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Tilt Measurement

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If the relative position of two points is described by the three-dimensional orientation of a line joining them, then, in general, *tilt* is the angular amount that the orientation has changed, in a vertical plane, from a previous direction or from a reference direction. If the original or reference orientation is nearly horizontal, then the term "tilt" is usually used. If it is nearly vertical, then the change is often regarded as "inclination." Here, "tilt" will refer to either. The two points can be separated by a discernable amount, the base, or the tilt can be measured at a point with the reference orientation being defined by the direction of the force of gravity at that point. Thus, the same instrument that measures tilt at a point can be called either a *tiltmeter* or an *inclinometer* (or clinometer), depending on the interpretation of the results. The instrument used to measure a series of tilts along any vertical orientation is often called an inclinometer (e.g., Dunnicliff [1]).

Angular tilt is directly related to the linear amount of change subtending the length of the base. Consequently, angular tilt does not have to be measured directly but can be derived from the mechanical or other measurement of this linear change if the length of the base is known.

Therefore, the following discussion has been subdivided into:

- 1. Tiltmeters or inclinometers (angular tilt at a point or over a limited, relatively small base length)
- 2. Geodetic leveling (tilt derived from a height difference over an extended base of virtually limitless length)
- 3. Hydrostatic leveling (tilt derived from a height difference over an extended base of limited length)
- 4. Suspended and inverted pendula, or plumb lines (inclination from a difference in horizontal relative position over a vertical base or height difference)

15.1 Tiltmeters or Inclinometers

Considering the basic principle of operation, tiltmeters may be divided into: liquid (including spirit bubble type), vertical pendulum, or horizontal pendulum. Dunnicliff [1] provides a comprehensive review of tiltmeters and inclinometers according to the method in which the tilt is sensed (i.e., mechanical, with accelerometer transducer, with vibrating wire transducer, or with electrolytic transducer).

The sensitivity of tilt falls into two distinct groups: geodetic or geophysical special tiltmeters with a resolution of 10^{-8} rad (0.002") or even 10^{-9} rad; and engineering tiltmeters with resolutions from 0.1" to several seconds of arc, depending on the required range of tilt to be measured.

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The first group includes instruments that are used mainly for geophysical studies of Earth tide phenomena and tectonic movements; for example, the Verbaander-Melchior [2] and the Zöllner [3, 4] horizontal pendulum tiltmeters, and the Rockwell Model TM-1 [5] liquid-bubble type. This category of instrument requires extremely stable mounting and a controlled environment. There are very few engineering projects where such sensitive instruments are required. However, deformation measurements of underground excavations for the storage of nuclear waste may be one of the few possible applications. An example is a mercury tiltmeter (Model 300) developed for that purpose by the Auckland Nuclear Accessory Co. Ltd. in New Zealand. In this instrument, the change in capacitance between electrodes and a mercury surface is proportional to the tilt. This tiltmeter, with a total range of 15", is claimed to give a resolution of 10^{-9} rad (0.0002"), which corresponds to a relative vertical displacement of only 6×10^{-7} mm over its base length of 587 mm.

In the second group, there are many models of liquid or pendulum tiltmeters of reasonable price (\$2000 to \$5000) that satisfy most needs in engineering studies. Apart from a spirit level or level vial by itself, the simplest form of tiltmeter is a base that is tens of centimeters long and leveled by centering the bubble in the vial by direct viewing or by an optical coincidence viewing of the two ends of the bubble. Direct viewing gives a resolution of 1/5 of a vial division (usually 2 mm), which typically has a sensitivity of 10" to 30" per division. Coincidence viewing increases the setting accuracy to 0.03 of the sensitivity of the vial. The discrepancy from horizontal between the two measurement points can be determined by a dial gage or micrometer that has a resolution of 0.0005 in. or 0.02 mm. Huggenberger AG claim a sensitivity of 0.3" (1×10^{-4} gon) over a range of $\pm 21'$ for their clinometer with a 100 mm base and coincidence centering of the bubble in the level vial. The clinometer can be attached to 1 m bases for either horizontal or vertical measurements.

