TDR 100
Soil Moisture Meter

PRODUCT MANUAL

Item # 6440FS
This manual will familiarize you with the features and operation of your new Field Scout™ TDR Soil Moisture Meter. Please read this manual thoroughly before using your instrument. For customer support, or to place an order, call Spectrum Technologies, Inc. at (800)248-8873 or (815) 436-4440 between 7:30 am and 5:30 p.m. CST
FAX (815)436-4460
e-mail: info@specmeters.com.
www.specmeters.com

Spectrum Technologies, Inc
3600 Thayer Ct.
Aurora, IL 60504
Thank you for purchasing the Field Scout™ TDR Soil Moisture Meter. This manual describes the features and operation of the meter.

Soil moisture is a critical and, potentially highly variable component of the soil environment. Time-domain reflectometry is a proven technology for quickly and accurately determining volumetric water content (VWC) in soil.

The Field Scout probe allows the user to easily and rapidly take many measurements. The user can quickly transition between taking VWC readings in standard and high-clay mode. Through the software, the user can program relative water content modes for multiple sites.
Meter Operation

The ON switch turns the meter on and off. When the meter is turned on, it will display the battery status for 3 seconds. The screen will then display the most recently used MODE screen (Volumetric or Relative water content or measurement period). The data screens for the Water Content Modes are explained on pages 8 and 10. The Period mode is used for doing soil-specific calibrations and is explained on page 14.

Press the READ button to read the probe and update the screen values. The data point can be cleared from memory with the DELETE/CLR AVG button (below).

When the DELETE/CLR AVG button is pressed and immediately released, the last data point will be removed from the running average. Pressing and holding this button will reset the running average.

Pressing the MODE button allows the user to determine the type of measurement that will be taken or select the length of rods connected to the probe.
Data Measurement Modes
Available measurement options are volumetric water content (VWC) using the standard or high clay mode (see p. 8), up to two relative water content modes (see p. 10), or measurement period (in microseconds). Relative water content options will only appear if they are configured in the software (see Meter Settings, p. 12). The period measurement is available for users interested in performing soil-specific calibrations (see Appendix 1).

Changing Rod Length

In order to get accurate volumetric or relative water content (VWC or RWC) readings, the rod length setting must be correct. In the VWC modes, the currently selected rod length appears in the lower left corner of the LCD screen. The options are Long (7.9”), Medium (4.7”), Short (3.0”), Turf (1.5”), T-BLK(1.0”), and T-BLK(0.5”) rods. The final two options are only available for customers that have purchased the TDR Turf Rod Spacer (item 6435SP). See p. 13 for further information. Press the MODE button until the LCD displays the rod length options screen. Pressing the DELETE/CLR AVG button will allow you to toggle between the five choices.

Meter Calibration Mode
This mode allows you to calibrate the meter. The calibration procedure is performed in air and distilled water (see Meter Calibration, p. 6). Requires firmware v. 6.5 or greater.
The meter has internal calibrations for standard and high-clay soil types. These calibrations will work for a large number of soils. However, each meter will have a small difference in how it responds to identical soil conditions. This is due to sensor drift or variability in the electronic components used during manufacturing. Meters with firmware v. 6.5 or greater allow for adjustments to the meter calibration to account for these differences. Therefore, if two meters are giving slightly different readings in the same soil, the output of the meters can be standardized such that the meters can be used interchangeably. Because the meter output is partially governed by rod length, the calibration should not be done with rods that are significantly reduced in size because of wear. The calibration procedure is as follows:

1. Use the MODE button to put meter in Calibration mode (see p. 5). Hit the READ button
2. Hold the meter so the rods are in the air. Press the READ button and wait until the meter indicates it is ready.
3. Immerse the rods completely in distilled or deionized water. The container should have a minimum diameter of 3 inches. Press the READ button and wait until the meter indicates it is ready.

The meter will then show that the calibration is complete for that specific rod length. If more than one rod size is being used, a calibration operation must be done for each one.

Note: This procedure is different than a soil-specific calibration (Appendix 1, p. 16) where a unique calibration curve is generated.
Connecting to a PC/Changing Batteries

The serial port is accessed by removing the face plate of the digital display. It is through this port that the meter is connected to a PC.

