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COMMONWEALTH of AUSTRALIA

PATENTS ACT 1952

APPLICATION FOR A STANDARD PATENT



SECTION 34(4)(a) DIRECTION SEE FOLIO 2a
NAME DIRECTED National Research Development Corporation
101 Newington Causeway, London, SE1 6BU
England.

hereby apply for the grant of a Standard Patent for an invention entitled;

"POROUS PTFE"

which is described in the accompanying ~~provisional~~ complete specification.

Details of basic application(s):—

<u>Number</u>	<u>Convention Country</u>	<u>Date</u>
GB- 86.13015	United Kingdom	29th May 1986

LOGGED AT SUB-OFFICE
28 MAY 1987
Melbourne

APPLICATION ACCEPTED AND AMENDMENTS

ALLOWED 18.12.90

The address for service is care of DAVIES & COLLISON, Patent Attorneys, of 1 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, in the State of Victoria, Commonwealth of Australia.

Dated this 27th day of May 19 87

H. H. Rivington

To: THE COMMISSIONER OF PATENTS

.....
(a member of the firm of DAVIES & COLLISON for and on behalf of the Applicant).

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Patents Act 1952

DECLARATION IN SUPPORT
OF AN APPLICATION OR
A CONVENTION APPLICATION FOR A
PATENT ~~OR PATENT OF ADDITION~~

In support of the Application made by
THOMAS RONALD THOMAS

for a patent/~~patent of addition~~ for an invention entitled:

"Porous PTFE"

I, THOMAS RONALD THOMAS of Palace Row, Hart Village, Cleveland, England.

~~as the applicant~~ do solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:

*a(1) I am the applicant for the patent/~~patent of addition~~

*a(1) ~~I am authorised by the applicant for the patent/patent of addition to make this~~
~~declaration on his behalf.~~

*b(2) The basic application~~(s)~~ as defined by section 141/142 of the Act was/~~were~~
made

in United Kingdom on 29 MAY 1986 under no. 86.13015

in on

in on

by

*a(3) I am the actual inventor of the invention.

*a(3)


~~is/are the actual inventor(s) of the invention and the facts upon which~~

~~is/are certified to make the application are as follows:~~

*b(4) The basic application~~(s)~~ referred to in paragraph 2 of this Declaration is/~~are~~ the
first application~~(s)~~ made in a Convention country in respect of the invention the
subject of the application.

Declared at Hartlepool, this 11 day of May 1987
Cleveland, England

To: The Commissioner of Patents,
Commonwealth of Australia.



Status

*a - Delete whichever is inapplicable.

*b - Delete if not a Convention application.

No legislation is required.

(12) PATENT ABRIDGMENT (11) Document No. AU-B-73493/87
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(54) Title
POROUS PTFE

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(57) Claim

1. A substantially cylindrical bar of microporous PTFE characterised in that the material is non-fibrillated and in that the pores within any cylindrical surface contained within the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

3. A process for producing a non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE having a substantially cylindrical outer surface thereto, the process comprising the steps of:
providing thermally and compressively untreated PTFE powder;

disagglomerating said powder;

heating the disagglomerated powder to a temperature having a value close to its microcrystalline melting point;

cooling the thermally treated material, and

breaking the cooled material up into granules;

characterised in that the powder particles are of irregular shape and are of a diameter within a predetermined range, and characterised by the steps of:

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forming the granulated material into a bar having a substantially cylindrical outer surface;

applying a substantially radial compressive force to the bar over the full length thereof;

relieving the bar of said radial compressive force;

heating the compressed granulated material to a temperature above its microcrystalline melting point, and

cooling the thermally treated material, the extent of the radial compression being such that, on said subsequent heating of the previously compressed granulated material, the material expands predominantly in a direction opposite to that of the compressive force and the granules fuse together to produce a non-fibrillated material the pores of which, within any cylindrical surface contained within the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof, are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PATENT ACT 1952

COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

(Original)

FOR OFFICE USE

This document contains the amendments made under Section 49 and is correct for printing

73493/87

Class Int. Class

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Lodged:

Complete Specification Lodged:
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Related Art:

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Complete Specification for the invention entitled:

"POROUS PIPE"

The following statement is a full description of this invention,
including the best method of performing it known to us :-

POROUS PTFE

This invention relates to porous PTFE and a process of producing same.

