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(54) Title: DURABLE HYDROGEN BONDED HYDROGELS

(57) Abstract: This invention relates to new injectable hydrogel materials that consist of water gellants comprising linear hydrophilic polymers that comprise hydrogen bonding units in the backbone combined with cross-linkable end groups, resulting in dynamic yet firm hydrogel materials that are easily processable, are highly elastic, show adhesive properties and are self-healing and are especially suitable for biomedical applications.



WO 2016/018145 A1

DURABLE HYDROGEN BONDED HYDROGELS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 This invention relates to injectable hydrogel materials that consist of water gellants comprising linear hydrophilic polymers that comprise hydrogen bonding units in the backbone combined with cross-linkable groups, resulting in dynamic yet firm hydrogel materials that are easy processable, highly elastic, self-healing, and that show adhesive properties.

10

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Hydrogels can be characterized by three-dimensional networks of polymer chains that can reversibly be deformed. They absorb polar solvents such as water and they find applications in for example medical applications including bone transplants and tissue adhesives, drug delivery systems, pharmaceuticals and in water management.

15 Hydrogels can occur in the cross-linked form or in the uncross-linked form. Cross-linking usually provides stiffer gels due to strong increase of the molecular weight. Cross-linking can be achieved chemically by the formation of covalent bonds or physically by the formation of *e.g.* hydrogen bonds or ionic interactions. Obviously, cross-linking can also be achieved by both chemical and physical means.

20 Chemical cross-linking of hydrophilic polymers is a general and often applied route to obtain hydrogels. In order to be able to administer or process these gels, prepolymers are dissolved in water and are then polymerized resulting in (*in situ*) hydrogel formation. Hydrogellation procedures are often based on the use of acrylic or methacrylic macromonomers that are not preferred in (biomedical) applications, because of their inherent toxicity and because they usually require a potentially hazardous initiator for polymerization. Moreover, cross-linked hydrogels lack reversibility and are limited in their degradation behavior, as poly(acrylates) and poly(methacrylates) are not biodegradable.

30

For example, US 5.410.016, incorporated by reference, discloses hydrogels based on copolymers of poly(ethylene glycol) with poly(DL-lactide) containing pendant acrylate functions that are cross-linked *in situ*.

WO 01/44307, incorporated by reference, discloses hydrogels based on polyvinyl alcohol modified with pendant acrylate and methacrylate groups that are chemically cross-linked *in situ*. Hence, in both patent documents an irreversible cross-linked hydrogel is obtained by starting from water processable prepolymers that contain reactive groups. Because a relative high level of cross-links is needed to gel these materials, the resulting hydrogels are rigid and lack beneficial elastic behavior.

US 8.673.286, incorporated by reference, discloses branched 4-arm poly(ethyleneglycol) materials end-functionalized with DOPA-groups (3,4-dihydroxyphenyl alanine), which aqueous formulations upon oxidative cross-linking result in adhesive hydrogels with 15 - 30 wt% solids content.

US 2014/0113989, incorporated by reference, discloses branched 4-arm poly(ethyleneoxide)-poly(propylene oxide) copolymers materials end-functionalized with DOPA-groups that display negative swelling hydrogels upon oxidative cross-linking.

Messersmith *et al.*, Chem. Comm. 47, 7497, 2011, incorporated by reference, discloses a pH-responsive hydrogel resulting from a cross-linked polymer made by reacting a branched 4-arm poly(ethyleneglycol) materials end-functionalized with DOPA-groups with bifunctional boronic acid moieties. Clearly, this approach needs two different ingredients in a specific ratio to obtain a gel. Moreover, this system is only gelled at alkaline pH of 9 and boronic acid derivatives are needed, which makes the biomedical application of this hydrogel system difficult due to the high pH and the increased concerns about the detrimental health effects of boric acid derivatives. The resulting hydrogels are tacky and, therefore, obviously demonstrate self-adhesive behavior.

WO 99/07343, incorporated by reference, discloses thermally reversible hydrogels intended for uses in drug delivery applications that are based on a hydrophilic polyethylene glycol block and hydrophobic PLLA (poly-L-lactic acid) blocks. The gelling is governed by the presence of the crystalline hard blocks formed by the PLLA. The presence of the crystalline PLLA-blocks limits the mechanical properties and the biodegradation of these materials to a great extent.

In general, "supramolecular chemistry" is understood to be the chemistry of physical or non-covalent, oriented, multiple (at least two), co-operative interactions. For instance, a "supramolecular polymer" is an organic compound that has polymeric

properties - for example with respect to its rheological behavior - due to specific and strong secondary interactions between the different molecules. These physical or non-covalent supramolecular interactions contribute substantially to the properties of the resulting material.

5 Supramolecular polymers comprising of (macro)molecules that bear hydrogen bonding units can have polymer properties in bulk and in solution, because of the hydrogen bridges between the molecules. Sijbesma *et al.* (US 6.320.018 and Science 278, 1601, **1997**; both incorporated by reference) have shown that in cases where a self-complementary quadruple hydrogen bonding unit (4H-unit) is used, the physical
10 interactions between the molecules become so strong that polymers with much improved material properties can be prepared.

 WO 2006/118460, incorporated by reference, discloses supramolecular hydrogel materials comprising water gellants that are comprised by hydrophilic polymers to which at least two 4H-units are covalently attached via urethane-alkyl moieties.
15 However, it appeared that these hydrogel materials are insufficient in strength for several applications and their viscosity is too high at biomedically relevant temperatures to allow administration via liquid processing techniques like injection through a syringe.

 EP 1.972.661 A1, incorporated by reference, discloses supramolecular hydrogels
20 that comprise 4H-units together with urea bonding-motifs in a hydrophilic polymer. These hydrogels are thermo-reversible due to their supramolecular nature. However, their reversible nature may also result in dissolving of the gel when an excess water is present such as inside the body.

 Dankers *et al.*, Adv. Healthcare Mat. 3, 87, **2014**, incorporated by reference,
25 discloses that a hydrogel of a specific embodiment of EP 1.972.661 A1, consisting of a poly(ethyleneglycol) of 10.000 Da with 4H-unit end groups, can be rendered injectable only when dissolved in strongly basic aqueous solution with a pH higher than 8.5, which is not favored for biomedical applications. Moreover, the resulting hydrogel has very limited elastic strength.

30 Dankers *et al.*, Adv. Mater. 24, 2703, **2012**, incorporated by reference, discloses transient networks based on bifunctional supramolecular polymers consisting of polyethylene glycol which is end-functionalized with 4H-units. The 4H-units are shielded by hydrophobic alkylene groups comprising a urea moiety for lateral hydrogen

bonding. The transient networks are only formed by supramolecular interactions between the polymer chains.

Hirschberg *et al.*, Chem. Eur. J. 9, 4222, **2003**, incorporated by reference, discloses mono- and bifunctional compounds comprising one or two 4H-units, respectively. Some of the bifunctional compounds have been shown to form polymers in apolar solvents by intermolecular supramolecular interactions only.

Kieltyka *et al.*, J. Am. Chem. Soc. 135, 11159, **2013**, incorporated by reference, discloses the bifunctional supramolecular polymers as Dankers *et al.*, Adv. Mater. 24, 2703, **2012**, as well as the corresponding monofunctional supramolecular polymers. Transient networks based on mixtures of the bifunctional and monofunctional supramolecular polymers are only formed by supramolecular interactions between the polymer chains.

Ramaekers *et al.*, Macromolecules 47, 3823, **2014**, incorporated by reference, discloses chiral derivatives of the bifunctional supramolecular polymers as Dankers *et al.*, Adv. Mater. 24, 2703, **2012**. In water, these polymers may form helical fibers by supramolecular interactions between the polymer chains.

Lee-Wang *et al.*, Macromol. Symp. 296, 229, **2010**, incorporated by reference, discloses telechelic PPG-PEG-PPG polymers which end-functionalized with 4H-units. These polymers are reported to have a low solubility in water and do not form hydrogels, although associating behavior of the 4H-units was observed.

Because of the shortcomings of state-of-the-art hydrogels, there is a need for synthetic polymers that are injectable, can gel water upon command, need only a limited amount of cross-links to gel, are highly elastic, are able to dissipate energy, and display self-healing behavior. In addition, it is desired that hydrogels can be tuned with respect to their mechanical properties to be able to meet the requirements of specific applications. Also, it would be advantageous to be able to make biodegradable reversible hydrogels.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

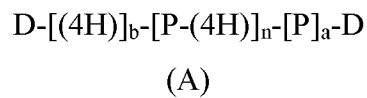
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It is an object of the present invention to provide injectable hydrogels using a polymeric gellant that comprises both strong and reversible hydrogen bonding units and durable chemical cross-linkable groups and it is a further object to provide for a process

to prepare such new hydrogels. With this invention, easy administration of hydrogels is combined with high strength and elasticity, without the need for high cross-linking densities due to the additional presence of the reversible hydrogen bonding motifs. Moreover, the hydrogels according to the invention are tunable in their mechanical properties, and offer tissue-adhesion, durability, and self-healing properties, while it is optional to make the hydrogels biodegradable.

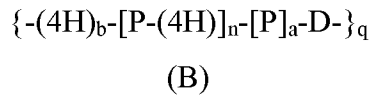
The present invention therefore relates to a water gellant comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, a hydrogen bonding 4H-unit 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or formula (C):

10



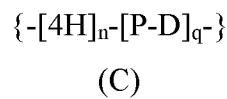
or

15



or

20



wherein:

25 n is in the range of 1 to 10;

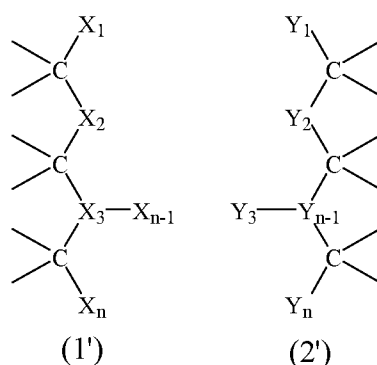
a is 0 or 1;

b is 0 or 1;

q is in the range of 1 to 10;

4H represents the 4H-unit that has the general formula (1') or (2'):

30



In the general formulas shown above the C-X_i and C-Y_i linkages each represent a
 5 single or double bond, n is 4 or more and X₁ ... X_n represent donors or acceptors that
 form hydrogen bridges with the H-bridge-forming unit containing a corresponding
 structural element (2) linked to them, with X_i representing a donor and Y_i an acceptor
 or vice versa. Properties of the 4H-unit having general formulas (1') and (2') are
 disclosed in US 6.320.018 which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

10 The present invention also relates to a process for preparing a water gellant
 comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, and a 4H-unit
 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or a formula (C), said
 process comprising reacting a polymer component P-(F)_v, a 4H-unit 4H-(F)_w and a
 cross-linking component (F)_x-L-Z, wherein:

15 F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy,
 amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these
 end groups;

v is in the range of 1 - 4;

w is in the range of 1 - 4;

20 x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

Z represents a group that can cross-link.

The present invention also relates to a process for preparing a water gellant
 comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, and a 4H-unit
 25 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or formula (C), said
 process comprising reacting a polymer component P-(F)_v, a precursor of the 4H-unit
 according to the formula 4H*-(F)_w and a cross-linking component (F)_x-L-Z, wherein:

F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups;

v is in the range of 1 - 4;

5 w is in the range of 1 - 4;

x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

Z represents a group that can cross-link.