Connecting to a PC
The TDR meter software comes with a black PC interface cable. This cable connects to the 9-pin serial port of your computer and to the meter’s serial port. The meter’s configuration can be modified by clicking on the Meter Settings button (see Meter Settings, p. 12). The Com Port, Meter Type, and Clear Meter Settings buttons are explained in the Main Toolbar section (p. 11).

Changing the batteries

The battery compartment is accessed by removing the meter’s face plate. The meter runs on 4 AAA batteries. When installing new batteries, note whether the batteries immediately feel hot to the touch. The battery has been short-circuited and should be replaced.
Volumetric Water Content Mode

Volumetric Water Content (VWC)
The soil can be thought of as being composed of soil, water and air. The volumetric water content (VWC) is the ratio of the volume of water in a given volume of soil to the total soil volume. This can be expressed as either a decimal or a percent. Three soil moisture levels of importance can be defined as follows:

Saturation: All soil pores are filled with water. The VWC will equal the percent pore space of the soil.

Field Capacity: The condition that exists after a saturated soil is allowed to drain to a point where the pull of gravity is no longer able to remove any additional water.

Permanent Wilting Point: The highest moisture content at which a plant can no longer extract water from the soil.

Additionally, we can define Plant Available Water as the amount of water between Permanent Wilting Point and Field Capacity. One rule of thumb is that irrigation should be initiated when half the Plant Available Water has been depleted.

Time Domain Reflectometry (TDR)
The underlying principal of TDR involves measuring the travel time of an electromagnetic wave along a waveguide. The speed of the wave in soil is dependent on the bulk dielectric permittivity ($\varepsilon$) of the soil matrix. The fact that water ($\varepsilon = 80$) has a much greater dielectric constant than air ($\varepsilon = 1$) or soil solids ($\varepsilon = 3-7$) is exploited to determine the VWC of the soil. The VWC measured by TDR is an average over the length of the waveguide.

Electronics in the TDR 100 generate and sense the return of a high energy signal that travels down and back, through the soil, along the waveguide composed of the two replaceable, stainless steel rods. The sampling volume is an elliptical cylinder that extends approximately 3
cm out from the rods. The high frequency signal information is then converted to volumetric water content. However, high amounts of clay and high electrical conductivity (EC>2 dS/m) will attenuate the high-frequency signal and affect the reading displayed by the meter. Very high organic matter content will similarly affect the VWC reading.

When taking a measurement, it is important that the rods be fully inserted into the soil. If not, part of the sampling volume will be composed of air and the reading will be inaccurately low. For the same reason, the probe should be inserted with a steady, downward pressure. If the rods are wiggled into the soil, air pockets can be created adjacent to the rods that will result in low readings. The probe should not be struck with a hammer or other blunt instrument as this can cause damage to the internal electronics. Also, care should be taken to ensure the rods are inserted as parallel to one another as possible. This will not have a large affect on the reading but will decrease the chances the rods will be bent or broken. Likewise, it is best to avoid areas with rocks or other material that can cause the rods to deflect or bend.

The TDR meter can be set to one of two VWC modes, Standard or High Clay. The Standard mode will be appropriate for most mineral soils. The High Clay mode will be more accurate for soils with higher clay contents (>27%). In VWC mode, the top line of the display shows the VWC mode and the water content. The bottom line has the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stndrd VWC%=25.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PL=L N=06 A= 23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PL: Probe Length [1 (1”), 2 (½”), Turf, Short, Medium, or Long rods]
N: Number of readings included in the Average
A: Average of all readings taken since meter was turned on or DELETE/CLR AVG button was pressed
In addition to displaying volumetric water content (VWC), the meter can also display the relative water content (RWC) and Water Deficit (see MODE button, p. 5). RWC is an index value calculated with respect to upper (wet) and lower (dry) VWC set points. The set points are configured with the software (refer to Meter Settings, p. 10). An RWC of 0 indicates the soil is at the dry set point while an RWC of 100 indicates the soil has reached the wet set point. (Example: Assume the dry set point is VWC=25% and the wet set point is VWC=40%. If the meter measured a VWC of 35%, this would translate to a RWC of 67 because 35% is 2/3 between 25% and 40%.) If the soil’s volumetric water content is outside the range of the set points, it is possible to get a negative RWC or an RWC greater than 100.

