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**Definitions of Heat Treating  
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# DEFINITIONS OF HEAT TREATING TERMS—SAE J415 AUG80

## SAE Information Report

Report of the Iron and Steel Division, approved June 1911, last revised by the Iron and Steel Technical Committee August 1980.

(These definitions were prepared by the Joint Committee on Definitions of Terms Relating to Heat Treatment appointed by the American Society for Testing and Materials, The American Society for Metals, the American Foundrymen's Association, and the SAE.)

This glossary is not intended to be a specification, and it should not be interpreted as such. Since this is intended to be strictly a set of definitions, temperatures have been omitted purposely.

**$Ac_{cm}$ ,  $Ac_1$ ,  $Ac_3$ ,  $Ac_4$** —Defined under Transformation Temperature.

**$Ae_{cm}$ ,  $Ae_1$ ,  $Ae_3$ ,  $Ae_4$** —Defined under Transformation Temperature.

**Age Hardening**—Hardening by aging, usually after rapid cooling or cold working. See Aging.

**Age Softening—Aluminum Alloys**—Spontaneous decrease of strength and hardness which takes place at room temperature in certain strain hardened alloys.

φ **Aging**—A generic term denoting a time-temperature-dependent change in the properties of certain alloys. Except for strain aging and age softening, it is the result of precipitation from a solid solution of one or more compounds whose solubility decreases with decreasing temperature. For each alloy system susceptible to aging, there is a unique range of time-temperature combinations to which the system will respond. See also Age Hardening, Artificial Aging, Age Softening, Natural Aging, Overaging, Peak Aging, Precipitation Hardening, Precipitation Heat Treatment, Quench Aging, Step Aging, Strain Aging, and Underaging.

**Anneal to Temper—Copper and Copper Alloys**—A final anneal used to produce specified mechanical properties in a material.

**Annealing**—A generic term denoting a treatment, consisting of heating to and holding at a suitable temperature followed by cooling at a suitable rate, used primarily to soften metallic materials, but also to simultaneously produce desired changes in other properties or in microstructure. The purpose of such changes may be, but is not confined to, one or more of: Improvement of machinability; facilitation of cold work; improvement of mechanical or electrical properties or increase in stability of dimensions.

**Annealing—Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys**—Annealing cycles are designed to: (1) remove part or all of the effects of cold working. (Recrystallization may or may not be involved); (2) cause substantially complete coalescence of precipitates from solid solution in relatively coarse form; or (3) both, depending on the composition and condition of the material. When the term is used without qualification, full annealing is implied. Specific process names in commercial use are: Final Annealing, Full Annealing, Intermediate Annealing, Partial Annealing, Recrystallization Annealing, Stress Relief Annealing.

φ **Annealing—Copper and Copper Alloys**—Depending on composition and condition, these materials are annealed by: (1) removal of the effects of cold work by recrystallization or recrystallization and grain growth; (2) substantially complete precipitation of the second phase in relatively coarse form in age (precipitation) hardened alloys; (3) solution heat treatment of age (precipitation) hardenable alloys; (4) relief of residual stress in castings. Specific process names in commercial use are: Final Annealing, Full Annealing, Light Annealing, Soft Annealing, Solution Annealing, and Stress Relief Annealing.

**Annealing—Ferrous**—The time-temperature cycles used vary widely in both maximum temperature attained and in cooling rate employed, depending on the composition of the material, its condition and the results desired. When applicable, the following more specific commercial process names should be used: Black Annealing, Blue Annealing, Box Annealing, Bright Annealing, Cycle Annealing, Flame Annealing, Full Annealing, Graphitizing, In-Process Annealing, Isothermal Annealing, Malleabilizing, Orientation Annealing, Process Annealing, Quench Annealing, Spheroidizing. When the term is used without qualification full annealing is implied. When applied only for the relief of stress, the process is properly called stress relieving.

**Artificial Aging**—Aging above room temperature. See Aging and Precipitation Heat Treatment. Compare with Natural Aging.

**Austempering**—Quenching a ferrous alloy from a temperature above the transformation range, in a medium having a rate of heat abstraction high enough to prevent the formation of high temperature transformation products, and then holding the alloy, until transformation is complete, at a temperature below that of pearlite formation and above that of martensite formation.

