

AU9223446

(12) PATENT ABRIDGMENT (11) Document No. AU-B-23446/92 (19) AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE (10) Acceptance No. 654578

(54) Title METHOD OF SEPARATING POLYETHYLENE (PE) AND POLYPROPYLENE (PP)

International Patent Classification(s)

(51)⁵ B03C 007/00 B03C 007/12

B29B 017/00

(21) Application No.: 23446/92

(22) Application Date: 04.07.92

(87) PCT Publication Number: WO93/03852

(30) Priority Data

(31) Number 4127574

(32) Date **21.08.91**

(33) Country

91 DE GERMANY

(43) Publication Date: 16.03.93

(44) Publication Date of Accepted Application: 10.11.94

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(56) Prior Art Documents
AU 23199/92 B03C 7/00
US 4570861
US 3563375

(57) Claim

1. A process for the separation of a mixture of plastic particles of plastics of a chemically different type which, however, have approximately the same density range by an electrostatic separation process by means of a free-fall separator, whereby the plastic particles are reduced to a particle size of less than 10mm subjected to air at a temperature of 15°C to 50°C, and a relative humidity of 10 to 40%, thereby undergoing triboelectric charging, wherein prior to the triboelectric charging, the plastic particles are subjected to a surface treatment.

AU9223446

(81) Bestimmungsstaaten: AU, BR, CA, CS, HU, JP, KR. PL,

RU, US, europäisches Patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK. ES, FR, GB, GR, IT, LU, MC, NL, SE).

INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT AUF DEM GEBIET DES PATENTWESENS (PCT)

(51) Internationale Patentklassifikation 5:

(11) Internationale Veröffentlichungsnummer:

WO 93/03852

B03C 7/00, 7/12, B29B 17/02

A1

(43) Internationales Veröffentlichungsdatum:

4. März 1993 (04.03.93)

(21) Internationales Aktenzeichen:

PCT/EP92/01614

(22) Internationales Anmeldedatum:

4. Juli 1992 (04.07.92)

(30) Prioritätsdaten:

P 41 27 574.8

21. August 1991 (21.08.91)

Veröffentlicht
Mit internationalem Recherchenbericht.

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654578

(54) Title: METHOD OF SEPARATING POLYETHYLENE (PE) AND POLYPROPYLENE (PP)

(54) Bezeichnung: VERFAHREN ZUR TRENNUNG VON POLYETHYLEN (PE) UND POLYPROPYLEN (PP)

(57) Abstract

The invention calls for mixtures of plastics materials, in particular materials of similar density such as polyethylene and polypropylene, to be separated using electrostatic techniques, the mixture being subjected to a surface-treatment operation before being electrostatically charged.

(57) Zusammenfassung

Kunststoffgemenge, insbesondere solche ähnlicher Dichte, wie Polyethylen und Polypropylen, werden auf elektrostatischem Wege getrennt, wobei das Gemenge vor der Aufladung einer Oberflächenbehandlung unterworfen wird.

Method for separation of polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP)

The present invention relates to a method for separation of synthetic material fragments of a mixture of synthetic materials of different chemical types, which possess approximately the same range of densities, for example, polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) by electrostatic separation using a free-fall separator,

The polyolefines, polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP), belong to the most commonly-used solid synthetic materials. They therefore represent the predominant portion of synthetic plastics materials occurring in waste. The density of PE lies in the range between 0.92 and 0.97 gm/cm³, and that of PP lies in the range between 0.9 and 0.91 gm/cm³.

Many utility- and single-use-articles consist of these synthetic plastics materials. An example of this is medicinal single-use syringes. Single-use syringes consist of a cylinder made from polypropylene and a plunger made from polyethylene. After removal of the injection needle, they are thrown away as rubbish and, up till the present time, they have largely been disposed of by burning. The trend in the waste material sector today is towards recovery of the materials. In many hospitals, there are already pilot projects for the collection of synthetic plastics material articles for re-cycling.

The amount of synthetic material in syringes consists of approximately equal parts of PE and PP. There is no particular demand for such mixtures and there is thus little or no profit to be made from them. There are even re-cycling enterprises which demand payment for their removal.



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In contrast to this, for re-cyclates of a single type of material there is a profit to be made which is related to the price of the new material and can amount to as much as 60% of the price of new material. As the result of this it is economically attractive to be able to separate such mixtures into their components.