If the volumetric water contents for field capacity and permanent wilting point are the wet and dry set points respectively, the RWC value will be equivalent to Plant Available Water (PAW). A general rule of thumb is to recommend irrigation when the soil has reached 50% of the PAW.

Also included on the first line is the Water Deficit. The Water Deficit is the amount of rain or irrigation water necessary to raise the soil water content to the wet set point. This calculation applies to a soil depth equal to the probe rod length. The water deficit can be extrapolated further into the profile if the porosity and water-holding characteristics are similar to the volume of soil sampled by the probe.

The second line of the LCD gives the Average (A) of all readings taken, the Number (N) of readings taken and the 5-symbol name given to this soil type in the Meter Settings screen (see p. 12).
**Main Toolbar**

**Com Port**
The black software cable connects the meter to the computer data port. Select the Com Port that is assigned to the computer data port. See Identifying the Correct Com Port (p. 14) for instructions on how to determine which port to select.

**Meter Type**
Select the TDR option from the list of available Field Scout meters.

**Meter Settings**
Click this button to configure the meter. Refer to “Meter Settings” (p. 12) for more details.

**Download** and **Clear Memory**
These functions are not active with the TDR 100.
With TDR model 100, the Meter Settings screen in the Field Scout software is mainly used to enter the set points for the Relative Water Content mode and enable the half-and one-inch probe length options. The meter name and measurement units are also entered here. The fields are described below.

**Meter Name:** The name given the meter will be the title on the first line of the downloaded text file.

**Units:** When operating the meter in Relative Water Content mode, the LCD can display the rod length options in English or metric units. The meter will calculate and display the water deficit (see Relative Water Content p. 10) in the same unit system.
Relative Water Content Set Points:  Up to 2 Relative Water Content (see p. 10) modes can be programmed into the meter by entering the wet and dry set points into the appropriate boxes. From the dropdown menus near the bottom of the screen, select which VWC calibration (Standard or High Clay) should be used for each RWC mode. Each of these modes can be given a descriptive name of 5 characters. These names can be used to identify a certain field or soil type.

Finally, for an RWC mode to be available, it must be enabled by checking the Enable Display box. If this box is not checked, that RWC mode will not appear on the LCD during meter operation.

Enable Spacers:  If you have purchased the TDR Turf Rod Spacer (item 6435 SP), the Enable Spacers button is how the additional rod length options are added to the meter. Instructions for activating this feature are included with the Spacer.
The computer Communications Port to which the PC-3.5mm serial cable is connected can usually be identified by clicking the Com Port button on the main screen to bring up the Port Selection screen. It can also be found by using a paper clip. The procedure is:

1. Disconnect the serial cable from the meter.

2. Bring up the Port Selection screen and click on the Com Port Button. Select the port to be tested and click the Test Port button. If the “Connection OK” message is displayed, another device (such as a modem) is probably connected to that port. If the “No Connection” message is displayed, this port may be the one connected to your serial cable and you can proceed to the next step.

3. Place a paperclip on the end of the serial pin so that it touches both the tip of the pin and the metal area between the two black rings. Again click on the Test Port button. If the “Connection OK” message now appears, this is the com port connected to your serial cable.

Note: The meters do not short-circuit the serial pin. Therefore, when the Test Port button is clicked while the meter is connected, the “No Connection” message will be displayed.
## Specifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Measurement Units</strong></th>
<th>Percent volumetric water content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>±3.0% volumetric water content with electrical conductivity &lt; 2 dS m⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>0% to saturation (<em>Saturation is typically around 50% volumetric water.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>4 AAA alkaline batteries Approximately 12 month life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Display</strong></td>
<td>16 character, 2 line LCD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight</strong></td>
<td>Model 100 1.5 lbs. (0.68 kg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 200 3.0 lbs. (1.36 kg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Probe Head Dimensions</strong></td>
<td>3.1” x 3” x 1”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.8cm x 7.5cm x 2.5cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rod Dimensions</strong></td>
<td>Length: 0.5” (1.3cm), 1.0” (2.5cm), 1.5” (3.8cm), 3” (7.6cm), 4.7” (12cm) or 7.9” (20cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diameter: 0.2” (0.5cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spacing: 1.3” (3.3cm)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The meter’s LCD screen will display the data in one of three modes (see Meter Operation p. 4):

