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(54) Title: PROCESS FOR REDUCING THE BENZENE CONTENT GASOLINE

(57) Abstract: A process is described for alkylating benzene contained in a refinery gasoline stream, in which the refinery gasoline stream is contacted with an alkylating agent comprising one or more C2 to C5 olefins in an alkylation reaction zone under alkylation conditions to produce an alkylated effluent. The alkylation reaction zone comprises at least a first alkylation reaction stage and a second alkylation reaction stage and a portion of said alkylating agent is fed to each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages so that, although the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent in the total feed to the alkylation reaction zone is less than 1, the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent at the inlet of each of the first and second alkylation reaction stages is at least 1.0.

PROCESS FOR REDUCING THE BENZENE CONTENT OF GASOLINE**FIELD**

[0001] This invention relates to a process for reducing the benzene content of gasoline.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Benzene is considered to be environmentally hazardous. As a result, the State of California and the United States Environmental Protection Agency have instituted regulations to limit the amount of benzene which may be present in gasoline. Beginning in January 2011, the US MSAT-2 (Mobile Source Air Toxics) regulation will require reduction of this annual average benzene content in gasoline to no greater than 0.62 volume %.

[0003] One known route for reducing the benzene content of gasoline is to selectively alkylate the benzene using a lower olefin. For example, Holtermann et al U.S. Patent No. 5,149,894 describes a process for converting benzene to alkylated benzenes in a gasoline blend stock. The process involves contacting a benzene-containing gasoline blend stock with a C2 to C4 olefin stream in the presence of a catalyst containing the zeolite, SSZ-25, to produce an alkylated light hydrocarbon stream with reduced benzene content.

[0004] Cheng et al. U.S. Patent No. 5,545,788 describes a process for the production of a more environmentally suitable gasoline by removing a substantial portion of benzene in gasoline by alkylation of reformate. The process involves alkylation using a light olefin feed at low temperature over the zeolite catalyst, MCM-49.

[0005] Umansky et al. U.S. Patent No. 7,476,774 describes a process where light olefins including ethylene and propylene are extracted from refinery off-gases, such as from a catalytic cracking unit, into a light aromatic stream, such as a reformate containing benzene and other single ring aromatic compounds, which is then reacted with the light olefins to form a gasoline boiling range product containing alkylaromatics. The alkylation reaction is carried out in the liquid phase with a catalyst which preferably

comprises a member of the MWW family of zeolites, such as MCM-22, using a fixed catalyst bed.

[0006] However, in addition to limiting the benzene level in gasoline, current and ongoing regulations restrict the content of residue, which consists of heavy hydrocarbon components with boiling points outside the gasoline boiling range. The US standard specification for automotive spark-ignition engine fuel (ASTM D4814) requires that the residue (heavies) in the gasoline product is no more than 2 volume %. As benzene regulations become more stringent, meeting the heavies level becomes an increasing problem because the light olefins used to alkylate the benzene in the gasoline can undergo undesirable competing reactions, such as olefin oligomerization to produce, for example, C6 to C8 olefins. Subsequent aromatic alkylation reactions result in the formation of heavies components, with boiling points outside of the typical gasoline boiling range.

[0007] According to the present invention, it has now been found that the undesirable formation of heavy components in the alkylation of a benzene-containing gasoline stream, such as a reformat or light naphtha, with an olefin alkylating agent can be reduced by conducting the alkylation reaction in at least two stages and splitting the olefin feed between the stages so that the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent in the feed to each stage is at least 1.0.

SUMMARY

[0008] In one aspect, the invention resides in a process for alkylating benzene contained in a refinery gasoline stream, said process comprising contacting said refinery gasoline stream with an alkylating agent comprising one or more C2 to C5 olefins in an alkylation reaction zone under alkylation conditions to produce an alkylated effluent, wherein said alkylation reaction zone comprises at least a first alkylation reaction stage and a second alkylation reaction stage, wherein a portion of said alkylating agent is fed to each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages so that, although the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent in the total feed to the alkylation reaction zone is less than 1, the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent at the inlet of each

of said first and second alkylation reaction stages is at least 1.0, for example, from about 1.0 to about 2.0.

[0009] The alkylated effluent from the alkylation reaction zone may be removed from the alkylation reaction zone without recycle to either of the first and second alkylation reaction stages.