**Austenitizing**—Forming austenite by heating a ferrous alloy into the transformation range (partial austenitizing) or above the transformation range (complete austenitizing). When used without qualification, the term implies complete austenitizing.

The  $\phi$  symbol is for the convenience of the user in locating areas where technical revisions have been made to the previous issue of the report.

If the symbol is next to the report title, it indicates a complete revision of the report.

**Baking**—Heating to a low temperature in order to remove gases.

**Betatizing**—Forming beta constituent by heating a non-ferrous alloy into the temperature region in which the constituent forms.

**Black Annealing**—Box annealing or pot annealing ferrous alloy sheet, strip or wire. See Box Annealing.

**Blank Carburizing**—Simulating the carburizing operation without introducing carbon. This is usually accomplished by using an inert material in place of the carburizing agent, or by applying a suitable protective coating to the ferrous alloy.

**Blank Nitriding**—Simulating the nitriding operation without introducing nitrogen. This is usually accomplished by using an inert material in place of the nitriding agent, or by applying a suitable protective coating to the ferrous alloy.

**Blue Annealing**—Heating hot rolled ferrous sheet in an open furnace to a temperature within the transformation range and then cooling in air, in order to soften the metal. The formation of a bluish oxide on the surface is incidental.

**Bluing**—Subjecting the scale free surface of a ferrous alloy to the action of air, steam, or other agents at a suitable temperature, thus forming a thin blue film of oxide and improving the appearance and resistance to corrosion.

**Note:** This term is ordinarily applied to sheet, strip, or finished parts. It is used also to denote the heating of springs after fabrication, in order to improve their properties.

**Box Annealing**—Annealing a metal or alloy in a sealed container under conditions that minimize oxidation. In box annealing a ferrous alloy, the charge is usually heated slowly to a temperature below the transformation range, but sometimes above or within it, and is then cooled slowly; this process is also called "close annealing" or "pot annealing." See Black Annealing.

**Bright Annealing**—Annealing in a protective medium to prevent discoloration of the bright surface.

**Burning**—Permanently damaging a metal or alloy by heating to cause either incipient melting or intergranular oxidation. See Overheating.

**Carbon Potential**—A measure of the ability of an environment containing active carbon to alter or maintain, under prescribed conditions, the carbon content of the steel exposed to it.

**Note:** In any particular environment, the carbon level attained will depend on such factors as temperature, time and steel composition.

**Carbon Restoration**—Replacing the carbon lost in the surface layer from previous processing by carburizing this layer to substantially the original carbon level.

**Carbonitriding**—A case hardening process in which a suitable ferrous material is heated above the lower transformation temperature in a gaseous atmosphere of such composition as to cause simultaneous absorption of carbon and nitrogen by the surface and, by diffusion, create a concentration gradient. The process is completed by cooling at a rate which produces the desired properties in the workpiece.

**Carburizing**—A process in which an austenitized ferrous material is brought into contact with a carbonaceous atmosphere of sufficient carbon potential to cause absorption of carbon at the surface and, by diffusion, create a concentration gradient.

**Case**—In a ferrous alloy, the outer portion that has been made harder than the inner portion or Core by Case Hardening.

**Case Hardening**—A generic term covering several processes applicable to steel that change the chemical composition of the surface layer by absorption of carbon, nitrogen, or a mixture of the two and, by diffusion, create a concentration gradient. The processes commonly used are: carburizing and quench hardening, cyaniding, nitriding, carbonitriding. The use of the applicable specific process name is preferred.

**Cementation**—The introduction of one or more elements into the outer portion of a metal object by means of diffusion at high temperature.

**Close Annealing**—See Box Annealing.

**Cold Treatment**—Exposing to suitable sub-zero temperatures for the purpose of obtaining desired conditions or properties, such as dimensional or microstructural stability. When the treatment involves the transformation of retained austenite, it is usually followed by a tempering treatment.

**Conditioning Heat Treatment**—A preliminary heat treatment used to prepare a material for a desired reaction to a subsequent heat treatment. For the term to be meaningful, the treatment used must be specified.

**Controlled Cooling**—Cooling from an elevated temperature in a predetermined manner, to avoid hardening, cracking, or internal damage, or to produce a desired microstructure or mechanical properties. The term applies to cooling following hot working.

