



15 January 2026  
MCA-GL-129, version 1 - 2025  
MCA Technical Working Group

## Guideline for Photostability Testing

Draft written by MCA Technical Working Group	12 December 2025
Release for and start of public consultation	15 December 2025
End of consultation (deadline for comments)	07 January 2026
Agreed by MCA Technical Working Group	13 January 2026
Approved by MCA Executive Director	15 January 2026
Date of coming into effect	19 January 2026

This is a new guideline.

Comments should be provided by using the template (MCA-F-021/03) for Submission of Comments and sent to [info@mca.gm](mailto:info@mca.gm)

<b>Keywords</b>	photostability testing, stability
-----------------	-----------------------------------



# Guideline for Photostability Testing

## Table of contents

<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Information on the parent guideline .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 General aspects and terms deviating from parent guideline .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Text of Parent Guideline with MCA's annotations .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 Annotations to aspects not included in parent guideline.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>References used for this guideline adoption approach .....</b>	<b>12</b>

## Executive summary

This guideline has been developed by using the adoption approach based on the work-plan agreed in March 2023 by the Joint Technical Working Group for Guidelines in Marketing Authorization (TWG-MAG). The TWG-MAG consists of two representatives each of the national medicines regulatory authorities (NMRA) of Liberia (LMHRA, Liberia Medicines and Health Products Regulatory Authority), Sierra Leone (PBSL, Pharmacy Board of Sierra Leone), The Gambia (MCA, Medicines Control Agency), and Ghana (FDA, Food and Drugs Authority) and is facilitated by the GHPP PharmTrain2 Project team of the Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices (BfArM, Germany).

Version 1 of the Guideline on Photostability Testing for the National Medicines Regulatory Authorities of Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia was finalised on 20 December 2023 for annotation in the MCA guideline.

This document should be read in conjunction with relevant sections of the MCA *Guideline for Marketing Authorisation (Registration) of Medicines* and other applicable guidance.

## Information on the parent guideline

Title: Stability Testing: Photostability Testing of New Drug Substances and Products

Author(s): International Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use

Document No: Q1B

Version No: Step 4 version

Date of issue: 6 November 1996

Source (e.g. website link):

<https://database.ich.org/sites/default/files/Q1B%20Guideline.pdf>

(Accessed October 2025)

This Guideline has been developed by the appropriate ICH Expert Working Group and has been subject to consultation by the regulatory parties, in accordance with the ICH

Process. At Step 4 of the Process the final draft is recommended for adoption to the regulatory bodies of the European Union, Japan and USA

### Q1B

#### Document History

First Codification	History	Date	New Codification
Q1B	Approval by the Steering Committee under Step 2 and release for public consultation.	28 November 1995	Q1B

#### Current Step 4 Version

Q1B	Approval by the Steering Committee under Step 4 and recommendation for adoption to the three ICH regulatory bodies.	6 November 1996	Q1B
-----	---	-----------------	-----

### ICH Harmonised Tripartite Guideline

Having reached Step 4 of the ICH Process at the ICH Steering Committee meeting on 6 November 1996, this guideline is recommended for adoption to the three regulatory parties to ICH

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### 1. General

- A. Preamble
- B. Light Sources
- C. Procedure

#### 2. Drug Substance

- A. Presentation of Samples
- B. Analysis of Samples
- C. Judgement of Results

#### 3. Drug Product

- A. Presentation of Samples
- B. Analysis of Samples
- C. Judgement of Results

#### 4. Annex

- A. Quinine Chemical Actinometry

#### 5. Glossary

#### 6. References

## 1 General aspects and terms deviating from parent guideline

- 1.1. For the purpose of consistency with other MCA guidelines, the terms of the parent guideline (left column) shall read as synonymous to the following terms (right column):

Parent guideline term	Synonymous term
(New) Drug substance	(New) Active pharmaceutical ingredient (API)
(New) Drug Products	(New) Finished Pharmaceutical Products (FPPs)

## 2 Text of Parent Guideline with MCA's annotations

### 1. GENERAL

The ICH Harmonized Tripartite Guideline covering the Stability Testing of New Drug Substances and Products (hereafter referred to as the Parent Guideline) notes that light testing should be an integral part of stress testing. This document is an annex to the Parent Guideline and addresses the recommendations for photostability testing.

