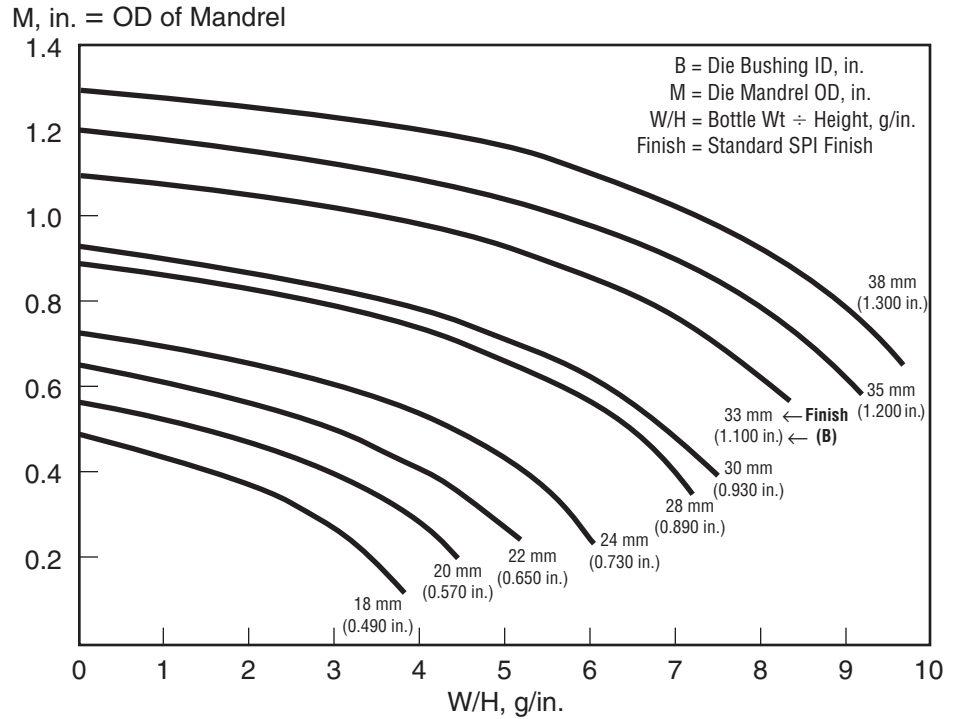
**Approximate Die Bushing Sizes for Extrusion Blow Molding of *Eastar* Copolyesters 6763, GN071, and GN077, Nonprogrammed**

Thread Finish, mm	“E” Dim. (Root Diam.) Max., mm (in.)	Bushing I.D. Estimate, mm (in.)
18	15.7 (0.620)	12.4 (0.490)
20	17.8 (0.699)	14.5 (0.570)
22	19.8 (0.778)	16.5 (0.650)
24	21.7 (0.856)	18.5 (0.730)
28	25.2 (0.994)	22.6 (0.890)
30	26.2 (1.033)	23.6 (0.930)
33	29.7 (1.171)	27.9 (1.100)
35	32.3 (1.270)	30.5 (1.200)
38	35.1 (1.382)	33.0 (1.300)

After selecting the bushing diameter, a mandrel size that will provide the correct parison wall thickness and specified bottle weight must be chosen. The graph shown in Figure 2 can be used to estimate die sizes for extrusion blow molding *Eastar* copolyesters. Parison programming can be used to compensate for parison sag and to improve container wall thickness distribution.

Figure 2

**Die Bushing and Mandrel Sizes for Extrusion Blow Molding  
Estar Copolyesters 6763, GN071, and GN077**



The above discussion applies to either straight-land or converging-die tooling but may be applied to adjustable tooling as well. With programmable tooling, an allowance must be made for the anticipated weight reduction.

