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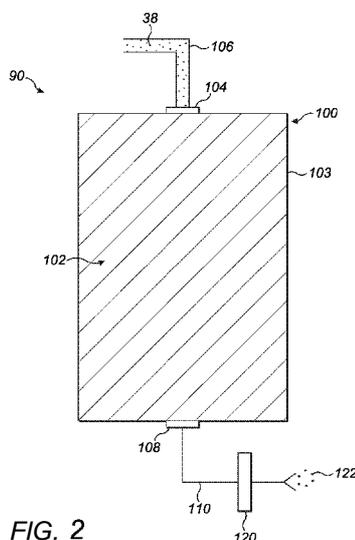


FIG. 2

(57) **Abstract:** A method for capturing halocarbon from a gas, the method comprising processing gas containing halocarbon with material which is undamaged by exposure to supercritical fluid. A method for reclaiming halocarbon from a material, the method comprising exposing the material to a supercritical fluid. A module for processing a gas containing halocarbon, the module comprising material for capturing halocarbon from a gas, wherein the module is arranged to withstand supercritical fluid.



Improvements to Halocarbon Recycling Methods and Systems

Technical Field

The present invention relates to methods and systems for capturing and recycling
5 halocarbons. In particular, the present invention relates to methods and systems for capturing and recycling halocarbons when used as volatile anaesthetic agents in medical environments.

Background

10 A halocarbon is an organic chemical molecule composed of at least one carbon atom bound covalently with one or more halocarbon atoms. Halocarbons have many uses and are used in several industries as solvents, pesticides, refrigerants, fire-resistant oils, ingredients of elastomers, adhesives and sealants, electrically insulating coatings, plastics and anaesthetics. An alternative term for halocarbons is "halocarbonated
15 fluorocarbons".

Examples of halocarbons which are used as anaesthetic agents typically include desflurane, isoflurane, sevoflurane, halothane and enflurane. These anaesthetics may be referred to as volatile anaesthetic agents because they are liquid at room temperature
20 but evaporate easily to produce a vapour for inhalation by a patient to induce anaesthesia. These agents are administered to patients using the breathing circuit of an anaesthetic machine, also known as a Boyle's machine. A schematic diagram of part of an anaesthetic machine including its breathing circuit 2 is described below with reference to Figure 1. The primary function of the anaesthetic machine is to mix oxygen with
25 volatile anaesthetic agent, at a clinician-specified concentration, for delivery to the patient via the breathing circuit 2.

The anaesthetic machine and breathing circuit 2 comprises a network of piped gas for inhalation by a patient (not shown). Air, oxygen (O_2) and nitrous oxide (N_2O) are supplied
30 respectively to the back bar 15 from an air pipe 3 or an air cylinder pipe 5, an oxygen pipe 7 or an oxygen cylinder pipe 9 and a nitrous oxide pipe 11 or a nitrous oxide cylinder pipe 13. Each gas pipe 3, 7, 11 supplies gas at 4 bar. Air and oxygen are supplied by cylinder pipes 5, 9, at 137 bar. Nitrous oxide is supplied by cylinder pipe 13 at 44 bar. To reduce the pressure of the gases supplied by the cylinder pipes 5, 9, 13 to
35 match the pressure of the gases supplied by the gas pipe 3, 7, 11 each cylinder pipe 5,

9, 13 comprises a pressure reducing valve (PRV) 17 which reduces the pressure of gases supplied by the cylinder pipes 5, 9, 13 to 4 bar.

Each of the air, oxygen and nitrous oxide is delivered separately to a respective variable flow valve 19, which allows an anaesthetist to mix the air, oxygen and nitrous oxide as required. Each variable flow valve 19 further reduces the pressure of the gases to just over 1 bar. Figure 1 shows the gases are delivered to the back bar 15, from left to right, via an air back bar pipe 18, an oxygen back bar pipe 20 and a nitrous oxide back bar pipe 22. It will be immediately apparent to the skilled person that the back bar pipes 18, 20, 22 may be arranged differently. For example, the back bar pipes 18, 20, 22 may be arranged from left to right in Figure 1 in the following order: the nitrous oxide back bar pipe 22; the oxygen back bar pipe 20; and the air back bar pipe 18.

The back bar 15 comprises a vaporiser 10 and a pressure relief valve 16. The vaporiser 10 contains a vaporisation chamber 21 in which the agent 12 is housed. The vaporisation chamber 21 is arranged so that the agent 12 evaporates to form vapour 14 at the saturated vapour pressure of the agent 12. For example, if the saturated vapour pressure is at too high a concentration to deliver agent 12 to the patient, a variable bypass valve 23 allows the anaesthetist to control the fraction of gases supplied from the back bar 15 that pass through the vaporiser 10. Accordingly, the output concentration of volatile agent 12 within the gas flow leaving the back bar 15 is controlled.

The patient inhales gases via a face mask 4 which fits over and forms a seal around the patient's nose and mouth. The face mask 4 is connected to an inspiratory tube 6 which supplies gases containing an anaesthetic agent 12, and an expiratory tube 8 through which exhaled and unused gases and agent 12 are transported away from the patient. The inspiratory tube 6 and expiratory tube 8 are typically corrugated hoses.

The inspiratory tube 6 comprises a unidirectional inspiratory valve 25 which opens upon inhalation by the patient. When the unidirectional inspiratory valve 25 is in an open state, gas flows through the back bar 15, through the vaporisation chamber 10 where it mixes with vapour 14 from the agent 12. The gas mixed with agent vapour 14 is inhaled by the patient. In use, the breathing circuit 2 dispenses an accurate and continuous supply of anaesthetic agent mixed with oxygen/air/nitrous oxide (N_2O) at a specific concentration to the patient at a safe pressure and flow rate.

The expiratory tube 8 is connected to an expiratory pipe 24 to which is connected a unidirectional expiratory valve 26 through which exhaled and unused gases pass when the unidirectional expiratory valve 26 is open. Gas that passes through the unidirectional expiratory valve 26 flows into a breathing bag 28. An exhaust pipe 30 leads from the breathing bag 28 to a variable pressure-relief valve 32.

A carbon dioxide (CO₂) absorber canister 34 is connected to the expiratory pipe 24 and the inspiratory pipe 15 and arranged to allow gases to flow through the absorber canister 34 from the expiratory pipe 24 to the inspiratory pipe 6. The absorber canister 34 contains soda lime 36 which absorbs carbon dioxide from the gas that flows through the canister 34.

The configuration of the breathing circuit 2 illustrated in Figure 1 is shown during inhalation of the gas/agent mixture by the patient. The movement of inhaled gases is shown by the solid arrows and the movement of exhaled gases is shown using dashed arrows.

Inhalation by the patient causes the expiratory valve 26 to close and the inspiratory valve 25 to open. This allows recirculated gas to flow from the breathing bag 28, through the absorption canister 34 which absorbs CO₂ in the gas, and into the inspiratory pipe 6. The gas passes through the vaporisation chamber 10 where it mixes with the agent vapour 14. The resultant gas/agent mixture is administered to the patient via the unidirectional inspiratory valve 25 and inspiratory limb 6 of the breathing circuit 2 and the breathing mask 4. The patient breathes the gas/agent mixture into their lungs which dissolve some of the agent vapour 14 into the patient's blood. This leads to a reversible state of anaesthesia.

Upon exhalation by the patient, the expiratory valve 26 opens and the inspiratory valve 25 closes. The gases exhaled by the patient, including the portion of the agent vapour 14 that is not absorbed by the patient, flow back into the breathing circuit 2 via the expiratory tube 8. The exhaled gases flow into the breathing bag 28 and excess waste gas 38 is vented via the pressure-relief valve 32. A waste pipe 40 guides the vented waste gas 38 from the breathing circuit 2.

The vented waste gas 38 will contain at least trace amounts of unused anaesthetic agent vapour 14. Even trace amounts of anaesthetic in the air in a medical environment will

- have an effect on medical staff, continued exposure to which will cause adverse health conditions, such as headache, increased incidence of spontaneous abortion, congenital anomalies in babies and haematological malignancy. Accordingly, governmental agencies have set limits on the level of volatile anaesthetic agent that hospital staff may be exposed to. In the USA the level of volatile anaesthetic agent in the air of an operating theatre should not exceed 2 parts per million (ppm), and the level of N₂O should not exceed 25ppm. The limit set for volatile agent in the UK is 50ppm, and for N₂O the limit is set at 100ppm.
- 10 In order to ensure that the environment within operating theatres and other medical environments stay within the above limits, the waste gas 38 which contains volatile anaesthetic agent vapour 14 is prevented from entering the atmosphere of medical environments.
- 15 To prevent the release of anaesthetic gases into the atmosphere of an operating theatre, in most developed countries, the waste gas 38 is "scavenged". In hospitals and large veterinary practices, operating theatre suites are provided with a negative pressure circuit. The negative pressure circuit is connected to the exhaust pipe 40 of the anaesthetic machine. The negative pressure circuit extracts the waste gas 38 to the atmosphere via an output pipe at the top of the building. Anaesthetic users of smaller practices extract waste gas 38 from the exhaust pipe 40 using the circuit pressure following the variable pressure release valve 32, which is at a pressure lower than the breathing circuit, to pass waste gases 38 from the exhaust pipe 40 through activated charcoal canisters. Such charcoal canisters are typically able to absorb twelve hours of waste gas 38. However, a problem with charcoal canisters is that once they have been used they cannot be recycled and must be disposed of, which is costly. Furthermore, unused volatile agent captured by the activated charcoal canisters may be slowly released after disposal.
- 30 Volatile anaesthetic agents are halogenated fluorocarbons, and therefore their release directly into the atmosphere is particularly undesirable. Halocarbons containing bromine and chlorine groups, collectively referred to as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), exert a damaging effect on the ozone layer. Indeed, the release of CFCs from any industry is damaging to the ozone layer. In the stratosphere, light at higher wavelength breaks down the C-Cl/Br bond of CFCs which releases highly reactive free radical groups that break down ozone (O₃), depleting the earth's UV protective barrier. Isoflurane and halothane

are both CFCs. Each agent has a different reactivity due to the amount of free radical each agent releases, and the ease with which the carbon-halide group is broken. Halothane is the most reactive, due to the relative ease with which the Br group may be removed from the molecule, followed by isoflurane. Nitrous oxide (N_2O) also has some ozone depleting potential.

