Selecting Zinc and ZA Alloys

Zinc (Zn) alloy die castings offer a broad range of excellent physical and mechanical properties, castability, and finishing characteristics. Thinner sections can be die cast in zinc alloy than in any of the commonly used die casting alloys.

Zinc alloy generally allows for greater variation in section design and for the maintenance of closer dimensional tolerances. The impact strength of zinc components is higher than other die casting alloys, with the exception of brass. Due to the lower pressures and temperatures under which zinc alloy is die cast, die life is significantly lengthened and die maintenance minimized.

This zinc alloy subsection presents guideline tables for chemical composition, typical properties, and die casting, machining and finishing characteristics for the two groups of zinc die casting alloys. This data can be used in combination with design engineering tolerancing guidelines for zinc die casting and can be compared with the guidelines for other alloys in this section and the Design Engineering section.

The zinc alloys include the traditional Zamak (acronym for zinc, aluminum, magnesium and copper) group, Nos. 2, 3, 5, and 7, and the relatively new high-aluminum or ZA® alloy group, ZA-8, ZA-12 and ZA-27.

The Zamak alloys all contain nominally 4% aluminum and a small amount of magnesium to improve strength and hardness and to protect castings from intergranular corrosion. These alloys all use the rapid-cycling hot-chamber process which allows maximum casting speed.

Miniature zinc die castings can be produced at high volume using special hot-chamber die casting machines that yield castings which are flash-free, with zero draft and very close tolerances, requiring no secondary trimming or machining.

Zinc No. 3 is the most widely used zinc alloy in North America, offering the best combination of mechanical properties, castability, and economics. It can produce castings with intricate detail and excellent surface finish at high production rates. The other alloys in the Zamak group are slightly more expensive and are used only where their specific properties are required.

Alloys 2 and 5 have a higher copper content, which further strengthens wear resistance, but at the expense of dimensional and property stability. No. 5 offers higher creep resistance and somewhat lower ductility and is often preferred whenever these qualities are required. No. 7 is a special high-purity alloy which has somewhat better fluidity and allows thinner walls to be cast.

The ZA alloys contain substantially more aluminum than the Zamak group, with the numerical designation representing the ZA alloy's approximate percent Al content.

The higher aluminum and copper content of the ZA alloys give them several distinct advantages over the traditional zinc alloys, including higher strength, superior wear resistance, superior creep resistance and lower densities.

ZA-8, with a nominal aluminum content of 8.4%, is the only ZA alloy that can be cast by the faster hot-chamber process. It has the highest strength of any hot-chamber zinc alloy, and the highest creep strength of any zinc alloy.

ZA-12, with a nominal aluminum content of 11%, has properties that fall midway in the ZA group. ZA-27, with a nominal aluminum content of 27%, has the highest melting point, the highest strength, and the lowest density of the ZA alloys.

Machining Characteristics

The machining characteristics of the Zamak and ZA alloys are considered very good. High-quality surface finishes and good productivity are achieved when routine guidelines for machining zinc are followed.

Surface Treatment Systems

In many applications, zinc alloy die castings are used without any applied surface finish or treatment.

Differences in the polishing, electroplating, anodizing and chemical coating characteristics of the Zamak and ZA alloys can be noted in table A-3-15.

Painting, chromating, phosphate coating and chrome plating can be used for decorative finishes. Painting, chromating, anodizing, and iridite coatings can be used as corrosion barriers. Hard chrome plating can be used to improve wear resistance, with the exception of ZA-27.

The bright chrome plating characteristics of the Zamak alloys and ZA-8 make these alloys a prevailing choice for hardware applications.

A detailed discussion of finishing methods for zinc die castings can be found in ***Product Design for Die Casting***.

Table A-3-13 Chemical Composition: Zn and ZA Alloys

All single values are maximum composition percentages unless otherwise stated.