The outstanding characteristics of PTFE, such as its chemical inertness, its resistance to corrosion, its
5 dielectric properties and its low frictional properties have resulted in this material being used in many diverse applications.

However certain of the inherent characteristics of PTFE produced by established methods - such as the void-
10 free nature of the material and its inability to adhere to other materials without etching, abrading or otherwise treating the PTFE - mean that it is not suitable for use in, for example, diffusion or filtration processes where porous materials are required.

15 In particular, liquid and gaseous diffusion processes such as plasma phoresis, renal dialysis, desalination of water and blood oxygenation, utilise thin porous membranes as the control element, the non-porous nature of established PTFE products preventing their use
20 in such processes. Most such membranes are manufactured either from cellulose and its derivatives, or from such materials as ceramics, asbestos, glass, porcelain, and metals. In the former case, the membranes produced are relatively mechanical weak, particularly when produced to
25 achieve high flow rates therethrough and often require

the addition thereto of mechanical supports. In the latter case, the membranes, although mechanically strong, are not as chemically inert as PTFE. Other plastics materials have been used, but these are
5 invariably less chemically inert than PTFE and may also require mechanical support.

It has been proposed to produce porous PTFE membranes by means of various specialist processes such as by plasma desposition, by conventional compression
10 moulding but at pressures lower than those normally recommended for the production of a void-free material, by paste-forming extrusion techniques and subsequent expansion by stretching, or by incorporating within the PTFE thermally or chemically degradable materials which
15 can be leached out during the process to leave the desired voids. However, such processes can require the use of complex and therefore expensive equipment and often result in the production of relatively weak membranes, or membranes which, because they are thin, are
20 difficult to handle.

It would be desirable to be able to produce a porous yet strong PTFE which is easy to handle.

According to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a substantially cylindrical bar of
25 non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE the pores of which within any cylindrical surface contained within the bar

and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

5 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a film of non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE the pores of which within any plane substantially perpendicular to the thickness of the film are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that plane and all such
10 parallel planes.

According to a still further aspect of the invention, there is provided a process for producing a non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE having a substantially cylindrical outer surface thereto, the process comprising
15 the steps of:

providing thermally and compressively untreated PTFE powder;

disagglomerating said powder;

20 heating the disagglomerated powder to a temperature having a value close to its microcrystalline melting point;

cooling the thermally treated material, and breaking the cooled material up into granules;

25 characterised in that the powder particles are of irregular shape and are of a diameter within a predetermined range, and characterised by the steps of:

forming the granulated material into a bar having a substantially cylindrical outer surface;

30 applying a substantially radial compressive force to the bar over the full length thereof;

relieving the bar of said radial compressive force;

heating the compressed granulated material to a temperature above its microcrystalline melting point, and cooling the thermally treated material,

35 the extent of the radial compression being such that, on said subsequent heating of the previously compressed



granulated material, the material expands predominantly in a direction opposite to that of the compressive force and the granules fuse together to produce a non-fibrillated material the pores of which, within any
5 cylindrical surface contained within the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof, are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

Preferably the particles are of irregular shape and
10 are of a diameter within a predetermined range, for example between 0.20 and 60 microns.



to the bar over the full length thereof;

relieving the bar of said radial compressive force;

heating the compressed granulated material to a temperature above its microcrystalline melting point,

5 and

cooling the thermally treated material,

the extent of the radial compression being such that, on said subsequent heating of the previously compressed granulated material, the material expands predominantly

10 in a direction opposite to that of the compressive force and the granules fuse together to produce a non-fibrillated material the pores of which, within any cylindrical

surface contained within the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof, are of substantially

15 uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

The process may further comprise the step of forming

a film from the cooled bar the plane of which film is perpendicular to the direction of the radial compressive

20 force whereby the pores within any plane substantially perpendicular to the thickness of the film are of

substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that plane and all such parallel planes.

The cooled material may be broken up into granules

25 of irregular shape the maximum diameter of which is of



the order of 400 microns, preferably 250 microns and more preferably 100 microns.