If the vial is filled with an electrolytic liquid, the centering of the bubble can be done electrically. An example is the Electrolevel (by the British Aircraft Corp.), which uses the spirit bubble principle [6] and in which the movement of the bubble is sensed by three electrodes. A tilt produces a change in differential resistivity between the electrodes that is measured by means of a Wheatstone bridge. A resolution of 0.25" is obtained over a total range of a few minutes of arc. Many other liquid types of tiltmeters with various ranges (up to 30°) are available from various companies. Holzhausen [7] and Egan and Holzhausen [8] discuss the application of electrolytic tiltmeters (resolution of 2" over a range of $\pm 1^\circ$, manufactured by Applied Geomechanics) in the monitoring of various hydroelectric power dams in the U.S.

The Rank Organization in the United Kingdom [9] makes a liquid-dampened pendulum-type electronic level, the Talyvel, which gives an accuracy of $\pm 0.5''$ over a total range of $\pm 8'$. A similar transducer of the pendulum type is used in the Niveltronic tiltmeter (range of $\pm 150''$ with an accuracy of $\pm 0.2''$) produced by Tesa S.A. in Switzerland. Of particular popularity are servo-accelerometer tiltmeters with horizontal pendula. They offer ruggedness, durability, and can operate in low temperatures. The output voltage is proportional to the sine of the angle of tilt. Schaevitz Engineering produces such a servoaccelerometer that employs a small-mass horizontal paddle (pendulum) which tries to move in the direction of tilt, due to the force of gravity. Any resultant motion is converted by position sensors to a signal input to the electronic amplifier whose current output is applied to the torque motor. This develops a torque that is equal and opposite to the original. The torque motor current produces a voltage output that is proportional to the sine of the angle of tilt.

The typical output voltage range for tiltmeters is ± 5 V, which corresponds to the maximum range of tilt and readily allows for serial interfacing. The angular resolution of a tiltmeter depends on its range of tilt since a larger range would result in more angular tilt per unit voltage so a higher resolution tiltmeter would have a smaller range of measurable tilt. Typically, the resolution is 0.02% of the range (volts) [10].

There are many factors affecting the accuracy of tilt sensing, not just the resolution of the readout. A temperature change produces dimensional changes in the mechanical components and changes in the viscosity of the liquid in electrolytic tiltmeters and of the dampening oil in pendulum-type tiltmeters. Also, electric characteristics can alter with temperature changes. Drifts in tilt indications and fluctuations of the readout may also occur. Compensation for the effects of temperature changes can be incorporated



FIGURE 15.1 Ground subsidence derived from tilt measurements.

in the construction of an instrument, but at an increased cost. An alternative is to design a linear reaction by the instrument to the effects of temperature and to apply simple calibration corrections.

In less expensive models, compensation for the aforementioned sources of error is not very sophisticated, and such tiltmeters may show nonlinear output in reaction to changes in temperature and erratic drifts or other behavior that would be difficult to predict without testing. Consequently, very thorough testing and calibration are required even when the accuracy requirement is not very high [11]. Testing should investigate, at least, the linearity of output in reaction to induced tilts over the instrument's full range (\pm) and to changes in temperature. Some suggestions for testing and calibrating inclinometers, among other instruments, are given in Dunnicliff [1]. It is further emphasized that regular and up-todate calibration is important in order to ensure continuity in the fidelity of the data being gathered. In most cases, the behavior being investigated changes with time and incorrect data cannot be recaptured.

Compensators for vertical circle readings in precision theodolites work on the same principle as some engineering tiltmeters. The liquid compensator of the Kern E2 electronic theodolite [12] gave a repeatability of better than 0.3'' over a range of $\pm 150''$ and was incorporated in their tiltmeter, NIVEL 20, in 1989. The same compensation system has been used in the currently available Leica TC2002 precision electronic total station [13]. Consequently, the theodolite may also be used as a tiltmeter, in some applications, giving the same accuracy as the Electrolevel, for example.

