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(54) **TREATMENT OF WASTE PRODUCTS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A method for the encapsulation of fine particulate materials includes treating these materials with a microfine hydraulic inorganic filler which, typically, includes a cementitious material, such as Portland Cement. The filler is ground to a much smaller particle size than is normally used in the production of a grout and is provided in the form of an aqueous composition for the treatment of the fine particulate materials by pumping under pressure through these materials such that they become intimately encapsulated. The method is particularly applicable to the treatment of waste materials and, most particularly, waste materials, which are encountered in the nuclear industry.

TREATMENT OF WASTE PRODUCTS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to a method for the treatment of waste by encapsulation. More specifically, it is concerned with the encapsulation of waste products produced in the nuclear industry by treatment of the wastes with microfine inorganic filler materials.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

[0002] Encapsulation has proved to be an especially favoured method for the disposal of certain waste materials; specifically it provides a suitable means for the conversion of these materials into a stable and safe form, which allows for long-term storage and/or ultimate disposal. The technique can find particular application in the nuclear industry, where the highly toxic nature of the materials involved, and the extended timescales over which the toxicity is maintained, are the principal considerations when devising safe disposal methods.

[0003] Whilst the technique of encapsulation can be of great value in such circumstances, however, it is known from the prior art that many fine particulate sized waste materials, as well as certain filters which contain ion exchange resins, are particularly problematic to encapsulate. This is a problem which becomes especially important in the nuclear industry where, in view of the nature of the waste products, it is vital to ensure that procedures are completed efficiently and successfully before disposal of the waste products.

[0004] Previously, it has been found necessary to treat these problematic materials by removing them from the containers in which they are stored and mixing them in drums with the encapsulation material, or subjecting them to vibro-grouting techniques. Such procedures, involving removal from containers, are invariably difficult, messy and expensive to carry out, and generally give rise to copious amounts of additional waste. Furthermore, there are obvious implications in terms of extra containment requirements and additional plant capacity.

[0005] In general, therefore, the situation is unsatisfactory. Indeed, no commercially acceptable means of dealing with such waste materials is yet available which does not rely on the technique of in-drum mixing which, as previously discussed, has several serious practical drawbacks.

[0006] The use of cement based injection grouting in the construction industry is well known from the prior art. Thus, EP-A-412913 teaches the use of a Portland Cement based grout in the consolidation of concrete structures affected by fine cracks, providing a cost-effective means of infilling both superficial and deeper fissures and cavities in such structures, including such as buildings, bridges and dams. Similarly, ZA-A-9209810 is concerned with a pumpable, spreadable grouting composition incorporating a cementitious and/or pozzolanic or equivalent material, and its application in sealing fissures and cracks, back-filling, providing mass fills in civil and mining works, or lining tunnels.

[0007] Also disclosed in the prior art are hydraulic setting compositions comprising particles of Portland Cement together with fine particles of silica fume containing amorphous silica, which are the subject of EP-A-534385 and are

used in the production of concrete, mortar or grout having improved fluidity, whilst GB-A-2187727 describes a rapid gelling, hydraulic cement composition which comprises an acrylic gelling agent, a fine filler and Portland Cement, this composition being thixotropic and finding particular application in the formation of bulk infills for underground mining, and in the filling of voids and cavities in construction or civil engineering. A composition which also is useful in general building and construction work, and as an insulating material comprises a particulate filler, cellulose fibres and a cementitious binder, and is disclosed in GB-A-2117753.

[0008] Whilst the majority of these compositions of the prior art have a requirement for the addition of water, EP-A-801124 is concerned with a dry mixture, used for fine soil injection grout preparation, the mixture comprising fillers which do not react with water, cement and deflocculant; on addition of water, an agglomerate-free fine grout is formed, and this is easily injected into fine soil.