**MCA's Annotation:** Unless stated otherwise, reference to parent guideline, pertains to the MCA Guideline on Stability Testing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and Finished Pharmaceutical Products.

**Rationale:** This guideline is applied by the MCA instead of the guideline stated in the parent guideline.

#### A. Preamble

The intrinsic photostability characteristics of new drug substances and products should be evaluated to demonstrate that, as appropriate, light exposure does not result in unacceptable change. Normally, photostability testing is carried out on a single batch of material selected as described under Selection of Batches in the Parent Guideline. Under some circumstances these studies should be repeated if certain variations and changes are made to the product (e.g., formulation, packaging). Whether these studies should be repeated depends on the photostability characteristics determined at the time of initial filing and the type of variation and/or change made.

**MCA's Annotation:** The following documents need to be replaced: "Normally, photostability testing is carried out on a single batch of material selected as described under Selection of Batches in the Parent guideline."

by the following document: "Normally, photostability testing is carried out on at least a single batch of one primary batch of the FPP if appropriate as described under "2.2.7. Storage conditions" MCA Guideline for Stability Testing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and Finished Pharmaceutical Products.

**Rationale:** Parent guideline in this context is the MCA Guideline for Stability testing instead of the ICH Guideline stated. Selection of Batch is also covered by this guideline.

The guideline primarily addresses the generation of photostability information for submission in Registration Applications for new molecular entities and associated drug products. The guideline does not cover the photostability of drugs after administration (i.e. under conditions of use) and those applications not covered by the Parent Guideline. Alternative approaches may be used if they are scientifically sound and justification is provided.

A systematic approach to photostability testing is recommended covering, as appropriate, studies such as:

- i) Tests on the drug substance;
- ii) Tests on the exposed drug product outside of the immediate pack;  
and if necessary;
- iii) Tests on the drug product in the immediate pack;  
and if necessary;
- iv) Tests on the drug product in the marketing pack.

The extent of drug product testing should be established by assessing whether or not acceptable change has occurred at the end of the light exposure testing as described in the Decision Flow Chart for Photostability Testing of Drug Products. Acceptable change is change within limits justified by the applicant.

The formal labelling requirements for photolabile drug substances and drug products are established by national/regional requirements.

## **B. Light Sources**

The light sources described below may be used for photostability testing. The applicant should either maintain an appropriate control of temperature to minimize the effect of localized temperature changes or include a dark control in the same environment unless otherwise justified. For both options 1 and 2, a pharmaceutical manufacturer/applicant may rely on the spectral distribution specification of the light source manufacturer.

### ***Option 1***

Any light source that is designed to produce an output similar to the D65/ID65 emission standard such as an artificial daylight fluorescent lamp combining visible and ultraviolet (UV) outputs, xenon, or metal halide lamp. D65 is the internationally recognized standard for outdoor daylight as defined in ISO 10977 (1993). ID65 is the equivalent indoor indirect daylight standard. For a light source emitting significant radiation below 320 nm, an appropriate filter(s) may be fitted to eliminate such radiation.

### ***Option 2***

For option 2 the same sample should be exposed to both the cool white fluorescent and near ultraviolet lamp.

1. A cool white fluorescent lamp designed to produce an output similar to that specified in ISO 10977(1993); and
2. A near UV fluorescent lamp having a spectral distribution from 320 nm to 400 nm with a maximum energy emission between 350 nm and 370 nm; a significant proportion of UV should be in both bands of 320 to 360 nm and 360 to 400 nm.