Conveniently the granules, prior to compression, have a bulk density of between 300 and 700 grams/litre.

5 In one process according to the invention the compressive force is applied radially inwardly of the bar on the substantially cylindrical outer surface thereof.

In a further process according to the invention, the bar is of substantially annular shape in transverse section
10 and the compressive force is applied radially outwardly of the bar on the substantially cylindrical inner surface thereof.

In a still further process according to the invention, the bar is of substantially annular shape in transverse
15 section and compressive forces are applied both radially inwardly and radially outwardly of the bar on the substantially cylindrical outer and inner surfaces thereof respectively.

The compressive force applied to the granulated
20 material may be within the range 40 to 900 kgm/cm² depending upon the nature of the material and the desired porosity and strength of the resultant product.

The microcrystalline melting point of untreated PTFE powder is about 340°C, and the temperature of the initially
25 heated powder is preferably within a few degrees of this value, either above or below this value, typically within the range of 300°C to 360°C.

After the first heat treatment, the microcrystalline melting point of the material will have fallen, and the second heat treatment following compression of the granulated material is carried out to a temperature above this value, typically to about 380°C when expansion of the material occurs predominantly in a direction opposite to that of the previously applied pressure.

Cooling of the material after both the initial and second heating treatments may be carried out slowly or by quenching depending upon the desired properties of the end product.

A film of material may be produced from the cylindrical bar by subjecting the bar to a knifing or skiving treatment with a blade extending parallel with the central longitudinal axis of the bar, while the film of material so formed may be laminated to a sheet of hydrophilic material.

By way of example only, the aspects of the invention will now be described in greater detail.

PTFE powders are supplied in a range of particle sizes and shapes ranging from small, irregularly shaped particles of up to perhaps 60 microns in diameter, to larger substantially spherical particles of several hundred microns in diameter. The preferred particles for treatment in accordance with the process of the invention are the smaller particles of previously untreated PTFE of between 0.20 and 60 microns in diameter and of irregular shape.

A quantity of such material is carefully disagglomerated by means of a vibrating seive technique and is then poured onto a suitable tray. The powder is then heated to a temperature close to its microcrystalline melting point of about 340°C, typically to a temperature within a few degrees above or below this value, for example between 320°C and 360°C, resulting in the individual particles of the material not fusing completely together but remaining compressible. This can be contrasted with normal sintering of PTFE which is carried out well above said melting point, typically at a temperature of about 380°C, with the result that the particles of the material coalesce into a substantially translucent gel.

The heated material is cooled in a controlled manner, either slowly or by quenching, the rate of cooling influencing the properties of the final product.

The resultant relatively soft mass is then broken up into granules by any one of various maceration techniques and, before further processing, may be sieved into fractions of different granule sizes. The granule size at this stage has a great bearing on the pore size of the finished material. Processing a fraction of material containing granules within a narrow range of sizes will result in a material having a narrow range of pore sizes therein.

A preferred working range of granular sizes is

between 100 and 250 microns, although the granules may have a maximum diameter of up to of the order of 400 microns. The granules are of spiky, irregular shape and may have a bulk density of between 300 and 700 grams/litre, preferably between 500 and 600 grams/litre.

This granular material is then placed into a compression device comprising a hollow metal cylinder housing a cylindrical flexible rubber sleeve surrounding a central, axially-extending mandrel.

More particularly, the granulated material is placed into the rubber sleeve to surround the mandrel, and fluid under pressure is forced into the annular space between the inner wall of the metal housing and the rubber sleeve. The cylinder of granulated material so formed within the sleeve is thus compressed by a uniform radial force applied thereto by way of the rubber sleeve over the whole of the surface area of the sleeve, the pressures involved typically being up to 900 kgm/cm^2 . This can be compared with pressures applied in normal treatments of PTFE which are typically of the order of 150 to 300 kgm/cm^2 , as pressures greater than this can cause cracking of the hard PTFE - in such known treatments, if a porous product is required, the material would normally have to be under-compressed, as pressures of even 150 to 300 kgm/cm^2 are sufficient virtually to eliminate voids.