It further relates to a liquid aqueous formulation comprising:

10 (a) 0.3 - 80.0 wt.%, based on the total weight of the formulation, of a water gellant;
and

(b) 20.0 to 99.7 wt.% water;

wherein said aqueous formulation is injectable and can be transformed into an elastic hydrogel upon cross-linking of the D moieties.

15 The present invention also relates to a process for preparing a hydrogel, wherein a liquid aqueous formulation comprising:

(a) 0.3 - 80.0 wt.%, based on the total weight of the formulation, of a water gellant;
and

(b) 20.0 to 99.7 wt.% water;

20 is reacted with an auxiliary A that initiates or mediates the cross-linking reaction of the D moieties in the water gellant.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

25 The verb "to comprise" and its conjugations as used in this description and in the claims are used in their non-limiting sense to mean that items following the word are included, but items not specifically mentioned are not excluded.

In addition, reference to an element by the indefinite article "a" or "an" does not exclude the possibility that more than one of the element is present, unless the context
30 clearly requires that there is one and only one of the elements. The indefinite article "a" or "an" thus usually means "at least one".

When investigating supramolecular hydrophilic polymers comprising quadruple hydrogen bonding units (4H-units), it was found that by introduction of chemical cross-

linkable groups in the polymers a new class of supramolecular hydrogel materials was obtained. Due to the synthetic and functional orthogonality of the reversible hydrogen bonding and the covalent cross-links, new hydrogel materials were obtained that combine the robustness of permanently cross-linked high molecular weight hydrogels with the dynamic nature of the reversible low molecular weight supramolecular hydrogels, resulting in hydrogels with advantageous properties like very high strength, elasticity, biodegradability, stress-relaxation, self-healing properties, and injectability. Moreover, the reversibility of the supramolecular hydrogen bonding interaction allows for temperature and pH dependant performance and the possibility to easily fine-tune material properties by supramolecular blending of other materials comprising the same hydrogen bonding unit. Additionally, the reversible supramolecular interaction can also favor the biodegradation of the hydrogel material.

In this document, the structure of the water gellant according to this invention and its preparation are disclosed, as well as the components of the gellant: (i) the hydrogen bonding 4H-unit, (ii) the polymer backbone P and (iii) the cross-linkable group D. Finally, the liquid aqueous formulations and the hydrogels that can be prepared from the water gellants are disclosed.

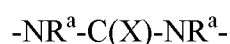
GENERAL DEFINITIONS

20

In this document, the terms “moiety” and “group” are used interchangeably.

An urea moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety according to the formula:

25

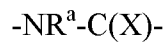


wherein X is O or S, preferably O, R^a is, independently, a hydrogen atom or a linear, branched or cyclic C₁ - C₁₂ alkyl group, preferably a hydrogen atom. R^a is more preferably a hydrogen atom or a linear, branched or cyclic C₁ - C₆ alkyl group, most preferably a hydrogen atom.

30

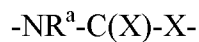
An amide moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety according to the formula:

9



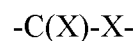
wherein X and R^a are as described above.

An urethane moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety
5 according to the formula:



wherein X and R^a are as described above (X can independently be O or S).

10 An ester moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety
according to the formula:



15 wherein X is as described above (X can independently be O or S).

A carbonate moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety
according to the formula:



20

wherein X is as described above (X can independently be O or S).

An amine moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety
according to the formula:

25



wherein R^a is as described above.

An ether moiety as indicated in this document is to be understood as a moiety
according to the formula:

30



wherein X is as described above.

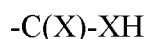
An isocyanate group is to be understood as a -NCX group, wherein X is as described above.

An hydroxy group is to be understood as a -OH group.

An amine group is to be understood as a -N(R^a)₂ group, wherein R^a is as
5 described above.

A thiol group is to be understood as a -SH group.

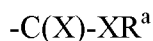
A carboxylic acid group is to be understood as a group according to the formula:



10

wherein X is as described above (X can independently be O or S).

A carboxylic ester group is to be understood as a group according to the formula:



15

wherein X is as described above (X can independently be O or S) and wherein R^a is not hydrogen.

Acrylate and methacrylate groups are to be understood as R^b-C(=CH₂)-C(X)-X-
20 groups, wherein X is as described above (X can independently be O or S), and wherein R^b is hydrogen or methyl. It is, however, preferred that in acrylate and methacrylate groups X is O.

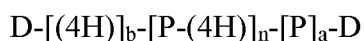
Acrylamide and methacrylamide groups are R^b-C(=CH₂)-C(X)-N(R^a)- groups,
wherein X and R^a are as described above, and wherein R^b is hydrogen or methyl. It is,
however, preferred that in acrylamide and methacrylamide groups X is O.

25

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WATER GELLANT AND ITS PREPARATION

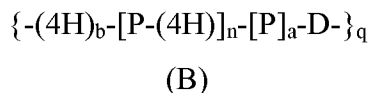
The water gellant of this invention has the general structure:

30

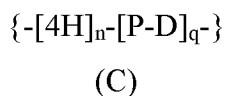


(A)

or



5 or



10 wherein P, 4H and D are as defined above.

The water gellant according to formula (A), formula (B) or formula (C) may have terminal end-groups that originate from the reactants as will be apparent to the person skilled in the art.

The water gellant has a molecular weight of about 800 to about 1.000.000, preferably about 1.000 to about 60.000, more preferably about 1.000 to about 20.000, and most preferably about 2.000 to about 10.000 Dalton.

The 4H-units can be attached to the polymer backbone P in any way, *e.g.* by grafting onto the polymer backbone, by attachment to multiple - *i.e.* two or more - end groups of the polymer backbone, or the 4H-units can be an integral part of the backbone of the polymer that constitutes the water gellant. As will be understood by the person skilled in the art, the 4H-units may also be attached by a combination of these bonding modes.

It is preferred that the polymer backbone P is connected to a 4H-unit via a direct bond, (thio)urea, (thio)urethane, amide, ester, carbonate, secondary amine, tertiary amine and/or ether moiety. It is, however, more preferred that the polymer backbone P and the 4H-unit are connected via a direct bond, (thio)urea, (thio)urethane, carbonate, and/or an amide moiety, even more preferably via a direct bond, urea, and/or urethane moiety, most preferably via a direct bond and/or urethane moiety.

The cross-linkable groups D can be attached to the polymer backbone P in any way, *e.g.* by grafting onto the polymer backbone, by attachment to multiple - *i.e.* two or more - end groups of the polymer backbone, or the cross-linkable group D can be an integral part of the backbone of the polymer that constitutes the water gellant. As will

be understood by the person skilled in the art, the cross-linkable groups D may also be attached by a combination of these bonding modes.

It is preferred that the polymer backbone P is connected to the cross-linkable groups D via a (thio)urea, (thio)urethane, amide, ester, carbonate, secondary amine, tertiary amine and/or ether moiety. It is, however, more preferred that the polymer backbone P and the cross-linkable group D are connected via a (thio)urea, (thio)urethane, ester, and/or an amide moiety, even more preferably via a urea and/or urethane moiety, most preferably via a urea moiety.

In a preferred embodiment of this invention, the 4H-units form an integral part of the backbone of the polymer and the water gellant has a linear structure according to Formula (A) or (B) or (C). More preferably, the cross-linkable groups D are present as end groups in the polymer and the water gellant has the structure according to Formula (A).

The polymer backbone P can be multifunctional but is preferably bifunctional, meaning that it has about 1.8 to about 2 end-groups, preferably about 1.9 to about 2 end groups, most preferably higher than about 1.95 to about 2 end groups

The number of repeating units n is at least 1 and not higher than 10, more preferably not higher than 6, most preferably not higher than 3.

The number of repeating units q is at least 1 and not higher than 10, more preferably at least 2, even more preferable at least 3, and most preferably at least 5.

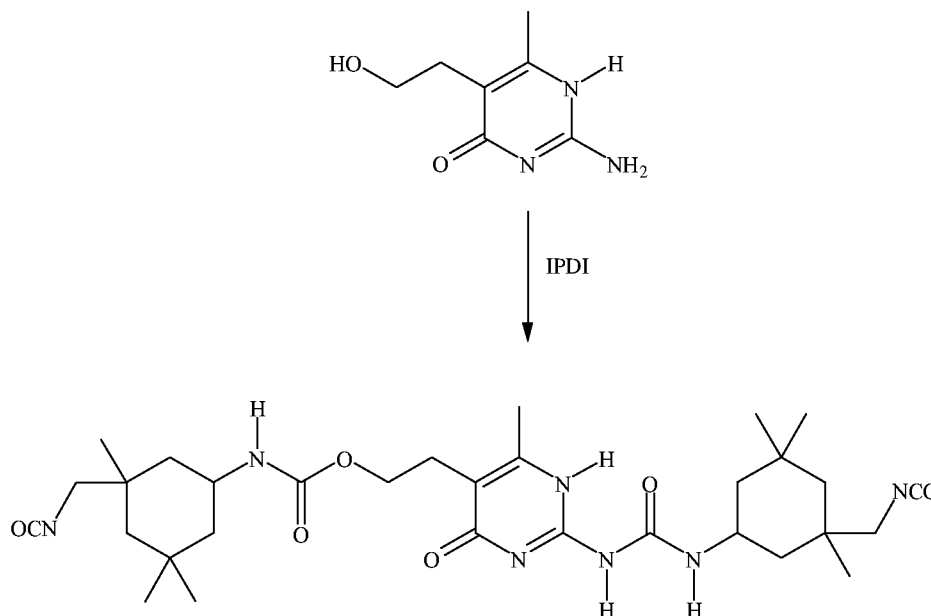
The number of repeating units a is 0 or 1, more preferable 1.

The number of repeating units b is 0 or 1, more preferable 0.

The water gellant can be prepared by three methods: (i) P, D, and the 4H-unit are all mixed together in one step and covalently attached to each other; (ii) P is first covalently attached to the 4H-unit, followed by covalently end-capping or chain extension with D; (iii) P is first covalently attached to D followed by covalent chain extension with the 4H-unit. Preferably, method (ii) is used to produce the water gellant.

The 4H-unit may be used as such or may be formed (optionally *in situ* in one of the methods (i), (ii) or (iii)) from a precursor of the 4H-unit (in this document indicated as a 4H*-unit) of the formula $4H^*-(F)_w$ and a reactive end-group F from one of the other reaction partners P and/or D or a reactive end group from a further reagent $E-F_y$ wherein y is 1 or 2, as is described in the section "THE 4H-UNIT". For example, the 4H*-unit 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (w is 2) may be

reacted with two molar equivalents of isophorone diisocyanate to form the corresponding 4H-unit:



5

Alternatively, the 4H*-unit 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methylpyrimidine (w is 2) may for example react with a polymer P having suitable reactive end-groups (e.g. isocyanate end-groups) to form the corresponding 4H-unit. Reference is made to the section “**THE POLYMER BACKBONE P**”.