	Zamak Die Casting Alloys				ZA Die Casting Alloys		
Commercial:	**No. 2**	**No. 3**	**No. 5**	**No. 7**	**ZA-8**	**ZA-12**	**ZA-27**
ASTM:		**AG-40A**	**AC-41A**	**AG-40B**			
Nominal Comp:	Al 4.0 Mg 0.035 Cu 3.0	Al 4.0 Mg 0.035	Al 4.0 Mg 0.055 Cu 1.0	Al 4.0 Mg 0.013 Ni 0.013	Al 8.4 Mg 0.023 Cu 1.0	Al 11.0 Mg 0.023 Cu 0.88	Al 27.0 Mg 0.015 Cu 2.25
Detailed Comp.							
Aluminum Al	3.5-4.3	3.5-4.3	3.5-4.3	3.5-4.3	8.0-8.8	10.5-11.5	25.0-28.0
Magnesium Mg	0.02-0.05	0.02-0.05Ⓐ	0.03-008	0.005-0.020	0.015-0.030	0.015-.030	0.010-0.020
Copper Cu	2.5-3.0	0.25 maxⒷ	0.75-1.25	0.25 max	0.8-1.3	0.5-1.2	2-2.5
Iron Fe (max)	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.075	0.075	0.075	0.075
Lead Pb (max)	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.003	0.006	0.006	0.006
Cadmium Cd (max)	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.002	0.006	0.006	0.006
Tin Sn (max)	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.001	0.003	0.003	0.003
Nickel Ni	—	—	—	0.005-0.020	—	—	—
Zinc Zn	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance

Ⓐ The magnesium may be as low as 0.015 per cent provided that the lead, cadmium, and tin do not exceed 0.003, 0.003, and 0.001 per cent, respectively. Ⓑ For the majority of commercial applications, a copper content in the range of 0.25-0.75 per cent will not adversely affect the serviceability of die castings and should not serve as a basis for rejection. Source: ASTM B86 and ASTM B791.

Alloy Data: Zinc and ZA Die Casting Alloy Properties

Table A-3-14 Typical Material Properties: Zn and ZA Alloys

Typical values based on "as-cast" characteristics for separately die cast specimens, not specimens cut from production die castings.

	Zamak Die Casting Alloys				ZA Die Casting Alloys		
Commercial:	**No. 2**	**No. 3**	**No. 5**	**No.7**	**ZA-8**	**ZA-12**	**ZA-27**
ASTM:		**AG-40A**	**AC-41A**	**AG-40B**			
Mechanical Properties							
Ultimate Tensile Strength							
ksi	52	41	48	41	54	59	62
(MPa)	(359)	(283)	(328)	(283)	(372)	(400)	(426)
Yield StrengthⒶ							
ksi	41	32	39	32	41-43	45-48	52-55
(MPa)	(283)	(221)	(269)	(221)	(283-296)	(310-331)	(359-379)
Compressive Yield StrengthⒷ							
ksi	93	60Ⓒ	87Ⓒ	60Ⓒ	37	39	52
(MPa)	(641)	(414)	(600)	(414)	(252)	(269)	(358)
Elongation							
% in 2 in. (51 mm)	7	10	7	13	6-10	4-7	2.0-3.5
HardnessⒹ							
BHN	100	82	91	80	100-106	95-105	116-122
Shear Strength							
ksi	46	31	38	31	40	43	47
(MPa)	(317)	(214)	(262)	(214)	(275)	(296)	(325)
Impact Strength							
ft-lb	35	43Ⓔ	48Ⓔ	43Ⓔ	24-35Ⓔ	15-27Ⓔ	7-12Ⓔ
(J)	(47.5)	(58)	(65)	(58)	(32-48)	(20-37)	(9-16)
Fatigue StrengthⒻ							
ksi	8.5	6.9	8.2	6.9	15	—	21
(MPa)	(58.6)	(47.6)	(56.5)	(47.6)	(103)		(145)
Young's Modulus							
psi x 10^6	Ⓖ	Ⓖ	Ⓖ	Ⓖ	12.4	12	11.3
(GPa)					(85.5)	(83)	(77.9)
Physical Properties							
Density							
lb/in^3	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.227	0.218	0.181
(g/cm^3)	(6.6)	(6.6)	(6.7)	(6.6)	(6.3)	(6.03)	(5.00)
Melting Range							
°F	715-734	718-728	717-727	718-728	707-759	710-810	708-903
(°C)	(379-390)	(381-387)	(380-386)	(381-387)	(375-404)	(377-432)	(375-484)
Specific Heat							
BTU/lb°F	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.104	0.107	0.125
(J/kg°C)	(419)	(419)	(419)	(419)	(435)	(450)	(525)
Coefficient of Thermal Expansion							
μ in./in./°F	15.4	15.2	15.2	15.2	12.9	13.4	14.4
(μ m/m°K)	(27.8)	(27.4)	(27.4)	(27.4)	23.2	(24.1)	(26.0)
Thermal Conductivity							
BTU/ft hr °F	60.5	65.3	62.9	65.3	66.3	67.1	72.5
(W/m°K)	(104.7)	(113)	(109)	(113)	(115)	(116)	(122.5)
Electrical Conductivity							
% IACS	25.0	27.0	26.0	27.0	27.7	28.3	29.7
Poisson's Ratio	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30