The cylinder of compressed granular material is

removed from the compression device and, after this compression stage, retains a 'plastic memory' of its structure prior to compression, the microcrystalline melting point of the material having fallen to, typically,
5 about 327°C as a result of the initial heat treatment.

The cylinder of granular material is then placed in an oven and is again heated, this time to a temperature well above its current microcrystalline melting point, typically to about 380°C. During this heating stage,
10 the granules fuse together and a large expansion of the material occurs predominantly in a direction opposite to that of the applied pressure during compression - i.e. radially outwardly - with some expansion in the axial direction also.

15 Cooling of the material is then effected in a controlled manner either slowly or by quenching dependent upon the desired properties of the resultant product, quenching resulting in a more porous material than slow cooling.

20 Thus there is produced a cylinder of non-fibrillated microporous PTFE, in which the nodes of material merge or fuse into one another to define a matrix of pores which, in any cylindrical surface within the material and centred about the central longitudinal axis of the cylinder, are
25 of uniform size and are uniformly distributed in that surface and in any concentric surface.

In a preferred application of the invention, the

cylinder of material is skived into a continuous thin film by means of a knife-blade extending axially of the cylinder and co-acting substantially tangentially with the external surface of the cylinder as it is rotated on a
5 central mandrel.

The formation of such a film the plane of which is substantially perpendicular to the direction of the compression forces ensures that the pores within any plane substantially perpendicular to the thickness of the film
10 are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that plane and all such parallel planes.

The preferred thickness of the films of material according to the invention falls within the range of
15 50 microns to 200 microns, while the preferred sizes of the pores may range from less than one micron to up to about 10 microns.

As well as being interconnected in said aforementioned
20 ed planes, the nodes of PTFE are also interconnected throughout the thickness of the film to define a complex three-dimensional matrix with much larger pore diameters and relatively non-uniform distribution of pores in planes parallel with the thickness of the film - i.e. perpendicular to the main plane of the film.

25 Thus it will be appreciated that the material invention, not being fibrillated in any dimens

significantly from axially fibrillated material which is necessarily relatively weak in one plane and is therefore prone to easy and undesirable deformation.

Indeed material according to the invention combines
5 porosity with strength, and shows excellent uniformity of pore size, with water vapour transmission values up to about 20,000 grams / 24 hours / square metre.

The material of the invention therefore has ideal application in, for example, liquid and gaseous diffusion
10 and filtration processes, as well as in the textile industry.

In this latter respect, mercury intrusion studies of the surface of the material so formed, as well as electron microscopy, reveal that the pores are substantially
15 ially funnel-shaped, being wider at the surface of the material and tapering inwardly thereof. If the size of the entrances to the pores at the surface of the material, as opposed to the size of the internal pore structure, is about 10 microns or less, the surface is non-composite
20 and can be penetrated by water. If the size of the entrances to the pores at the surface of the material is greater than about 10 microns, a composite surface results in which water can only contact the high points of the surface, thus trapping air in the surface and whereby a
25 surface with increased hydrophobicity results.

A further indication of the strength of the porous

material according to the invention is achieved by forcing mercury into the pores of the material under gradually increasing pressure, it being observed that the mercury occupies a cumulative volume within the material, and that, on slow release of the pressure, the mercury exudes therefrom with a lag or hysteresis. The test illustrates that the material retains its internal structure despite the presence of the mercury under pressure, and this can be compared with the reaction of axially-fibrillated PTFE to the same test, such material giving up all the mercury immediately on release of the pressure even if said pressure is relatively low and illustrating that the internal pore structure is easily destroyed.

The surface morphology of the non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE of the invention is such as to allow adhesion to a wide range of other surfaces without the usual surface preparation for normal, non-porous PTFE. The material can be vulcanised to substrates without the use of adhesives, while, in the textile field, the material in this film form can be laminated to one or more sheets of textile material such as polyester.

Unlike in the production of non-porous PTFE, solids may be deposited within the porous material by absorption of solutions, said solid material subsequently being precipitated within the body of the matrix to provide

electrically-conducting characteristics to the material.