**Core**—In a case hardened or surface hardened ferrous alloy, the inner portion that is softer than the outer portion or Case.

**Critical Cooling Rate**—The minimum rate of continuous cooling to prevent undesirable transformations. For steel it is the minimum rate at which austenite must be continuously cooled to suppress transformations above the  $M_s$  temperature.

**Critical Temperature Range**—Synonymous with Transformation range, which is preferred.

**Cyaniding**—A case hardening process in which a ferrous material is heated above the lower transformation range in a molten salt containing cyanide to cause simultaneous absorption of carbon and nitrogen at the surface and, by diffusion, create a concentration gradient. Quench hardening completes the process.

**Cycle Annealing**—An annealing process employing a predetermined and closely controlled time-temperature cycle to produce specific properties or microstructure.

**Decarburization**—The loss of carbon from the surface of a ferrous alloy as a result of heating in a medium that reacts with the carbon.

**Differential Heating**—Heating that intentionally produces a temperature gradient within an object such that, after cooling, a desired stress distribution or variation in properties is present within the object.

**Diffusion Coating**—Any process whereby a basis metal or alloy is either: (1) coated with another metal or alloy and heated to a sufficient temperature in a suitable environment or (2) exposed to a gaseous or liquid medium containing the other metal or alloy, thus causing diffusion of the coating or of the other metal or alloy into the basis metal with resultant change in the composition and properties of its surface.

**Direct Quenching**—Quenching carburized parts directly from the carburizing operation.

**Double Aging**—Employment of two different aging treatments to control the type of precipitate formed from a super-saturated alloy matrix in order to obtain the desired properties. The first aging treatment, sometimes referred to as intermediate or stabilizing, is usually carried out at a higher temperature than the second.

**Double Tempering**—A treatment in which quench hardened steel is given two complete tempering cycles at substantially the same temperature for the purpose of assuring completion of the tempering reaction and promoting stability of the resulting microstructure.

**Drawing**—A misnomer for Tempering.

**Ductile Nitriding**—See nitriding.

**Ferritizing Anneal**—A treatment given as-cast gray or ductile (nodular) iron to produce an essentially ferritic matrix. For the term to be meaningful, the final microstructure desired or the time-temperature cycle used must be specified.

**Final Annealing—Nonferrous**—An imprecise term used to denote the anneal used to prepare a material for shipment to the user.

**Flame Annealing**—Annealing in which the heat is applied directly by a flame.

**Flame Hardening**—A surface hardening process in which only the surface layer of a suitable workpiece is heated by a suitably intense flame to above the upper transformation temperature and immediately quenched.

**Fog Quenching**—Quenching in a mist.

**Full Annealing—Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys**—An imprecise term used to denote the annealing cycle required to produce minimum strength. For the term to be meaningful, the composition and condition of the material and the time-temperature cycle used must be stated.

**Full Annealing—Ferrous**—Austenitizing and then cooling at such a rate that the hardness of the product approaches a minimum.

**Gas Cyaniding**—A misnomer for Carbonitriding.

**Grain Growth**—An increase in the average size of the grains (see Notes 1 and 2) in polycrystalline metal, usually as a result of heating at elevated temperature.

NOTES: (1) A grain is an individual crystal in a polycrystalline metal and includes twinned regions and subgrains when present.

(2) Grain size is a measure of the mean diameter, area, or volume of all individual grains observed in a polycrystalline metal. In metals containing two or more phases, the grain size refers to that of the matrix unless otherwise specified. For further information on grain size and its measurement, see ASTM E 112, Methods for Estimating the Average Grain Size of Metals.

**Graphitizing**—Annealing a ferrous alloy in such a way that some or all of the carbon is precipitated as graphite.

**Hardenability**—In a ferrous alloy, the property that determines the depth and distribution of hardness induced by quenching.

**Hardening**—Increasing the hardness by suitable treatment, usually involving heating and cooling. When applicable, the following more specific terms should be used: Age Hardening, Case Hardening, Precipitation Hardening, Quench Hardening, Surface Hardening.

**Heat Treatment**—Heating and cooling a solid metal or alloy in such a way as to produce desired conditions or properties. Heating for the sole purpose of hot working is excluded from the meaning of this definition.