10 Preferably, E is a cyclic, linear or branched C₁ - C₂₄ alkyl or alkylene group, a C₆ - C₂₄ aryl or arylene group, a C₇ - C₂₄ alkaryl or alkarylene group or a C₇ - C₂₄ arylalkyl or arylalkylene group, wherein these groups optionally, but not preferably, comprise 1 - 5 heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N and S.

15 Accordingly, the process for preparing the water gellant comprises reacting a polymer component P-(F)_v, a 4H-unit 4H-(F)_w and a cross-linking component (F)_x-L-Z, wherein:

F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups;

20 v is in the range of 1 - 4;

w is in the range of 1 - 4;

x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

Z represents a group that can cross-link.

The present invention also relates to a process for preparing a water gellant comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, and a 4H-unit 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or formula (C), said process comprising reacting a polymer component $P-(F)_v$, a precursor of the 4H-unit according to the formula $4H^*-(F)_w$ and a cross-linking component $(F)_x-L-Z$, wherein:

F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups;

10 v is in the range of 1 - 4;

w is in the range of 1 - 4;

x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

Z represents a group that can cross-link.

15 Preferably, v is in range of 1 - 2

Preferably, w is in range of 1 - 2

Preferably, x is in range of 1 - 2

In these processes, it is preferred that P, D, and the 4H-unit are covalently connected to each other by moieties selected from the group consisting of (thio)urea, (thio)urethane, amide, ester, carbonate, secondary amine, tertiary amine and ether moieties and combinations thereof. As will be apparent to the skilled person, the polymer backbone P, the cross-linkable group D and the 4H-unit are furnished with functional groups that are capable in providing the connecting moieties described above.

25 The methods (i), (ii), and (iii) can be executed in the bulk or in solution. Reaction solvents are preferably aprotic solvents known in the art, such as ethers, such as diethyl ether, THF, methyl-tetrahydrofuran, dioxane and methyl-tert-butyl ether, DMSO, dimethyl acetamide, DMF, NMP, chloroform, dichloromethane, diethylcarbonate, propylene carbonate, ketones such as acetone, MEK and methyl-tert-butyl ketone, esters such as ethyl acetate and butyl acetate, and toluene.

30 Preferably, the reactants and solvents are dried, *i.e.* containing no or little water. Preferably, the reaction is executed under an inert atmosphere of nitrogen or argon.

The water gellant can be isolated by different type of work-up procedures that are known in the art, such as precipitation, extraction, washing, drying, filtration and evaporation procedures, or combinations thereof.

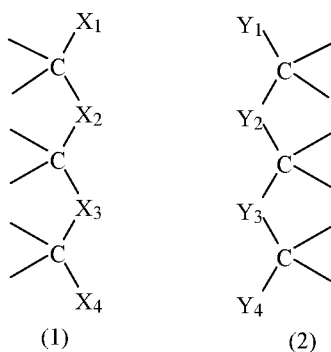
Preferably, the reaction is performed with less than about 25% by weight of solvent, more preferably less than about 15% by weight of solvent, most preferably without solvent, at temperatures in between about 100°C and 150°C, possibly by using an (twin screw) extruder, kneader or mixer.

THE 4H-UNIT

10

It is preferred that the 4H-unit is an essentially planar or flat structure.

If the 4H-unit is capable of forming four hydrogen bridges which is preferred according to the invention, the 4H-unit has preferably the general formula (1) or (2):



15

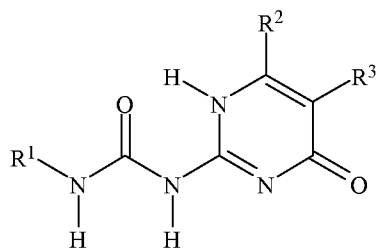
Properties of the 4H-unit having general formulas (1) and (2) are disclosed in US 6.320.018 which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

It is therefore preferred that in formulas (1) and (2) n equals 4 so that the 4H-unit comprises four donors or acceptors $X_1...X_4$ and $Y_1...Y_4$. The 4H-unit may be self-complementary (*i.e.* the two hydrogen bonded units $X_1...X_4$ and $Y_1...Y_4$ have an equal array of donors and acceptors), or non self-complementary (*i.e.* the two hydrogen bonded units $X_1...X_4$ and $Y_1...Y_4$ have two different arrays of donors and acceptors). Preferably, the 4H-unit comprises two successive donors, followed by two successive acceptors, *i.e.* that it is preferred that X_1 and X_2 are donors and X_3 and X_4 are acceptors.

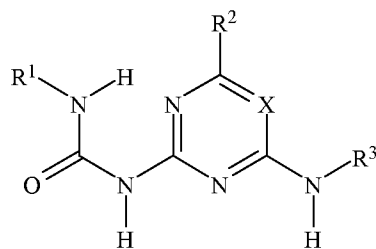
Preferably, the donors and acceptors are O, S, and N atoms. This 4H-unit is in detail disclosed in US 6.320.018 which is specifically incorporated by reference herein.

25

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention the 4H-unit has the general formula (3) or formula (4) and tautomers thereof:



(3)



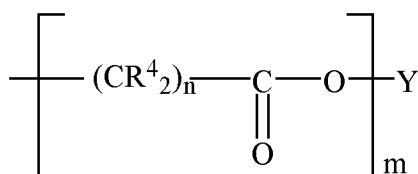
(4)

5

wherein X is a nitrogen atom or a carbon atom bearing a substituent R⁸, preferably X is a nitrogen, and wherein R¹, R², R³ and R⁸ are selected from the group consisting of:

- (a) hydrogen;
- (b) C₁ - C₂₀ alkyl;
- 10 (c) C₆ - C₁₂ aryl;
- (d) C₇ - C₁₂ alkaryl;
- (e) C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryl;
- (f) polyester groups having the formula (5)

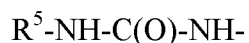
15



(5)

wherein R⁴ and Y are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and C₁ - C₆ linear or branched alkyl, n is 1 - 6 and m is 10 to 100;

- 20 (g) C₁ - C₁₀ alkyl groups substituted with 1 - 4 ureido groups according to the formula (6)

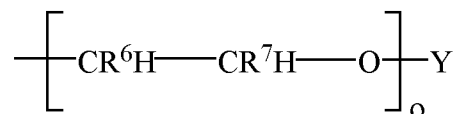


(6)

25

wherein R⁵ is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and C₁ - C₆ linear or branched alkyl;

(h) polyether groups having the formula (7)



5

(7)

wherein Y, R⁶ and R⁷ are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and C₁ - C₆ linear or branched alkyl and o is 10 - 100, and

wherein the 4H-unit is bonded to the polymer backbone P via R¹, R² and/or R³ (so that
10 R¹, R² or R³ represent a direct bond) with the other R groups representing, independently a side chain according to (a) - (h).

As will be apparent to the person skilled in the art, the groups (b) - (h) defined above may be linear, branched or cyclic where appropriate.

In a first preferred embodiment, the 4H-unit is bonded to a polymer backbone P
15 via R₁ and R₂ (so that R₁ and R₂ constitute direct bonds), while R₃ is any one of the groups (a) - (h) defined above, preferably group (a) or (b), more preferably group (a).

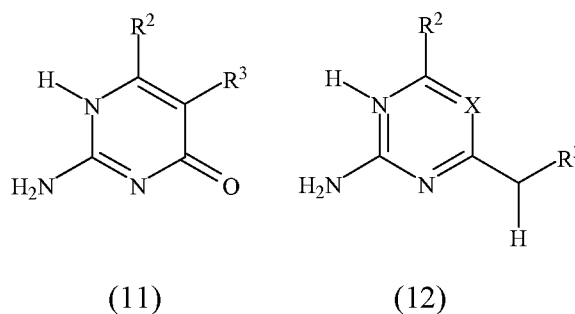
In a second preferred embodiment, the 4H-unit is bonded to a polymer backbone P via R₁ and R₃ (so that R₁ and R₃ constitute a direct bond), while R₂ is any one of the
20 groups (a) - (h) defined above, preferably group (b), more preferably isopropyl or methyl and most preferably methyl. Most preferably for this second preferred embodiment, the 4H-unit is bonded to a polymer backbone P via R₁ and R₃, while R₂ is any one of the groups (a) - (h) defined above, preferably group (b), more preferably isopropyl or methyl and most preferably methyl.

The 4H-unit building blocks that are used to prepare the water gellants of this
25 invention are furnished with functional groups that are part of the R₁, R₂ and R₃. The functional groups are preferably (thio)isocyanates, (activated) amines, alcohols, thiols, (activated) esters, acrylates, methacrylates, acryl amides, methacryl amides or other vinyl groups, more preferably isocyanates, (activated) amines, or alcohols, even more preferably isocyanates or (activated) amines, most preferably isocyanates.

30 Precursors of the 4H-unit (4H*) are nitrogen containing compounds that are reacted with isocyanates or activated amines, or that are activated and reacted with primary amines, to obtain a urea moiety that is part of the quadruple hydrogen bonding

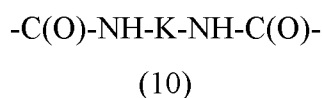
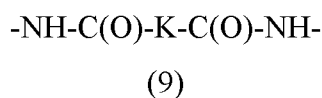
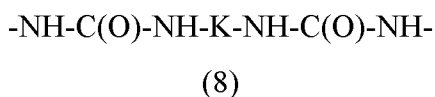
site. The nitrogen containing compound is preferably an isocytosine derivative (*i.e.* a 2-amino-4-hydroxy-pyrimidine derivative) or a triazine derivative, or a tautomer and/or enantiomer of these derivatives. More preferably, the nitrogen containing compound is an isocytosine derivative having an aliphatic-substituent containing a functional group in the 5-position and an alkyl-substituent in the 6-position, most preferably 2-hydroxy-ethyl or propionic acid ester in the 5-position and methyl in the 6-position, most preferably the precursor of the 4H-unit is 5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl isocytosine.

In a preferred embodiment, the precursor of the 4H-unit according to the formula $4H^*-(F)_w$ is represented by formula (11) or formula (12):



wherein R^2 , R^3 and X have the meaning as defined for formulas (3) and (4).

In another preferred embodiment of this invention, the 4H-unit is a simple hydrogen bonding unit (SHB-unit) selected from the group consisting of a (thio)urea, a bisureido, an amide, a bisamide or a (thio)urethane moieties. More preferably, it is a bisureido or bisamide moiety and has the general formula (8), (9), or (10):



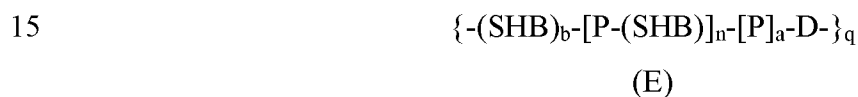
in which K is selected from the group consisting of a direct covalent bond, cyclic, linear or branched $C_1 - C_{24}$ alkylene groups, $C_6 - C_{24}$ arylene groups, $C_7 - C_{24}$

alkarylene groups and C₇ - C₂₄ arylalkylene groups, wherein the alkylene groups, arylene groups, alkarylene groups and arylalkylene groups optionally, but not preferably, comprise 1 - 5 heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N and S, more preferably K is selected from a direct bond, cyclic or linear C₁ - C₂₄ alkylene groups, and C₇ - C₂₄ arylalkylene groups, most preferably K is selected from linear C₂ - C₁₂ alkylene groups.