Ⓐ 0.2% offset, strain rate sensitive, values obtained at a strain rate of 0.125/min (12.5% per minute) Ⓑ 0.1% offset Ⓒ Compressive strength Ⓓ 500 kg load, 10mm ball Ⓔ ASTM E 23 unnotched 0.25 in. die cast bar Ⓕ Rotary Bend 5 x 10^8 cycles Ⓖ Varies with stress level; applicable only for short-duration loads. Use 10^7 as a first approximation. Source: International Lead Zinc Research Organization.

Alloy Data: Zinc and ZA Die Casting Alloy Characteristics

Die casting alloy selection requires evaluation not only of physical and mechanical properties, and chemical composition, but also of inherent alloy characteristics and their effect on die casting production as well as possible machining and final surface finishing.

This table includes selected die casting and other special characteristics which are usually considered in selecting a zinc alloy for a specific application.

The characteristics are rated from (1) to (5), (1) being the most desirable and (5) being the least. In applying these ratings, it should be noted that all the alloys have sufficiently good characteristics to be accepted by users and producers of die castings. A rating of (5) in one or more categories would not rule out an alloy if other attributes are particularly favorable, but ratings of (5) may present manufacturing difficulties.

The benefits of consulting a custom die caster experienced in casting the zinc or ZA alloy being considered are clear.

Table A-3-15 Die Casting and Other Characteristics: Zn and ZA Alloys

(1 = most desirable, 5 = least desirable)

	Zamak Die Casting Alloys				ZA Die Casting Alloys		
Commercial:	**No. 2**	**No. 3**	**No. 5**	**No. 7**	**ZA-8**	**ZA-12**	**ZA-27**
ASTM:		**AG-40A**	**AC-41A**	**AG-40B**			
Resistance to Hot Cracking®	1	1	2	1	2	3	4
Pressure Tightness	3	1	2	1	3	3	4
Casting Ease	1	1	1	1	2	3	3
Part Complexity	1	1	1	1	2	3	3
Dimensional Accuracy	1	1	1	1	2	2	3
Dimensional Stability	4	2	2	1	2	3	4
Corrosion Resistance	2	3	3	2	2	2	1
Resistance to Cold Defects®	2	2	2	1	2	3	4
Machining Ease & Quality©	1	1	1	1	2	3	4
Polishing Ease & Quality	2	1	1	1	2	3	4
Electroplating Ease & Quality®	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Anodizing (Protection)	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Chemical Coating (Protection)	1	1	1	1	2	3	3

® The ability of alloy to resist formation of cold defects; for example, cold shuts, cold cracks, non-fill "woody" areas, swirls, etc. ® Ability of alloy to withstand stresses from contraction while cooling through the hot-short or brittle temperature range. © Composite rating based on ease of cutting, chip characteristics, quality of finish and tool life. ® Ability of the die casting to take and hold an electroplate applied by present standard methods. Source: International Lead Zinc Research Organization.