In addition, N_2O and all agents, including sevoflurane and desflurane, are potent greenhouse gases due to their ability to absorb infrared light. Desflurane is the most potent due to its long atmospheric half-life. One kilo of Desflurane is equivalent to approximately 2000-3500kg of CO_2 .

The use of CFCs was curbed by the Montreal agreement in 1987 (and subsequent amendments). As a result, the use of CFCs in refrigeration and aerosols was banned and all CFC use not deemed 'essential' was monitored. Medical uses of CFCs are deemed 'essential' and are therefore unmonitored. With the banning of the use of CFCs in refrigeration and aerosols, the proportion of halocarbons released into the atmosphere due to medical use has increased and is likely to increase further. Currently, forty million anaesthetics are delivered per year in the US, and five million are delivered per year in the UK. The majority of these anaesthetics are delivered under the influence of volatile agents. In addition, it is estimated that medical use of N_2O contributes 3% of US N_2O emissions.

An alternative way to capture the agent vapour from the waste gas of the breathing circuit is to subject the waste gas to extreme cold using liquid oxygen. Halocarbons will crystallise at around -118° . However, due to safety issues surrounding the use of liquid oxygen and the practicalities of removing and separating crystalline volatile agents from super-cold oxygen pipework, this is not a viable option for most medical establishments.

Another prior art system to capture volatile anaesthetic agent from the waste gas is to pass the waste gas over silicon dioxide (SiO_2), also known as "silica" for extraction by steam. An example of this type of prior art system is described in International Patent Application Publication No. WO 2011/026230 A1.

Similarly to the charcoal method described above, the waste gas is captured from the exhaust pipe and passed through canisters that contain granular SiO_2 to which the

agent 12 binds. Once the SiO₂ is saturated with agent 12, the SiO₂ canisters are removed for processing. During processing the SiO₂ is subjected to a steam purge gas at high pressure and high temperature to separate the agent 12 from the SiO₂. Collected anaesthetic agent must be purified to remove water and then separated by fractional
5 distillation.

Summary of the Invention

Against the above background it is an aim of the present invention to at least provide methods and apparatus for capturing, reclaiming, recycling and using halocarbons which
10 overcome the problems discussed above. These and other uses, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from the teachings provided herein.

According to an aspect of the invention, there is provided a method for capturing
15 halocarbon from a gas. The method may comprise processing gas containing halocarbon with material which is undamaged by exposure to supercritical fluid. Alternatively or in combination, the method may comprise passing gas containing halocarbon through material. The halocarbon may be an anaesthetic agent. Capturing halocarbon may comprise exposing the gas to the material. In preferred embodiments, the method may
20 be performed in a medical environment, wherein the material may be a filter material.

The material may be housed in a module which is resistant to supercritical fluid to enable captured halocarbon to be reclaimed by being dissolvable in a supercritical fluid to form a
25 supercritical solution. Accordingly, the module may be arranged to withstand fluid at supercritical pressure which may be between about 7MPa and 50MPa; and/or may be arranged to withstand fluid at supercritical temperature which may be between 30°C and 100°C. Preferably, the module is arranged to withstand high internal pressure.

The halocarbon may be separated from the supercritical solution. The supercritical
30 solution and/or the separated halocarbon may be delivered as required. These further aspects of the invention are discussed further below. The combination of the aspects of the invention enables halocarbon to be continuously recycled. In a medical environment, the halocarbon may be anaesthetic agent, which may be a volatile anaesthetic agent, and the invention enables the anaesthetic agent to be recycled and reused.

35

The method preferably comprises passing gas containing one or more halocarbons through material. The material may be or comprise aerogel. The most common aerogel is made of silicon dioxide (SiO_2), but aerogels according to the invention may be made from or comprise other materials, for example, resorcinol formaldehyde, carbon, calcium carbonate and zeolite (aluminosilicate). Zeolites are micro-porous alumina silicate minerals found naturally but may also be made artificially. Carbon may be exposed to high temperatures to expand its surface area for absorption. The filter material may be doped with a metal. According to the invention, aerogel may be functionalised by the addition of one or more of halocarbon, metal oxide, cellulose, carbon nanotubes, or internally supported by polymers to improve their chemical or mechanical properties. These changes may improve the binding of halocarbons and/or the stability of the aerogel. For example, functionalisation with halocarbon improves the binding of halocarbon to the material. The material may comprise granular particles.

Furthermore, the material may comprise or be a metal or metal oxide which may be formed by forming metal-oxygen-metal bridges. Examples of preferable metals and metal oxides include nickel oxide, molybdenum oxide, alumina, titania, zirconia, iron oxide, chromia, vanadium, platinum, rhodium, palladium and tungsten. The material may comprise or be a precious metal. A metal and/or a metal oxide may be added by deposition to the material, for example by physical or chemical vapour phase deposition.

The halocarbon may bind to the material as the gas passes through the material. The material may capture the halocarbon from the gas which may be the waste gas from an anaesthetic machine.

The gas may be processed when the halocarbon in the gas binds to the material. After processing by the material, processed gas may pass through a capture agent to capture halocarbon not processed by the material. The capture agent may be activated charcoal. Gas which has been processed by the material may be monitored for halocarbon. The concentration of the processed gas may be monitored as a concentration of halocarbon in processed gas above a predetermined saturation threshold which may indicate that the material may be saturated with halocarbon. The method may comprise monitoring processed gas for an increase in the concentration of halocarbon in the processed gas, which may indicate that the material is saturated with halocarbon. The method may comprise stopping the supply of gas to the material when the material is saturated with halocarbon. The method may comprise switching the supply of gas so that it is

processed by alternative material as described herein. The alternative material may be housed in a further module.

5 The gas may be from atmospheric air in a medical environment. The gas may be supplied by an anaesthetic machine. The gas may be supplied by a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. Accordingly, a further aspect of the invention extends to a method of capturing anaesthetic agent from a gas, the method comprising passing gas containing anaesthetic agent through filter material.

10 According to an aspect of the invention there is provided a method for reclaiming, removing or extracting halocarbon from a material. The method may comprise exposing or subjecting the material to a supercritical fluid. A supercritical fluid will expand to fill its container and effuse through solids like a gas and dissolve materials like a liquid.

15 Subjecting material to which halocarbon is bound to a supercritical fluid breaks the interactions between the halocarbon and the material, and the halocarbon may be displaced from the material and/or dissolves in the supercritical fluid to form a supercritical solution containing the halocarbon. Accordingly, the halocarbon may be bound to or interact with the material so that when the material is exposed to supercritical
20 fluid, the halocarbon may be displaced and dissolves in the supercritical fluid. The material may contain a plurality of different halocarbons which may be reclaimed from the material. The supercritical solution may then carry the halocarbon away from the material leaving the material intact. A supercritical fluid is a substance at a temperature and pressure above its critical point where distinct states of gas or liquid do not exist.

25 Accordingly, before the material is subjected to supercritical fluid, the halocarbon is preferably bound to the material. The material is arranged to allow the supercritical fluid to pass through the material. The material may be a filter material. The material may comprise an aerogel.

30 The supercritical fluid may be at a pressure between about 7MPa and 50MPa; and may be at a temperature between 30°C and 100°C. The material is preferably housed in a module which may be resistant to fluids at supercritical temperature and pressure. The module may be arranged to withstand high internal pressure.

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The supercritical fluid may be or comprise supercritical carbon dioxide (CO_2). Carbon dioxide exists in a supercritical state above its critical temperature (31.1°C) and critical pressure (7.39MPa). This temperature is close to room temperature and the pressure is within pressures often used in medicine and in operating theatres. The halocarbon may be one or more anaesthetic agents which are very soluble in supercritical CO_2 and may be washed from the material by dissolving in supercritical CO_2 . Alternatively, the supercritical fluid may be or comprise nitrous oxide (N_2O).

In medicine, nitrous oxide may be used alongside anaesthetic agents to maintain anaesthesia. N_2O becomes supercritical at a similar temperature and pressure as CO_2 . However, N_2O is often unstable when supercritical. Supercritical N_2O may be broken down or reduced by including a reduction catalyst. For example, a metal catalyst reduces nitrous oxide, often in the presence of urea or ammonia. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the material comprises a reduction catalyst, which may be a metal catalyst which may be deposited on the material. A preferred metal catalyst is platinum. The catalyst may be loaded with reactant, preferably urea, before the halocarbon has been captured by the material or before the material is exposed to supercritical fluid. As gas is exposed to the material nitrous oxide in the gas may react with the urea ($\text{CO}(\text{NH}_2)_2$) in the presence of the catalyst to form nitrogen (N_2), water (H_2O) and carbon dioxide (CO_2).

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, when the material has been exposed to halocarbon and nitrous oxide, the material may be flushed with supercritical CO_2 to elute the halocarbon and remaining nitrous oxide (N_2O). Carbon dioxide may be supplied to the material and pressurised to achieve supercritical pressure, preferably around 10MPa , and heated to achieve supercritical pressure, preferably around 35°C . However, other supercritical temperatures and pressures may be used. When the supercritical CO_2 flows through the material the N_2O may be diluted in supercritical CO_2 and may become supercritical N_2O . The supercritical N_2O and supercritical CO_2 mixture may pass through the material, catalyst and/or reactant. The breakdown N_2O may occur at supercritical temperatures and pressures. At supercritical temperatures and pressures the reaction speed of the breakdown of N_2O is significantly faster than at room temperature and pressure. The invention is advantageous in that, the dilution of N_2O in supercritical CO_2 prevents a runaway reaction occurring, which may cause an explosion. Nitrogen gas, water and any other by-products may be separated by the separation steps detailed herein.

Preferably, the material is exposed to supercritical fluid when the material is saturated with halocarbon. When the material is exposed to supercritical fluid it may be flushed with supercritical fluid to elute the halocarbon and any nitrous oxide.

5 The method may comprise the step of supplying supercritical solution to a separation system for separating halocarbon from the supercritical solution. The supercritical fluid in the supercritical solution may act as a mobile phase. The separation system may comprise at least one chromatography column. The separation system may comprise a fractionating column.