[0010] The refinery gasoline stream may be, for example, a reformate or a light naphtha. The alkylating agent may be, for example, propylene.

[0011] The refinery gasoline stream may comprise at least 10 wt % benzene. The effluent from the reaction zone may comprise less than 1 volume % benzene, for example, less than 0.62 volume % benzene.

[0012] The alkylated effluent from the reaction zone may comprise no more than 2 volume % of compounds having a boiling point greater than the boiling point of 1,3,5-trisisopropylbenzene.

[0013] The alkylation reaction in each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages may take place over a catalyst comprising an MWW zeolite.

[0014] The refinery gasoline stream may be substantially in the liquid phase during contact with the alkylating agent in the alkylation reaction zone.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] Refinery streams which may be alkylated to decrease benzene content include streams comprising benzene and alkylbenzenes. Examples of such streams include reformates and naphtha streams, especially light naphtha streams (typically boiling in the range from about 40 °C to about 150 °C). Blends of refinery streams may also be alkylated.

[0016] Reformates have high octane number attributable to their high aromatics content. However, high concentrations of benzene in reformate, e.g., 4 to 6 wt %, can limit reformate utility as a blending component where environmental considerations require low benzene levels in gasoline product (no greater than 1 vol %). Various efforts to reduce benzene content in reformate, e.g., selective hydrogenation, high temperature fluid-bed MBR, and reformate alkylation with methanol all suffer from octane losses or total liquid product losses associated with undesired cracking of C5+ non-aromatics.

[0017] The present invention relates to a process whereby benzene-containing reformates and other refinery streams are treated to reduce benzene content by alkylation. Undesirable alkylation of higher boiling aromatics, such as xylenes, may be minimized.

[0018] The catalyst employed in the present invention, may comprise an MWW member family zeolite. Zeolites of the MWW family are described in U.S. Patent No. 7,476,774.

[0019] Examples of suitable alkylating agents for use in the present invention are olefins such as ethylene, propylene, the butenes, and the pentenes. Mixtures of light olefins are especially useful as alkylating agents in the alkylation process of this invention. Accordingly, mixtures of ethylene, propylene, butenes, and/or pentenes which are major constituents of a variety of refinery streams, e.g., fuel gas, gas plant off-gas containing ethylene, propylene, etc., naphtha cracker off-gas containing light olefins, refinery FCC propane/propylene streams, and FCC off-gas, etc., are useful alkylating agents herein. Compositions of examples of olefin containing streams suitable for use as alkylating agents are described, for example, in U.S. Patent No. 7,476,774.

[0020] The alkylation process is conducted such that the organic reactants, i.e., the alkylatable aromatic compound and the alkylating agent, are brought into contact with a zeolite catalyst composition in a suitable reaction zone comprising at least a first alkylation reaction stage and a second alkylation reaction stage connected in series. For example, the alkylation process may be conducted in a flow reactor containing first and second fixed beds of the catalyst composition. An equal portion of the alkylating agent is fed to each reaction stage, while all of the gasoline feed is supplied to the first alkylation stage. In this way, although the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent in the total feed to the process is less than 1, the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent at the inlet of each of the first and second alkylation reaction stages is at least 1.0., such as from 1 to 2.

[0021] The alkylation process is typically conducted under conditions including a temperature of from about 0 °C to about 500 °C, for example, between about 50 °C and about 250 °C, a pressure of from about 0.2 to about 250 atmospheres, for example, from about 1 to about 25 atmospheres, a feed weight hourly space velocity (WHSV) of

between 0.1 hr^{-1} and 500 hr^{-1} , for example, from 0.5 hr^{-1} to 100 hr^{-1} . The latter WHSV is based upon the total weight of active catalyst (and binder if present).

[0022] The reactants may be in the vapor phase or the liquid phase or in a mixture of liquid and vapor phases. The reactants may be neat, i.e., free from intentional admixture or dilution with other material, or they can be brought into contact with the zeolite catalyst composition with the aid of carrier gases or diluents such as, for example, hydrogen or nitrogen.