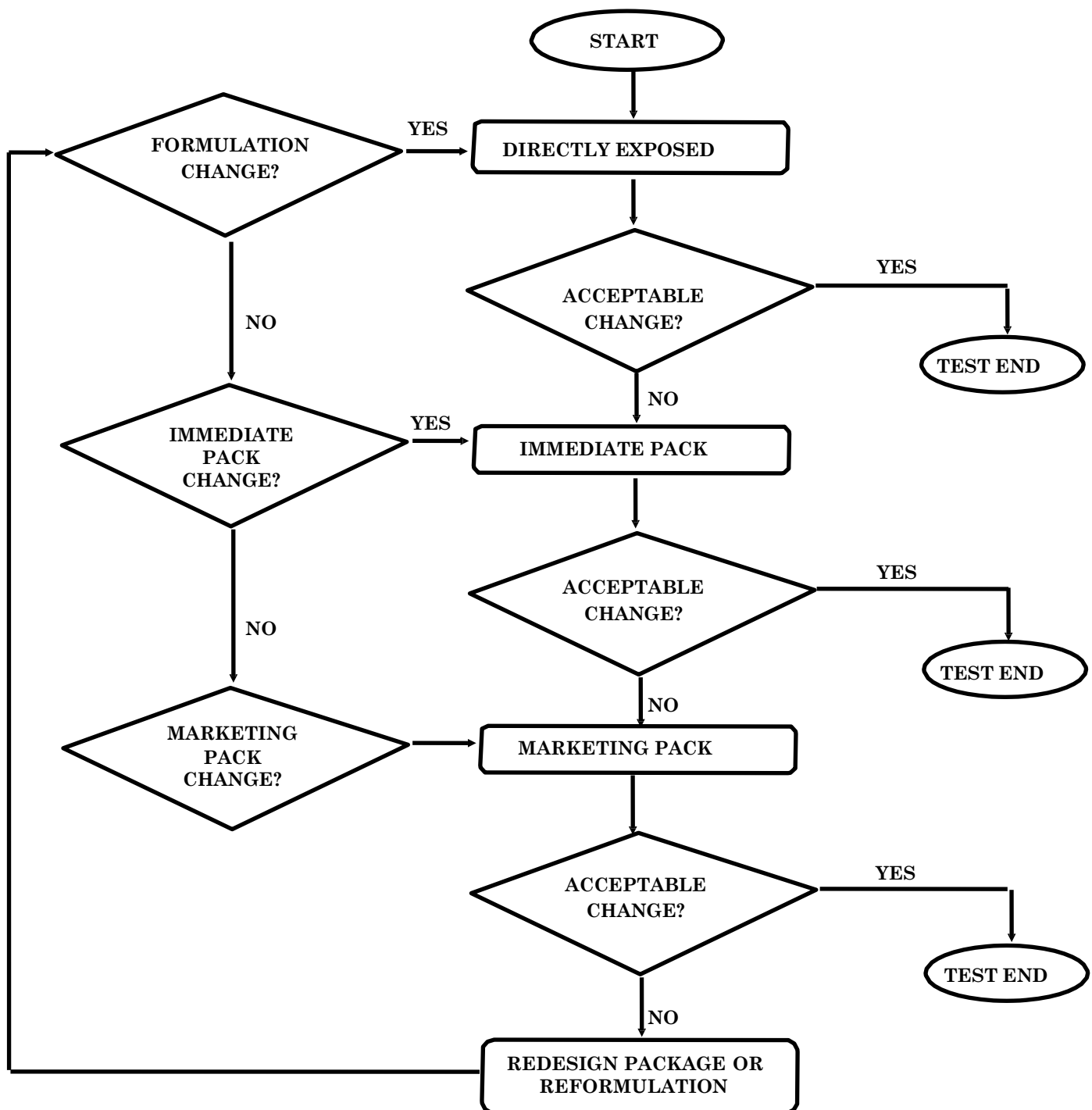
## **C. Procedure**

For confirmatory studies, samples should be exposed to light providing an overall illumination of not less than 1.2 million lux hours and an integrated near ultraviolet energy of not less than 200-watt hours/square meter to allow direct comparisons to be made between the drug substance and drug product.

Samples may be exposed side-by-side with a validated chemical actinometric system to ensure the specified light exposure is obtained, or for the appropriate duration of time when conditions have

been monitored using calibrated radiometers/lux meters. An example of an actinometric procedure is provided in the Annex.

If protected samples (e.g., wrapped in aluminium foil) are used as dark controls to evaluate the contribution of thermally induced change to the total observed change, these should be placed alongside the authentic sample.