10

The halocarbon may comprise a plurality of different types of halocarbon, wherein the method may comprise separating one or more of the different types of halocarbon from the supercritical solution. The method may comprise the step of removing non-halocarbon contaminants from the supercritical solution. The method may comprise the

15 step of removing nitrous oxide (N_2O) from the supercritical solution.

Prior art methods of reclaiming, removing or extracting halocarbon from material using steam require further steps to separate halocarbon from the steam so that the halocarbon may be reused. Prior art systems and methods typically include a steam

20 purge of the material; separation of halocarbon by condensation separation; and purification of the halocarbon by fractional distillation.

The method of reclaiming halocarbon from filter material according to the invention is advantageous over the prior art in that the supercritical fluid may be used as the

25 separating agent when removing the halocarbon from the supercritical solution. The present invention advantageously combines extraction of the halocarbon from the filter material with separation of the halocarbon from the supercritical solution, as described below. The invention disposes of the need to remove water from the solutions produced by the prior art methods. The present invention advantageously combines one or more of

30 the reclamation of halocarbon from filter material, the separation of halocarbon from supercritical fluid, the purification of halocarbon and the delivery of halocarbon.

In particular, an aerogel may be damaged by steam or purge vapours according to the prior art, which exert surface tension on the delicate structure of the aerogel. Aerogels

35 are not damaged by supercritical CO_2 because supercritical CO_2 exerts no surface tension.

According to a further aspect of the invention, the invention extends to a module for processing halocarbon. Preferably, the module may comprise material for capturing halocarbon from a gas. In a preferred embodiment, the module is arranged to withstand
5 supercritical fluid. The module may comprise a housing for housing the material. The module, and preferably the housing, may be arranged to allow the gas and supercritical fluid to pass through the material. Preferably, the gas and the supercritical fluid pass through the material alternately. Preferably, the gas and the supercritical fluid pass through the material at alternate times.

10

The module may be arranged so that the gas and the supercritical fluid may move through the material in opposite directions. Alternatively, the gas and the supercritical fluid may move through the filter material in similar directions. Preferably, the module is arranged to withstand supercritical pressures in the range of between about 7MPa and
15 50MPa. Preferably, the module is arranged to withstand high internal pressure.

As mentioned above, the material may be a filter material, and the material may comprise aerogel. Since the material may be manufactured using a supercritical process, the material may be reusable in a plurality of reclamation cycles. The module may be
20 arranged to allow the material to be replaced. The pore size of the aerogel may range between 0.5 and 50 nm (5 and 500 Angstroms). The material may comprise one or more of silicon dioxide (silica), zeolite (aluminosilicate), carbon and activated carbon. The material, which may preferably be an aerogel, may be doped with metal, cellulose, carbon nanotubes, a polymer or a halocarbon. The material may comprise granular
25 particles. The material may comprise a metal catalyst. The metal catalyst may comprise platinum. The material may comprise a reactant. The reactant may comprise one or more of urea, anhydrous ammonia and aqueous ammonia.

The module may be arranged to allow the ingress and egress of gas containing
30 halocarbon and/or supercritical fluid through the material. Preferably, the module may comprise a first conduit to allow the ingress and egress of gas and supercritical fluid. The module may comprise a second conduit to allow the ingress and egress of gas and supercritical fluid, wherein the first conduit may allow gas to ingress into the module and supercritical fluid to egress the module; and the second conduit may allow gas to egress
35 the module and supercritical fluid to ingress into the module.

The module may comprise a first pair of conduits and may comprise a second pair of conduits. Either or both pairs of conduits may be arranged to allow the ingress and egress of fluid through the filter material. Preferably, the first pair of conduits may allow the ingress and egress of gas, and the second pair of conduits may be arranged to allow
5 the ingress and egress of supercritical fluid.

The module may comprise an air intake duct arranged to allow atmospheric air to be processed by the material. The module may be arranged to allow atmospheric air to pass through the filter material. In a preferred embodiment, the module is a canister.
10

According to another aspect, the invention extends to a halocarbon recycling system comprising at least one module as described above.

If the invention is used in a medical environment, an air intake duct may allow the
15 entrainment of air from the local environment in order to capture escaped anaesthetic agent gas from an operating theatre, which may be in addition to receiving gas from a medical device, such as the exhaust of an anaesthetic machine. In an alternative embodiment, the module may be arranged to allow the ingress and egress of gas containing anaesthetic agent through the filter material via one pair of conduits, and the
20 ingress and egress of supercritical fluid through the filter material via the other pair of conduits. According to a further aspect of the invention, there is a module for recycling anaesthetic agent from a gas, the module comprising a housing comprising filter material for capturing anaesthetic agent from a gas, wherein the housing is arranged to allow supercritical fluid to pass through the filter material.

25 According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a medical device comprising at least one module as described above. Preferably, the medical device comprises a plurality of modules, and the anaesthetic machine is arranged to concurrently supply (i) gas containing anaesthetic agent to at least one of the modules of
30 the plurality of modules; and (ii) supply supercritical fluid to at least one other of the modules of the plurality of modules. In a preferred embodiment, the anaesthetic machine may be arranged to switch the supply of gas and supercritical fluid between the modules of the plurality of modules to enable a continuous flow of anaesthetic.

35 According to an aspect of the invention there is provided a processing method for separating one or more substances from a supercritical solution. The method preferably

comprises separating one or more halocarbons from a supercritical solution comprising halocarbon and supercritical fluid. Preferably, the one or more halocarbons may be dissolved in the supercritical fluid. The method may comprise supplying the supercritical solution to a separation system.

5

The method may comprise using supercritical fluid as the mobile phase in the separation system which may be an elution system. The separation method may be used to purify and collect the one or more halocarbons from the supercritical fluid. The method may comprise supplying supercritical fluid to the separation system. The method may
10 comprise producing a product which is monitored for one or more halocarbons. The method may comprise collecting the product if the product contains one or more halocarbons. The method may comprise disposing of the product if the product does not contain halocarbon. The method may comprise the step of removing one or more halocarbons from the product. The method may comprise the step of collecting
15 halocarbon separated from the supercritical fluid. The method may comprise using a cyclonic collector to collect the halocarbon. The method may comprise the step of separating contaminants from the supercritical solution. Preferably, the contaminants comprise of one or more of water, urea, ammonia and formaldehyde.

20 One or more of the separating steps may be performed by chromatography. Supercritical chromatography may be used after agent has been eluted from capture material. The method of chromatography may be based on polarity, molecular size, molecular weight or other molecular physiochemical differences that lead to different rates of flow under the influence of a supercritical fluid mobile phase. The separating system may comprise
25 monitoring means for monitoring the output from the at least one chromatography column. The system may comprise a controller for controlling the output of the at least one chromatography column. Following depressurisation of the supercritical CO₂, one or more temperature controlled cyclonic collectors may collect purified halocarbon or contaminates from the gaseous CO₂.

30

In a preferred embodiment, polarity based normal-phase chromatography columns are used to separate anaesthetic agents (which all have similar polarity) from other contaminants (water, urea, ammonia, formaldehyde, etc.). Different chromatography columns may be used in series to aid separation and more than one column may be
35 required to remove all contaminants. In the preferred embodiment, a molecular size exclusion chromatography column that distinguishes between the molecular sizes of the

anaesthetic agents may be used to separate agents from each other for subsequent collection from CO₂ in cooled cyclonic collectors.

5 One or more of the separating steps may be performed by fractionation. Fractionation may be driven by supercritical carbon dioxide. Supercritical fractionation may comprise the separation of volatile fractions of halocarbon dissolved in supercritical fluid by their volatility at different pressures and temperatures. A CO₂ mobile phase may be produced by a stepwise reduction in pressure of CO₂ from its supercritical pressure to atmospheric pressure. At each pressure stage the mixture may be passed through fractionating
10 columns under temperature control. Accordingly, individual halocarbon fractions may be liquefied for collection. Thus highly purified halocarbon fractions are separated from each other and from CO₂.

15 In the aspects described above, the one or more halocarbons may be one or more anaesthetic agents. The one or more anaesthetic agents may be one or more volatile anaesthetic agents. The one or more halocarbons may also be industrial halocarbons used or produced by industrial processes.

20 In order to retrieve one or more substances from a supercritical fluid, an aspect of the invention extends to a separation system for retrieving one or more substances from a supercritical solution, wherein the separation system is arranged to separate halocarbon from a supercritical solution comprising halocarbon and supercritical fluid.

25 The separating system may comprise separating means to which supercritical solution may be supplied. The separating means may comprise at least one chromatography column into which supercritical solution may be supplied. The separating means may comprise at least one fractionation column into which supercritical solution may be supplied. The separating system may comprise monitoring means for monitoring the product produced by the separating means. The monitoring means may comprise an
30 infrared spectroscopy sensor. The infrared spectroscopy sensor may be a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy device. Alternative monitoring means and methods include mass spectroscopy, UV detection, Raman spectroscopy, Acoustic resonance spectroscopy and piezoelectric crystal resonance.

35 Preferably, the system may comprise a controller for controlling the output of the separating means, wherein the controller may direct the output of the separating means

to a collection module if the product contains halocarbon. The collection module may be arranged to separate one or more of the halocarbon types. The system may comprise a collection module control means for controlling the input of product into the collection module. The system may comprise a collection module monitoring means for monitoring
5 the halocarbon type entering the collection module. The collection module monitoring means may comprise an infrared spectroscopy sensor. The infrared spectroscopy sensor may be a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy device. The collection module may comprise at least one cyclonic collector.

10 When the invention is used in a medical environment, the halocarbon may be an anaesthetic agent. Accordingly, the invention extends to a method of delivering or introducing anaesthetic agent to a medical device. Preferably, the anaesthetic agent is dissolved in a supercritical fluid. According a preferred embodiment of the invention, the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is injected into the inspiratory limb of
15 an anaesthesia breathing circuit.