Catalyst System

[0023] The catalyst system used in the alkylation of the present process is preferably one based on a zeolite of the MWW family because these catalysts exhibit excellent activity for the desired aromatic alkylation reaction using light olefins, especially propylene. It is, however, possible to use other molecular sieve catalysts for this alkylation, including catalysts based on ZSM-12 as described in U.S. Patent Nos. 3,755,483 and 4,393,262 for the manufacture of petrochemical cumene from refinery benzene and propylene or catalysts based on zeolite beta as described in U.S. Patent No. 4,891,458, all of which are reported to have activity for the alkylation of light aromatics by propylene.

MWW Zeolite

[0024] The MWW family of zeolite materials has achieved recognition as having a characteristic framework structure which presents unique and interesting catalytic properties. The MWW topology consists of two independent pore systems: a sinusoidal ten-member ring [10 MR] two dimensional channel separated from each other by a second, two dimensional pore system comprised of 12 MR super cages connected to each other through 10 MR windows. The crystal system of the MWW framework is hexagonal and the molecules diffuse along the [100] directions in the zeolite, i.e., there is no communication along the c direction between the pores. In the hexagonal plate-like crystals of the MWW type zeolites, the crystals are formed of relatively small number of units along the c direction as a result of which, much of the catalytic activity is due to active sites located on the external surface of the crystals in the form of the cup-shaped

cavities. In the interior structure of certain members of the family such as MCM-22, the cup-shaped cavities combine together to form a supercage. The MCM-22 family of zeolites has attracted significant scientific attention since its initial announcement by Leonovicz et al. in *Science* 264, 1910-1913 [1994] and the later recognition that the family includes a number of zeolitic materials such as PSH 3, MCM-22, MCM-49, MCM-56, SSZ-25, ERB-1, ITQ-1, and others. Lobo et al. *AIChE Annual Meeting* 1999, Paper 292J.

[0025] The relationship between the various members of the MCM-22 family have been described in a number of publications. Significant members of the family are MCM-22, MCM-36, MCM-49, and MCM-56. When initially synthesized from a mixture including sources of silica, alumina, sodium, and hexamethylene imine as an organic template, the initial product will be MCM-22 precursor or MCM-56, depending upon the silica: alumina ratio of the initial synthesis mixture. At silica:alumina ratios greater than 20, MCM-22 precursor comprising H-bonded vertically aligned layers is produced whereas randomly oriented, non-bonded layers of MCM-56 are produced at lower silica:alumina ratios. Both these materials may be converted to a swollen material by the use of a pillaring agent and on calcination, this leads to the laminar, pillared structure of MCM-36. The as-synthesized MCM-22 precursor can be converted directly by calcination to MCM-22 which is identical to calcined MCM-49, an intermediate product obtained by the crystallization of the randomly oriented, as-synthesized MCM-56. In MCM-49, the layers are covalently bonded with an interlaminar spacing slightly greater than that found in the calcined MCM-22/MCM-49 materials. The as-synthesized MCM-56 may be calcined itself to form calcined MCM-56 which is distinct from calcined MCM-22/MCM-49 in having a randomly oriented rather than a laminar structure. In the patent literature MCM-22 is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,954,325 as well as in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,250,777; 5,284,643 and 5,382,742. MCM-49 is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,236,575; MCM-36 in U.S. Patent No. 5,229,341 and MCM-56 in U.S. Patent No. 5,362,697.

[0026] A preferred zeolitic material for use as the MWW component of the catalyst system is MCM-22. It has been found that the MCM-22 may be either used fresh, that is, not having been previously used as a catalyst or, alternatively, regenerated MCM-22 may

be used. Regenerated MCM-22 may be used after it has been used in any of the catalytic processes for which it is known to be suitable but one form of regenerated MCM-22 which has been found to be highly effective in the present condensation process is MCM-22 which has previously been used for the production of aromatics such as ethylbenzene or cumene, normally using reactions such as alkylation and transalkylation. The cumene production (alkylation) process is described in U.S. Patent No. U.S. Patent No. 4,992,606 (Kushnerick et al). Ethylbenzene production processes are described in U.S. Patent No. 3,751,504 (Keown); U.S. Patent No. 4,547,605 (Kresge); and U.S. Patent No. 4,016,218 (Haag); U.S. Patent Nos. 4,962,256; 4,992,606; 4,954,663; 5,001,295; and 5,043,501 describe alkylation of aromatic compounds with various alkylating agents over catalysts comprising MWW zeolites such as PSH-3 or MCM-22. U.S. Patent No. 5,334,795 describes the liquid phase synthesis of ethylbenzene with MCM-22.

