

TECHNICAL REPORT



**Optical amplifiers –
Part 4: Maximum permissible optical power for the damage-free and safe use of
optical amplifiers, including Raman amplifiers**

INTERNATIONAL
ELECTROTECHNICAL
COMMISSION

ICS 33.160.10; 33.180.30

ISBN 978-2-8322-6339-6

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	6
1 Scope.....	7
2 Normative references	7
3 Terms, definitions, and abbreviated terms	8
3.1 Terms and definitions.....	8
3.2 Abbreviated terms.....	8
4 Maximum transmissible optical power to keep fibres damage-free	8
4.1 General.....	8
4.2 Fibre fuse and its propagation.....	9
4.3 Loss-induced heating at connectors or splices	10
4.4 Connector endface damage induced by dust/contamination	11
4.5 Fibre coat burn/melt induced by tight fibre bending	13
4.6 Summary of the fibre damage	14
5 Maximum transmissible optical power to keep eyes and skin safe	15
5.1 Maximum transmissible exposure (MPE) on the surface of eye and skin	15
5.2 Maximum permissible optical power in the fibre for the safety of eye and skin.....	15
5.2.1 Power limit.....	15
5.2.2 Need for APR	16
5.2.3 Wavelengths.....	17
5.2.4 Locations.....	17
5.2.5 Nominal ocular hazard distance (NOHD).....	17
5.2.6 Power reduction times	17
5.2.7 Medical aspects of the safety of eyes and skin in existing standards	18
6 Maximum optical power permissible for optical amplifiers from the viewpoint of fibre damage as well as eye and skin safety	19
7 Conclusion	19
Annex A (informative) General information for optical fibre fuse	20
A.1 Introductory remark.....	20
A.2 Generating mechanism	20
A.3 Void formation mechanism.....	24
A.4 Propagation characteristic of a fibre fuse	24
A.5 Prevention and termination	26
A.5.1 General	26
A.5.2 Prevention methods.....	26
A.5.3 Termination methods	27
A.6 Additional safety information	29
A.7 Conclusion.....	29
Bibliography.....	30
Figure 1 – Experimental set-up for fibre fuse propagation	9
Figure 2 – Connection loss versus temperature increase	11
Figure 3 – Test set-up.....	11
Figure 4 – Surface condition contaminated with metal filings, before the test	12
Figure 5 – Variation of power attenuation during test at several power input values for plugs contaminated with metal filings	13

Figure 6 – Polishing surface condition contaminated with metal filing, after test	13
Figure 7 – Thermo viewer image of tightly bent SMF with optical power of 3 W at 1 480 nm	14
Figure 8 – Temperature of the coating surface of SMFs against bending with optical power of 3 W at 1 480 nm	14
Figure 9 – Maximum permissible power in the fibre against APR power reduction time	18
Figure A.1 – Front part of the fibre fuse damage generated in the optical fibre	20
Figure A.2 – SiO absorption model	22
Figure A.3 – Calculated fibre fuse propagation behaviour simulated with the SiO absorption model	23
Figure A.4 – Series of optical micrographs showing damage generated by 9,0 W 1 480 nm laser light suggesting a mechanism of periodic void formation	24
Figure A.5 – Images of fibre fuse ignition taken with an ultra-high-speed camera and an optical micrograph of the damaged fibre	25
Figure A.6 – Power density dependence of the fibre-fuse propagation velocity	26
Figure A.7 – Optical micrographs showing front part of the fibre fuse damage generated in SMF-28 fibres with various laser intensities (1 480 nm)	26
Figure A.8 – Principle of the optical fibre fuse passive termination method and photograph of a fibre fuse terminator using a TEC structure	27
Figure A.9 – Photograph of hole-assisted fibre and fibre fuse termination using a hole-assisted fibre	28
Figure A.10 – Example of fibre fuse active termination scheme	29
Figure A.11 – Transformation of electrical signal by optical fibre fuse	29
Table 1 – Threshold power of fibre fuse propagation for various fibres	9
Table 2 – Measurement conditions	10
Table 3 – Examples of power limits for optical fibre communication systems having automatic power reduction to reduce emissions to a lower hazard level	16
Table 4 – Location types within an optical fibre communication system and their typical installations	17

INTERNATIONAL ELECTROTECHNICAL COMMISSION

OPTICAL AMPLIFIERS –

Part 4: Maximum permissible optical power for the damage-free and safe use of optical amplifiers, including Raman amplifiers

FOREWORD

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IEC TR 61292-4 has been prepared by subcommittee 86C: Fibre optic systems and active devices, of IEC technical committee 86: Fibre optics. It is a Technical Report.

This fourth edition cancels and replaces the third edition published in 2014. This edition constitutes a technical revision.

This edition includes the following significant technical changes with respect to the previous edition.

- a) The technical information has been updated to reflect revisions of the relevant references.
- b) In particular, the descriptions provided in Clause 5 and Clause 6 have been modified significantly to reflect changes in the cited references. Unnecessary formulas and explanations that overlap with the references have been removed to simplify the document.
- c) New information has been added to Annex A on optical fibre burning when light enters an optical fibre with a bubble train formed by a fibre fuse.