An anaesthetic machine according to the prior art mixes oxygen/air/nitrous with anaesthetic agent and then delivers it to the breathing circuit. The present invention is advantageous in that it is necessary to only add oxygen and/or air to a breathing circuit
20 to replace those gasses that a patient consumes during anaesthesia. This is typically approximately 200ml/min oxygen. According to the present invention, anaesthetic agent which is dissolved in supercritical fluid may be added directly into the breathing circuit, i.e. independently of the oxygen and/or air.

25 In the prior art, if a clinician wishes to give a patient more anaesthetic they must deliver more oxygen/air/nitrous through the vaporiser and into the breathing circuit. This displaces some of the gas being recirculated in the breathing circuit of an anaesthetic machine, which wastes the displaced gas. The invention is advantageous in that the flow of gas does not have to be altered to alter the concentration of anaesthetic agent
30 delivered to the patient. The flow of oxygen/air/nitrous may be continuous and steady and does not alter depending on the concentration of agent that is required. Preferably, a control module, such as a computer, may calculate the amount of anaesthetic agent to be delivered directly into the breathing circuit based on the concentration the clinician requires. Accordingly, the clinician may change the desired anaesthetic agent
35 concentration without altering the flow of oxygen/air/nitrous. For example, when a clinician wishes to increase the depth of anaesthesia of a patient, the clinician may

increase the concentration of anaesthetic supplied to the breathing circuit. Conversely, when the clinician wishes to revive the patient, the clinician may select an anaesthetic concentration of zero which results in anaesthetic agent being captured and/or reclaimed from the breathing circuit. The gas in the breathing circuit may therefore be replaced with
5 fresh oxygen/air/nitrous.

Therefore, in a preferred embodiment, the medical device may be an anaesthetic machine, and the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent may be delivered to the anaesthetic machine. Preferably, anaesthetic agent may be injected into the medical
10 device. The supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent may be delivered or injected into the backbar or breathing circuit of the anaesthetic machine.

The medical device may be a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. The supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent may be delivered to the cardiopulmonary bypass
15 machine. The supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent may be delivered to the gas flow to the oxygenator of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine. The supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent may be injected into the arterial line of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

20 The method may comprise capturing anaesthetic agent from a medical device. The method may comprise monitoring the level and/or concentration of anaesthetic agent entering and or exiting the medical device. The method may comprise adjusting delivery of anaesthetic agent by computer and/or by clinician control.

25 Accordingly, an aspect of the invention also extends to a system for delivering or introducing anaesthetic agent to a medical device. Preferably, a supercritical solution of anaesthetic agent may be dissolved in supercritical fluid and delivered to a medical device. The system may comprise a cartridge or storage tank containing the supercritical solution of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid.

30 Preferably, the system comprises delivery means for delivering the supercritical solution to the medical device. The delivery means may comprise an injector for delivering the supercritical solution. The delivery means may comprise a warming sleeve to maintain a supercritical temperature. The system may be arranged to deliver the supercritical
35 solution to an anaesthetic machine or a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. The system

may be arranged to introduce anaesthetic agent into the breathing circuit of the anaesthetic machine or into the cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

5 The system may comprise at least one sensor for monitoring the level of anaesthetic agent in the system. Preferably, the at least one sensor may comprise an infrared spectroscopy sensor. The infrared spectroscopy sensor may be a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy device. The system may comprise a control module for controlling the amount of anaesthetic agent delivered by the system. The system may comprise an injector module or an injector. The injector module or the injector may be arranged to
10 deliver anaesthetic agent and supercritical fluid to the breathing circuit or backbar of the anaesthetic machine, or the arterial line of a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. The system may comprise a control module for controlling the amount of anaesthetic agent delivered by the system.

15 The injector may be computer-controlled to enable the delivery of precise amounts of diluted halocarbon into the breathing circuit using the pressure of the supercritical fluid as the driving pressure. The injector may be warmed to prevent icing as the supercritical fluid is depressurised. As the supercritical fluid is warmed and depressurises, it disperses and vaporises the halocarbon for delivery to the patient. The carbon dioxide absorber in
20 the breathing circuit may absorb the small amounts of carbon dioxide used to deliver the agent.

The delivery system may include one or more modules as described above and/or the recycling system as described above. The system may comprise a pressurised and
25 temperature-regulated module containing halocarbon dissolved in supercritical fluid.

It will be clear to those skilled in the art that the delivery system can be used in combination with the capture, reclamation and separation systems above to provide a mobile, closed-loop anaesthetic machine that is able to deliver and recycle anaesthetic
30 gases.

According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method and system for recycling halocarbon. In addition to the preferred embodiments below, the method and system for recycling halocarbon may comprise any combination of the capturing,
35 reclamation, separation and delivery steps and apparatus described above.

The method for recycling halocarbon preferably comprises processing gas containing halocarbon with halocarbon-binding material to bind halocarbon to the material; and may comprise exposing the material to supercritical fluid to dissolve halocarbon bound to the material in the supercritical fluid to form a supercritical solution.

5

Preferably, the gas is processed by passing the gas through the material. The supercritical fluid may pass through the material to dissolve halocarbon bound to the material. The method may comprise monitoring the concentration of halocarbon in the processed gas, and may comprise switching from the processing step to the exposing
10 step at a predetermined concentration of halocarbon. Preferably, the method may alternate between the processing and exposing steps. Alternatively, the processing steps and exposing steps may take place concurrently.

In a preferred embodiment, the method may comprise the step of separating halocarbon
15 from the supercritical solution. The method may comprise delivering supercritical solution to a medical device. Preferably, the gas containing halocarbon may be provided by a medical device. The method may comprise monitoring the concentration of halocarbon delivered to the device, and may comprise monitoring the concentration of halocarbon received from the medical device.

20

According to an aspect of the invention there is provided a recycling system for recycling halocarbon. The recycling system preferably comprises halocarbon-binding material for capturing halocarbon from a gas. The system may be arranged to expose material (i) to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and preferably (ii) to supercritical
25 fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

The recycling system may comprise at least one module as described above. The recycling system may comprise a gas ingress pipe for supplying gas containing halocarbon to at least one module. The recycling system may comprise a gas egress
30 pipe for carrying processed gas away from at least one module. The recycling system may comprise a supercritical fluid ingress pipe for supplying supercritical fluid to at least one module. The system may comprise a supercritical fluid egress pipe for carrying supercritical fluid in which halocarbon is dissolved away from the module.

35 Accordingly, material may be housed in one or more modules. The recycling system may be arranged to supply fluid to one or more of the modules so that the supercritical fluid

passes through the material to dissolve halocarbon. In a preferred embodiment, the fluid is supercritical fluid. In a preferred embodiment, the fluid is gas. The gas preferably contains halocarbon. The recycling system may be arranged to supply gas containing halocarbon to one or more modules so that gas passes through the material to capture
5 halocarbon.

The system may be arranged to switch between exposing the material to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon, and exposing the material to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon. The system may be arranged to alternately expose the material
10 to (i) gas containing halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid. The system may be arranged to expose material to gas containing halocarbon; and to expose material to supercritical fluid at the same time.

The system may be arranged so that each module of a plurality of modules may be
15 arranged to expose the material housed in the module to (i) gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution. Each module of the plurality of modules may be arranged to switch between exposing the material housed in the module to (i) gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a
20 supercritical solution.

The system may be arranged to supply gas to one or more modules of the plurality of modules to capture halocarbon at the same time as supercritical fluid passes through at least one of the other modules to dissolve halocarbon. The system may be arranged to
25 switch the modes of one or more of the modules of the plurality of modules between exposing the material (i) to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

In an embodiment of the recycling system which has at least two modules, the system
30 may be arranged to pass gas containing halocarbon through one module to capture the halocarbon, and pass supercritical fluid through the other module to dissolve captured halocarbon. In a preferred embodiment, the system is arranged to switch a first module from passing gas containing anaesthetic agent to passing supercritical fluid through the first module; and switch a second module from passing supercritical fluid to passing gas
35 containing anaesthetic agent. This enables the system to switch operation when or

before the module through which gas containing anaesthetic agent passes is saturated with halocarbon.

5 The recycling system may comprise a gas ingress means for supplying gas containing halocarbon to the material. The system may comprise control means for controlling the flow of gas to the material. The system may comprise a gas egress means for carrying processed gas away from the material. The recycling system may comprise monitoring means for monitoring the concentration of halocarbon in the processed gas, and the monitoring means may be arranged to send a control signal to the control means. The
10 recycling system may comprise a supercritical fluid ingress pipe for supplying supercritical fluid to the material. The system may comprise a supercritical fluid egress pipe for carrying supercritical fluid in which halocarbon may be dissolved away from the material.

15 Advantageously, the invention enables a continuous flow of gas containing halocarbon to be processed while, preferably at the same time, a continuous flow of halocarbon dissolved in supercritical fluid may be provided for use. In an embodiment where the halocarbon contains one or more anaesthetic agents, the invention enables anaesthetic agent returning from a patient under anaesthesia to be captured from a gas, reclaimed
20 from the material and delivered back to the patient. Therefore, in a preferred embodiment, the recycling system may deliver the supercritical solution to a medical device. The gas may contain halocarbon which may be supplied from a medical device.

Accordingly, the invention enables halocarbon to be constantly captured from waste gas
25 without interruption; and halocarbon, which may be one or more anaesthetic agents, may be continuously provided to apparatus for inducing anaesthesia. For example, an anaesthetic machine. Alternatively, the invention may provide halocarbon to a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. Accordingly, the recycling system may be arranged so that gas passes through one module to capture halocarbon at the same time as
30 supercritical fluid passes through another module to dissolve halocarbon captured by the other module.

The operation of each module in a plurality of modules may be switched, and the switch may be synchronised between each module so that each model switches operation at
35 the same time, so that the system may be arranged to switch the operation of the modules concurrently.

Preferably, the recycling system comprises gas control means to switch the flow of gas between the modules. The system may comprise a further gas ingress pipe for supplying gas containing halocarbon to a further module. The system may further comprise a
5 further gas egress pipe for carrying processed gas away from the further module.

In a preferred embodiment, the recycling system comprises monitoring means arranged to monitor the concentration of halocarbon egressing from each module. Preferably, the monitoring means is a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) device. The
10 system may comprise gas flow control means to control the flow of gas to the modules. Preferably, the monitoring means is arranged to send a signal to the gas control means to switch the gas flow between the modules when the monitoring means detects that one of the modules is saturated with halocarbon. This allows the modules to be swapped when the module processing the gas reaches saturation point, thereby providing a
15 continuous flow of useable halocarbon.