[0027] The MCM-22 catalysts may be regenerated after catalytic use in aromatics production processes by conventional air oxidation techniques similar to those used with other zeolite catalysts.

Catalyst Matrix

[0028] In addition to the zeolitic component, the catalyst will usually contain a matrix material or binder in order to give adequate strength to the catalyst as well as to provide the desired porosity characteristics in the catalyst. High activity catalysts may, however, be formulated in the binder-free form by the use of suitable extrusion techniques, for example, as described in U.S. Patent No. 4,908,120. When used, matrix materials suitably include alumina, silica, silica alumina, titania, zirconia, and other inorganic oxide materials commonly used in the formulation of molecular sieve catalysts. For use in the present process, the level of zeolite, such as MCM-22 or ZSM-5 type (intermediate pore size) zeolite, in the finished matrixed catalyst will be typically from 20 to 70% by weight, and in most cases from 25 to 65% by weight. In manufacture of a matrixed catalyst, the active ingredient will typically be milled with the matrix material using an aqueous suspension of the catalyst and matrix, after which the active component and the matrix are extruded into the desired shape, for example, cylinders, hollow cylinders, trilobe, quadlobe, etc. A binder material such as clay may be added during the mulling in order

to facilitate extrusion, increase the strength of the final catalytic material and to confer other desirable solid state properties. The amount of clay will not normally exceed 10% by weight of the total finished catalyst. Unbound (or, alternatively, self-bound) catalysts are suitably produced by the extrusion method described in U.S. Patent No. 4,582,815, to which reference is made for a description of the method and of the extruded products obtained by its use. The method described there enables extrudates having high constraining strength to be produced on conventional extrusion equipment and accordingly, the method is suitable for producing the catalysts which are silica-rich. The catalysts are produced by mulling the zeolite with water to a solids level of 25 to 75 wt % in the presence of 0.25 to 10 wt % of basic material such as sodium hydroxide. Further details are to be found in U.S. Patent No. 4,582,815.

Comparative Example 1

[0029] Alkylation of a synthetic benzene containing reformat stream with propylene was carried out in a fixed bed once-through reactor. The reactor was loaded with a fixed bed alkylation catalyst. The synthetic reformat feed comprised 15% benzene, 4% toluene and 81% n-heptane and was introduced into the reactor at a flow rate of 100 grams per hour, and the reactor was heated up to the reaction temperature of 200 °C before propylene charge was introduced. The reactor pressure was kept above the vapor pressure of the reaction mixture to ensure liquid phase operation. The reactor performance was evaluated at three different propylene charge rates. The results are listed in Table 1, wherein the charge rates are designated as 1A, 1B and 1C.

TABLE 1

Case	1A	1B	1C
Feed Aromatic to Propylene Ratio (molar)	0.92	0.80	0.65
Aromatic to Propylene Ratio at Reactor Inlet (molar)	0.92	0.80	0.65
Effluent Benzene (volume %)	2.3	1.6	0.70
Effluent Heavies (volume %)	0.8	1.3	2.9
Benzene Conversion (%)	82	87	94

[0030] As shown in Table 1, the benzene content in the reactor effluent decreased as propylene charge was increased. However, the effluent heavies content also increased with increasing propylene charge and went above 2 volume % before the target 0.62 volume % benzene content was reached. The heavies content includes all the compounds that have a higher boiling point than 1,3,5-trisisopropylbenzene. This reactor system was therefore not capable of achieving both high benzene conversion and low heavies make simultaneously and was unable to produce a gasoline product that met both the < 0.62 volume % benzene content and the < 2 volume % distillation residue specifications without fractionation of the reactor effluent to remove excess benzene and/or heavies.

Example 2

[0031] A second reactor was connected in series to and downstream of the first reactor of Comparative Example 1. The reformat feed was fed to the first reactor with a first portion of the same propylene charge. The effluent from the first reactor was fed to the second reactor together with a second equal portion of propylene charge. The same synthetic reformat feed described in Comparative Example 1 was introduced into the first reactor at a flow rate of 100 grams per hour, and the reactors were heated up to the reaction temperature of 200 °C before propylene charge was introduced. The reactor pressure was kept above the vapor pressure of the reaction mixture to ensure liquid phase operation. The reactor performance was evaluated at three different propylene charge rates, and the propylene charge was equally distributed between the two reactors. The results are listed in Table 2, wherein the charge rates are designated as 2A, 2B and 2C.