**Homogeneous Carburizing**—A process that converts a low carbon ferrous alloy to one of substantially uniform and higher carbon content throughout the section, so that a specific response to hardening may be obtained.

**Homogenizing**—Holding at high temperature to reduce or eliminate chemical segregation by diffusion.

**Hot-Cold Working**—Mechanical deformation of austenitic and precipitation hardening alloys at a temperature just below the recrystallization range to increase the yield strength and hardness by either plastic deformation or precipitation hardening effects induced by plastic deformation or both.

**Hot Quenching**—An imprecise term used to cover a variety of quenching procedures in which a quenching medium is maintained at a prescribed temperature above 160°F (71°C).

**Induction Hardening**—A surface hardening process in which only the surface layer of a suitable ferrous workpiece is heated by electrical induction to above the upper transformation temperature and immediately quenched.

**Induction Heating**—Heating by electrical induction.

**Intermediate Annealing**—Annealing wrought metals at one or more stages during manufacture and before final thermal treatment.

**Intermediate Annealing—Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys**—An imprecise term used to denote annealing of wrought products at one or more stages during processing but before final heat treatment. For the term to be meaningful, the type and condition of the material and the time-temperature cycle used must be stated.

**Interrupted Aging**—Aging at two or more temperatures, by steps, and cooling to room temperature after each step. See Aging and compare with Progressive Aging.

**Interrupted Quenching**—A quenching procedure in which the work piece is removed from the first quench at a temperature substantially higher than that of the quenchant and is then subjected to a second quenching system having a different cooling rate than the first.

**Isothermal Annealing**—Austenitizing a ferrous alloy and then cooling to and holding at a temperature at which austenite transforms to a relatively soft ferrite-carbide aggregate.

**Isothermal Transformation**—A change in phase at constant temperature.

**Malleabilizing**—A process in which the as-cast malleable-type (white) iron is thermally treated for the purpose of converting most of all of the carbon in  $Fe_3C$  to graphite (temper carbon) to produce a family of products with improved ductility.

**Maraging**—A precipitation hardening treatment applied to a special group of iron base alloys to precipitate one or more intermetallic compounds in matrix of essentially carbon-free martensite.

NOTE: The first developed series of maraging steels contained, in addition to iron, more than 10% nickel and one or more supplemental hardening elements. In this series, the aging is done at about 900°F.

**Marquenching**—See martempering (2).

**Martempering**—(1) A hardening procedure in which an austenitized ferrous workpiece is quenched into an appropriate medium whose temperature is maintained substantially at the  $M_s$  of the workpiece, held in the medium until its temperature is uniform throughout but not long enough to permit bainite to form and then cooled in air. The treatment is frequently followed by tempering. (2) When the process is applied to carburized material, the controlling  $M_s$  temperature is that of the case. This variation of the process is frequently called marquenching.

**Martensite Range**—The temperature interval between  $M_s$  and  $M_f$ .

**$M_f$** —Defined under Transformation Temperature.

**$M_s$** —Defined under Transformation Temperature.

**Natural Aging**—Spontaneous aging of a supersaturated solid solution at room temperature. See Aging and compare with Artificial Aging.

**Nitriding**—A case hardening process in which a ferrous-base material is heated to approximately the iron-nitrogen eutectoid temperature in either a gaseous or a liquid medium containing active nitrogen, thus causing absorption of nitrogen at the surface and, by diffusion, creating a concentration gradient. Within the capabilities of the particular material, slow cooling produces full hardness of the case.

In conventional nitriding a hardened and tempered alloy steel or tool steel is treated for sufficient time to produce highly saturated nitrides in the case.

In an important variation of the process, sometimes called ductile nitriding, applied to any ferrous-base material, the amount of active nitrogen and the time of exposure are so controlled as to produce a case of lower nitrogen content which, within the capabilities of the material, is fully hard on a micro scale but lower in hardness on a macro scale and relatively ductile.

**Normalizing**—Heating a ferrous alloy to a suitable temperature above the transformation range and then cooling in air to a temperature substantially below the transformation range.

**Orientation Anneal**—A final, high-temperature anneal applied principally to flat-rolled electrical steel to develop secondary grain growth and directionality of magnetic properties.