In a preferred embodiment, a supercritical solution of anaesthetic agent may be injected into the gas stream supplying the oxygenator, or injection into the oxygenator gas flow, of a cardiopulmonary bypass machine. This enables diffusion of volatile anaesthetic agent
20 to equal partial pressures from the gas into blood passing through the oxygenator to maintain anaesthesia. Halocarbon that does not dissolve and gas that has transferred from blood into the oxygenator down any partial pressure gradient is exhausted. In one embodiment of the invention, exhaust gases from the oxygenator are passed through a module to capture halocarbon.
25

The delivery system may comprise a pressurised and temperature-regulated module containing anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid and a warmed injector module to deliver exact amounts of anaesthetic agent and supercritical fluid to either the gas passing to the oxygenator or directly into the arterial blood supply. In the case of
30 delivery to the oxygenator gas supply, the warming and depressurisation of the supercritical fluid drives dispersion and/or vapourisation of anaesthetic agent into the gas stream. In the case of delivery to the arterial tube of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine, carbon dioxide quickly dissolves in blood due to its high solubility, which quickly dilutes anaesthetic agent into the blood.
35

Advantageously, the invention provides a closed recycling system that enables the safe delivery of accurate concentrations of volatile agents to patients without the need for ventilation of a patient in cardiac anaesthesia. Currently, if volatile agents are used to supply the oxygenator from a conventional vapouriser, high flows are required and are wasteful. Many hospitals therefore use intravenous anaesthesia during cardiopulmonary bypass. This invention enables the efficient use of volatile anaesthetic agents, which is advantageous as they are reported to have better neuroprotective effects than propofol.

Furthermore, pure volatile anaesthetic agent is extremely insoluble in water or blood. Therefore, anaesthetic agent may remain as a bolus in the patient's circulation when delivered directly into a patient's blood as a liquid. The invention therefore overcomes the problem of how to provide a system for providing volatile anaesthetic agent directly into blood at a concentration low enough to be safe.

It will be clear to those skilled in the art that the module and delivery system may be used separately. The capture module may be used to recycle anaesthetic gases delivered before and/or during cardiopulmonary bypass by a conventional anaesthetic machine, in which a vaporiser supplies an oxygenator. A separate stand-alone source of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid may be used for delivery of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid to a medical device. In this way, the delivery system may supply anaesthetic agent independent of a closed-loop system by using a stand-alone source of pressurised, temperature-controlled anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid with an injector module.

The system may also comprise a control module for controlling the amount of halocarbon delivered by the system. The control module and/or one or more of the sensors may be linked so that a change in the level of halocarbon returning to the system results in a change in the level of halocarbon delivered by the system. The control module and one or more of the sensors may be linked to maintain a constant supply of halocarbon dissolved in supercritical fluid. This supply would be from recycled halocarbon with system losses replaced either from a liquid source of halocarbon or a separate supply of halocarbon dissolved in supercritical fluid.

The invention provides apparatus and methods of capturing, reclaiming, separating, delivering and recycling halocarbon from waste gas, which may be from the breathing circuit of an anaesthetic machine. By capturing halocarbon, which may comprise, volatile

anaesthetic agents, and preventing their release into the atmosphere global halocarbon emissions may be reduced.

The aspects of the invention are interrelated to provide apparatus and methods which
5 improve the capture and reuse of halocarbons in the medical and industrial sectors.

It is to be appreciated that one or more of the aspects, embodiments and features of any
of the above aspects or embodiments of the invention may be readily combined, as will
be readily apparent to the skilled person. Furthermore, the forgoing advantages may
10 relate to more than one aspect of the present invention.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only,
with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which like components are assigned
15 like numerals, and in which:-

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of the breathing circuit of an anaesthetic
machine according to the prior art;

20 Figure 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating a module for capturing anaesthetic
agent from contaminated gas according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating an alternative module for capturing
anaesthetic agent from contaminated gas from the anaesthetic machine and theatre
25 environment according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram illustrating the invention in use in a medical
environment which comprises multiple theatres and/or anaesthetic machines according
to an embodiment of the invention;

30 Figure 5 is a schematic diagram illustrating apparatus for reclaiming anaesthetic
agent captured in a canister according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 6 is a schematic diagram illustrating alternative apparatus for reclaiming
35 and purifying anaesthetic agent captured in a canister according to an embodiment of the
invention;

Figure 7 is a schematic diagram illustrating apparatus for separating anaesthetic agents according to an embodiment of the invention;

5 Figure 8 is a schematic diagram illustrating alternative apparatus for separating anaesthetic agents according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 9 is a schematic diagram illustrating apparatus for recycling anaesthetic agent for use in an anaesthetic machine according to an embodiment of the invention;
10

Figure 10 is a schematic diagram illustrating alternative apparatus for recycling anaesthetic agent for use in an anaesthetic machine according to an embodiment of the invention;

15 Figure 11 is a schematic diagram illustrating apparatus for capturing anaesthetic agent for delivery to a cardiac bypass machine according to an embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 12 is a schematic diagram illustrating the use of the invention for delivering
20 anaesthetic agent to a breathing circuit in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

Detailed Description

A module 90 for processing halocarbon, in particular capturing anaesthetic agent from a
25 gas is shown in Figure 2. A pressure canister 100 comprises a housing 103 containing material for capturing halocarbon from a gas, which is held in the canister 100 by at least one mesh (not shown in Figure 2). In the presently described embodiment of the invention the material is a filter material 102 which is an aerogel which is formed from silica (SiO_2) and functionalised with halocarbon. In alternative embodiments of the
30 invention the filter material may comprised from other materials described below. The module 90, and in particular, the canister 100, is able to withstand supercritical fluid to allow supercritical fluid to pass through the filter material 102.

An aerogel is a synthetic porous ultra-light material derived from a gel, in which the liquid
35 component of the gel has been replaced with gas. An aerogel is formed by first creating a gel. Once the gel is created, the liquid component of the gel is removed by solvent

exchange. Finally, the material is subjected to supercritical CO₂. Supercritical CO₂ is a fluid state of CO₂ in which CO₂ is at a pressure and temperature at or above its critical temperature and pressure, which are 31.1°C (304.25K) and 7.39MPa (72.9atm) respectively. When it is in a supercritical state, CO₂ has the properties of a gas and a
5 fluid in that it will expand to fill its container like a gas but can dissolve materials like a liquid. In addition, supercritical CO₂ does not have any surface tension. Therefore, when supercritical CO₂ is allowed to vaporise it does not exert capillary hydrostatic pressures onto the aerogel material that would normally collapse it. The end result is that all the liquid is removed from the gel to arrive at an aerogel in which the gel structure remains
10 intact.

The most common type of aerogel is silica aerogel. However, other aerogels exist, such as aerogels manufactured from carbon or metal oxides, calcium carbonate and resorcinol formaldehyde. The produced aerogel may be doped with metal compounds,
15 such as nickel, precious metals, fluorocarbons or metal oxides. Doping of the aerogel gives certain properties such as preventing water absorption, gas selectivity, catalysis or adsorbent characteristics, for example. The produced aerogel may also be functionalized by cellulose, carbonisation of the aerogel, carbon nanotubes and polymerisation of monomer after aerogel formation to improve mechanical strength.

20

The canister 100 has an ingress conduit 104 which is removably connected to an ingress pipe 106 which receives waste gas 38 from the exhaust pipe 40 of an anaesthetic machine. As the patient breathes out, the pressure of their exhaled air pushes the waste gas 38 through the pressure release valve 32, which then flows through the canister 100.
25 The canister 100 comprises an egress conduit 108 to which an egress pipe 110 is removably connected. Processed gas 122 exits the canister 100 through the egress pipe 110 into the atmosphere. The egress pipe 110 comprises a small activated charcoal filter 120 through which gas exiting the canister 100 passes to ensure that any residual volatile agent is absorbed and prevented from being released into the atmosphere.

30

In use, waste gas 38 flows from the exhaust pipe 40 of the anaesthetic machine into the ingress pipe 106. The anaesthetic machine from which the canister 100 receives waste gas 38 may deliver several different types of agent. Accordingly, the canister 100 may process and collect a mixture of volatile anaesthetic agents.

35

As mentioned above, the waste gas 38 contains non-metabolised volatile anaesthetic agent 12, which is a class of halocarbon. The anaesthetic agent 12 is captured from the waste gas 38 by processing the waste gas 38 containing the anaesthetic agent 12 with the filter material which, as described above, is undamaged by exposure to supercritical
5 fluid. The waste gas 12 containing anaesthetic agent is passed through the filter material 102. The volatile anaesthetic agent 12 in the waste gas 38 binds to the filter material 102 as the waste gas 38 passes through the canister 100. The agent 12 binds to the filter material 102 mainly due to van der Waals and some very weak hydrogen bonding. Once the waste gas 38 has passed through the filter material 102, the processed gas 122 exits
10 the canister 100 via the egress pipe 110. Any residual agent 12 remaining in the processed gas 122 is absorbed by the activated charcoal filter 120 before the processed gas 122 exits into the atmosphere.

When the filter material 102 in the canister 100 is saturated with agent 12, the feed of
15 waste gas 38 to the ingress pipe 106 may be terminated and the canister 100 removed from the ingress pipe 106 and the egress pipe 110.

An alternative module 90a according to an alternative embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Figure 3. A canister 101 has an ingress conduit 104 which is removably
20 connected to an ingress pipe 106 which receives waste gas 38 from the exhaust pipe 40 of an anaesthetic machine. In addition, canister 101 has a first duct 105a and a second duct 105b in the housing 103. The first and second ducts 105a, 105b allow gas from another source to pass through the canister 101. In the presently described embodiment, environmental air 107 from an operating theatre, which may contain small quantities of
25 anaesthetic agent 12, is free to pass through the ducts 105a, 105b.