### Surface Finish Regulation

*Eastman* copolyesters produce a glossy surface that contributes to the clarity and sparkle of the blow molded item. A smooth die surface finish is an important factor in obtaining clarity of the finished blow molded item. Two mold factors that can affect the container surface clarity are the mold surface texture and the venting. Melt fracture (surface roughness of the container) can occur at low melt temperatures, high outputs, and with restricted or rough die tooling.

## **Mold Surface**

A mold with a standard polish or glossy surface finish works well with most mold cavity configurations. A smooth matte finish, such as that produced by vapor honing or jet blasting with a mixture of water and fine glass beads (such as No. 13 beads) has been used successfully. The smooth matte finish is preferred for cylindrical cavity configurations and is suggested for any other configurations that tend to have venting problems. Venting problems usually appear as wavy or splotchy areas on the outside surface of the blow molded item. These wavy or splotched areas are caused by entrapped air between the parison and the mold surfaces. The microscopic matte finish on the mold prevents the formation of air pockets by reducing the degree of surface contact and allowing the air to escape through vents. Cavity vents can be added to the mold to vent problem areas. Copolyesters pick up the mold texture surface easily, so adjust mold surface accordingly.

## **Melt Fracture**

Melt fracture is evidenced by a rough surface finish on the plastic as it exits the extrusion die. It usually appears as very tiny wavy lines around the circumference of the parison. Melt fracture can occur on the inside or outside surfaces of the parison. Most internal surface problems are not noticeable when the molded container is filled with a liquid product.

The visible effect of surface roughness is reduced during the blow molding process by the stretching and elongating of the parison and by the relaxing of surface disturbances. The first step in reducing melt fracture is to raise only the die bushing temperature. If this heater cannot maintain sufficiently high bushing temperatures, a heater band of larger electrical wattage should be installed. Refer to Table 2 for recommended die bushing temperature range. After start-up of the extrusion process, the die bushing temperature can be adjusted to obtain the best container surface finish.

The next step is to raise the melt temperature slightly, which reduces the melt viscosity of the polymer and, consequently, reduces shear stress of the melt in the die; this, in turn, reduces the degree of melt fracture.

Other methods that can reduce melt fracture include cleaning and polishing the die tool, coating the tooling with a low coefficient of friction material, increase die gap opening, or change die angles.

## **Parison Programming**

Programmable dies are beneficial to controlling the material wall thickness distribution when extrusion blow molding *Eastar* copolyesters. A parison programmer is sometimes used with containers having a widely varying cross-sectional diameter so that a uniform bottle wall thickness can be achieved. The tooling should be selected so that the mandrel does not extend more than 0.16 mm (0.0625 in.) beyond the bushing during the programmed movement. There is a risk of mark-off rings appearing in the parison, and the parison wall thickness may not follow the program accurately.

## **Parison Cutting**

A cutoff knife is used to cut the hot parison so that the mold can move it away from the die to the blow station. Both the cold knife and hot knife method have been found to provide a reliable cutoff. The blade should be well sharpened and fairly close to the mold. A clearance of approximately 13–19 mm (0.50–0.75 in.) is desirable. A similar clearance between the blade and the extrusion die is also preferred. Sufficient activation pressure should be used to provide a rapid knife cut. A prepinch setup with a standard cold knife or a linear cut hot knife can be used for GN046 and EB062.

The parison inflation air must be precisely adjusted to provide the correct amount of parison expansion just prior to the knife cut. The parison must also be sized (with die tooling) to fit the mold thread finish properly to ensure a good cut with the top of parison remaining open for the blow pin insertion. If the parison is too small and is not properly held by the mold at the thread area, it will not be possible to get a good parison cut and the top of parison will close to one side. Excessively high melt temperatures can also cause this problem.

## **Shrinkage Rate**

The shrinkage rate for amorphous copolyesters is in the range of 0.003–0.006 in./in. or mm/mm. Most mold makers use a shrinkage rate of around 0.004 in./in.

## **Mold Materials**

The body of the mold is typically mold grade aluminum or BeCu HH. For improved durability of aluminum mold pinch lands, use pinch lands inserts of BeCu HH or hardened tool steel (S7, up to 55–60 Rockwell-C).