- According to the present state of the art, the following possibilities exist for the separation of such types of mixtures of synthetic plastics materials.
 - 1. <u>Sorting by hand</u> This method is employed on a large scale in re-cycling operations for the want of better methods, although it involves very high labour costs and is therefore uneconomical.
- 2. Sorting by density does not appear to be a very successful method, because PE and PP have similar densities and their separation by means of a water-alcohol mixture having a density of 0.91 has not found any practical application. From this it may be seen that a density separation based on water, because of the densities of the two substances being substantially the same, is not possible.
- The separation of mixtures of synthetic materials in a free-fall separator is described in the DE-PS 30 35 649. However, the known procedure cannot be utilised for the separation of the afore-named synthetic plastics materials because, in the triboelectric charging of the mixture of synthetic materials, the different synthetic plastics materials PE and PP are not selectively charged.
- The result of this is that, in the passage through the free-fall separator, a very substantial amount of middlings is produced, that is to say, the fragments of synthetic material carry a very small charge which is not sufficient for their deflection in the electrostatic field. Frequently, the charging is quite un-selective.

The objective to be achieved by the invention is therefore to develop a method of the type initially referred to in such a way that, in particular in the separation of PE and PP, a higher degree of purity of each of the synthetic plastics materials involved will be achieved, in which case the amount of middlings obtained will be kept as small as possible.

In accordance with the present invention, there is provided a process for the separation of a mixture of plastic particles of plastics of a chemically different type which, however, have approximately the same density range by an electrostatic separation process by means of a free-fall separator, whereby the plastic particles are reduced to a particle size of less than 10mm subjected to air at a temperature of 15°C to 50°C, and a relative humidity of 10 to 40%, thereby undergoing triboelectric charging, wherein prior to the triboelectric charging, the plastic particles are subjected to a surface treatment.



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The objective to be achieved by the invention is therefore to develop a method of the type initially referred to in such a way that, in particular in the separation of PE and PP, a higher degree of purity of each of the synthetic plastics materials involved will be achieved, in which case the amount of middlings obtained will be kept as small as possible.

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In accordance with the present invention, this objective may be achieved by subjecting the mixture of synthetic materials to a surface treatment before the triboelectric charging. The surface treatment of the mixture of synthetic materials is effected in accordance with an embodiment of the invention by using mineral acid. In another embodiment the mixture of synthetic materials is brought into contact with an alkaline solution. The mineral acid recommended for use is, in particular, dilute hydrochloric acid, in which case the dilution is such that the pH-value is approximately 3.

The caustic soda solution is preferably diluted to such an extent that a solution of caustic soda is obtained having a pH-value of approximately 10 - 12.

Experiments have shown that a surface treatment with the appropriate substances will yield good results in the free-fall separator, which is evident, in particular, from the high degree of purity of the fractions, and also from the relatively small amount of middlings obtained.

The explanation for this appears to be that the caustic soda solution produces a change in the surface of the synthetic material in such a way that a better triboelectric charging is made possible.

Before the actual surface treatment, the mixture of synthetic materials, preferably comminuted to fragments having a size less than 10 millimetres, preferably less

than 6 millimetres, is freed from foreign substances, such as paper for example, and washed clean with water. In accordance with a special feature of the invention, mineral acid or alkaline solution is added to the cleansing water, during the cleansing process, in which case, however, the degree of dilution, characterised by adjustment to the appropriate pH-value, must be maintained.

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After the cleansing process, if necessary with the addition of alkaline solution or mineral acid, and if necessary after the washing of the mixture of synthetic materials with clear water, it is dried in de-watering equipment, for example a centrifuge, to a moisture content of approximately 2% or less.

Subsequently the mixture of synthetic materials is subjected to heat treatment at a temperature in the range from 70 to 100 °C during not less than 5 minutes.

This treatment also serves to alter the surface with the objective of achieving a better triboelectric charging of the individual fragments of synthetic material.

After the temperature treatment, in accordance with another advantageous feature of the invention, fatty acid is added at the rate of 10 - 50 mg/kg of mixture of synthetic materials.

It has been demonstrated that, on the basis of this preliminary treatment and here, in particular on the basis of the preliminary treatment with acid or alkali solution, it is satisfactory if the free-fall separator operates at a field strength maintained at only 2 - 3 KV/cm, in order to promote the deposition of the fragments of synthetic material on the appropriate electrodes. With such a comparatively low field strength, corona discharges, such as could occur at higher field strengths, are avoided, and consequently the possible ignition of the fragments of synthetic material, or a probable dust explosion, is avoided.