Filter material 102 is held inside the housing 103 by an ingress mesh 109a and an egress mesh 109b. The meshes 109a, 109b are metal. The canister 101 comprises an egress conduit 108. The width of the canister 101 reduces to form a conical venturi
30 chamber 111 which has an egress neck portion 113. The egress conduit 108 is mounted on the egress neck portion 113.

A pump (not shown) is attached to the egress conduit 108 and arranged to suck the waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 from the ingress pipe 106 and ducts 105a, 105b
35 respectively. The combination of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 is sucked through the filter material 102. The anaesthetic agent 12 is captured from the

combination of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 as they pass through the filter material 102. The resultant processed gas 122 is then released into the atmosphere after passing through a further activated charcoal filter (not shown in Figure 3) to capture any residual agent 12.

5

When the filter material 102 in the canister 101 is saturated with agent 12, the feed of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 to the canister 101 is terminated and the canister 101 is removed from the ingress pipe 106 and the egress pipe 110.

10 One or more canisters 100 may be used to process gasses from a plurality of anaesthetic machines and/or operating theatres. Figure 4 illustrates a processing system 150 for processing gas from a plurality of anaesthetic machines and/or operating theatres using a first canister 100a and a second canister 100b. The canisters 100a, 100b may be similar to the canister 100 described with reference to Figure 2.

15

In the system illustrated in Figure 4, a first receiving pipe 152a receives waste gas 38 from a first anaesthetic machine; a second receiving pipe 152b receives waste gas 38 from a second anaesthetic machine; and a third receiving pipe 152c receives environmental air 107 from an operating theatre. For simplicity three receiving pipes
20 152a, 152b, 152c are shown in Figure 4. However, the processing system 150 may comprise any number of receiving pipes. Each receiving pipe 152a, 152b, 152c may receive waste gas 38 from an anaesthetic machine or environmental air 107 from an operating theatre.

25 The receiving pipes 152a, 152b, 152c converge into a main receiving pipe 154. The waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 flow towards a first directional valve 156a. The first directional valve 156a directs the flow of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 to either a first ingress pipe 106a or a second ingress pipe 106b. Figure 4 shows the first directional valve 156a directing the flow of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 into
30 the first ingress pipe 106a. The first canister 100a is connected between the first ingress pipe 106a and a first egress pipe 110a, so that the waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 flows through filter material 102 in the first canister 100a, which captures anaesthetic agent from the gas 38 and air 107. The second canister 100b is connected between the second ingress pipe 106b and a second egress pipe 110b, so that the waste gas 38 and
35 environmental air 107 flows through filter material 102 in the second canister 100b when

the first directional valve 156a directs the flow of gas 38 and air 107 through the second ingress pipe 106b.

5 The first egress pipe 110a and second egress pipe 110b meet at a second directional valve 156b which directs processed gas 122 to a main egress pipe 110. The second directional valve 156b directs the flow of processed gas 122 from the first egress pipe 110a or the second egress pipe 110b to the main egress pipe 110.

10 The directions of each of the first directional valve 156a and the second directional valve 156b are controlled by a valve controller 158. The valve controller 158 is operatively linked to a module for monitoring gas. In the present embodiment, infra-red spectroscopy, which in the presently described embodiment is a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) device 160, is used to analyse the gas flowing in each of the first and second egress pipes 110a, 110b. In alternative embodiments of the
15 invention, a dispersive infra-red device may be used. The FT-IR device 160 is arranged to receive samples 161 from the gas flowing in each of the first and second egress pipes 110a, 110b. Alternative monitoring means or sensors and methods include mass spectroscopy, UV detection, Raman spectroscopy, Acoustic resonance spectroscopy and piezoelectric crystal resonance.

20

In the configuration illustrated in Figure 4, the FT-IR device 160 periodically tests processed gas 122 from the first egress pipe 110a. The FT-IR device 160 analyses each sample for anaesthetic agent 12. Detection of anaesthetic agent 12 above a predetermined concentration in the processed gas 122 indicates that the filter material
25 102 in the first canister 100a is saturated with anaesthetic agent 12. For example, once the filter material is saturated with agent 12, the concentration of agent 12 in the gas exiting the canister 100a will rise to the concentration of agent 12 entering the canister 100a. If the concentration of agent 12 in the gas exiting the canister 100a and flowing through the first egress pipe 100a, is detected by the FT-IR device 160 as rising above
30 the predetermined threshold concentration, the FT-IR device 160 sends a saturation signal 162 to the valve controller 158.

Alternatively, an increase in concentration of agent 12 exiting the canister 100a may trigger the sending of a saturation signal 162 to the valve controller. For example, while
35 agent 12 is captured by the filter material 102, a constant concentration of agent 12, which may be a trace amount, may exit a canister 100a. Therefore, an indication of

saturation of filter material 102 may be the increase in the concentration of agent 12 exiting the canister 100a.

When anaesthetic agent 12 above the predetermined concentration is detected in the first egress pipe 110a by the FT-IR device 160, the FT-IR device 160 sends a saturation signal 162 to the valve controller 158. On receipt of the saturation signal 162 the valve controller 158 sends a switch signal 164 to each of the valve controllers 156a, 156b. On receipt of the switch signal 164 the first valve controller 156a switches the direction of flow of waste gas 38 and environmental air 107 to the second ingress pipe 106b, and the second directional valve 156b switches direction to allow processed gas 122 to flow from the second egress pipe 110b to the main egress pipe 110. Once the gas 38 and air 107 are flowing through the second canister 100b the first canister may be replaced. In turn, once the filter material of the second canister 100b has been saturated the directional valves will switch in the opposite direction to allow the replacement of the second canister 100b.

Accordingly, the processing system 150 provides a system in which the output of more than one anaesthetic machine and/or the environmental air of more than one operating theatre can be passed through a bank of canisters. Further embodiments of the processing system may comprise more than two canisters connected in parallel via corresponding ingress and egress pipes. A processing system according to these further embodiments may be used to process the anaesthetic gas scavenging system (AGSS) of an entire hospital.

The canister 100 shown in Figure 5 has been used to absorb an anaesthetic agent 12 which is bonded to the filter material 102 in the canister 100. A method for reclaiming the anaesthetic agent 12 from the filter material 102 is described herein with reference to Figure 5 which shows a reclamation system 200 for retrieving agent 12 from the canister 100 according to an embodiment of the invention.

The reclamation system 200 exposes the filter material 102 to a supercritical fluid. In the current embodiment, supercritical CO₂ 203 is fed into the canister 100, wherein supercritical CO₂ 203 passes through the filter material 102. Liquid CO₂ 201 is fed into the system 200 from a liquid CO₂ tank 202 and collects in a CO₂ reservoir 204. A separation pump 206 pumps CO₂ 201 from the reservoir 204 into a separation condenser or accumulator 208 which pressurises and raises the temperature of the CO₂ 201 above

its critical temperature and pressure to form supercritical CO₂ 203. The separation pump 206 and the accumulator 208 control the conditions under which the supercritical CO₂ 203 enters the canister 100.

5 The supercritical CO₂ 203 is fed into the egress conduit 108 of the canister 100 wherein it passes through the filter material 102. Volatile anaesthetic agent 12 bound to the filter material 102 will dissolve in the supercritical CO₂ 203, so that both the agent 12 and the supercritical CO₂ 203 form a supercritical solution 250. The supercritical CO₂ 203 acts to displace and dissolve the agent 12 from the filter material 102. The supercritical solution
10 250 exits the canister 100 through the ingress conduit 104.

The supercritical CO₂ 203 acts as a mobile phase, drawing supercritical agent 12 within it through a chromatography column 210. Chromatography columns may separate supercritical agent 12 based on polarity, molecular size and weight as discussed below.

15 The supercritical solution 250 is supplied to an injector 211 which injects the supercritical solution 250 in aliquots into the chromatography column 210.

The pressure inside the canister 100 and the chromatography column 210 is maintained by a back-pressure regulator 205. After passing through the chromatography column
20 210, separated volatile anaesthetic agents 12 and CO₂ are released from their supercritical state and the volatile anaesthetic agents 12 are collected by cyclonic collection into a collection vessel 212. The gaseous CO₂ is subsequently re-compressed for re-use. The accumulator 208, canister 100 and chromatography column 210 are maintained at supercritical temperatures by one or more ovens (not shown). The cyclonic
25 collector 212 may be maintained at cold temperatures to liquefy the anaesthetic agent 12 from the gaseous CO₂ 201.

The chromatography column 210 may be based on polarity, molecular size and weight and/or other molecular physiochemical differences that lead to different rates of flow
30 under the influence of a supercritical fluid mobile phase. For example, a chromatography column with molecular size filters may lead to different retention times within the column that can separate different types of anaesthetic agents 12 from each other. Alternatively, a polarity based chromatography column may separate contaminants from supercritical solution 250. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, after injection of an aliquot of
35 supercritical solution 250 for separation, pure supercritical CO₂ 203 may be provided to the column as the mobile phase (not shown).

In addition to capturing agent 12, the filter material 102 also captures contaminants, for example, water, urea, ammonia, formaldehyde, which may also be released into the supercritical solution 250. In the currently described embodiment, a polarity based chromatography column such as 2-PE (2-Ethyl Pyridine) is used to separate anaesthetic agents from contaminants.

The reclamation system 200 allows contaminants to be removed from the supercritical solution 250 via the chromatography column 210 and by cyclonic collection into the collection vessel 212.

It will be clear to those skilled in the art that more than one chromatography column 210 can be placed in series to perform different separations. If a plurality of anaesthetic agents 12 is absorbed by the filter material 102, a further chromatography column may be required after contaminants have been removed. In the preferred embodiment, a chromatography column 210 based on molecular size is used to separate anaesthetic agents. Monitoring of the product of one or more of the chromatography columns may be performed by infra-red monitoring equipment, such as those described herein. The flow of the product of one or more of the chromatography columns may be controlled by a controller, such as a computer to select volatile agents 12 and exclude contaminants where required.

When the canister 100 has been used to capture a single type of agent 12 and the risk of the filter material capturing contaminants is minimal, there is no need to use a chromatography column 210. Either the mixture of supercritical CO₂ and supercritical volatile anaesthetic agent 12 remains in a supercritical state for subsequent redelivery to the patient via the breathing circuit, or they are depressurised from supercritical conditions and the volatile anaesthetic agent 12 is collected by the cyclonic collector 212. The gaseous CO₂ is subsequently re-compressed for re-use, as described in detail below.