1. Volumetric water content - in Standard or High Clay mode (see p. 8).
2. Relative water content - up to 2 RWC modes can be established (see p. 10).
3. Measurement period - in microseconds
Appendix 1
Soil-Specific Calibration

For maximum accuracy, you may choose to perform a soil-specific calibration rather than use either of the internal (Standard or High Clay) soil calibrations coded into the TDR meter’s firmware. In these cases, an independent soil moisture content measurement is required. A relation can then be developed that relates the meter’s period reading (see MODE button, pp. 4-5) to actual volumetric water content (VWC). This is most easily accomplished by doing a regression of one set of data against another.

VWC data can be obtained with a device such as a neutron probe, by measuring the weight of a saturated soil column of known volume as it is gradually dried, or by gradually wetting a known volume soil with the addition of known increments of water. In most cases, however, the calibration will be done with gravimetric sampling. This procedure is briefly described below.

In the field, establish a number of sites to sample. Each site should be wetted to a different soil moisture content by adding varying amounts of water. At each site a Field Scout TDR reading is taken followed by the extraction of a known volume of soil. Ideally, this would be an undisturbed soil core. The wet weight of this soil must be determined. If the soil cannot be weighed immediately, it should be stored in a plastic bag to reduce evaporation. The soil is then oven-dried (105°C for 48 hours is a common requirement) and weighed again. The volumetric water content is calculated as follows:
\[ \text{VWC} = 100 \times \frac{(M_{\text{wet}} - M_{\text{dry}})}{(\rho_w \times V_{\text{tot}})} \]

Where:

- \( M_{\text{wet}} \), \( M_{\text{dry}} \) = mass (g) of wet and dry soil respectively
- \( V_{\text{tot}} \) = total soil volume (ml)
- \( \rho_w \) = density of water (1g/ml)

An alternate, but equivalent, calculation can be obtained from the gravimetric water content and soil bulk density.

\[ \text{VWC} = \text{GWC} \times \frac{\rho_b}{\rho_w} \]

Where \( \text{GWC} \) is the gravimetric water content and \( \rho_b \) is the bulk density:

\[ \text{GWC} = 100 \times \frac{(M_{\text{wet}} - M_{\text{dry}})}{M_{\text{dry}}} \]

\[ \rho_b = \frac{M_{\text{dry}}}{V_{\text{tot}}} \]

The final step is to plot the calculated or measured period values with the readings obtained from Field Scout TDR meter. Regression analysis can then be performed on this data to develop an equation to convert from period to VWC.
This product is warranted to be free from defects in material or workmanship for one year from the date of purchase. During the warranty period Spectrum will, at its option, either repair or replace products that prove to be defective. This warranty does not cover damage due to improper installation or use, lightning, negligence, accident, or unauthorized modifications, or to incidental or consequential damages beyond the Spectrum product. Before returning a failed unit, you must obtain a Returned Materials Authorization (RMA) from Spectrum. Spectrum is not responsible for any package that is returned without a valid RMA number or for the loss of the package by any shipping company.
DECLARATION OF CONFORMITY

Spectrum Technologies, Inc.
3600 Thayer Court
Aurora, IL 60504  USA

Model Numbers: 6435FS/6440FS
Description: Portable Soil Moisture Probe
Type: Electrical Equipment for Measurement, Control, and Laboratory Use
Standards:
EN 61326-1:2006
EN 61000-4-3:2002

As a consequence of the meter’s measurement principle, radio frequencies less than 950 MHz can affect the meter’s readings. Operating the meter in areas where such transmissions are present should be avoided.

EN 55011:2007

Douglas Kieffer, Soil/Water Products Manager  March 18, 2009