[0009] Thus, the use of such grouting materials in—primarily—civil engineering is well known. Surprisingly, the present inventors have now found that it is possible to make use of these materials in order to overcome many of the problems associated with encapsulation of fine particulate sized wastes which have previously been detailed. Thus, it is now possible to provide a treatment method for wastes of this type which affords much greater efficiency, convenience and safety in handling, and has a consequent beneficial effect both in terms of environmental considerations and cost.

STATEMENTS OF INVENTION

[0010] Thus, according to the present invention there is provided a method for the encapsulation of fine particulate materials which comprises treating said materials with at least one microfine hydraulic inorganic filler.

[0011] Typically, the microfine hydraulic inorganic filler comprises a cementitious material, preferably Portland Cement.

[0012] One or more additional inorganic fillers may optionally be added to the cementitious material; suitable fillers include blast furnace slag, pulverised fuel ash, hydrated lime, finely divided silica, limestone flour and organic and inorganic fluidising agents.

[0013] In each case, the filler is ground to a much smaller particle size than is normally used in the production of a grout. Typically, the filler has a maximum particle size of less than 10 μm .

[0014] The microfine hydraulic inorganic filler is provided in the form of an aqueous composition for the treatment of the fine particulate materials; the water content of the composition is preferably in the region of 40-50% (w/w). Thus, the filler may be pumped under pressure through the materials in order to ensure that they become intimately encapsulated. In this way, the filler is able to fill the very small interstitial cavities in the waste, thereby achieving intimate encapsulation without the need to remove the materials from their container, with all the attendant disadvantages that would be associated with such a procedure. Hence, the method of the present invention may be distinguished over the prior art, since all the known methods involve the mixing of materials and filler in a container,

whereas mixing of the filler into an aqueous composition occurs prior to treatment of the materials in the container in the present case. The intimate encapsulation which is a feature of the present method would not be achievable by using the methods of the prior art.

[0015] A further advantage of the present method is that the container in which the fine particulate materials are held may be used as part of the waste packaging.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0016] The method of the present invention may be applied to the treatment of a wide range of fine particulate materials. Of particular value, however, is the application of the method to the treatment of waste materials in general and, most particularly, waste materials which are encountered in the nuclear industry which, as previously discussed, provide particular areas of concern in their disposal. Such materials may be treated by this method in order to eliminate many of the practical handling difficulties, and potential contamination hazards, which would be associated with the need to remove the materials from their containers prior to treatment.

[0017] A particular example of the application of the method in the field of nuclear technology involves the treatment of filters containing ion exchange resins. Said filters may typically be used for both liquids and gases and a particular application is in the removal of caesium from waste ponds. The used filters comprise cartridges of spent ion exchange resin and these may be successfully encapsulated using the technique according to the present invention.

1. A method for the encapsulation of fine particulate materials comprising:

treating said materials with a microfine hydraulic inorganic filler.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the microfine hydraulic inorganic filler comprises a cementitious material.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the cementitious material comprises Portland Cement.

4. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the microfine hydraulic inorganic filler further comprises at least one inorganic filler selected from the group consisting of blast furnace slag, pulverised fuel ash, hydrated lime, finely divided silica, limestone flour and organic and inorganic fluidising agents.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the filler is ground to a much smaller particle size than is normally used in the production of a grout.

6. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the filler has a maximum particle size of less than about 10 μm .

7. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the microfine hydraulic inorganic filler is provided in the form of an aqueous composition.

8. A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein the water content of the composition is approximately 40-50% (w/w).

9. A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein said aqueous composition is pumped under pressure through the fine particulate materials in order to achieve intimate encapsulation.

10. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the fine particulate materials comprise waste materials.

11. A method as claimed in claim 10 wherein said waste materials comprise waste materials generated in the nuclear industry.

12. A method as claimed in claim 10 wherein said waste materials comprise filters containing ion exchange resins.

13. A method as claimed in claim 12 wherein said filters are utilised in the removal of caesium from waste ponds.

14. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said fine particulate materials are treated in containers, without the requirement for removal from said containers prior to treatment.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein the container is used as part of the waste packaging.

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