**DECISION FLOW CHART FOR  
PHOTOSTABILITY TESTING  
OF DRUG PRODUCTS**

## 2. DRUG SUBSTANCE

For drug substances, photostability testing should consist of two parts: forced degradation testing and confirmatory testing.

The purpose of forced degradation testing studies is to evaluate the overall photosensitivity of the material for method development purposes and/or degradation pathway elucidation. This testing may involve the drug substance alone and/or in simple solutions/suspensions to validate the analytical procedures. In these studies, the samples should be in chemically inert and transparent containers. In these forced degradation studies, a variety of exposure conditions may be used, depending on the photosensitivity of the drug substance involved and the intensity of the light sources used. For development and validation purposes it is appropriate to limit exposure and end the studies if extensive decomposition occurs. For photostable materials, studies may be terminated after an appropriate exposure level has been used. The design of these experiments is left to the applicant's discretion although the exposure levels used should be justified.

Under forcing conditions, decomposition products may be observed that are unlikely to be formed under the conditions used for confirmatory studies. This information may be useful in developing and validating suitable analytical methods. If in practice it has been demonstrated they are not formed in the confirmatory studies, these degradation products need not be further examined.

Confirmatory studies should then be undertaken to provide the information necessary for handling, packaging, and labeling (see section I.C., Procedure, and II.A., Presentation, for information on the design of these studies).

Normally, only one batch of drug substance is tested during the development phase, and then the photostability characteristics should be confirmed on a single batch selected as described in the Parent Guideline if the drug is clearly photostable or photolabile. If the results of the confirmatory study are equivocal, testing of up to two additional batches should be conducted. Samples should be selected as described in the Parent Guideline.

### A. Presentation of Samples

Care should be taken to ensure that the physical characteristics of the samples under test are taken into account and efforts should be made, such as cooling and/or placing the samples in sealed containers, to ensure that the effects of the changes in physical states such as sublimation, evaporation or melting are minimized. All such precautions should be chosen to provide minimal interference with the exposure of samples under test. Possible interactions between the samples and any material used for containers or for general protection of the sample, should also be considered and eliminated wherever not relevant to the test being carried out.

As a direct challenge for samples of solid drug substances, an appropriate amount of sample should be taken and placed in a suitable glass or plastic dish and protected with a suitable transparent cover if considered necessary. Solid drug substances should be spread across the container to give a thickness of typically not more than 3 millimeters. Drug substances that are liquids should be exposed in chemically inert and transparent containers.

### B. Analysis of Samples

At the end of the exposure period, the samples should be examined for any changes in physical properties (e.g., appearance, clarity, or colour of solution) and for assay and degradants by a method suitably validated for products likely to arise from photochemical degradation processes.

Where solid drug substance samples are involved, sampling should ensure that a representative portion is used in individual tests. Similar sampling considerations, such as homogenization of the entire sample, apply to other materials that may not be homogeneous after exposure. The analysis



of the exposed sample should be performed concomitantly with that of any protected samples used as dark controls if these are used in the test.

### **C. Judgement of Results**

The forced degradation studies should be designed to provide suitable information to develop and validate test methods for the confirmatory studies. These test methods should be capable of resolving and detecting photolytic degradants that appear during the confirmatory studies. When evaluating the results of these studies, it is important to recognize that they form part of the stress testing and are not therefore designed to establish qualitative or quantitative limits for change.

The confirmatory studies should identify precautionary measures needed in manufacturing or in formulation of the drug product, and if light resistant packaging is needed. When evaluating the results of confirmatory studies to determine whether change due to exposure to light is acceptable, it is important to consider the results from other formal stability studies in order to assure that the drug will be within justified limits at time of use (see the relevant ICH Stability and Impurity Guidelines).

## **3. DRUG PRODUCT**

Normally, the studies on drug products should be carried out in a sequential manner starting with testing the fully exposed product then progressing as necessary to the product in the immediate pack and then in the marketing pack. Testing should progress until the results demonstrate that the drug product is adequately protected from exposure to light. The drug product should be exposed to the light conditions described under the procedure in section I.C.

