

LMHC Information Sheet # 13

Hydrophane Opal

- **Definition**
- **Suggested Testing Procedure**
- **Report wording**

Members of the Laboratory Manual Harmonisation Committee (LMHC) have standardised the nomenclature that they use to describe hydrophane opal.

Definition

Hydrophane opal is opal that will absorb liquids to the point of affecting the appearance and potentially the weight of the gemstone. Most opals have a porous structure to some extent, but when this porosity is considerable the term hydrophane may apply. Such opals could come from any opal locality, but opals from deposits in Ethiopia produce an unusually high percentage of such gemstones.

Suggested Testing Procedure

- Place a drop of water on the surface of the opal. Observe under the microscope how and if the water drop is absorbed by the stone. If absorbed in few seconds, then considered hydrophane opal.
- Immersion of the stone in water for five minutes. Afterwards quick drying of stone with tissue. If the weight changed by more than 1% compared to before immersion, then considered hydrophane opal. In some cases, this test may result in cracking or change of appearance of the stone.

When the weight of an opal varies over a certain amount of time (e.g. several days), it is already considered a first indication that the stone may be a hydrophane opal.

Report wording

Hydrophane opal shall be described as,

Identification:

Species: (natural)¹ opal

Variety: (hydrophane)¹ (opal)²

Further information

(may be called hydrophane opal in the trade)¹

(Due to its natural porosity, this gemstone may absorb liquids and as a result its weight and appearance may change.)¹

¹ Wording and text in parentheses is optional.

² If 'hydrophane' is not used in the 'variety' section, the word 'opal' shall be used.

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