NIST-7, THE NEW US PRIMARY FREQUENCY STANDARD

R. E. Drullinger, J. P. Lowe, D. J. Glaze and Jon Shirley
National Institute of Standards and Technology
Time and Frequency Division
Boulder, Colorado
USA

Abstract

NIST-7, an optically pumped, cesium-beam frequency standard has replaced NBS-6 as the official US primary frequency standard. The present short-term stability of the standard, measured with respect to an active hydrogen maser, is characterized by \( \sigma_N = 8 \times 10^{-16} \). Our first evaluation has resulted in an uncertainty of \( 4 \times 10^{-14} \). An improved servo-electronic system is being developed and this should improve stability and allow for more precise evaluation of the various systematic errors.

1. INTRODUCTION

An optically pumped, thermal atomic-beam frequency standard developed at NIST and known as NIST-7 has officially replaced NBS-6 as the US primary frequency standard. The present short-term stability of the standard, measured with respect to an active hydrogen maser, is characterized by \( \sigma_N = 8 \times 10^{-16} \) (Fig. 2) and is limited by phase noise in the microwave radiation. The standard is designed to operate with an oven temperature of 110°C at which point the atomic shot-noise limited stability should be \( \approx 3 \times 10^{-13} \). The frequency biases and their associated uncertainties are quoted throughout this paper in terms of fractional frequency change in the standard.

2. EVALUATION

The first evaluation of the standard has been reported in detail elsewhere [4] and will only briefly be presented here with the results summarized in Table 1. The correction for second-order Zeeman splitting is included in the first-order Zeeman splitting. Errors caused by field inhomogeneity are less than \( 10^{-13} \). At present, the correction for the second-order Doppler shift has been made by a theoretical calculation which takes into account the velocity distribution, the microwave power, and the modulation parameters. A thermal velocity distribution, weighted by \( 1/v \) for detection by a cycling transition, was assumed. It predicts a Ramsey lineshape differing by only 1 or 2 % from the measured lineshape. The quality of this fit together with uncertainties in microwave power, and modulation parameters, leads to an uncertainty in the second-order Doppler correction of \(-2 \times 10^{-14}\).

The end-to-end cavity phase shift has been measured by beam reversal. The frequency shift on beam reversal at optimum power was \( 1.52 \times 10^{-12} \) with an uncertainty of \( 3 \times 10^{-12} \). A search for distributed-cavity phase shift by alternately blocking one-half of the atomic beam near one end of the Ramsey cavity or the other showed no effect at the \( 1 \times 10^{-14} \) level. The cavity Q of 600 and measured mistuning lead to cavity-pulling errors of less than \( 10^{-14} \).

Line overlap shifts have not been evaluated in depth. But in an optically pumped standard with the high spectral symmetry demonstrated in Fig. 1, these effects are expected to lead to errors of less than \( 10^{-13} \). The shift due to blackbody radiation [5] can be calculated to very high accuracy since the temperature of the atomic beam tube of NIST-7 is regulated. The fluorescence light shift in NIST-7
Fig. 1. Zeeman spectrum of the $F = 3$ to $F = 4$ transition. The microwave power level is about 7 dB below optimum and the C-field corresponds to a first order Zeeman splitting of 24.2 KHz ($\nu_{0,0} - \nu_{1,1}$).

NIST-7 vs H-Maser

![Plot showing frequency stability comparison](image)

Fig. 2. Frequency stability of NIST-7 measured against an active hydrogen maser. The error bars represent 1σ on the statistics of the measurement.
is expected to be \( \leq 10^{-16} \) [6]. Using different optical powers and atomic beam fluxes we have observed no frequency shifts at the \( 10^{-14} \) level.

Frequency errors coming in through the electronics and arising from RF spectral purity, modulation distortion or offsets in the integrators or DC gain stages have been shown to be less than \( 1 \times 10^{-14} \).

3. SUMMARY

NIST-7 has undergone a preliminary evaluation and been shown to be several times more accurate than NBS-6. As of January 1, 1993, it has become the official US primary standard for frequency. It will be used to steer the long-term behavior of the NIST time scale while it continues to be developed and improved. As the error budget is reduced, international comparisons will be performed with other high-accuracy standards.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Fred Walls and Andrea DeMarchi for their numerous and invaluable contributions throughout this work.

5. REFERENCES


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Measurement Uncertainty (1( \sigma ))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd-order Zeeman</td>
<td>( \approx 10,000 )</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd-order Doppler</td>
<td>( \approx 30 )</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line overlap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC Stark</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavity phase</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Summary of systematic errors in NIST-7. The size of the resulting bias is given together with the associated uncertainty (all in units of \( 10^{-14} \)).