Normally, only one batch of drug product is tested during the development phase, and then the photostability characteristics should be confirmed on a single batch selected as described in the Parent Guideline if the product is clearly photostable or photolabile. If the results of the confirmatory study are equivocal, testing of up to two additional batches should be conducted.

For some products where it has been demonstrated that the immediate pack is completely impenetrable to light, such as aluminium tubes or cans, testing should normally only be conducted on directly exposed drug product.

It may be appropriate to test certain products such as infusion liquids, dermal creams, etc., to support their photostability in-use. The extent of this testing should depend on and relate to the directions for use, and is left to the applicant's discretion.

The analytical procedures used should be suitably validated.

### **A. Presentation of Samples**

Care should be taken to ensure that the physical characteristics of the samples under test are taken into account and efforts, such as cooling and/or placing the samples in sealed containers, should be made to ensure that the effects of the changes in physical states are minimized, such as sublimation, evaporation, or melting. All such precautions should be chosen to provide a minimal interference with the irradiation of samples under test. Possible interactions between the samples and any material used for containers or for general protection of the sample should also be considered and eliminated wherever not relevant to the test being carried out.

Where practicable when testing samples of the drug product outside of the primary pack, these should be presented in a way similar to the conditions mentioned for the drug substance. The samples should be positioned to provide maximum area of exposure to the light source. For example, tablets, capsules, etc., should be spread in a single layer.

If direct exposure is not practical (e.g., due to oxidation of a product), the sample should be placed in a suitable protective inert transparent container (e.g., quartz).

If testing of the drug product in the immediate container or as marketed is needed, the samples should be placed horizontally or transversely with respect to the light source, whichever provides for the most uniform exposure of the samples. Some adjustment of testing conditions may have to be made when testing large volume containers (e.g., dispensing packs).

## **B. Analysis of Samples**

At the end of the exposure period, the samples should be examined for any changes in physical properties (e.g., appearance, clarity or color of solution, dissolution/disintegration for dosage forms such as capsules, etc.) and for assay and degradants by a method suitably validated for products likely to arise from photochemical degradation processes.

When powder samples are involved, sampling should ensure that a representative portion is used in individual tests. For solid oral dosage form products, testing should be conducted on an appropriately sized composite of, for example, 20 tablets or capsules. Similar sampling considerations, such as homogenization or solubilization of the entire sample, apply to other materials that may not be homogeneous after exposure (e.g., creams, ointments, suspensions, etc.). The analysis of the exposed sample should be performed concomitantly with that of any protected samples used as dark controls if these are used in the test.

## **C. Judgement of Results**

Depending on the extent of change special labeling or packaging may be needed to mitigate exposure to light. When evaluating the results of photostability studies to determine whether change due to exposure to light is acceptable, it is important to consider the results obtained from other formal stability studies in order to assure that the product will be within proposed specifications during the shelf life (see the relevant ICH Stability and Impurity Guidelines).

# **4. ANNEX**

## **A. Quinine Chemical Actinometry**

The following provides details of an actinometric procedure for monitoring exposure to a near UV fluorescent lamp (based on FDA/National Institute of Standards and Technology study). For other light sources/actinometric systems, the same approach may be used, but each actinometric system should be calibrated for the light source used.

Prepare a sufficient quantity of a 2 per cent weight/volume aqueous solution of quinine monohydrochloride dihydrate (if necessary, dissolve by heating).

### ***Option 1***

Put 10 millilitres (ml) of the solution into a 20 ml colourless ampoule seal it hermetically, and use this as the sample. Separately, put 10 ml of the solution into a 20 ml colourless ampoule (see note 1), seal it hermetically, wrap in aluminium foil to protect completely from light, and use this as the control. Expose the sample and control to the light source for an appropriate number of hours. After exposure determine the absorbances of the sample (AT) and the control (Ao) at 400 nm using a 1 centimetre (cm) path length. Calculate the change in absorbance,  $\Delta A = AT - A_o$ . The length of exposure should be sufficient to ensure a change in absorbance of at least 0.9.