The text of this Technical Report is based on the following documents:

Draft	Report on voting
86C/1821/DTR	86C/1832/RVDTR

Full information on the voting for its approval can be found in the report on voting indicated in the above table.

The language used for the development of this Technical Report is English.

This document was drafted in accordance with ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2, and developed in accordance with ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1 and ISO/IEC Directives, IEC Supplement, available at www.iec.ch/members_experts/refdocs. The main document types developed by IEC are described in greater detail at www.iec.ch/standardsdev/publications.

A list of all parts in the IEC 61292 series, published under the general title *Optical amplifiers* can be found on the IEC website.

The committee has decided that the contents of this document will remain unchanged until the stability date indicated on the IEC website under webstore.iec.ch in the data related to the specific document. At this date, the document will be

- reconfirmed,
- withdrawn,
- replaced by a revised edition, or
- amended.

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INTRODUCTION

This document is dedicated to the subject of maximally permissible optical power for damage-free and safe use of optical amplifiers, including Raman amplifiers. Since the technology is quite new and still evolving, amendments and new editions to this document can be expected.

Many new types of optical amplifiers are entering the marketplace, and research is also stimulating the development of many new types of fibre and non-fibre based optical amplifiers. With the introduction of new technologies, such as long-haul, beyond 100 Gb/s, WDM transmission, digital coherent transmission and Raman amplification, some optical amplifiers employ optical pump sources with extremely high optical power – possibly up to several Watts. For example, erbium doped fibre amplifiers that provide extremely high output power are described in IEC TR 61292-8 [1]¹, and Raman amplifiers in IEC TR 61292-6 [2].

Excessively high optical power can cause physical damage to the optical fibres, components and equipment, in addition to presenting a medical hazard to the human eye and skin.

The possibility of fibre damage caused by high optical intensity has been discussed at technical conferences and in technical reports for many years. The use of high intensity optical amplifiers can cause problems in optical fibres, which include fibre fuse, heating in the splice points (connection points), fibre endface damage due to dust, and fibre coat burning due to tight fibre bending. For example, IEC TR 62547 [3] provides guidelines for the measurement of high-power damage sensitivity of single-mode fibre to bends, and IEC TR 62627-01 [4] describes cleaning methods for fibre optic connectors to reduce the risk of fibre endface damage. In addition, other standard groups are discussing the risk of ignition of hazardous environments caused by high-power radiation from optical equipment.

The medical aspects of high-power optical radiation have also been addressed by standards. IEC 60825-2 defines the concept of hazard levels and corresponding labelling, which addresses the safety aspects of lasers specifically in relation to tissue damage.

In addition, IEC TR 60825-17 [5] describes safety measures to protect against effects caused exclusively by thermal, opto-mechanical and related effects in passive optical components and optical cables used in high power optical fibre communication systems. Moreover, ITU-T Recommendation G.664 [6] discusses the safety feature of automatic laser power reduction.

With the recently growing interest in high power fibre amplifiers and fibre Raman amplifiers, however, some difficulties have been identified among optical amplifier users and manufacturers in fully understanding the technical details and requirements across all such standards and agreements.

This document provides a simple informative guideline on the maximum optical power permissible for optical amplifiers for optical amplifier users and manufacturers.

¹ Numbers in square brackets refer to the Bibliography.

OPTICAL AMPLIFIERS –

Part 4: Maximum permissible optical power for the damage-free and safe use of optical amplifiers, including Raman amplifiers

1 Scope

This part of IEC 61292, which is a Technical Report, applies to all commercially available optical amplifiers (OAs), including optical fibre amplifiers (OFAs) using active fibres as well as Raman amplifiers. Semiconductor optical amplifiers (SOAs) using semiconductor gain media are also included.

This document provides informative guidelines on the threshold of high optical power that can cause high-temperature damage of the fibre. Also discussed is optical safety for manufacturers and users of optical amplifiers by quoting parts of existing standards and agreements on eye and skin safety.

This document identifies the following values for maximum permissible optical power in the optical amplifier for damage-free and safe operation:

- a) the optical power limit that causes thermal damage to the fibre, such as fibre fuse and fibre-coat burning;
- b) the maximum permissible exposure (MPE) to which the eyes/skin can be exposed without consequent injury;
- c) the optical power limit in the fibre that causes MPE on the eyes/skin after free-space propagation from the fibre;
- d) the absolute allowable optical power level for damage-free and safe operation of the optical amplifier by comparing a) and c).

The objective of this document is to minimize potential confusion and misunderstanding in the industry that can cause unnecessary alarms and hinder the progress and acceptance of advancing optical amplifier technologies in the market.

It is important that the reader always refers to the latest international standards and agreements, because the technologies concerned are rapidly evolving.

The present document will be frequently reviewed and updated in a timely manner by incorporating the results of various studies related to OAs and OA-supported optical systems.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

IEC 61291-1:2018, *Optical amplifiers – Part 1: Generic specification*