The triboelectric charging of the mixture of synthetic materials is introduced into a fluidised-bed drier.

The triboelectric charging itself is effected, after the temperature treatment at a temperature in the range from 15 to 50 °C, preferably from 20 to 35 °C, with a relative humidity of the surrounding air of 10 to 40%, preferably 15 to 20%. The charging itself may be effected in a fluidised-bed drier or in a spiral screw conveyor of sufficient length. The charging may equally well be possible by forwarding the mixture of synthetic materials over a specified distance by pneumatic means.



The method of the invention is explained in the following two examples:

Example 1

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Discarded syringes from a hospital were comminuted in a cutting mill. The mixture of fragments obtained had a PP-content of 51.1% and a PE-content of 49.9%. The mixture of fragments was washed, centrifuged and dried in a fluidised-bed drier at 80 ° 7 for a period of 6 minutes and, after cooling, it was charged for a further 3 minutes in the fluidised-bed at 25 °C and 21% relative humidity. However, before the charging in the fluidised-bed, fatty acid to the extent of 50 milligrams /kg of synthetic material was added.

10 The following results were obtained from the separation:

Analysis	(degree of purity)	Yield (amount)
1 =====================================	(mp0-cc or herrel)	ricia fantoant

Eff.	amt.	(%)		% PE			% PP			PE (%	}		PP (%)	
P	, M	N	P	M	N	P	M	N	P	М	N	Р	М	N
46,4	7,2	46,4	96,9	55,2	3,9	3,1	47,5	92,1	89,0	7,4	3,6	2,9	6,9	90,2

15 for explanation:

P = positive electrode

N = negative electrode

M = middlings

From the fragments of the synthetic mixture derived from discarded syringes, outstanding results were obtained after washing, drying at a higher temperature, conditioning with fatty acid and charging at a temperature slightly higher than room temperature.



Example 2

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A dried mixture of fragments of PP/PE from comminuted bottles had a PP-content of approximately 57% and a PE-content of approximately 43%. The mixture was first of all treated with 4% caustic soda solution and then washed with water, centrifuged and dried in the air for 20 hours.

The mixture was charged in a fluidised bed for 3 minutes at a temperature of 25 °C and 11% relative humidity and then separated in a free-fall separator.

The following results were obtained from the separation:

		An	alysis	(deg	ree c	of pur	ity)		Yield	d (an	ount)		
Eff	. amt	. (%)		% PE			% PP			PE (%)		PP (%	
Р	М	N	Р	М	N	Р	M	N	Р	М	N	Р	M	N
41,1	15,8	43,1	88,2	26,7	6,8	11,8	73,3	93,2	83,5	9,7	6,8	8,6	20,4	71,0

It was found that washing with diluted caustic soda solution led to useful results from the separation.



Example 3

Discarded syringes from a hospital were comminuted in a cutting mill and, after different drying procedures, was separated in a free-fall separator.

The mixture of fragments obtained had a PP-content of 57.6% and a PE-content of 42.4%.

- a) The mixture of fragments was heated in a fluidised-bed drier at 80 °C for a period of 6 minutes and, after cooling to 30 °C, it was charged for a further 3 minutes in the fluidised-bed at 30 °C.
- b) The same mixture was charged for 5 minutes in a fluidised-bed at 30 °C.
- 10 c) The same mixture was charged for 5 minutes in a fluidised-bed at 80 °C.

The following results were obtained from the separation:

Analysis (degree of purity) Yield (amount)

	Ef	f. amt	. (%)		% PE			% PP)		PE (2	3)	F	ም (%)	
	р	M	N	Р	M	. N	ф	М	N	p	М	N	Р	М	N
a)	36,5	28,5	35,0	83,2	40,9	14,3	16,8	59,1	85,7	64.6	24,8	10,6	11,6	31,8	56,6
ь)	29,1	63,6	7,3	40,8	44,7	40,8	59,2	55,3	59,2	27,4	65,7	6,9	30,3	62,0	7,6
e)	50.9	19.9	26.2	42.5	51.1	46.5	57.5	48.9	53.5	47.7	22,4	29,9	53,6	17,8	28,6

According to this, it is advantageous to dry the mixture of fragments first of all at a relatively high temperature and then charge it at a moderate temperature.