**Overaging**—Aging at any combination of time and temperature in excess of

that required to produce maximum strength or hardness.

**Overheating**—Heating a metal or alloy to such a high temperature that its properties are impaired. When the original properties cannot be restored by further heat treating, by mechanical working, or by a combination of working and heat treating, the overheating is known as Burning.

**Partial Annealing—Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys**—An imprecise term used to denote a treatment given cold worked material to reduce the strength to a controlled level or to effect stress relief. To be meaningful, the type of material, the degree of cold work it had undergone and the time-temperature cycle used must be stated.

**Patenting**—In wire making, a heat treatment applied to medium carbon or high carbon steel before the drawing of wire or between drafts. This process consists of heating to a temperature above the transformation range and then cooling to a temperature below  $Ae_1$  in air or in a bath of molten lead or salt.

❖ **Peak Aging**—Aging at whatever combination of time and temperature produces maximum strength or hardness. See Aging.

**Postheating**—Heating weldments immediately after welding, for tempering, for stress relieving, or for providing a controlled rate of cooling to prevent formation of a hard or brittle structure.

**Pot Annealing**—See Box Annealing.

**Precipitation Hardening**—Hardening caused by the precipitation of a constituent from a supersaturated solid solution. See also Age Hardening and Aging.

**Precipitation Heat Treatment**—Artificial aging in which a constituent precipitates from a supersaturated solid solution. See Artificial Aging, Interrupted Aging, and Progressive Aging.

**Preheating**—Heating before some further thermal or mechanical treatment. For tool steel, heating to an intermediate temperature immediately before final austenitizing. For some nonferrous alloys, heating to a high temperature for a long time in order to homogenize the structure before working.

**Process Annealing—Ferrous and Copper and Copper Alloys**—An imprecise term used to denote various treatments used to improve workability. For the term to be meaningful, the condition of the material and the time-temperature cycle used must be stated.

**Progressive Aging**—Aging by increasing the temperature in steps or continuously during the aging cycle. See Aging and compare with Interrupted Aging and Step Aging.

**Pseudocarburizing**—See Blank Carburizing.

**Pseudonitriding**—See Blank Nitriding.

❖ **Quench Aging**—Natural or artificial aging of a ferrous material caused by the precipitation of an iron carbide or an iron nitride or a complex of both in alpha iron supersaturated with these compounds. Supersaturation is achieved by rapidly cooling the heated material from  $Ar_1$ .

**Quench Annealing**—Annealing an austenitic ferrous alloy by Solution Heat Treatment.

**Quench Hardening—Copper Alloys**—Hardening suitable alloys by betatizing and quenching to develop a martensite-like structure.

**Quench Hardening—Ferrous**—Hardening a suitable ferrous alloy by austenitizing and then cooling at a rate such that a substantial amount of austenite transforms to martensite.

**Quenching**—Rapid cooling. When applicable, the following more specific terms should be used: Direct Quenching, Fog Quenching, Hot Quenching, Interrupted Quenching, Selective Quenching, Spray Quenching, and Time Quenching.

**Recrystallization**—(1) The change from one crystal structure to another, as occurs on heating or cooling through a transformation temperature. (2) The formation of a new, strain-free grain structure from that existing in cold worked metal, usually accomplished by heating.

**Recrystallization Annealing**—Annealing cold worked metal to produce a new grain structure without phase change.

**Recrystallization Temperature**—The approximate minimum temperature at which complete recrystallization of a cold-worked metal occurs within a specified time.

**Secondary Hardening**—The hardening phenomenon that occurs during high temperature tempering of certain steels containing one or more carbide forming alloying elements. Up to an optimum combination of tempering time and temperature, the reaction results either in the retention of hardness or an actual increase in hardness.

**Selective Carburizing**—Carburizing only selected surfaces of a workpiece by preventing absorption of carbon by all other surfaces.

**Selective Case Hardening**—Case hardening only selected surfaces of a workpiece.

**Selective Heating**—Intentional heating of only certain portions of a workpiece.

**Selective Quenching**—Quenching only certain portions of a workpiece.

**Shell Hardening**—A surface hardening process in which a suitable steel workpiece, when heated through and quench hardened, develops a martensitic

layer or shell that closely follows the contour of the piece and surrounds a core of essentially pearlitic transformation product. This result is accomplished by a proper balance between section size, steel hardenability, and severity of quench.