## Pinch Land Design

Typical pinch lands are 0.008–0.012 in. wide, tapering at 45° into the pinch pocket. A stronger pinch weld can be achieved by tapering from the pinch land at 30° for a short distance into a 45° angle leading into the pinch pocket. Alternately, a short dam of 0.100 in. width can be introduced after the 30° angle before leading 45° into the pinch pocket. The pinch lands should be “proud,” i.e., extend above the mold face by 0.0005–0.0015 in. A light hand honing of the hardened pinch lands is sometimes helpful to remove sharp, rough edges from newly machined mold faces.

## Deflashing

The approximate clamp tonnage required for deflashing copolyesters is 0.28 ton (U.S.) per inch of linear pinch (about 2 × the requirement for PVC and HDPE).

A major equipment manufacturer suggests a minimum machine clamp tonnage of 0.11 tons (U.S.) per linear centimeter of pinch land (about 2x the requirement for PVC and HDPE). If the mold is handleware, go extra deep in the handle pinch pocket to allow the flash to remain warm. The flash should detach easily to prevent micro-fissures that can propagate to a crack upon impact. Deflashing should normally be completed within 30 seconds of molding. The best container impact results can be achieved by deflashing when the polymer at the pinched flash to container interface has a “leathery” flex feel vs. being rigid or rubbery. Generally, this leathery state is achieved within 30 seconds of molding and is around 80°C to 95°C (180°F to 200°F), measured with an IR temperature measuring instrument.

## Mold Cooling Channels

Most molds should be segmented for three zone cooling of the base, body, and finish-handle areas. Segmented mold cooling allows optimized deflashing temperature of base, handle, and neck.

## Container Design

The container should be designed with long gentle radii to help disperse drop impact forces. Draft angles and container design features should allow easy release of the container from the mold. The base footprint should be wide with a long gentle radii leading into the base pushup. The best impact properties are achieved when the parison pinch length is contained within the base pushup. The base footprint should be gently

recessed at the thick, parison pinch termination points to minimize impact stress at the thick-to-thin transition of this area. This base pinch tunnel should be shallow, with a generous width, and then taper gently into the footprint. Locate any base indexing notches or engravings away from the pinch area. Keep engravings shallow, approximately 0.008 in. deep, with generous, soft radii. Any sidewall features should have long, generous radii to help disperse impact and flexure forces. Standard venting guidelines apply.

## Pre-Delivery Evaluation

Prior to delivery of the mold, it should be leak and flow (Reynolds number appropriate for cooling fluid turbulent flow) tested. A carbon paper compression imprint of the mold contact areas should be presented showing parallel compression of parting line and pinch lands. Unit cavity evaluation of the mold is prudent if working with a new container design.

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### Typical Start-Up/ Line-Out/Shutdown Procedure for Extruding *Eastar* Copolyesters

#### Preparation

1. Select a low-shear screw and low-restriction (free-flowing) die head assembly, such as a torpedo or spider die that is used with PVC. This setup prevents excessive melt temperature from screw shear heating and head back pressure.
2. Select die tooling large enough to accommodate the bottle weight and thread-finish diameter required.
3. Start with a clean screw and die head assembly.
4. Predry the resin for 6 hours in a low dewpoint dryer system at 65°C (150°F).
5. Set the extruder zones according to the recommendations in Table 1. To ensure the adapter head and extrusion system are adequately heated, allow at least 1 hour heating (soak) after temperatures are at the set point. Extruder barrel feed throat cooling is recommended to prevent pellet bridging and enhance pellet feeding.
6. Set the mold coolant temperature.
7. Sharpen the parison cutoff knife.
8. Check sharpness of blow pin flash cut washer (cutter ring) and the mold striker plates. Turn cooling onto blow pin.