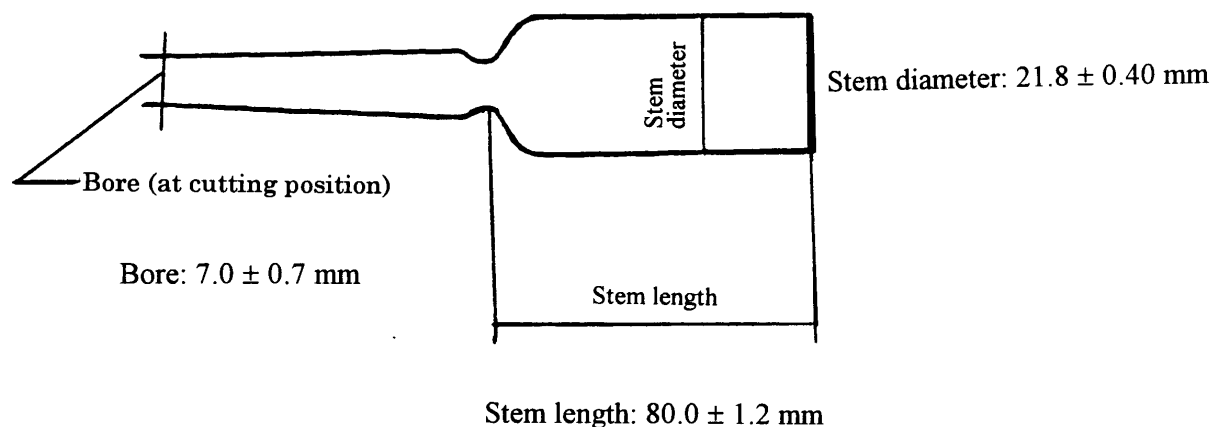
### ***Option 2***

Fill a 1 cm quartz cell and use this as the sample. Separately fill a 1 cm quartz cell, wrap in aluminium foil to protect completely from light, and use this as the control. Expose the sample and control to the light source for an appropriate number of hours. After exposure determine the absorbances

of the sample (AT) and the control (Ao) at 400 nm. Calculate the change in absorbance,  $\Delta A = AT - Ao$ . The length of exposure should be sufficient to ensure a change in absorbance of at least 0.5.

Alternative packaging configurations may be used if appropriately validated. Alternative validated chemical actinometers may be used.

Note 1: Shape and Dimensions (See Japanese Industry Standard (JIS) R3512 (1974) for ampoule specifications)



## 5. GLOSSARY

Immediate (primary) pack is that constituent of the packaging that is in direct contact with the drug substance or drug product, and includes any appropriate label.

Marketing pack is the combination of immediate pack and other secondary packaging such as a carton.

Forced degradation testing studies are those undertaken to degrade the sample deliberately. These studies, which may be undertaken in the development phase normally on the drug substances, are used to evaluate the overall photosensitivity of the material for method development purposes and/or degradation pathway elucidation.

Confirmatory studies are those undertaken to establish photostability characteristics under standardized conditions. These studies are used to identify precautionary measures needed in manufacturing or formulation and whether light resistant packaging and/or special labeling is needed to mitigate exposure to light. For the confirmatory studies, the batch(es) should be selected according to batch selection for long-term and accelerated testings which is described in the Parent Guideline.

## 6. REFERENCES

Quinine Actinometry as a method for calibrating ultraviolet radiation intensity in light-stability testing of pharmaceuticals.

Yoshioka S. et al., Drug Development and Industrial Pharmacy, 20 (13), 2049 - 2062 (1994).

### 3 Annotations to aspects not included in parent guideline

**MCA's Annotation:** The legal basis should be included as follows: This guideline has to be read in conjunction with the Medicines and Related Product Act, 2014. This guideline is coherent with national/regional frameworks and policies. The usage of this guideline by MCA is supported/embedded in the Act.

**Rationale:** Legal basis has to be followed by MCA therefore reference is made.

### References used for this guideline adoption approach

- MCA Guideline on Stability Testing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and Finished Pharmaceutical Products (MCA-GL-123).

*[When this document will be published, delete the section below before converting to PDF file.]*

Prepared by:

Name: ..... Job Title: .....

Signature: ..... Date .....

Executive Director: .....  
Signature Date