Water gellants comprising a SHB-unit can be characterised by formula (D), formula (E) and/or formula (F):



or



or



The water gellant according to formula (D) or formula (E) or formula (F) may have terminal end-groups that originate from the reactants as will be apparent to the person skilled in the art.

In this another preferred embodiment, the SHB-unit is preferably formula (8) and the nitrogen containing compound that is the precursor of this 4H-unit (*i.e.* the SHB component; see below) is preferably selected from hydrazine, 1,2-diaminoethane, 1,3-diaminopropane, 1,4-diaminobutane, 1,5-diaminopentane, 1,6-diaminohexane, 1,4-diaminocyclohexane, 1,7-diaminoheptane, 1,8-diaminooctane, 1,6-diamino 3,3,4-trimethylhexane, 1,10-diaminododecane, 1,11-diaminoundecane, 1,12-diaminododecane, methylene dicyclohexane 4,4-diamine, 1,3-bis(aminomethyl)benzene, 1,4-bis(aminomethyl)benzene, and methylene diphenyl diamine, more preferably

hydrazine, 1,2-diaminoethane, 1,4-diaminobutane, 1,6-diaminohexane, *trans*-1,4-diaminocyclohexane, 1,10-diaminodecane, and 1,12-diaminododecane, most preferably 1,4-diaminobutane and 1,6-diaminohexane.

A process for preparing the water gellant based on general formulas (8), (9) and (10) comprises reacting a polymer component $P-(F)_v$, a SHB component and a cross-linking component $(F)_x-L-Z$, wherein P, F, L, Z, v, w and x are defined as above. The SHB component is selected from the group consisting of mono- and difunctional compounds comprising 0 to 20 carbon atoms, preferably 4 to 13 carbon atoms. The mono- and difunctional compounds are selected from the group consisting of (di)isocyanates, (di)thioisocyanates, (di) amines which are optionally activated, (di)acid chlorides, (di)esters which are optionally activated, (di)ols which are optionally activated, (di)acryl amides, (di)methacryl amides or (di)thiols which are optionally activated. Preferably, the mono- and difunctional compounds are selected from the group consisting of (di)isocyanates, (di) activated amines or (di) activated esters. Most preferably, the mono- and difunctional compounds are (di)amines. Suitable examples are hexylamine, dodecylamine, 1,6-hexyldiamine, 1,10-decyldiamine, isophorone diamine, adipoyl chloride, glutaryl chloride, succinyl chloride, undecenoyl chloride.

The water gellant based on general formulas (8), (9) and (10) can be prepared by the three methods: (i), (ii) and (iii) described above but is preferably prepared with method (ii). Hence, a polymer component $P-(F)_v$ is reacted with the mono- or difunctional compound described above, followed by covalently end-capping or chain extension with $(F)_x-L-Z$.

THE POLYMER BACKBONE P

25

The polymer backbone P has a molecular weight of about 250 to about 50.000, preferably about 3.000 to about 30.000, more preferably about 5.000 to about 15.000, more preferably about 5.000 to about 10.000 and most preferably about 5.000 to about 8.000 Dalton.

30

The polymer backbone P is preferably a hydrophilic polymer, and according to this invention, a hydrophilic polymer is defined as a polymer having a solubility in water of at least about 1 g/L.

P may represent any type of polymer backbone known in the art, such as polyethers, polyesters, polycarbonates, polyamides, polyoxazolines, polyacrylates, polymethacrylates, polyolefins, hydrogenated polyolefins, polysiloxanes, polycarbonates, (per)fluorinated polyethers, polyvinylenes, or co-polymers of such
5 polymers. More preferably, the polymer backbone is a polyether, polyester, polycarbonate, polyamide, polyoxazoline, polyacrylate, polymethacrylate, polyolefin, hydrogenated polyolefin, polycarbonate, polyvinylene, or a co-polymer of such polymers. Even more preferred are polyethers, polyesters, polycarbonates, or copolymers thereof. Most preferably, P is a polyether, preferably a polyglycol,
10 preferably a polyethylene glycol or a poly ethylene-co-propylene glycol (random or block), most preferably a polyethylene glycol.

Although some of the above listed polymer backbones P themselves may not be hydrophilic per se, co-polymerizing them with the right amount of water soluble polymer, or use of a combination of these polymer backbones P can lead to a water
15 gellant, as will be obvious to a person skilled in the art.

The polymer backbone P that is used to prepare the water gellant of this invention can have different numbers of functional groups. The average functionality of the functional polymer is preferably about 1.5 to about 2, more preferably about 1.8 to about 2, and most preferably about 1.9 to about 2.

20 The polymers P that are used to prepare the water gellant of this invention can have different functional groups, such as for example alcohols, amines, thiols, isocyanates, carboxylic acids or combinations of these end groups. Preferably, the functional groups are alcohols or isocyanates, most preferably isocyanates. In this most preferred embodiment, the polymer backbone P is derived from a polymer having two
25 hydroxy-end-groups after reaction with about 2 to 6 molar equivalents of diisocyanate, preferably with about 2 to 3, and most preferably with about 2 molar equivalents of diisocyanate to form an isocyanate functional polymer. The diisocyanates are preferably selected from the group consisting of 1, ω -diisocyanates comprising 1 to 20 carbon atoms, more preferably from the group consisting of toluene diisocyanate (TDI),
30 methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI), methylene dicyclohexane 4,4-diisocyanate (HMDI), isophorone diisocyanate (IPDI), hexane diisocyanate (HDI), 1,6-diisocyanato-2,2,4-trimethylhexane, 1,6-diisocyanato-2,4,4-trimethylhexane, 1,3-xylylene diisocyanate, 1,4-xylylene diisocyanate and uretdione dimers of HDI, more preferably

from the group consisting of IPDI, HMDI, HDI, 1,6-diisocyanato-2,2,4-trimethylhexane and 1,6-diisocyanato-2,4,4-trimethylhexane. Most preferably, the diisocyanate is isophorone diisocyanate (IPDI) or methylene dicyclohexane 4,4-diisocyanate (HMDI).

5 The polymer backbones P that are used to prepare the water gellant of this invention can be combinations of polymers with different backbone compositions, different architectures, different molecular weights and/or a different (numbers of) functional groups. For example, one can use a telechelic polyethylene glycol with a molecular weight of about 5000 Dalton in combination with a telechelic polyester with
10 a molecular weight of about 500 Dalton.

 Examples of telechelic polymers with hydroxyl end-groups that can be used for polymer backbone P are (a) polyetherdiols having a polyoxyalkylene structure, such as polyethylene glycols, polypropylene glycols, poly(ethylene-co-propylene) glycols (random or block), poly(ethylene-block-propylene-block-ethylene) glycols (also known
15 as Pluronics), polytetramethylene glycols (*i.e.* poly-tetrahydrofurans) or poly(ethylene-co-tetramethylene) glycols. Other examples are (b) polyesterdiols or copolyester diols, made by polycondensation of dicarboxylic acids and diols, or by polycondensation of hydroxyacids, or by ringopening polymerisation of *e.g.* ϵ -caprolactone, glycolide, lactide, δ -valerolactone, 1,4-dioxane-2-one, 1,5-dioxepan-2-one, oxepan-2,7-dione, and
20 the like. Specific examples are poly ϵ -caprolactonediol, hydroxy terminated polyadipates or polyglutarates, such as hydroxy terminated poly(1,4-butylene adipate)s, hydroxy terminated poly(1,2-ethylene adipate)s, hydroxy terminated poly(1,4-butylene glutarate)s, hydroxy terminated poly(2-methyl-1,3-propylene adipate)s, hydroxy terminated poly(2-methyl-1,3-propylene glutarate)s, hydroxy terminated poly(2-
25 methyl-1,5-pentylene adipate)s, polyesterdiols of polylactides, polyglycolides, poly(lactide-co-glycolide)s, poly(hydroxy butyrate)s, polyterephthalates such as polyethyleneterephthalates and polybutyleneterephthalates, polyisophthalates (*e.g.* hydroxy terminated copolymers of 5-NaSO₃-isophthalic acid, isophthalic acid, diethyleneglycol and bis-hydroxymethylene-cyclohexane, hydroxy terminated
30 copolymers of isophthalic acid and 1,4-butanediol, hydroxy terminated copolymers of 5-NaSO₃-isophthalic acid, adipic acid, phthalic acid and 1,6-hexanediol) and polyphthalates such as poly(1,6-hexylene phthalate)s or hydroxy terminated copolymers of phthalic acid and diethyleneglycol. Further examples include (c)

polyolefine diols or hydrogenated polyolefine diols, such as hydroxyl functionalized polybutadienes or hydroxyl functionalized hydrogenated poly(ethylene-butylene)s such as Kraton L-2203 or Nisso-type materials. Other examples are (d) hydroxy functionalized polycarbonates and co-polycarbonates based on glycols or made by ringopening polymerization of e.g. trimethylenecarbonate, 1,3-dioxepane-2-one, 1,3-dioxanone-2-on and 1,3,8,10-tetraoxacyclotetradecane-2,9-dione. Examples are hydroxy terminated poly(1,3-propanediol carbonate)glycols, poly(trimethylenecarbonate)s, poly(1,6-hexanediol carbonate)glycols. More examples include (e) low molecular weight diols based on dimerized fatty acids such as Pripols and Priplasts, such as Pripol 2033, Priplast 3190 or Priplast 3192 (marketed by Uniqema BV, the Netherlands), (f) polysiloxanes such as α,ω - bis(6-hydroxy hexyl) polydimethylsiloxanes, α,ω -bis(oligo-ethyleneoxide) polydimethylsiloxanes, and (g) polyamides such as α,ω -dihydroxy-polyamides and polyoxazolines. Of course, examples are also (h) alcohol terminated co-polymers of the examples mentioned above, such as (block)-co-polymers of poly-caprolactone and ethylene glycol or (block)-co-polymers of poly-caprolactone and tetramethylene glycol.

Preferably, polymer backbone P comprises telechelic polymers of categories (a), (b), (d), and (g), more preferred are those of (a). Within category (a), the telechelic polymer is preferably selected from the group consisting of polyethylene glycol, poly(tetrahydrofuran) or poly(ethylene-co-propylene) glycol (random or block), most preferably, polyethylene glycol.

As an alternative, although less preferred, telechelic polyoxyalkylene amines may be used, such as polyethylene glycols or poly(ethylene-co-propylene) glycols with terminal amino groups. Examples are Jeffamines® as sold by Huntsman.

According to the second embodiment of this invention, the functional polymer P that is used to prepare the water gellant is from natural origin and it is selected from the group consisting of proteins (e.g. proteins selected from the group consisting of collagen, gelatine, and fibrin); polysaccharides (e.g. polysaccharides selected from the group consisting of hyaluronic acid, agar, agarose, xantham gums, natural gum, alginate, chitosan and inulin) and synthetic derivatives from these polymers of natural origin, preferably collagen or hyaluronic acid.