## Start-Up and Line-Out

1. Start the extruder motor while the extruder is empty, then open the feedhopper throat. Observe the motor-load indicator for satisfactory amperage load.
2. Vary the temperature of the extruder zones as necessary to obtain a melt temperature in the range indicated in Table 1. Check the melt temperature with a hand-held pyrometer placed directly into the parison melt stream about a quarter inch from the die exit.
3. Adjust the die(s) so that the parison extrudes uniformly straight down. Readjustment may be required as the temperature stabilizes. On multihead units, adjust the manifold heat for balance of parison flow for all die heads.
4. Begin the mold press cycling. Cycle time settings are normally the same as for PVC resins, typically 8–12 seconds for a 2-station machine, depending on container size and weight. Small containers [180 ml (6 fl. oz) or less] can process on even faster cycles. The in-mold cooling typically requires 3–6 seconds for most average weight bottles. Make adjustments in mold centering, die, blow pins, and cutters as required. It should be noted that the blow-pin cutting washers must be sharp and accurately set for a good trimming. Continue to adjust the extruder zone heaters and barrel cooling circulator to obtain a melt temperature in the range recommended in Table 1. The melt temperature may tend to increase, and the barrel settings may require readjustment during the first hour or so of operation. Adjust the die bushings temperature control to achieve the best surface finish, gloss, and clarity.
5. Adjust the extruder speed to obtain proper parison length, and adjust the parison program as required.
6. Check bottle weight, wall thickness uniformity, and thread finish quality. If necessary, change the tooling to get the required parison diameter and bottle weight.

## Shutdown Procedure

1. Shut off pellet flow by shutting off the hopper feed-throat slide valve.
2. Stop the mold cycling.
3. Allow the extruder to run empty, stop extruder, and then turn heat off.
4. For a short downtime (approximately 2 hours or less), the barrel and die heat may be left on and at the operating temperature setting. Restart by starting screw rotation, then open hopper gate to start pellet feeding.
5. For an extended shutdown, the heaters may be turned off.

## Restarting Procedure

1. For restarting after a heat-off shutdown with *Eastar* copolyesters in the die head and adapter, refer to the “Start-Up and Line-Out” procedure. It is important to monitor motor load amperage and head pressure gage for an alarm condition.

***Eastar* Copolyesters  
Extrusion Blow Molding  
Troubleshooting Guide**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Possible Cause</b>	<b>Possible Remedies</b>
<b>Poor Melt Strength</b>	Melt temperature too high	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Decrease barrel heat.</li> <li>2. Employ a low-work, barrier screw.</li> <li>3. Use a reverse temperature profile.</li> <li>4. Cool front zones.</li> <li>5. Avoid restrictive adapter and head. PVC/copolyester dies generally work best.</li> </ol>
	Inadequate drying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Troubleshoot drying system.</li> </ol>
<b>Surging</b>	Inconsistent pellet feeding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use proper screw design.</li> <li>2. Do not use internally cooled screws; cool screw only in the first four to five flights of the feed zone.</li> <li>3. Ensure regrind is not blocking/bridging hopper throat and is at a consistent size and blend percent.</li> <li>4. Increase back pressure by cooling adapter or head cooling.</li> <li>5. Reaffirm proper drying. Copolyesters dried at temperatures greater than 70°C (160°F) may bridge feed throat.</li> </ol>
	Improper temperature	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Use lower percentage of regrind. May be experiencing poor material pickup by screw and/or nonuniform packing on the screw.</li> <li>7. Ensure die bushing heat is uniformly controlled.</li> <li>8. Ensure that all heaters or controllers are at setpoint</li> </ol>
	Programming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Ensure parison programmer is operating properly.</li> </ol>
<b>Splotched Surface Finish</b>	Air entrapment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure proper venting of mold.</li> <li>2. Jet blast mold surface (No. 13 bead or 220 grit).</li> <li>3. Vapor hone mold surface.</li> <li>4. If mold is highly polished, radial wipe to vents with 600 grit sandpaper.</li> </ol>
	Moisture condensation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Increase mold temperature to eliminate condensation.</li> <li>6. Install a controlled atmosphere enclosure with a low dew point.</li> </ol>