Tiltmeters have a wide range of applications. A series of tiltmeters, if arranged along a terrain profile in a mining area, may replace geodetic leveling in the determination of ground subsidence [11] as shown in Figure 15.1. For example, the subsidence (i.e., the variation from the previous or original profile) of point 4 (δh_4) with respect to point 1 may be estimated from the observed changes in tilt, from a base or original position, (α_i in radians) and known distances between the points as:

$$\delta h_4 = s_1 \left(\alpha_1 + \alpha_2 \right) / 2 + s_2 \left(\alpha_2 + \alpha_3 \right) / 2 + s_3 \left(\alpha_3 + \alpha_4 \right) / 2$$
(15.1)

The fidelity of this method depends on the density of tilt measurements along the profile and the continuity of the profile (a constant slope of the terrain between measurement points is assumed). Similarly, deformation profiles of tall buildings may be determined by placing a series of tiltmeters at different levels of the structure [14]. Also, changes in borehole profiles can be created in a similar manner. The absolute profile of a borehole can be generated by considering the horizontal displacement in the direction of the orientation of the inclinometer (usually controlled by guide grooves in the borehole casing) for the *i*-th position, as it traverses a borehole with observation of α_i at a depth s_i . However, this would require calibration of the inclinometer to correct its output to show zero in its vertical position since the α_i are tilts from the vertical rather than angular changes from an original inclination.

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In geomechanical engineering, the most popular application of tiltmeters and borehole inclinometers is in slope stability studies and in monitoring earth-fill dams. Torpedo-shaped biaxial inclinometers are used to scan boreholes drilled to the depth of an expected stable strata in the slope. By lowering the inclinometer on a cable with marked intervals and taking readings of the inclinometer at those intervals, a full profile of the borehole and its changes may be determined through repeated surveys, as mentioned above. SINCO and other producers of tiltmeters provide special borehole inclinometers (50 cm or 2 ft long) with guide wheels to control the orientation of the inclinometer. A special borehole casing (plastic or aluminum) with guiding grooves for the wheels is available. Usually, servo-accelerometer type inclinometers are used with various ranges of inclination measurements; for example, $\pm 6^\circ$, $\pm 53^\circ$, or even $\pm 90^\circ$. A 40 m deep borehole, if measured every 50 cm with an inclinometer having an accuracy of only $\pm 100''$, should allow for the determination of linear lateral displacement of the collar of the borehole with an accuracy of ± 2 mm.

In cases where there is difficult access to the monitored area or a need for continuous data acquisition or both, tiltmeters or borehole inclinometers can be left in place at the observing station with a telemetry monitoring system allowing for communication to the processing location. One example of a station setup of a telemetric monitoring of ground subsidence in a mining area near Sparwood, B.C. used a telemetry system developed for the Canadian Centre for Mining and Energy Technology (CANMET) by the University of New Brunswick [11, 15]. Terra Technology biaxial servo-accelerometer tiltmeters of $\pm 1^{\circ}$ range were used in the study. The telemetry system could work with up to 256 field stations. Each station accepted up to six sensors (not only tiltmeters but any type of instrument with electric output, e.g., temperature, power level or voltage). Another example is a fully automated borehole scanning system with a SINCO inclinometer and telemetric data acquisition that was also developed at the University of New Brunswick [16]. It has been used successfully in monitoring highwall stability at the Syncrude Canada Limited tarsands mining operation in northern Alberta.

15.2 Geodetic Leveling

Geodetic or differential leveling measures the height difference between two points using precision tilting levels, or precision automatic levels with compensators, with parallel plate micrometers and calibrated invar leveling staves or rods. Recent technology has provided digital automatic levels that use a CCD sensor in the instrument and bar codes, rather than linear graduations, on the staves [17]. Their ease of use and comparable precision have quickly made them rivals to the traditional optical instruments. In a single setup of the level, the height difference is the backsight rod reading minus the foresight rod reading. Any number of setup height differences can be combined to determine the height difference between two points of interest; however, the errors involved accumulate with the number of setups. With sight lengths limited to no more than 20 m, geodetic leveling can produce height differences with a precision of ± 0.1 mm per setup, which is equivalent to a precision of $\pm 0.5''$ in tilt. Although geodetic leveling is traditionally used to determine elevations, it is often used to monitor not only the settlement of sensitive structures but also to describe the tilt of components of a structure by determining the tilt between appropriate pairs of benchmarks (monumented in or on the structure) [18]. Since the level reference is created by an optical line of sight through a telescope (magnification up to $40\times$), a major source of systematic error is the effect of vertical atmospheric refraction. A vertical temperature gradient of even 1°C m⁻¹ across the line of sight would bend the line of sight to be in error by 0.4 mm at 30 m. Gradients of this magnitude are commonly encountered in industrial settings and are usually even more evident outdoors. Less effect is realized if the sight lengths are kept short, but this must be weighted against the accumulation of random error with each additional setup (shorter sight lengths would require more setups to traverse the same height difference). The errors that seem to be insignificant in a single setup (or in a few setups) become magnified in height differences involving a large number of setups (e.g., rod scale error and settlement of the instrument or rods). Such errors have become quite noticeable in the monitoring of tectonic plate movement and undetected systematic effects can be misleading. Further discussion on precision leveling and sources of error is available in Vanicek et al. [19] and in Schomacker and Berry [20].