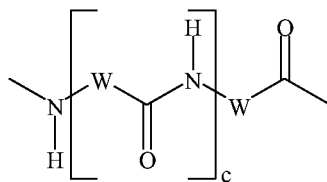
THE CROSS-LINKABLE GROUP D

The cross-linkable group D comprises a reactive group that is able to cross-link with other groups D, optionally in the presence of an auxiliary A that mediates or initiates the cross-linking, or is able to cross-link with an auxiliary A. Preferably, cross-linkable group D cross-links via an oxidative pathway mediated by auxiliary A as oxidator.

The cross-linkable group D has a molecular weight of about 70 to about 1.000, preferably about 70 to about 500, more preferably about 70 to about 250, more preferably about 70 to about 200 and most preferably about 100 to about 175 Dalton.

The cross-linkable groups D that are used to prepare the water gellant of the invention comprise at least one functional group F that can react with the polymer backbone P or the 4H-unit and form a chemical bond with P or the 4H-unit, and they comprise at least one reactive group Z that can cross-link with other groups Z.

It is preferred that D represents the group $(-)_xL-Z$, wherein x is 1 to 4, L is a linker moiety that is covalently linked to Z and is selected from (i) the group consisting of cyclic, linear or branched $C_1 - C_{24}$ alkylene groups, $C_6 - C_{24}$ arylene groups, $C_7 - C_{24}$ alkarylene groups and $C_7 - C_{24}$ arylalkylene groups and/or (ii) the group consisting of amino acid residues according to the formula (G):



(G)

wherein W is a cyclic, linear or branched $C_1 - C_{24}$ alkylene group and c is 0 - 3.

Z is preferably selected from the group consisting of multihydroxy aryl, $C_1 - C_6$ alkyleneboronic acid, $C_6 - C_{12}$ aryleneboronic acid, $C_7 - C_{12}$ alkylaryleneboronic acid, $C_7 - C_{12}$ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether $-S-S-R^9$ (wherein R^9 is $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl or alanyl), $C_2 - C_6$ alkynyl, $C_2 - C_6$ alkenyl, methacrylate or acrylate. An example of an alkylene boronic acid group is the group methylene boronic acid $-CH_2-B(OH)_2$. An example of an dithioether group is dithiocysteine.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention the cross-linkable component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention has the general formula (C):



where Z represents a chemical group that can cross-link, L represents a linker moiety, and F represents the reactive group linked to the linker moiety, and x represents the number of reactive groups connected to the linker moiety that ranges from 1 to 4. Preferably, x ranges from 1 to 2, most preferably x is 1 and the cross-linkable component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention can then be represented by the following formula:



F is a reactive group that can react with complementary reactive groups on P or the 4H-unit. F is selected from hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups, and forms moieties as defined in the section “**GENERAL DEFINITIONS**”.

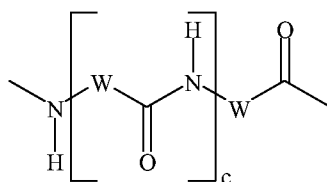
Preferably, F is selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, and carboxylic acid, more preferably hydroxy and amine, most preferably amine. When x is 2 or larger, F can be the same or different in one D.

Z can be any chemical group that can react with the same chemical group or with a complementary chemical group, preferably Z is a chemical group that can react with the same chemical group in the presence of an auxiliary A. Preferably, Z is selected from multihydroxy aryl (which contains 2 - 6 hydroxy groups, preferably 2 hydroxy groups), C₁ - C₆ alkyleneboronic acid, C₆ - C₁₂ aryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether -S-S-R⁹ (wherein R⁹ is C₁ - C₆ alkyl or alanyl), C₂ - C₆ alkynyl or C₂ - C₆ alkenyl, methacrylate and acrylate. More preferably, Z is selected from multihydroxy aryl, C₁ - C₆ alkyleneboronic acid, C₆ - C₁₂ aryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryleneboronic acid,

C₇ - C₁₂ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether -S-S-R⁹ (wherein R⁹ is C₁ - C₆ alkyl or alanyl) and C₂ - C₆ alkynyl, most preferably multihydroxy aryl.

L is a linker moiety that is covalently linked to F and covalently linked to Z. L is selected from (i) the group consisting of cyclic, linear or branched C₁ - C₂₄ alkylene groups, C₆ - C₂₄ arylene groups, C₇ - C₂₄ alkarylene groups and C₇ - C₂₄ arylalkylene groups, wherein the alkylene groups, arylene groups, alkarylene groups and arylalkylene groups optionally, but not preferably, comprise 1 - 5 heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N and S, and (ii) the group consisting of amino acids, protected amino acids, dipeptides, tripeptides, tetrapeptides, protected or partially protected, or a combination of (i) and (ii). The groups according to group (ii) do not necessarily comprise a reactive group F since they are already provided with an (protected) amino group and a (protected) carboxylic acid group. Preferably, L is selected from (i).

According to an embodiment, the groups according to group (ii) are preferably be presented by formula (E):



(E)

20

wherein W is a cyclic, linear or branched C₁ - C₂₄ alkylene group and c is 0 - 3.

In a first preferred embodiment, the cross-linking component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention comprises a 3,4-dihydroxy aryl group as cross-linkable group Z and F is selected from amine, hydroxy, and carboxylic acid. More preferably, the cross-linking component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention is selected from dopamine, 3,4-dihydroxy cinnamic acid, 3,4-dihydroxy hydrocinnamic acid, 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl acetic acid, 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl alanine, 3-hydroxy tyrosol, 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl glycol, all optionally comprising amino acid or oligopeptide residues, even more preferably from dopamine, 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl alanine, and 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl alanine that optionally comprises oligopeptides.

30

In a second preferred embodiment, the cross-linking component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention comprises a thiol group as cross-linkable group Z and F is selected from amine, hydroxyl, and carboxylic acid. More preferably, the cross-linking component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention is selected from α,ω -mercapto alkyl amines, α,ω -mercapto alkyl alcohols, α,ω -mercapto carboxylic acids, and cysteine derivatives, in which the mercapto-group is optionally present as a thiuronium group, even more preferably selected from cysteamine, cysteine, 2-mercapto ethanol, 3-mercapto propanol, 6-mercapto hexanoic acid, 12-mercapto dodecanoic acid, and cysteine-comprising oligopeptides.

In a third preferred embodiment, the cross-linking component that is used to prepare the water gellant of the invention comprises an alkynyl, alkenyl or acrylate as cross-linkable group Z, and F is selected from amine, hydroxyl, and carboxylic acid. Most preferably, Z is alkynyl in this embodiment. Preferably, the alkynyl and alkenyl groups are $C_2 - C_{24}$ alkynyl and $C_2 - C_{24}$ alkenyl groups.

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THE LIQUID AQUEOUS FORMULATION

The liquid aqueous formulation comprises the water gellant dissolved in water. The amount of the water gellant in the liquid aqueous formulation ranges from about 0.3% - 50.0% by weight, preferably from about 1% - 25% by weight, more preferably from about 1% - 20% by weight, more preferably from about 2% - 10% by weight, and most preferably from about 2% - 3% by weight, based on the total weight of the liquid aqueous formulation. The liquid aqueous formulation may contain additional functional ingredients that will contribute to the specific use of the hydrogel.

The liquid aqueous formulation comprises about 50.0 - 99.7 wt.% of water, preferably about 75 - 99% by weight, more preferably about 80 -99 wt.%, and most preferably about 90 -98 wt.%, based on the total weight of the liquid aqueous formulation. Preferably, the water contains a pH-buffer known in the art, such as a PBS or borate buffer.

Preferably, the pH of the liquid aqueous formulation is in between pH of about 6 and pH of about 11, more preferably in between pH of about 7 and pH of about 9, most preferably in between pH of about 7 and pH of about 8.

The viscosity of the liquid aqueous formulation is low enough to allow administration of the formulation by a syringe or catheter. Consequently, the liquid aqueous formulation is not gelled as determined with a simple inverted vial test. More preferably, the loss factor ($\tan \delta$) at 1 Hz and 37°C as determined with a plate-plate rheometer is about 0.7 or higher, most preferably the loss factor is higher than about 1.0.

In another preferred embodiment, the dynamic viscosity of the liquid aqueous formulation at 25°C is about 0.01 to about 10 Pa.s, preferably of about 0.1 to about 8 Pa.s, most preferably of about 0.8 to about 5 Pa.s, as measured with a rotational viscometer.

Obviously, but not preferably, the liquid aqueous formulation may contain other polar solvents, preferably those solvents having a dielectric constant ϵ at 20°C of at least about 20. The upper limit is given by the dielectric constant ϵ at 20 °C for pure water which is about 80 (Handbook of Chemistry & Physics, 59th Ed., page E-61, 1978 - 1979). Suitable examples are DMSO, alcohols, preferably ethanol, glycols, and glycerols. Preferably ethanol, glycol, propyleneglycol, and glycerol. Preferably, the amount of other solvents is lower than about 15% by weight, more preferably lower than about 8% by weight, and most preferably lower than about 0.1% by weight, calculated on the basis of the total weight of the liquid aqueous formulation.

In another preferred embodiment, the liquid aqueous formulation comprises an additional polymer in order to modify the rheological properties of the liquid aqueous formulation. This additional polymer is hydrophilic and may represent any type of polymer backbone known in the art, preferably polyethers, polyesters, polyamides, polyoxazolines, polyamines, polyacrylates, polymethacrylates, polyolefins, hydrogenated polyolefins, polysiloxanes, polycarbonates, (per)fluorinated polyethers, polyvinylenes, or co-polymers of such polymers. More preferably, the polymer backbone is a polyether, polyester, polyacrylate, polymethacrylate, polyolefin, hydrogenated polyolefin, polycarbonate, polyvinylene, or a co-polymer of such polymers. Even more preferred are polyethers, polyesters, or copolymers thereof. Most preferably, this additional polymer is a polyether, preferably a polyglycol, preferably a polyethylene glycol or a poly ethylene-co-propylene glycol (random or block), most preferably a polyethylene glycol.

This additional polymer preferably is a supramolecular polymer that comprises at least one 4H-unit. These polymers and their aqueous formulation are in detail disclosed in WO 2006/118460 and EP 1972661 A1, which are incorporated by reference herein. The amount of additional polymer is in the range of about 0 % to 99 % by weight of the total solids content, preferably about 1% to 90% by weight, most preferably about 1% to 50% by weight of the total solids content of the liquid aqueous formulation.

The liquid aqueous formulation may comprise additional ingredients selected from a solid filler, a diluent, a thickener, a carrier, and an excipient known in the art. A non-limited list of additional ingredients includes sugars, starches, cellulose and its derivatives, gelatin, talc, clays, waxes (natural and synthetic), oils from natural origin, fatty acids and their esters, and ionic additives. Preferably, clay particles are added to improve the hydrogel properties. Clay particles may be selected from laponite and bentonite, optionally in the presence of (ionic) compatibilizers known in the art.