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Possible Cause</b>	<b>Possible Remedies</b>
<b>Melt Fracture/ Surface Haze</b>	Parison surface stress	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase temperature of die bushing surface.</li> <li>2. Increase melt temperature.</li> <li>3. Increase die opening.</li> <li>4. Reduce extrusion rate.</li> <li>5. Polish die tooling surface.</li> <li>6. Coat polished die tooling with low coefficient of friction coating.</li> </ol>
<b>Poor Drop Impact Resistance</b>	Poor container design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use generous radii in bottle design.</li> <li>2. Locate index mark away from pinch-off area.</li> <li>3. Maximize impact surface area.</li> <li>4. Use a base push-up design.</li> <li>5. Optimize wall thickness between 0.38 and 0.64 mm (0.015 and 0.025 in.) for most containers.</li> </ol>
	Mold	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Ensure pinch weld integrity.</li> <li>7. Perform pinch area maintenance (flash should detach easily).</li> <li>8. Ensure pinch-off termination does not extend into impact area of base.</li> <li>9. Increase mold temperature.</li> <li>10. Trim flash immediately after molding while flash is still hot.</li> </ol>
	Material issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Minimize molecular weight/degradation by drying properly.</li> <li>12. Increase melt temperature to improve pinch weld.</li> </ol>
<b>Poor Parison Cutoff</b>	Poor knife setup	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use knife with sharp edges.</li> <li>2. Provide rapid cut.</li> <li>3. Increase hot knife temperature.</li> </ol>
	Inadequate melt strength	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Reduce melt temperature.</li> </ol>
<b>Bubbles</b>	Inadequate drying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Troubleshoot drying process.</li> </ol>
	Air entrapment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Use proper screw design and optimize barrel temperature profile.</li> </ol>
<b>Parison Slipping in Mold</b>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase die size.</li> <li>2. Increase support air volume.</li> <li>3. Adjust knife cut timing.</li> <li>4. Apply vacuum to finish area of mold.</li> <li>5. Use side pinch or captured neck.</li> </ol>

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Possible Cause</b>	<b>Possible Remedies</b>
<b>Screw Load Too High Upon Restart</b>	Material not to proper melting temperature	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase barrel temperature, for start-up and then readjust to optimize processing conditions.</li> <li>2. Allow longer soak time.</li> </ol>
<b>Rough Surface Finish Trim</b>	Dull cutters or mold striker plates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Replace, realign, or resharpen cutting washers.</li> <li>2. Use washers with raised cutting surface.</li> <li>3. Increase blow pin calibration pressure.</li> <li>4. Trim hotter.</li> </ol>
<b>Uneven Parison Control on Multiple Head</b>	Nonhomogenous melt temperature	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use barrier screw with low-work mixer.</li> <li>2. Cool screw tip slightly with small amount of air.</li> <li>3. Use better temperature control at adapter and splitter.</li> <li>4. Use individual head temperature controllers.</li> <li>5. Use proportional temperature controllers on each die bushing.</li> </ol>
<b>Die Lines</b>	Degraded material or contaminates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Always clean and polish all die surfaces when going from PVC or PC to <i>Eastar</i> copolyesters.</li> </ol>
<b>Trim Sticks to Bottle</b>	Hot flash	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use trim separation at mold ejection.</li> </ol>
<b>Container Fractures</b>	Deflasher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adjust blow pin cutter and mold striker to cut closer.</li> <li>2. Maintain pinch lands to original specifications.</li> <li>3. Trim flash while hot immediately after molding.</li> <li>4. Contour the deflash impactor to the shape of the container.</li> </ol>

Conversions of metric/U.S. customary values may have been rounded and therefore may not be exact conversions.



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