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FIGURE 15.2 Hydrostatic equilibrium in connected vessels.

Having the elevations or heights, h_1 and h_2 , of two points or having measured, or determined, the height difference between them, $\Delta h_{12^t} = h_2 - h_1$, at a time *t*, means that, if $\delta \Delta h = \Delta h_{12^{t2}} - \Delta h_{12^{t1}}$, the tilt, T_{12} , can be calculated if the horizontal separation s_{12} is known, since $T_{12} = \delta \Delta h / s_{12}$. The separation does not have to be known as precisely as the height difference since the total random error is $\sigma_{T^2} = \sigma_{\delta \Delta h^2}/s^2 + \sigma_{s^2}(\delta \Delta h^2/s^4)$. As an example, for two points that are 60 m apart with a height difference of 0.5 m (extreme in most structural cases) with the height difference known to $\pm 50 \,\mu\text{m} (\sigma_{\delta \Delta h})$ and the distance known to $\pm 0.01 \text{ m} (\sigma_s)$, the tilt would have a precision (σ_T) of $\pm 0.3''$. Further, neither the measurement of the height difference nor the determination of the separation have to be done directly between the two points. The leveling can be done along whatever route is convenient and the separation can be obtained in a variety of ways, for example, inversing from coordinated values for the points [21].

15.3 Hydrostatic Leveling

If two connected containers (Figure 15.2) are partially filled with a liquid, then the heights h_1 and h_2 are related through the hydrostatic equation (Bernoulli's equation, as given in [22]):

$$h_1 + P_1 / (g_1 \rho_1) = h_2 + P_2 / (g_2 \rho_2) = c$$
 (15.2)

where *P* is the barometric pressure, *g* is the force of gravity, ρ is the density of the liquid which is a function of temperature, and *c* is a constant.

The above relationship has been employed in hydrostatic leveling, as shown schematically in Figure 15.3. The air tube connecting the two containers eliminates possible error due to different air pressures at two stations. The temperature of the liquid should also be maintained constant because, for example, a difference of 1.2° C between two containers may cause an error of 0.05 mm in a Δh determination

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FIGURE 15.3 Hydrostatic leveling $(\Delta h_{12} = r_2 - r_1)$.

for an average h = 0.2 m and $t = 20^{\circ}$ C. Huggett et al. [23] devised a two-fluid tiltmeter to overcome the temperature effect by using two liquids with different temperature coefficients and claim a resolution of 10^{-8} to 10^{-9} rad over a separation of up to 1 km. In a discussion of liquid level gages, Dunnicliff [1] emphasizes that care should be exercised to ensure that there is no discontinuity in the liquid since any gas (usually air, often entering when filling the tubing) in the liquid line will introduce an error in the level difference, especially in a vertical, more than in a horizontal, portion of tubing. He also mentions that the behavior of the liquid is influenced by the inside diameter and capillary effects of the tubing, while the outside diameter is likely what is quoted by manufacturers. Dunnicliff [1] also provides a comprehensive summary of the variety of liquid level gages.

Two examples of typical hydrostatic instruments used in precision leveling will be mentioned here. The ELWAAG 001, developed in Germany [24], is a fully automatic instrument with a traveling (by means of an electric stepping motor) sensor pin that closes the electric circuit on touching the surface of the liquid. A standard deviation of ± 0.03 mm is claimed over distances of 40 m between the instruments [22]. Another automatic system, the Nivomatic Telenivelling System, is available from Telemac or Roctest Ltd. The Nivomatic uses inductance transducers that translate the up and down movements of its floats into electric signals (frequency changes in a resonant circuit). An accuracy of ± 0.1 mm is claimed over a 24 m length. P & S Enterprises, Ltd. produces a Pellissier model H5 portable hydrostatic level/tiltmeter, for which they claim an accuracy of $\pm 5 \,\mu$ m over a tube length of 14 m, for engineering and Earth tide measurements.