In another embodiment, the liquid aqueous formulations comprise a biologically active or pharmaceutically active compound. The liquid aqueous formulation may also comprise a bioactive species, *e.g.* a living cell, an enzyme, or a micro-organism. A living cell in this embodiment means and includes individual animal and plant cells, cell clusters, tissues, organs and organisms, including organisms such as bacteria, fungi or moulds. A biologically active or pharmaceutically active compound, as used herein, includes a compound which provides a therapeutic, diagnostic or prophylactic effect, a compound that affects or participates in tissue growth, cell growth, cell differentiation, a compound that may be able to invoke a biological action such as an immune response, or could play any other role in one or more biological processes. Such compounds, peptide or non-peptide, protein or non-protein, include, but are not limited to, antimicrobial agents (including antibacterial, hemotherapeutic and anti-fungal agents), anti-viral agents, anti-tumor agents, hormones, hormone antagonists, corticosteroids such as mineralocorticosteroids or glucocorticosteroids, androgens, estrogens, progestins immunogenic agents, anti-inflammatory agents, anti-gout agents, centrally acting analgesics, local anesthetics, centrally active muscle relaxants, growth factors, (fluorescent) dyes, contrast agents, nucleic acids, DNA-derivatives, RNA-derivatives, lipids, lipopolysaccharides, (poly)saccharides, vitamins, and peptides, polypeptides and proteins in general. In this embodiment, preferably, the biologically

active compounds comprises at least one 4H-unit up to a maximum of ten 4H-units, preferably one to four, and most preferably two to four 4H-units. These 4H-units are covalently attached to the biologically active compound.

Apart from the previous list, it is also possible to load the liquid aqueous formulations with inorganic compounds, such as reactive oxygen scavengers and bone-extracts like apatite.

It is possible within the scope of the present invention to incorporate drugs of a polymeric nature, but also to incorporate drugs or vitamins of a relatively small molecular weight of less than about 1500, or even less than about 500.

10 Additionally, two or more different biologically active compounds may be present in the liquid aqueous formulations. This is especially beneficial when the bioactivity is based on multivalent and/or synergistic interactions. A non-limiting example of such interaction is that cell adhesion is advantageously mediated by a combination of RGD and PHSRN peptides.

15 In a preferred embodiment of this invention, the liquid aqueous formulation comprises an auxiliary A that initiates or mediates the cross-linking reaction of the D groups in the water gellant. These auxiliaries A can be any species that initiates or mediates chemical reactions with groups Z. Preferably, A is selected from oxidators, radical-initiators, redox-active compounds, metal salts, metalloids-containing oxyanions, acids and bases, Lewis-acids, Lewis-bases, or a combinations of these auxiliaries. A typical molar ratio of A to D is in between 0.01 to 2.0 (A to D), a preferred molar ratio is in between 0.4 to 1.0 (A to D).

25 In a first preferred embodiment of this embodiment, A is an oxidant or initiator selected from alkali metal periodates (wherein the alkali metal is lithium, sodium, potassium rubidium or cesium), alkaline earth metal periodates (wherein the alkaline earth metal is magnesium, calcium or barium), hydrogen peroxide, organic peroxides ($R^{10}-O-O-R^{10}$), hydroperoxides ($R^{10}-O-O-H$) and peroxy-carboxylic acids ($R^{10}-C(O)-O-O-H$) wherein R^{10} is independently selected from the group of linear, branched or cyclic $C_1 - C_{12}$ alkyl groups, $C_6 - C_{12}$ aryl groups, $C_7 - C_{14}$ alkaryl groups, $C_7 - C_{14}$ arylalkyl groups and mixtures thereof, salts of a transition metal (wherein the transition metal is selected from the elements defined by Groups 3 to 12 and Period 4 to 6 of the Periodic Table and wherein the salt anion is preferably chloride), oxygen, inorganic bases (preferably hydroxides from the alkali metals and the alkali earth metals defined

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above), peroxidases (wherein the peroxidase is selected from the group consisting of horseradish peroxidase, cytochrome c peroxidase, glutathione peroxidase and catalase) and oxidases (wherein the oxidase is selected from the group consisting of glucose oxidase, cytochrome P450 oxidase and laccase), most preferably sodium periodate, hydrogen peroxide, oxygen, iron(III)chloride, and horseradish peroxidase.

In a second preferred embodiment of this embodiment, A is a cross-linker or initiator comprising two or more reactive groups selected from boronic acids according to the formula $R^{10}-B(OH)_2$, thiols according to the formula $R^{10}-SH$, thioesters according to the formula $R^{10}-C(O)-SR^{10}$, transition metal complexes (the transition metals are preferably selected from the group defined for the transition metal salts, most preferably iron(III)chloride or manganese(III)chloride), $C_4 - C_{24}$ dienes and organic azides according to the formula $R^{10}-N_3$.

THE HYDROGEL

The composition of the hydrogel is identical to that of the liquid aqueous formulation, provided that the water-gellant is in a cross-linked state. The amount of the cross-linked water gellant in the hydrogel ranges from about 0.3% - 50.0% by weight, preferably from about 1% - 25% by weight, more preferably from about 1% - 20% by weight, yet more preferably from about 1% - 10% by weight, and most preferably from about 2% - 3% by weight, based on the total weight of the hydrogel. The hydrogel may contain additional functional ingredients that will contribute to the specific use of the hydrogel.

The hydrogel comprises about 50.0 - 99.7 wt.% of water, preferably about 75 - 99% by weight, more preferably 80 - 99 wt.%, yet more preferably 90 - 99% by weight and most preferably 97 to 98 wt.%, based on the total weight of the hydrogel.

Obviously, but not preferably, the hydrogel may contain other polar solvents, preferably those solvents having a dielectric constant ϵ at 20°C of at least about 20. The upper limit is given by the dielectric constant ϵ at 20 °C for pure water which is about 80 (Handbook of Chemistry & Physics, 59th Ed., page E-61, 1978 - 1979). Suitable examples are DMSO, alcohols, preferably ethanol, glycols, and glycerols. Preferably ethanol, glycol, propyleneglycol, and glycerol. Preferably, the amount of other solvents is lower than about 15% by weight, more preferably lower than about 8% by weight,

and most preferably lower than about 0.1% by weight, calculated on the basis of the total weight of the hydrogel.

The hydrogels according to the present invention have a limited amount of cross-links, preferably the molecular weight per cross-link is higher than about 3.000 Da, more preferably higher than about 4.000, most preferably higher than about 5.000 Da.

The hydrogels according to the present invention have a wide range of mechanical properties, ranging from elastic to tough, depending on the nature of the polymer backbone P, the nature of the cross linker D, and the number of 4H-units attached to the polymer. In the preferred case of elastic hydrogels, the hydrogel materials preferably have an elongation at break at 25 °C greater than about 100%, more preferably greater than about 300%, more preferably greater than about 600%. In another preferred case of elastic hydrogels, the hydrogel materials preferably have Young's modulus in between about 1 kPa to about 1 MPa, more preferably in between about 10 kPa to about 200 kPa, and most preferably in between about 20 kPa to about 100 kPa.

The hydrogels according to the present invention can be prepared by three different methods: (i) the liquid aqueous formulation comprising the auxiliary A is administered to the desired location and the hydrogel is formed in time; (ii) the liquid aqueous formulation is *in situ* mixed with the auxiliary A resulting in the formation of the hydrogel; (iii) the liquid aqueous formulation is administered to the desired location and the hydrogel is formed in time; (iv) the liquid aqueous formulation is *in situ* mixed with another liquid aqueous formulation resulting in the formation of the hydrogel. For methods (i) and (iii) slower cross-linking reactions are preferred than for methods (ii) and (iv). Preferably for methods (i) and (iii), the hydrogel is formed in between about 0.1 minutes and about 60 minutes, more preferably in between about 2 minutes and about 30 minutes, most preferably in between about 4 minutes and about 25 minutes. Whereas for methods (ii) and (iv), the hydrogel is preferably formed in between about 0.05 minutes and about 10 minutes, more preferably in between about 0.1 minutes and about 5 minutes, most preferably in between about 0.2 minutes and about 3 minutes.

Administration of the liquid formulation to the location where the hydrogels needs to be formed can be done by any method in the art, preferably selected from injection through a needle, injection through a catheter, injection through a double

chamber syringe, injection through a double chamber catheter, spraying, foaming, or pouring.

The hydrogels according to the present invention show preferably only a limited amount of swelling due to water absorption. The increase in weight of the gel due to absorption of water after 2 days at 37°C is preferably less than about 500%, more preferably less than about 300%, most preferably less than about 250%.

The hydrogels preferably keep their structural integrity and will not dissolve or fall apart into small fragments, upon exposure to an excess water after 2 days at 37°C.

The hydrogel may comprise additional ingredients such as those listed for the liquid aqueous formulation. In a preferred embodiment, the hydrogel comprises a biologically active or pharmaceutically active compound as set out for the liquid aqueous formulation.

The hydrogels according to the invention show preferably adhesive properties to tissue, skin, and keratin-containing materials. More preferably, these hydrogels have a mean lap-shear tensile strength of at least about 10 kPa, more preferable at least about 40 kPa, and most preferable at least about 50 kPa, using porcine skin as substrates and having a hydrogel solids content of about 15% by weight in PBS.

In a preferred embodiment of this invention, the water gellant, the liquid aqueous formulation and the hydrogel, are used in biomedical applications, such as carriers for the controlled release of drugs, scaffolds for tissue-engineering, prosthetic intervertebral disc nucleus, cardio-vascular structures, non-fouling surfaces, wound-dressings and wound-care, artificial cartilage material, tissue-adhesion, tissue sealant, cardiac patch, transdermal patch, (adhesive) coatings for medical devices, as water absorbers, gelators, and as thickeners for aqueous solvents. In another preferred embodiment of this invention, the water gellant, the liquid aqueous formulation and the hydrogel, are used in cosmetic applications, such as formulations used for skin-care, make-up, hair-care, deodorants and anti-perspirants.

EXAMPLES

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The following examples further illustrate the preferred embodiments of the invention. When not specifically mentioned, chemicals are obtained from Sigma Aldrich. IPDI is isophorone diisocyanate, HMDI is methylene dicyclohexane 4,4-

diisocyanate, DBTDL is dibutyl tin dilaurate, DIPEA is diisopropylethylamine. SEC is performed with a GPC-system equipped with a KD-804 column (Showa Denko, 500 – 400000 Da) using RI detection with DMF comprising 10 mM LiBr as eluent at a flow rate of 1.0 mL/min. M_n and M_w are calculated on selected peak relative to PEG-standards (Polymer Laboratories, molecular weight range: 580 - 100000 g/mol)

Polymer 1

Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-3000 (16.0 g, 5.33 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (676 mg, 4.00 mmol) and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 70°C, IPDI (2.37 g, 10.7 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 120°C, followed by cooling to 100°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, dopamine hydrochloride (557 mg, 2.93 mmol) was dissolved in 2 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.55 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 100°C. The mixture was stirred for 15 minutes at 100°C, followed by cooling to 70°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 30 mL methyl-THF was added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 30 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, which was isolated by filtration. The dried precipitate was redissolved in 60 mL chloroform and 7 mL ethanol, filtered, and precipitated by the addition of methyl-t-butyl ether. The product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 87%. SEC: $M_n = 5.0$ kDa

Polymer 2

Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (31.6 g, 5.27 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (455 mg, 2.69 mmol) and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 70°C, IPDI (2.34 g, 10.53 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 120°C, followed by cooling to 100°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, dopamine hydrochloride (1.10 g, 5.79 mmol) was dissolved in 7 mL DMSO in the presence of 1.1 mL DIPEA,

and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 100°C. The mixture was stirred for 15 minutes at 100°C, followed by cooling to 70°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 50 mL methyl-THF was added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 50 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, which was isolated by filtration. The dried precipitate was redissolved in 80 mL chloroform and 10 mL ethanol, filtered, and precipitated by the addition of methyl-t-butyl ether. The product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 91%. SEC: $M_n = 9.0$ kDa