The claims defining the invention are as follows:-

- 1. A process for the separation of a mixture of plastic particles of plastics of a chemically different type which, however, have approximately the same density range by an electrostatic separation process by means of a free-fall separator, whereby the plastic particles are reduced to a particle size of less than 10mm subjected to air at a temperature of 15°C to 50°C, and a relative humidity of 10 to 40%, thereby undergoing triboelectric charging, wherein prior to the triboelectric charging, the plastic particles are subjected to a surface treatment.
- 10 2. The process as claimed in claim 1 whereby the plastic particles are reduced to a particle size of less than 6mm.
 - 3. The process according to claim 1 or 2, wherein for the surface treatment, the plastic particles are contacted with a mineral acid.
 - 4. The process according to claim 1 or 2, wherein for the surface treatment, the plastic particles are contacted with an alkali lye.
 - 5. The process according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein prior to the surface treatment, the mixture of plastic particles is cleaned of foreign substances, including paper, by water.
 - 6. The process according to any one of claims 3 to 5, wherein the mineral acid or alkali lye is added to the cleaning water.
 - 7. The process according to claim 6, wherein after the surface treatment with mineral acid or alkali lye, the mixture of plastic particles is washed with clear water.
- 8. The process according to anyone of claims 5 to 7, wherein the mixture is dried to a residual water proportion of less than 2% by dehydration aggregates, including a curved screen or centrifuge.
 - 9. The process according to claim 8 wherein after the drying by dehydration aggregates, the mixture of plastic particles is subjected to a temperature treatment at 70 to 100°C over a time period of at least 5 minutes.
 - 10. The process according to claim 9, wherein after the temperature

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treatment, 10 to 50 mg fatty acid per kg mixture is added to the mixture.

- 11. The process according to any one cf claims 3 or 7 to 10, wherein diluted hydrochloric acid is used as mineral acid.
- 5 12. The process according to claim 11, wherein the dilution of the hydrochloric acid is selected in such a way that a pH of approximately 3 is obtained.
 - 13. The process according to any one of claims 4 or 7 to 10, wherein diluted soda lye is used as alkali lye.
- 10 14. The process according to claim 13, wherein the dilution of the sodalye is selected in such a way that a pH of approximately 11 to 12 is obtained.
 - 15. The process according to claim 1, wherein the mixture of plastic particles is passed through a spiral worm.
 - 16. The process according to claim 1, wherein the mixture of plastic particles is conveyed pneumatically.
 - 17. The process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the mixture of plastic particles is a mixture of polyethylene and polypropylene particles.
- 20 DATED this 12th day of September 1994.

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By their Patent Attorneys:

CALLINAN LAWRIE



ABSTRACT

Mixtures of synthetic materials, in particular those of similar density, such as polyethylene and polypropylene, are separated into their individual components by electrostatic separation, in which case the electrostatic separation is preceded by a surface treatment.



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/EP 92/01614

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER	
Int.Cl.: B 03 C 7/00; B 03 C 7/12; B 29 B 17/02	
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)	
Int.Cl.: B 03 C	
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the	ne fields searched
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search	terms used)
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT	
Category* Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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see page 6, paragraph 1 - page 7, paragraph 1; claims 1,2	4,11,16
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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. "T" later document published after the interded date and not in conflict with the applitude principle or theory underlying the 	cation but cited to understand
"E" earlier document 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	dered to involve an inventive ne
special reason (as specified) "Y" document of particular relevance; the considered to involve an inventive combined with one or more other such means	documents, such combination
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "&" document member of the same paten	i
Date of the actual completion of the international search 13 October 1992 (13.10.92) Date of mailing of the international search 27 October 1992 (27.10.	
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Authorized officer	
European Patent Office	;
Facsimile No. Telephone No.	

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1992)

ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP SA 62780

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on

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FR-A-1505274		None				

INTERNATIONALER RECHERCHENBERICHT

PCT/EP 92/01614 Internationales Aktenzeichen 1. I'LASSIFIKATION DES ANMELDUNGSGEGENSTANDS (bei mehreren Kiassifikationssymbolen sind elle nazugeben)* Nach der Internationalen Patentialestifikation (IPC) oder nach der nationalen Kinzsifikation und der IPC Int.Kl. 5 B03C7/00; B03C7/12; IL RECHERCHIERTE SACHGERIETE Recherchierter Mindestprüfstoff 7 Klassifikationssymbole <u>Kinerifikationssytem</u> Int.Kl. 5 **B03C** Recherchierte nicht zum Mindestpräfstoff gehörende Veröffentlichungen, zoweit diese unter die recherchierten Suchgebiete fallen I IIL EINSCHLAGIGE VEROFFENTLICHUNGEN 1 Kennzeichnung der Veröffentlichung 11, soweit erforderlich unter Angabe der maßgeblichen Teile 12 Betr. Anspruch Nr.13 DE, A, 3 035 649 (KALI UND SALZ AG) 1,17 8. April 1982 in der Anmeldung erwähnt siehe Seite 6, Absatz 1 - Seite 7, Absatz 4,11,16 1; Ansprüche 1,2 1,17 DE,A,1 758 756 (SOCIÉTÉ DE PRODUITS CHIMIQUES D'AUBY) 25. Februar 1971 siehe Seite 2, Absatz 3 - Seite 3, Absatz 2,10 1; Ansprüche 1,4 siehe Seite 6, Absatz 4 - Seite 7, Absatz DE, A, 3 227 874 (KALI UND SALZ AG) 1,4,11, 16,17 26. Januar 1984 siehe Seite 4, Absatz 3; Anspruch 1 Besondere Kategorien von angegebenen Veröffentlichungen ¹⁰: A Veröffentlichung, die den aligemeinen Stand der Technik definiert, aber nicht als besonders bedeutsam anzusehen ist "T" Spätere Veröffentlichung, die nach dem internationalen An-meidedatum oder dem Prioritätsdatum veröffentlicht worden ist und mit der Anmeidung nicht kollidiert, sondern nur zum Verständnis des der Erfindung zugrundeliegenden Prinzips "E" Elteres Dokument, das jedoch erst am oder nach dem interna-tionalen Anmeidedatum veröffentlicht worden ist oder der ihr zugrundeliegenden Theorie angegeben ist-"L" Veröffentlichung, die geeignet ist, einen Prioritätsanspruch zweifelhaft erscheinen zu lassen, nder durch die das Veröf-fentlichungstamm einer anderen im Recherchenbericht ge-naanten Veröffentlichung belegt werden zoll oder die aus einem anderen besonderen Grund angegeben ist (wie ausgeführt) "X" Veröffentlichung von besonderer Bedeutung; die bezaspruch-te Erfindung kann nicht als neu oder auf erfinderischer Tätigkelt berubend betrachtet werden "Y" Veröffentlichung von besonderer Bedeutung; die beanspruch-te Erfindung kann nicht als auf erfinderischer Tätigkeit be-rubend betrachtet werden, wenn die Veröffentlichung mit einer oder menreren anderen Veröffentlichungen dicser Kate-gorie in Verbindung gebracht wird und diese Verbindung für einen Fachmann naheliegend ist "O" Veröffentlichung, die sich auf eine mündliche Offenbarung, eine Benutzung, eine Ausstellung oder andere Malinahmen Veröffentlichung, die vor dem internationalen Anmeideda-tum, aber nach dem beanspruchten Prioritätsdatum veröffent-licht worden ist "A" Veröffentlichung, die Mitglied derselben Patentfamilie ist IV. BESCHEINIGUNG Datum des Abschiusses der internationalen Recherche Absendedatum des internationalen Recherchenberichts 27, 10, 92 13.0KTOBER 1992 Internationale Recherchenhabbrde Unterschrift des bevollmächtigten Bediensteten DECANNIERE L. **EUROPAISCHES PATENTAMT**

PCT/EP 92/01614

Internationales Aktenzeichen

III. EINSCHLAGIGE VEROFFENTLICHUNGEN (Fortsettung von Biatt 2) Kenazeichnung der Veröffentlichung, soweit erforderlich unter Angabe der maligeblichen Teile Betr. Anspruch Nr. Art * FR,A,1 505 274 (KALI-FORSCHUNG-ANSTALT G.M.B.H.)
8. Dezember 1967

ANHANG ZUM INTERNATIONALEN RECHERCHENBERICHT ÜBER DIE INTERNATIONALE PATENTANMELDUNG NR.

EP 9201614 SA 62780

In diesem Anhang sind die Mitglieder der Patentfamilien der im obengenannten internationalen Recherchenhericht angeführten Patentdokumente angegeben.

Die Angaben über die Familienmitglieder entsprechen dem Stand der Datei des Europäischen Patentamts am

Diese Angaben dienen nur zur Unterrichtung und erfolgen ohne Gewähr.

13/10/92

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