Table 2

Charge Rate	2A	2B	2C
Feed Aromatic to Propylene Ratio (molar)	0.80	0.70	0.66
Aromatic to Propylene Ratio at each Reactor Inlet (molar)	1.6	1.4	1.3
Effluent Benzene (volume %)	1.4	0.82	0.59
Effluent Heavies (volume %)	0.8	1.3	1.7
Benzene Conversion (%)	89	93	95

[0032] Since the synthetic reformat feed went through both reactors while the propylene feed was evenly distributed between the two reactors and completely consumed in the first reactor, the aromatic to propylene ratio at the inlet of each of the two reactors was twice of that in the overall feeds. As shown in Table 2, the benzene content in the reactor effluent decreased and the heavies content increased as the propylene charge was increased, in a way similar to that shown in the Comparative Example. The benzene content in this example, however, reached the desired < 0.62 volume % level before the heavies content exceeded the 2 volume % limit. The two-reactor system employed in this Example was therefore shown capable of achieving both high benzene conversion and low heavies make simultaneously and produced a gasoline product that met both the < 0.62 volume % benzene content and < 2 volume % distillation residue specifications without fractionation of the reactor effluent to remove excess benzene and/or heavies. By comparing the results from Comparative Example 1 and this Example 2, the reactor inlet aromatic to propylene (A/P) molar ratio is found to be a major factor that affects the production of heavies. As the A/P ratio is lowered, more and more propylene oligomerizes and cracks. In the meantime, these oligomers react with benzene and alkylated benzenes to form heavies. By controlling the reactor inlet aromatic to propylene ratio, one can then control the propylene oligomerization reaction and heavies make.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A process for alkylating benzene contained in a refinery gasoline stream, said process comprising contacting said refinery gasoline stream with an alkylating agent comprising one or more C2 to C5 olefins in an alkylation reaction zone under alkylation conditions to produce an alkylated effluent, wherein said alkylation reaction zone comprises at least a first alkylation reaction stage and a second alkylation reaction stage, wherein a portion of said alkylating agent is fed to each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages so that, although the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent in the total feed to the alkylation reaction zone is less than 1, the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent at the inlet of each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages is at least 1.0.
2. A process according to claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of alkylatable aromatic to alkylating agent at the inlet of each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages is about 1.0 to about 2.0.
3. A process according to claim 1, wherein said alkylated effluent is removed from said alkylation reaction zone without recycle to either of said first and second alkylation reaction stages.
4. A process according to claim 1, wherein said refinery gasoline stream is a reformat or a light naphtha.
5. A process according to claim 1, wherein said alkylating agent is propylene.
6. A process according to claim 1, wherein said refinery gasoline stream comprises at least 10 wt % benzene.
7. A process according to claim 1, wherein said alkylated effluent comprises less than 1 volume % benzene.

8. A process according to claim 1, wherein said alkylated effluent comprises less than 0.62 volume % benzene.
9. A process according to claim 1, wherein said alkylated effluent comprises no more than 2 volume % of compounds having a boiling point greater than the boiling point of 1,3,5-trisisopropylbenzene.
10. A process according to claim 1, wherein the alkylation reaction in each of said first and second alkylation reaction stages takes place over a catalyst comprising an MWW zeolite.
11. A process according to claim 1, wherein said refinery gasoline stream is substantially in the liquid phase during said contacting.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2011/062635

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER INV. C10G29/20 C07C2/66 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) C10G C07C		
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 practical, search terms used) EPO-Internal		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 485 683 A1 (FINA TECHNOLOGY [US]) 20 May 1992 (1992-05-20) figure 11 table V page 20 - page 24	1-11
X	US 6 008 422 A (SCHULZ RUSSELL C [US] ET AL) 28 December 1999 (1999-12-28) figure 1 column 5, line 3 - line 7	1-11
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	-/--	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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 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 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
Date of the actual completion of the international search 6 February 2012		Date of mailing of the international search report 14/02/2012
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 Bernet, Olivier

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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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.
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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