10 Polymer 3

Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (22.8 g, 3.80 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (425 mg, 2.51 mmol) and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 80°C, HMDI (1.99 g, 7.59 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 130°C, followed by cooling to 100°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, dopamine hydrochloride (0.48 g, 2.53 mmol) was dissolved in 2 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.5 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 100°C. The mixture was stirred for 15 minutes at 100°C, followed by cooling to 70°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 30 mL methyl-THF was added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 30 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, which was isolated by filtration. The dried precipitate was redissolved in 60 mL chloroform and 7 mL ethanol, filtered, and precipitated by the addition of methyl-t-butyl ether. The product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 86%. SEC: $M_n = 12$ kDa

Polymer 4

30 Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-10000 (25.0 g, 2.50 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (280 mg, 1.66 mmol) and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 80°C, HMDI (1.31 g, 4.99 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while

stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 130°C, followed by cooling to 100°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, dopamine hydrochloride (0.35 g, 1.84 mmol) was dissolved in 1.5 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.35 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 100°C. The mixture was stirred
5 for 15 minutes at 100°C, followed by cooling to 70°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 30 mL methyl-THF was added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 30 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, which was isolated by filtration. The dried precipitate was redissolved in 80 mL chloroform and 10 mL ethanol, filtered, and precipitated by
10 the addition of methyl-t-butyl ether. The product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 86%. SEC: $M_n = 21$ kDa

Polymer 5

15 Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (10.0 g, 1.67 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (211 mg, 1.25 mmol) and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 70°C, IPDI (0.74 g, 3.33 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 120°C, followed by
20 cooling to 80°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, 2-(2-aminoethyl)isothiourea dihydrobromide (234 mg, 0.83 mmol) was dissolved in 2 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.3 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 80°C. The mixture was stirred for 60 minutes at 80°C, followed by cooling to 60°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 50 mL methyl-THF and 10 mL ethanol were added,
25 followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 100 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, the product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 79%. SEC: $M_n = 9.3$ kDa

Polymer 6

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Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (12.6 g, 2.11 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 70°C, IPDI (0.94 g, 4.23 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the

reaction mixture was stirred for another 1h at 80°C. Subsequently, 1,6-diaminohexane (122 mg, 1.06 mmol) and dopamine hydrochloride (440 mg, 2.32 mmol) were dissolved in 2 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.3 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 80°C. The mixture was stirred for 60 minutes at 80°C, followed by cooling to 60°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 50 mL methyl-THF and 50 mL ethanol were added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 100 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, the product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residu. Yield: 92%. SEC: $M_n = 11$ kDa

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Comparative Polymer 1

Comparative Polymer 1 is a linear polymer with only 4H units according to WO 2006/118460.

15 Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (100 g, 16.7 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C together with 2-amino-4-hydroxy-5-(2-hydroxy ethyl)-6-methyl-pyrimidine (2.46 g, 14.6 mmol) and stirred for 2 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 80°C, HMDI (8.75 g, 33.4 mmol) was added and 2 drops DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 2h at 120°C, followed by putting it in an oven 145°C *in vacuo* for 45 minutes, after which it was collected and the product was isolated as a solid polymer at room temperature. Yield: 96%. SEC: $M_n = 24$ kDa

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Comparative Polymer 2

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Comparitive Polymer 2 is linear cross-linkable polymer with no 4H units.

30 Telechelic hydroxy terminated PEG-6000 (10.5 g, 1.75 mmol) was heated *in vacuo* in a 3-neck flask to 120°C and stirred for 1 h *in vacuo*. After cooling to 70°C, IPDI (583 mg, 2.62 mmol) was added and 1 drop DBTDL while stirring. After 1 h the reaction mixture was stirred for another 1h at 110°C, followed by cooling to 100°C under an argon atmosphere. Subsequently, dopamine hydrochloride (366 mg, 1.93 mmol) was dissolved in 3 mL DMSO in the presence of 0.35 mL DIPEA, and added to the viscous reaction mixture at 100°C. The mixture was stirred for 15 minutes at

100°C, followed by cooling to 70°C while stirring under an argon atmosphere. To this mixture 50 mL methyl-THF was added, followed by cooling and stirring until 25°C after which 50 mL methyl-t-butyl ether was added resulting in the formation of a white precipitate, which was isolated by filtration. The dried precipitate was redissolved in 80
5 mL chloroform and 10 mL ethanol, filtered, and precipitated by the addition of methyl-t-butyl ether. The product was isolated by filtration and subsequent drying of the residue. Yield: 91%. SEC: $M_n = 7.2$ kDa

Aqueous liquid formulations

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Aqueous solutions were obtained by dissolving the desired amount of polymer into deionized water or into standard PBS buffer solution at pH = 7.4. Table 1 lists typical formulations obtained with the polymers of the examples.

Table 1: Liquid Aqueous Formulations

Formulation	Material	Solids content	Medium	Morphology
1	Polymer 1	15 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
2	Polymer 1	20 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
3	Polymer 2	5 wt%	PBS	liquid
4	Polymer 3	5 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
5	Polymer 3	10 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
6	Polymer 3	15 wt%	H ₂ O	viscous liquid
7	Polymer 4	10 wt%	H ₂ O	viscous liquid
8	Polymer 5	10 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
9	Comparative Polymer 1	5 wt%	PBS	elastic gel
10	Comparative Polymer 2	5 wt%	PBS	liquid
11	Comparative Polymer 2	5 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
12	Comparative Polymer 2	10 wt%	H ₂ O	liquid
13	Polymer 6	5 wt%	PBS	liquid
14	Polymer 6	10 wt%	PBS	liquid
15	Polymer 6	20 wt%	PBS	liquid

Formulations 1 to 8 and 13 to 15 of Polymers 1 to 6 and formulations 10 to 12 of Comparative Polymer 2 can be injected with a syringe. Formulation 9 of Comparative Polymer 1 is an elastic gel due to the high level of 4H-units and, therefore, cannot be pushed through a syringe.

Hydrogel

The hydrogels were obtained after cross-linking the selected liquid aqueous formulations from Table 1 by addition of aqueous NaIO₄ solutions, following method A or B, as depicted in Table 2. Hydrogels were formed in timeframes ranging from a few minutes to half an hour.

Method A: NaIO₄ is dissolved in 0,01 M NaOH in concentrations determined by the amount of mol equivalents to be added (typically 0.1 to 0.3 M). The added volume of the NaIO₄ solution is 20% of the volume of the formulation to be cross-linked. After addition of the NaIO₄-solution via a syringe, the mixture is vortexed for 10 seconds and left standing.

Method B: NaIO₄ is dissolved in H₂O in concentrations determined by the amount of mol equivalents to be added (typically 0.03 M). The added volume of the NaIO₄ solution is 20% of the volume of the formulation to be cross-linked. After addition of the NaIO₄-solution via a syringe, the mixture is vortexed for 10 seconds and left standing.

Table 2: Hydrogels

Hydrogel	Formulation	Molequiv NaIO ₄	Method	Morphology
1	1	2.0	A	elastic gel after 15'
2	2	2.0	A	elastic gel after 25'
3	3	0.8	B	elastic gel after 4'
4	4	2.0	A	elastic gel after 20'
5	4	2.0	A	elastic gel after 5'
6	7	2.0	A	elastic gel after 3'
7	10	0.8	B	liquid ^a
8	11	2.0	A	liquid ^a
9	12	2.0	A	liquid ^a
10	13	1.0	B	elastic gel after 6'
12	14	1.0	B	elastic gel after 7'
13	15	1.0	B	elastic gel after 8'

^a these formulations did not gel and remained a liquid for at least 10 hours after addition of the NaIO₄ solutions, revealing that the 4H-units are necessary to obtain a hydrogel.

Tensile performance hydrogels

Dogbones (22 mm) were cut from films of the hydrogels obtained after 16h of curing in a Teflon mould in an environment saturated with water vapour, typical thicknesses were 3 - 5 mm. After cutting of the dogbones they were directly measured in order to prevent significant water evaporation. Tensile testing took place at room temperature with a cross-head speed of 20 mm/min. Results are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Tensile performance of the hydrogels

Hydrogel	E_{mod}	Tensile strength	Elongation@break
1	23 kPa	98 kPa	750%
2	28 kPa	77 kPa	376%

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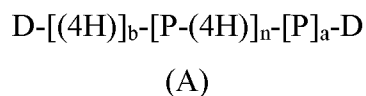
Self Healing of the hydrogels

A circular film with a thickness of 3 mm and a diameter of 25 mm cut from hydrogel 2 was mounted on a 3-necked flask and subjected to a water pressure of 150 mm Hg. The hydrogel seal did not show any leakage. After punching this hydrogel seal with an injection needle (20G), no leakage was observed after removal of the needle. Moreover, punching this hydrogel seal with a scalpel did also not result in leakage after removal of the blade from the hydrogel. Clearly, the freshly created surface show sufficient self-adhesion to close punctures and withstand a load of 0.2 bar.

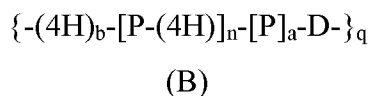
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CLAIMS

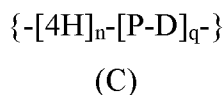
1. A water gellant comprising of a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D and a 4H-unit 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or
5 formula (B) or formula (C):



10 or



15 or



20 wherein:

n is in the range of 1 to 10;

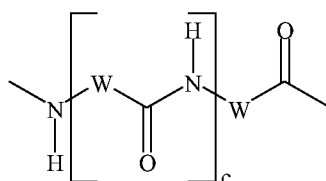
a is 0 or 1;

b is 0 or 1;

q is in the range of 1 to 10;

25 D represents the group $(-)_x\text{L}-\text{Z}$, wherein x is 1 to 4, L is a linker moiety that is covalently linked to Z and is selected from (i) the group consisting of cyclic, linear or branched $\text{C}_1 - \text{C}_{24}$ alkylene groups, $\text{C}_6 - \text{C}_{24}$ arylene groups, $\text{C}_7 - \text{C}_{24}$ alkarylene groups and $\text{C}_7 - \text{C}_{24}$ arylalkylene groups and/or (ii) the group consisting of amino acid residues according to the formula (G):

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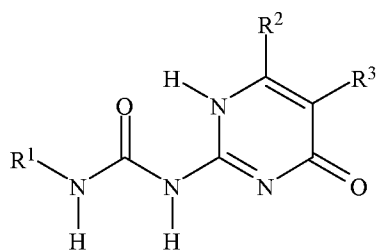
(G)

wherein W is a cyclic, linear or branched C₁ - C₂₄ alkylene group;

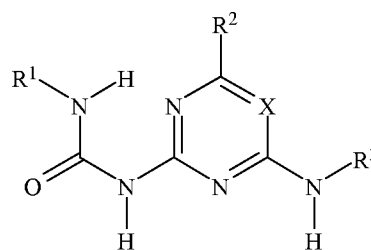
c is 0 - 3;