**Slack Quenching**—The incomplete hardening of steel due to quenching from the austenitizing temperature at a rate slower than the critical cooling rate for the particular steel, resulting in the formation of one or more transformation products in addition to martensite.

**Snap Temper**—A precautionary interim stress-relieving treatment applied to high hardenability steels immediately after quenching to prevent cracking because of delay in tempering them at the prescribed higher temperature.

**Soaking**—Prolonged holding at a selected temperature.

**Solution Heat Treatment**—Heating an alloy to a suitable temperature, holding at that temperature long enough to cause one or more constituents to enter into solid solution, and then cooling rapidly enough to hold these constituents in solution.

**Soft Nitriding**—A misnomer for ductile nitriding.

**Solutionizing**—Another name for solution heat treatment, used principally in copper-beryllium technology.

**Spheroidizing**—Heating and cooling to produce a spheroidal or globular form of carbide in steel. Spheroidizing methods frequently used are:

1. Prolong holding at a temperature just below  $Ae_1$ .
2. Heating and cooling alternately between temperatures that are just above and just below  $Ae_1$ .
3. Heating to a temperature above  $Ae_1$  or  $Ae_3$  and then cooling very slowly in the furnace or holding at a temperature just below  $Ae_1$ .

4. Cooling at a suitable rate from the minimum temperature at which all carbide is dissolved, to prevent the re-formation of a carbide network and then reheating in accordance with Method 1 or 2 above. (Applicable to hypereutectoid steel containing a carbide network.)

**Spray Quenching**—Quenching in a spray of liquid.

**Stabilizing Treatment—Aluminum and Aluminum Alloys**—An imprecise term used to denote a treatment above room temperature but below the recrystallization temperature applied:

1. To cold worked materials of some non-heat-treatable alloy systems to reduce the tendency to age soften.
2. To some types of solution-treated artificial aging alloys in order to improve stability of mechanical properties and of dimensions. See Overaging.
3. To other types of solution-treated artificial aging alloys to control the size and distribution of the precipitate to improve resistance to intergranular corrosion or exfoliation corrosion and to stress corrosion cracking.
4. To still other types of age hardening alloys to reduce the tendency to age naturally.

**Stabilizing Treatment—Ferrous**—A treatment applied for the purpose of stabilizing the dimensions of a workpiece or the structure of a material such as (1) before finishing to final dimensions, heating a workpiece to or somewhat beyond its operating temperature and then cooling to room temperature a sufficient number of times to insure stability of dimensions in service, (2) transforming retained austenite in those materials which retain substantial amounts when quenched hardened (see cold treatment), (3) heating a solution treated austenitic stainless steel that contains controlled amounts of titanium or columbium plus tantalum to a temperature below the solution heat treating temperature to cause precipitation of finely divided, uniformly distributed carbides of those elements, thereby substantially reducing the amount of carbon available for the formation of chromium carbides in the grain boundaries upon subsequent exposure to temperatures in the sensitizing range.

**Step Aging—Aluminum Alloys**—Employment of two different aging treatments to control the type of precipitate formed from a super-saturated alloy matrix in order to obtain the desired properties. The first aging treatment, sometimes referred to as intermediate or stabilizing, is usually carried out at a higher temperature than the second.

**Strain Aging**—Natural aging of a ferrous material following cold plastic strain. When tested in tension, strain-aged low-carbon sheet exhibits discontinuous yielding, a decrease in ductility, and an increase in yield strength and hardness without substantial change in tensile strength as compared with unaged sheet. Appropriate restraining (temper rolling) temporarily restores continuous yielding.

**Stress Relieving**—Heating to a suitable temperature, holding long enough to reduce residual stresses and then cooling slowly enough to minimize the development of new residual stresses.

NOTE: Stress relief may be accomplished by the application of other forms of energy, principally mechanical, either alone or in combination with thermal energy.

**Subcritical Annealing—Ferrous**—A process anneal performed at a temperature below  $Ac_1$ .

**Surface Hardening**—A generic term covering several processes applicable to a suitable ferrous alloy that produces by quench hardening only, a surface