Hydrostatic levels may be used in a network formation of permanently installed instruments to monitor tilts in large structures. Robotti and Rossini [25] report on a DAG (Automatic Measuring Device of Levels and Inclinations) network monitoring system available from SIS Geotecnica (Italy) that offers an accuracy of about ± 0.01 mm using inductive transducers in the measurement of liquid levels. Various systems of double liquid (e.g., water and mercury) settlement gages based on the principle of hydrostatic leveling are used for monitoring power dams [26] with extended networks of connecting tubing.

Instruments with direct measurement of liquid levels are limited in their vertical range by the height of their containers. This problem may be overcome if liquid pressures are measured instead of the changes in elevation of the liquid levels. Pneumatic pressure cells or pressure transducer cells may be used. Both Dunnicliff [1] and Hanna [26] give numerous examples of various settlement gages based on that principle. Meier [27] mentions the application of a differential pressure tiltmeter in the monitoring of a concrete dam.



FIGURE 15.4 Inclination measurements with plumblines. (a) suspended pendulum; (b) inverted pendulum.

15.4 Suspended and Inverted Plumb Lines

Two types of mechanical plumbing are used in monitoring the stability of vertical structures:

- 1. Suspended pendula or plumb lines (Figure 15.4(a))
- 2. Floating pendula or inverted, or reversed, plumb lines (Figure 15.4(b))

Typical applications are in the monitoring of power dams and of the stability of reference survey pillars. Suspended pendula are also commonly used in mine orientation surveys and in monitoring the stability of mine shafts. Tilt, or inclination, is derived from differences in horizontal relative position combined with vertical separation in the same way as tilt is derived from geodetic leveling. So, similarly, the vertical separation between two reading tables or between a reading table and anchor point does not have to be known as precisely as the change in relative position. Two table readings, each ± 0.02 mm, with a relative position difference of 100 mm and a vertical separation of 10 m, known to ± 0.01 m, would result in a tilt precision of $\pm 2''$.

Inverted plumb lines have become standard instrumentation in large dams (e.g., Hydro Quebec uses them routinely). Their advantage over suspended plumb lines is in the possibility of monitoring the absolute displacements of structures with respect to deeply anchored points in the foundation rock which may be considered as stable. In power dams, the depth of anchors must be 30 m or even more below the foundation in order to obtain absolute displacements of the surface points. The main problem with inverted plumb lines is the drilling of vertical boreholes so that the vertical wire of the plumb line would have freedom to remain straight and vertical. A special technique for drilling vertical holes has been developed at Hydro Quebec [28].

Several types of recording devices that measure displacements of structural points with respect to vertical plumb lines are produced by different companies. The simplest are mechanical or electromechanical micrometers with which the plumb wire can be positioned with respect to reference lines of a recording (coordinating) table with an accuracy of ± 0.2 mm or better. Traveling microscopes may give the same accuracy. Automatic sensing and recording is possible with a Telecoordinator from Huggenberger

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FIGURE 15.5 (*a*) Influence of air currents on a suspended plumbline. (*b*) Horizontal error due to the spiral shape of the wire.

AG in Switzerland. Telemac Co. (France) developed a system, Telependulum (marketed by Roctest), for continuous sensing of the position of the wire with remote reading and recording. A rigidly mounted reading table supports two pairs of induction type proximity sensors arranged on two mutually perpendicular axes. A hollow cylinder is fixed on the pendulum wire at the appropriate level, passing through the center of the table and between the sensors. Changes in the width of the gap between the target cylinder and the sensors are detected by the corresponding changes in the induction effect. The system has a resolution of ± 0.01 mm.

An interesting Automated Vision System has been developed by Spectron Engineering (Denver, Colorado). The system uses solid state electronic cameras to image the plumb line with a resolution of about 3 µm over a range of about 75 mm. Several plumb lines at Glen Canyon dam and at Monticello dam, near Sacramento, California, have been using the system since 1982 [29].