The gaseous CO₂ 207 flows into a recompression pump 214 which pumps the gaseous CO₂ 207 into a recompression condenser 216 which converts the gaseous CO₂ 207 into liquid CO₂ 201 which is stored in the CO₂ reservoir 204, or any excess is stored in the liquid CO₂ tank 202.

Figure 6 illustrates an alternative reclamation system 200a and method for extracting anaesthetic agent 12 from the filter material 102 of a canister 100 which comprises three chromatography columns: a first chromatography column 210a, a second chromatography column 210b and a third chromatography column 210c.

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Liquid CO₂ 201 is fed into the system 200a from a liquid CO₂ tank 202. A pump 206 pumps CO₂ 201 from the liquid CO₂ tank 202 into a temperature-controlled accumulator 208. This pressurises and raises the temperature of the CO₂ 201 above its critical temperature and pressure to form supercritical CO₂ 203 and provides a reservoir to supply a constant flow of supercritical CO₂ 203. The pump 206 and the temperature-controlled accumulator 208 control the conditions under which the supercritical CO₂ 203 enters the canister 100.

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The supercritical CO₂ 203 is fed into the egress conduit 108 of the canister 100 wherein it passes through the filter material 102 which has captured a plurality of volatile anaesthetic agents 12. Volatile anaesthetic agents 12 bound to the filter material 102 dissolve in the supercritical CO₂ 203, forming a supercritical solution 250. The supercritical solution 250 exits the canister 100 through the ingress conduit 104 and collects in a supercritical fluid collection vessel 213.

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The supercritical solution 250 is fed into a main injection pipe 209, which feeds a first injection pipe 209a, a second injection pipe 209b and a third injection pipe 209c. The first injection pipe 209a supplies supercritical CO₂ 203 and agent 12 solution 250 to a first injector 211a; the second injection pipe 209b supplies supercritical CO₂ 203 and agent 12 solution 250 to a second injector 211b; and the third injection pipe 209c supplies supercritical CO₂ 203 and agent 12 solution 250 to a third injector 211c.

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The first injector 211a, the second injector 211b and the third injector 211c are arranged to inject supercritical CO₂ 203 and agent 12 solution 250 aliquots into the first chromatography column 210a, the second chromatography column 210b and the third chromatography column 210c respectively.

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Each Injection of solution 250 into each chromatography column is followed by a flow of pure supercritical CO₂ 203, which is supplied from the accumulator 208 via a supercritical CO₂ supply line 227. Supercritical CO₂ 203 acts as the mobile phase of the chromatography columns 210a, 210b, 210c which drives separation of anaesthetic

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agents 12 from contaminants. The chromatography columns aim to remove and separate hydrophilic contaminants such as methanol and formaldehyde and significantly different hydrophobic contaminants such as anaesthetic agent breakdown products from the supercritical solution 250; thereby maximising the purity of the agent 12 reclaimed by the invention.

In the presently described embodiment, the chromatography columns separate agents 12 based on polarity. Anaesthetic agents 12 have very similar polarities and are therefore eluted together. However, in alternative embodiments of the invention chromatography columns may be used which separate agents based on other characteristics such as size exclusion. For example, a molecular size exclusion chromatography column that distinguishes between the molecular sizes of the anaesthetic agents 12 may be used to separate agents from each other for subsequent collection in cyclonic collectors. Alternatively, chromatography columns may be placed in series to perform different separations on the same aliquot of supercritical solution 250.

The product produced by each chromatography column 210a, 210b, 210c is fed into a first chromatography egress pipe 217a, a second chromatography egress pipe 217b and a third chromatography egress pipe 217c respectively. Each chromatography egress pipe 217a, 217b, 217c is connected to a respective collection pipe 219a, 219b 219c and a respective waste pipe 221a, 221b, 221c. The first collection pipe 219a, the second collection pipe 219b and the third collection pipe 219c converge into a main collection pipe 219. The first waste pipe 221a, the second waste pipe 221b and the third waste pipe 221c converge into a main waste pipe 221 which leads to a waste vent 229. The flow of product through each chromatography egress pipe 217a, 217b, 217c is directed to either the respective collection pipe 219a, 219b 219c or the respective waste pipe 221a, 221b, 221c by a respective control valve 223a, 223b, 223c which are controlled by a valve controller 225.

An FT-IR device 160 monitors the product produced by each chromatography column 210a, 210b, 210c. When the FT-IR device 160 detects that agent 12 is being produced by the one or more chromatography columns 210a, 210b, 210c, the valve controller 225 sets the respective control valve(s) 223a, 223b, 223c so that the agent-product 230 flows through the respective collection pipe(s) 219a, 219b, 219c. In addition to anaesthetic agent 12, the product 230 produced by the one or more chromatography columns 210a, 210b, 210c also contains CO₂. The product 230 is in a supercritical state. The

supercritical state is maintained by a back-pressure regulator 205, shown in Figures 7 and 8. All components including those downstream of the accumulator 208 are located in a temperature controlled environment (not shown) above the supercritical temperature of the fluid. In the preferred embodiment, the supercritical fluid is carbon dioxide and the temperature is 35°C, although other temperatures above the supercritical temperature of CO₂ could be used.

Alternatively, when the FT-IR device 160 detects that one or more chromatography columns 210a, 210b, 210c is no longer producing anaesthetic agent 12, the valve controller 225 sets the respective control valve(s) 223a, 223b, 223c so that the waste-product 231 flows through the respective waste pipe(s) 221a, 221b, 221c to the waste vent 229. The waste vent 229 allows the waste product 231 to change to the gas phase which is vented into the atmosphere.

The reclamation systems described herein typically operate at 7.4MPa to 50MPa (or higher). A preferred pressure is 10MPa; and at 31°C to 100° C (or higher). A preferred temperature is 35°C. The reclamation systems described here may equally be used to reclaim agent 12 from a canister 101 described with reference to Figure 3.

If a plurality of different anaesthetic agents 12 have been captured by the canister 100 shown in Figure 6, the gas 230 produced by the one or more chromatography columns 210a, 210b, 210c will contain a plurality of anaesthetic agents 12. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate apparatus and methods for separating each agent 12 from a plurality of anaesthetic agents 12 contained in the gas 230.

Figure 7 shows an agent collection system 600 in which one or more substances are separated from a supercritical solution comprising halocarbon and supercritical fluid. In the presently described embodiment, the supercritical solution is agent-product 230 from which one or more halocarbons are separated. Agent-product 230 is supplied to a chromatography column ingress pipe 602. The agent-product 230 contains three anaesthetic agents 12: agent A 12a; agent B 12b; and agent C 12c. The agents 12a, 12b, 12c are dissolved in supercritical CO₂. Example agents include isoflurane, sevoflurane and desflurane.

The chromatography column ingress pipe 602 supplies agent-product 230 to a chromatography column 210. A chromatography column egress pipe 604 directs the

product of the chromatography column 210 to a back-pressure regulator 205 to which a directional valve 605 is connected. The back-pressure regulator 205 depressurises the product of the chromatography column 210, which causes the product of the chromatography column 210 to cool. To mitigate the effects of cooling, the back-pressure regulator 205 contains a heating module (not shown) that prevents icing following decompression which may lead to sticking of the valve 605. The directional valve 605 is controlled by a controller 607. A FT-IR device 160 monitors the product produced by the chromatography column 210 by firing light through an in-line IR flow cell (not shown) located in the chromatography column egress pipe 604, and sends corresponding signals 614 to the controller 607, which is described further below.

The agent collection system 600 comprises a collection module 608, the interior of which is cooled by a temperature control system to liquefy the anaesthetic agent 12. The interior of the collection module 608 comprises three accumulators: a first heat accumulator 610a, a second heat accumulator 610b and a third heat accumulator 610c. Each heat accumulator 610a, 610b, 610c is connected to the directional valve 605 by a respective accumulator ingress pipe 612a, 612b, 612c.

The FT-IR device 160 ensures that each heat accumulator 610a, 610b, 610c collects a different agent. For example, when the FT-IR device 160 detects that agent A 12a is being produced by the chromatography column 210, the FT-IR device 160 sends a signal 614 to the controller 607 which in turn sets the valve 605 so that agent A 12a flows into the first accumulator 610a. If the FT-IR device 160 detects that that agent B 12b is being produced by the chromatography column 210, the FT-IR device 160 sends a signal 614 to the controller 607 which in turn sets the valve 605 so that agent B 12b flows into in the second accumulator 610b. Similarly, if the FT-IR device 160 detects that that agent C 12c is being produced by the chromatography column 210, the FT-IR device 160 sends a signal 614 to the controller 607 which in turn sets the valve 605 so that agent C 12c flows into the third accumulator 610c. Each heat accumulator 610a, 610b, 610c is arranged to transfer heat away from the anaesthetic agent gas 12a, 12b, 12c which are cooled and liquefy entering it which collects in an associated cyclonic collector 616a, 616b, 616c. Gaseous CO₂ is allowed to escape from each cyclonic collector 616a, 616b, 616c through an associated cyclonic vent 618a, 618b, 618c.

Alternative embodiments may contain further chromatography columns. Chromatography columns may separate based on polarity, molecular size or weight.

The preferred embodiment of the invention uses a size exclusion chromatography column with a pore size that differentiates between the different anaesthetic agents.

Alternatively, supercritical fractionation can be used to separate individual anaesthetic agents. This process refers to use of staged depressurisation of CO₂ and its use as a driving gas in cold fractionating columns to elute the different agents based on their volatility. Thus lower volatility fractions condense first during slow transit through the column. The more volatile fraction continues into the next column with CO₂. In this column, further cooling of the column causes condensation of this fraction and its separation from CO₂.

Figure 8 shows an alternative agent collection system 600a which uses fractionation to separate anaesthetic agent 12 from agent-product 230. As above, the agent-product 230 is in a supercritical state when it enters the system 600a. The agent-product 230 flows along a pipe 650 to a back pressure regulator 205. Agent-product 230 is depressurised below critical pressure and warmed to prevent icing by the back-pressure regulator 205. Agent-product 230 flows to a first fractionating column 652a along a first fractionating column ingress pipe 654a.