The process for production of non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE according to the invention may be varied somewhat from that detailed above. For example,
5 ~~of or~~ in addition to applying a radially-inwardly directed compressive force to the outer surface of the cylinder of granular material within the compression device, a radially-outwardly directed compressive force could be applied within the hollow cylindrical interior of the
10 mass of granular material. In such a case, the solid central mandrel of the above-detailed compression device is replaced by a further flexible rubber sleeve centrally within the granular material, the outer surface of the sleeve engaging the granular material and to the hollow
15 interior of which is supplied fluid under pressure whereby the required, radially-outwardly directed compressive force is applied to the granular material by way of the flexible sleeve.

A combination of radially-inwardly directed and
20 radially-outwardly directed compressive forces is particularly useful when substantial quantities of granular material are being treated and the thickness of the annulus of material within the compression device is such that radial forces in one direction only may be
25 dissipated through said thickness.

Other modifications and variations from the described arrangements will be apparent to those skilled in the art.



THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. A substantially cylindrical bar of microporous PTFE characterised in that the material is non-fibrillated and in that the pores within any cylindrical surface contained within the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

2. A film of microporous PTFE characterised in that the material is non-fibrillated and in that the pores within any plane substantially perpendicular to the thickness of the film are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that plane and all such parallel planes.

3. A process for producing a non-fibrillated, microporous PTFE having a substantially cylindrical outer surface thereto, the process comprising the steps of:

providing thermally and compressively untreated PTFE powder;

disagglomerating said powder;

heating the disagglomerated powder to a temperature having a value close to its microcrystalline melting point;

cooling the thermally treated material, and

breaking the cooled material up into granules;

characterised in that the powder particles are of irregular shape and are of a diameter within a predetermined range, and characterised by the steps of:



forming the granulated material into a bar having a substantially cylindrical outer surface;

applying a substantially radial compressive force to the bar over the full length thereof;

5 relieving the bar of said radial compressive force;

heating the compressed granulated material to a temperature above its microcrystalline melting point, and

cooling the thermally treated material,

10 the extent of the radial compression being such that, on said subsequent heating of the previously compressed granulated material, the material expands predominantly in a direction opposite to that of the compressive force and the granules fuse together to produce a non-fibrillat-
15 ed material the pores of which, within any cylindrical surface contained in the bar and centred about the central longitudinal axis thereof, are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that surface.

20 4. A process as claimed in claim 3 and further comprising the step of forming a film from the cooled bar the plane of which film is perpendicular to the direction of the radial compressive force whereby the pores within any plane substantially perpendicular to the thickness of
25 the film are of substantially uniform size and are substantially uniformly distributed within that plane and

all such parallel planes.

5. A process as claimed in claim 3 or claim 4 in which the diameters of the powder particles are between 0.20 and 60 microns.

6. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5 in which the granules are of irregular shape and have a maximum diameter of 400 microns.

7. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5 in which the granules are of irregular shape and have a maximum diameter of 250 microns.

8. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5 in which the granules are of irregular shape and have a maximum diameter of 100 microns.

9. A process as claimed in any one of claims 6 to 8 in which the granules, prior to compression, have a bulk density of between 300 and 700 grams/litre.

10. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 9 in which the compressive force is applied radially inwardly of the bar on the substantially cylindrical outer surface thereof.

11. A process as claimed in claim 10 in which the bar is of substantially annular shape in transverse section, a compressive force also being applied radially outwardly of the bar on the substantially cylindrical inner surface thereof.

12. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 11 in which the granulated material is compressed at a pressure within the range 40 to 900 kgm/cm².

13. A process as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 12 in which the powder is initially heated to a temperature within the range 320°C to 360°C and in which the second heating is carried out to a temperature of the order of 380°C.

14. A process as claimed in claim 4 and claims dependent therefrom in which the film is formed by knifing or skiving the bar of material with a blade



extending parallel with the central longitudinal axis of the cylinder.

15. A process as claimed in claim 4 and claims dependent therefrom and further comprising the step of laminating the film of material so formed to a sheet of hydrophilic material.

16. A substantially cylindrical bar of microporous PTFE substantially as described herein.

17. A film of microporous PTFE substantially as described herein.

18. A process for producing microporous PTFE substantially as described herein.

DATED this 21st day of November, 1990.

NATIONAL RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

By its Patent Attorneys:

DAVIES & COLLISON