Two sources of error, which may be often underestimated by the user, may strongly affect plumb line measurements:

- 1. The influence of air currents
- 2. The spiral shape of the wire

If the wire of a plumb line (Figure 15.5(a)), with pendulum mass Q, is exposed along a length h to an air current of speed v at a distance H from the anchor point, then the plumb line is deflected by an amount [30]:

$$e = f_0 h H/Q \tag{15.3}$$

where f_0 is the acting force of air current per unit length of the wire. The value of f_0 may be calculated approximately from [30]

$$f_0 = 0.08 \, dv^2 / Q \tag{15.4}$$

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where *d* is the diameter of the wire in millimeters, *v* is in meters per second, and *Q* is in kilograms. As an example, if H = 50 m, h = 5 m, d = 1 mm, Q = 20 kg, and v = 1 m s⁻¹ (only 3.6 km h⁻¹) then e = 1 mm.

The second source of error, which is usually underestimated in practice, is that the spiral shape (annealing) of the wire (Figure 15.5(b)) affects all wires unless they are specially straightened or suspended for a prolonged time (on the order of several months). If the wire changes its position (rotates) between two campaigns of measurements, then the recorded displacements could have a maximum error of 2r. The value of r can be calculated from [30]:

$$r = \left(\pi d^4 E\right) / \left(64 RQ\right) \tag{15.5}$$

where *E* is Young's modulus of elasticity (about 2×10^{11} Pa for steel); *R* is the radius of the free spirals of the unloaded wire that, typically, is about 15 cm for wires up to 1.5 mm diameter; and *d* and *Q* are as above. For a plumb wire with d = 1 mm, R = 15 cm, and Q = 196 N (i.e., 20 kg), r = 0.3 mm.

If one plumb line cannot be established through all levels of a monitored structure, then a combination of suspended and inverted plumb lines may be used as long as they overlap at least at one level of the structure. At Hydro Quebec, the drill holes of the plumb lines are also used for monitoring height changes (vertical extension) by installing tensioned invar wires [31].

15.5 Integration of Observations

The above discussion has considered using individual instruments. Because many investigations, using other instrumentation as well as the measurement of tilt, involve the repetition of measurements, often over a long term, the fidelity of the measurements and their being referenced to the original or initial observation is vital to the investigation. It is risky to expect consistent behavior of instrumentation, particularly in environments with dramatic variations (especially in temperature), and over a long period of time. Any conclusion relating to the behavior of a structure is only as good as the data used in the analysis of the behavior. Two ways to ensure reliability are possible. One is to make regular testing and calibration a component of the observation regimen. The other is to analyze the observations as they are accumulated, either each observable as a temporal series of repeated measurements or observations of different locations or types together in an integrated analysis. The analytical tools for integrated analyses, as well as for calibration testing and temporal series analysis, have been developed [21, 32] and successfully implemented in several projects [15, 18, 33]. Proper calibration testing and correction, rigorous statistical analysis of trend in temporal series, and integrated analysis have proven to be valuable tools in the analysis of deformations and serve to enhance the monitoring of sensitive structures.

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Appendix

A Sampling of Possible Suppliers of Tilt Measuring Instrumentation

Applied Geomechanics Inc. 1336 Brommer Street Santa Cruz, CA 95062

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Leica AG CH-9435 Heerbrugg Switzerland

Maihak AG Semperstrasse 38 D-2000 Hamburg 60 West Germany

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Serata Geomechanics, Inc. 4124 Lakeside Drive Richmond, CA 94806

Soil Instruments Ltd. Bell Lane, Uckfield East Sussex TN22 1Ql England

Solinst Canada Ltd. 2440 Industrial St. Burlington, Ontario Canada L7P 1A5

Spectron Engineering 800 West 9th Avenue Denver, CO 80204

Telemac 2 Rue Auguste Thomas 92600 Asnieres France

P & S Enterprises, Ltd. 240 South Monaco Pkwy, # 302 Denver, CO 80224 Auckland Nuclear Accessory Company Ltd. P.O. Box 16066 Auckland, 3. New Zealand

Geotechnical Instruments Ltd. Station House, Old Warwich Road Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV31 3HR England

IRAD GAGE Etna Road Lebanon, NH 03766

Measurement Devices Limited 11211 Richmond Avenue, Suite 106, Building B Houston, TX 77082

Roctest Ltée Ltd. 665 Pine Montreal, P.Q. Canada J4P 2P4

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