5 Z is selected from the group consisting of multihydroxy aryl, C₁ - C₆ alkyleneboronic acid, C₆ - C₁₂ aryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether -S-S-R⁹ (wherein R⁹ is C₁ - C₆ alkyl or alanyl), C₂ - C₆ alkynyl, C₂ - C₆ alkenyl, methacrylate and acrylate;

10 4H represents the 4H-unit that has the general formula (3) or formula (4) and tautomers thereof:



(3)



(4)

wherein X is nitrogen atom or a carbon atom bearing a substituent R⁸ and

15 wherein R¹, R², R³ and R⁸ are independently selected from the group consisting of:

(a) hydrogen;

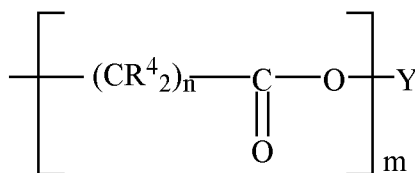
(b) C₁ - C₂₀ alkyl;

(c) C₆ - C₁₂ aryl;

20 (d) C₇ - C₁₂ alkaryl;

(e) C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryl;

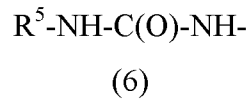
(f) polyester groups having the formula (5)



(5)

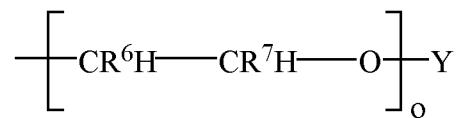
wherein R^4 and Y are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and $C_1 - C_6$ linear or branched alkyl, n is 1 - 6 and m is 10 to 100;

- (g) $C_1 - C_{10}$ alkyl groups substituted with 1 - 4 ureido groups according to the formula (6)



wherein R^5 is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and $C_1 - C_6$ linear or branched alkyl;

- (h) polyether groups having the formula (7)



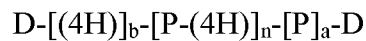
(7)

wherein Y, R^6 and R^7 are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and $C_1 - C_6$ linear or branched alkyl and o is 10 - 100; and wherein the 4H-unit is bonded to the polymer backbone P via R^1 and R^2 while R^3 represents a side chain according to (a) - (h), or via R^1 and R^3 while R^2 represents a side chain according to (a) - (h).

- 2 The water gellant according to claim 1, wherein the polymer backbone P is selected from telechelic polymers and natural polymers.
3. The water gellant according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the water gellant has a number average molecular weight of 1.000 to 60.000.
- 25 4. The water gellant according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the polymer backbone P is selected from the group consisting of polyether, polyester, polycarbonate, and copolymers thereof.
5. The water gellant according any one of the preceding claims, wherein the water gellant has a linear structure according to formula (A).
- 30 6. A liquid aqueous formulation comprising:
 - (a) 0.3% - 50.0% by weight of the water gellant according to any of claims 1 - 5; and

- (b) 50.0 to 99.7 wt.% of water.
7. The liquid aqueous formulation according to claim 6, wherein the liquid aqueous formulation comprises a biologically active or pharmaceutically active compound or a bioactive species.
- 5 8. A hydrogel comprising the water gellant according to any of claims 1 - 5 after cross-linking of groups D.
9. A biomedical or cosmetic product comprising a water gellant according to any of claims 1 - 5.
- 10 10. Use of a biomedical product according to claim 9 in controlled drug-delivery, tissue engineering, wound-care, tissue-adhesion, tissue sealant, cardiac patch, transdermal patch, cardio-vascular structures, and coatings for medical devices.
11. A process for preparing a water gellant comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, and a 4H-unit 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or formula (C) as defined in claim 1:

15



(A)

or

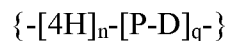
20



(B)

or

25



(C)

30

said process comprising reacting a polymer component P-(F)_v, a 4H-unit 4H-(F)_w and a cross-linking component (F)_x-L-Z, wherein:

F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups;

v is in the range of 1 - 4;

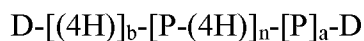
w is in the range of 1 - 4;

x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

5 Z represents a group that can cross-link and is selected from the group consisting of multihydroxy aryl, C₁ - C₆ alkyleneboronic acid, C₆ - C₁₂ aryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ alkylaryleneboronic acid, C₇ - C₁₂ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether -S-S-R⁹ (wherein R⁹ is C₁ - C₆ alkyl or alanyl), C₂ - C₆ alkynyl, C₂ - C₆ alkenyl, methacrylate and acrylate.

10 12. A process for preparing a water gellant comprising a hydrophilic polymer backbone P, a cross-linkable group D, and a 4H-unit 4H, having the structure according to formula (A) or formula (B) or formula (C) as defined in claim 1:



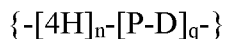
15 (A)

or



20 (B)

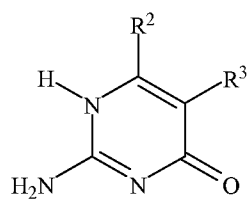
or



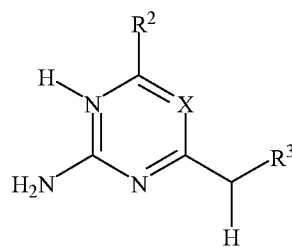
25 (C)

said process comprising reacting a polymer component P-(F)_v, a precursor of the 4H-unit according to the formula 4H*-(F)_w and a cross-linking component (F)_x-L-Z, wherein:

30 4H*-(F)_w is represented by formula (11) or formula (12):



(11)



(12)

wherein R^2 , R^3 and X have the meaning as defined in claim 1;

F represents a reactive end-group selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, amine, thiol, isocyanate, carboxylic acid, carboxylic ester, and combinations of these end groups;

v is in the range of 1 - 4;

w is in the range of 1 - 4;

x is in the range of 1 - 4;

L represents a linker moiety; and

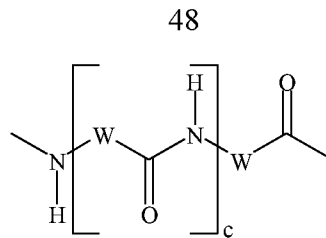
Z represents a group that can cross-link and is selected from the group consisting of multihydroxy aryl, $C_1 - C_6$ alkyleneboronic acid, $C_6 - C_{12}$ aryleneboronic acid, $C_7 - C_{12}$ alkylaryleneboronic acid, $C_7 - C_{12}$ arylalkyleneboronic acid, thiol, dithioether $-S-S-R^9$ (wherein R^9 is $C_1 - C_6$ alkyl or alanyl), $C_2 - C_6$ alkynyl, $C_2 - C_6$ alkenyl, methacrylate and acrylate.

13. The process according to claim 11 or claim 12, wherein the cross-linking component is represented by the formula F-L-Z.

14. The process according to claim 11 or claim 12, wherein the cross-linking component is selected from dopamine, 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl alanine and 3,4-dihydroxy phenyl alanine comprising oligopeptides.

15. The process according to any one of claims 11 - 13, wherein L is a linker moiety that is covalently linked to Z and is selected from (i) the group consisting of cyclic, linear or branched $C_1 - C_{24}$ alkylene groups, $C_6 - C_{24}$ arylene groups, $C_7 - C_{24}$ alkarylene groups and $C_7 - C_{24}$ arylalkylene groups and/or (ii) the group consisting of amino acids, protected amino acids, dipeptides, tripeptides, tetrapeptides.

16. The process according to claim 15, wherein (ii) is a group consisting of amino acid residues according to the formula (G):



(G)

wherein W is a cyclic, linear or branched C₁ - C₂₄ alkylene group; and c is 0 - 3.

- 5 17. A water gellant obtainable by the process according to any one of claims 11 - 16.
18. A process for preparing a hydrogel, a cosmetic or a biomedical product, wherein a liquid aqueous formulation comprising:
- (a) 0.3 - 80.0 wt.%, based on the total weight of the formulation, of a water gellant according to any one of claims 1 - 5 or 17; and
- 10 (b) 20.0 to 99.7 wt.% water;
- is reacted with an auxiliary A that initiates or mediates the cross-linking reaction of the D moieties in the water gellant.
18. A hydrogel, a cosmetic or biomedical product obtainable by the process according to claim 17.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/NL2015/050545

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 INV. A61K9/00 A61L24/00 A61L26/00 C08G65/329 C08G65/333
 A61K47/10 A61K47/48
 ADD.
 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED
 Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 A61K A61L C08G C08L
 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
 EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	PATRICIA Y. W. DANKERS ET AL: "Hierarchical Formation of Supramolecular Transient Networks in Water: A Modular Injectable Delivery System", ADVANCED MATERIALS, vol. 24, no. 20, 22 May 2012 (2012-05-22), pages 2703-2709, XP055161851, ISSN: 0935-9648, DOI: 10.1002/adma.201104072 page 2703, paragraph 2 - page 2704, paragraph 4 page 2706, paragraph 2 - page 2708, paragraph 2 figures 1, 4 ----- -/--	1-19

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family
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Date of the actual completion of the international search 2 September 2015	Date of mailing of the international search report 10/09/2015
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Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer González Ferreiro, M
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C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	J. H. K. KY HIRSCHBERG ET AL: "Helical Supramolecular Aggregates Based on Ureidopyrimidinone Quadruple Hydrogen Bonding", CHEMISTRY - A EUROPEAN JOURNAL, vol. 9, no. 17, 5 September 2003 (2003-09-05), pages 4222-4231, XP055161837, ISSN: 0947-6539, DOI: 10.1002/chem.200204495 page 4222 - page 4224 Scheme 1; figure 1	1-3,5,8
X	----- ROXANNE E. KIELTYKA ET AL: "Mesoscale Modulation of Supramolecular Ureidopyrimidinone-Based Poly(ethylene glycol) Transient Networks in Water", JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY, vol. 135, no. 30, 31 July 2013 (2013-07-31), pages 11159-11164, XP055161854, ISSN: 0002-7863, DOI: 10.1021/ja403745w page 11159 - page 11163 abstract Scheme 1; figure 1	1-5,8-10
X	----- MELLANY RAMAEKERS ET AL: "Self-Assembly of Chiral Supramolecular Ureido-Pyrimidinone-Based Poly(ethylene glycol) Polymers via Multiple Pathways", MACROMOLECULES, vol. 47, no. 12, 24 June 2014 (2014-06-24), pages 3823-3828, XP055161832, ISSN: 0024-9297, DOI: 10.1021/ma500611e abstract page 3823 - page 3824 Scheme 1	1-10,18, 19
X	----- HUI HUI LEE-WANG ET AL: "Novel Supramolecular Hydrogels as Artificial Vitreous Substitutes", MACROMOLECULAR SYMPOSIA, vol. 296, no. 1, 29 October 2010 (2010-10-29), pages 229-232, XP055161853, ISSN: 1022-1360, DOI: 10.1002/masy.201051032 abstract page 229 - page 230 figures 1, 2	1-5,8-10
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/NL2015/050545

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6 320 018 B1 (SIJBESMA RINTJE P [NL] ET AL) 20 November 2001 (2001-11-20) cited in the application column 1, line 29 - column 4, line 50 examples X-Xiii claims 1, 5-14 -----	1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/NL2015/050545

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