A first fractionating column egress pipe 656a extends from the first fractionating column 652a to a first pressure reducing valve 205a. Pressure is further controlled by the downstream pressure-regulator valve 658a. A second fractionating column ingress pipe 654b extends from the first pressure reducing valve 658a to a second fractionating column 652b. A second fractionating column egress pipe 656b extends from the second fractionating column 652b to a second pressure reducing valve 205b. A vent pipe 659 extends from the second pressure reducing valve 205b to a vent 660.

Each fractionating column 652a, 652b comprises non-absorbent beads 661a, 661b, and a cooling jacket 662a, 662b to allow temperature control of each fractionating column 652a, 652b. A first collection vessel 664a is associated with the first fractionating column 652a, and a second collection vessel 664b is associated with the second fractionating column 652b.

The pressure of the solution 503 is lowered in stages by the pressure regulating valves 205a and 205b. Less volatile agent 12, for example Agent X 12x, is liquefied by the first fractionating column 652a and collects in the first collection vessel 664a. CO₂ and

anaesthetic agent with a higher volatility, for example Agent Y 12y, passes into the second fractionating column 652b, which may be further depressurised by the pressure regulating valve 205b. Due to the low temperatures in the fractionating column 661b, the remaining anaesthetic agent liquefies and collects in the second collection vessel.

5 Gaseous CO₂ is released via the vent 660. Alternatively, gaseous CO₂ may be recompressed for future use (not shown).

A plurality of fractionating columns may be arranged in parallel which enables selected agents to be recovered at a higher rate. Alternatively, a plurality of fractionating columns
10 may be arranged in series, as shown in Figure 8, to allow a greater range of agents to be collected.

In alternative embodiments of the invention, in-line infra-red, preferably FT-IR sensor, devices may be used to detect the presence of anaesthetic agents and contaminants in
15 liquidised agent 12x, 12y. Further separation steps, for example using chromatography or fractional distillation, may then be used to achieve the required purity of agent 12x, 12y

According to a further embodiment of the invention, a recycling system 300 for
20 reintroducing halocarbon is shown in Figure 9. The recycling system 300 comprises halocarbon-binding material, filter material 102 in the presently described embodiment, for capturing halocarbon from a gas. The system 300 is arranged to expose the material to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon, and to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution. In the presently described
25 embodiment, the halocarbon is volatile anaesthetic agent 12 that has been extracted from the waste gas 38 of an anaesthetic machine, and returned back into the same anaesthetic machine, as shown in Figure 9.

The recycling system 300 shown in Figure 9 has a first module as described above, and
30 the system 300 is arranged to supply fluid to the module so that the fluid passes through the filter material 102. The recycling system 300 offers the optimum in volatile anaesthetic agent 12 recycling to patients during long operations and in intensive care. The recycling system 300 is arranged to continually recycle a single volatile anaesthetic agent 12.

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The recycling system 300 comprises a first silica aerogel canister 100a and a second silica aerogel canister 100b. Each canister 100a, 100b has a waste gas ingress conduit 104a, 104b to allow waste gas 38 to enter each canister 100a, 100b and a gas egress conduit 108a, 108b to allow processed gas to exit each canister 100a, 100b. The first waste gas ingress conduit 104a and the second waste gas ingress conduit 104b are each connected to a respective first waste gas ingress pipe 106a and second waste gas ingress pipe 106b. Each ingress pipe 106a, 106b comprises an ingress valve 302a, 302b for controlling the flow of waste gas 38 into the respective canister 100a, 100b. The first processed gas egress conduit 108a and the second processed gas egress conduit 108b are each removably connected to a respective first egress pipe 110a and second egress pipe 110b. The first and second egress pipes 110a, 110b meet to form a single main egress pipe 110 which comprises a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) device 160 arranged to detect the presence of volatile anaesthetic agent 12 in the main egress pipe 108. A rise in the concentration of volatile anaesthetic agent 12 in the main egress pipe 108 indicates that the canister currently removing agent 12 from the waste gas 38 is saturated which will necessitate a switch in the operation of the canisters 100a, 100b. After the gas has passed through the Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) device 160, it then passes through a small activated charcoal filter 120 which captures any residual agent 12.

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In addition to a waste gas ingress conduit 104a, 104b and processed gas egress conduit 108a, 108b each canister 100a, 100b has a supercritical CO₂ ingress port 304a, 304b and a supercritical CO₂ egress port 306a, 306b. Each CO₂ ingress port 304a, 304b is connected to a CO₂ ingress pipe 308a, 308b which supplies supercritical CO₂ 203 into each respective canister 100a, 100b. Each CO₂ ingress pipe 308a, 308b comprises a CO₂ valve 310a, 310b for controlling the flow of supercritical CO₂ 203 into each respective canister 100a, 100b. Each CO₂ ingress pipe 308a, 308b is fed from a main CO₂ ingress pipe 308. Each supercritical CO₂ egress port 306a, 306b is connected to a respective CO₂ egress pipe 312a, 312b. Each CO₂ egress pipe 312a, 312b is connected to a main CO₂ egress pipe 312 which carries supercritical CO₂ 203 from the first and second canisters 100a, 100b.

The main CO₂ egress pipe 312 leads to a back pressure regulator 320 that warms and decompresses the CO₂ and dissolved agent 12. A cooled cyclonic separation chamber 322 liquefies and separates the volatile agent 12 from the gaseous CO₂. The gaseous CO₂ flows in a recovered CO₂ pipe 324 to a CO₂ reservoir 204. A CO₂ tank 202 is

connected to the recovered CO₂ pipe 324 to top-up the CO₂ in the recycling system 300. A separation pump 206 pumps CO₂ from the reservoir 204 into a separation accumulator 208. The separation pump 206 increases the pressure of the CO₂ above the critical pressure of CO₂ (73 bar). The accumulator 208 and canisters 100a, 100b are housed in an oven (not shown) to maintain the temperature above the critical temperature of CO₂ (31.1 °C). The accumulator 208 warms the CO₂ and provides a buffer of supercritical CO₂ to maintain the pressure in the circuit above critical pressure. Preferably the operating temperature is 35°C and the pressure 100bar (10MPa). However, in alternative embodiments these values may be higher. The separation pump 206 and the accumulator 208 control the conditions under which the liquid CO₂ enters the main CO₂ ingress pipe 308.

The delivery chamber 316 is warmed above the critical temperature of CO₂ and stores agent 12 dissolved in supercritical CO₂ for use in a breathing circuit 2 of an anaesthetic machine. The delivery chamber 316 may receive injected recycled anaesthetic agent 12 from the cyclonic separator 322 via the delivery pipe 314 or from a container 326 containing non-recycled agent 12 which may have been obtained from another source. The anaesthetic agent 12 in the delivery chamber 316 is dissolved in supercritical CO₂. The concentration is measured by a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) device 160. Accordingly, the concentration of agent 12 in the supercritical CO₂ may be adjusted to the correct level by adding more or less agent 12 from the cyclonic separator 322 or container 326 or by adding supercritical CO₂ to the delivery chamber 316 from the separation pump 206 (connection not shown).

An injection pipe 330 extends from the delivery chamber 316 to the breathing circuit 2 of an anaesthetic machine. The injection pipe 330 comprises a warmed injector 334 under the influence of a computer and clinician-controlled valve 332. The injector injects agent 12 dissolved in supercritical CO₂ into the breathing circuit 2, preferably directly into the inspiration pipe 6. As the CO₂ is decompressed and warmed it vaporises and disperses the anaesthetic agent 12 for delivery to the patient. The soda lime canister 34 of the breathing circuit 2 may be moved to the inspiratory limb 6 to absorb the small amounts of CO₂ delivered by the injector 334.

A method of recycling halocarbon is now described with reference to Figure 9. A patient breathes in gas containing volatile anaesthetic agent 12 supplied by the inspiration tube 6 of a breathing circuit 2 modified as described above and shown in Figure 9. The patient

exhales unused agent 12 via an expiratory tube 8. Waste gas 38 released by a pressure-relief valve 32 (not shown in Figure 9) flows through the exhaust pipe 40 which is connected to a main ingress pipe 106 which splits into the first ingress pipe 106a and the second ingress pipe 106b. The first ingress valve 302a is open to allow waste gas 38 into the first canister 100a and the second ingress valve 302b is closed to prevent waste gas 38 from entering the second canister 100b. The waste gas 38 containing agent 12 is processed by the halocarbon-binding material to bind halocarbon to the material. The flow through the first canister 100a is as described above with reference to Figure 2 and exits the first canister 100a via its egress port 108a. The processed gas 122 is released into the atmosphere via an activated charcoal filter 120.

The first CO₂ valve 310a is closed to prevent supercritical CO₂ entering the first canister 100a and the second CO₂ valve 310b is open to allow supercritical CO₂ to enter the second canister 100b. The material 102 is exposed to the supercritical CO₂ entering the second canister 100b which flows through the filter material 102 to dissolve halocarbon, i.e. the agent 12, bound to the material 102 by dissolving the agent 12 in the supercritical CO₂, as described above with reference to Figure 5. The dissolved halocarbon and supercritical fluid to form a supercritical solution. The supercritical solution in which agent 12 is diluted exits the second canister 100b through the second supercritical CO₂ egress port 306b.

During processing of waste gas 38 by the current embodiment of the invention, the first ingress valve 302a and the first CO₂ valve 310a are arranged so that when the first ingress valve 302a is open the first CO₂ valve 310a is closed, and vice versa. Similarly, the second ingress valve 302b and the second CO₂ valve 310b are arranged so that when the second ingress valve 302b is open the second CO₂ valve 310b is closed, and vice versa. Accordingly, the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b are arranged such that either of the first canister 100a or the second canister 100b cannot receive waste gas 38 and supercritical CO₂ simultaneously. In addition, during processing of waste gas 38 by the current embodiment of the invention, the first ingress valve 302a and the second ingress valve 302b are arranged so that they cannot be in the same state, i.e. open or closed at the same time. Similarly, the first CO₂ valve 310a and the second CO₂ valve 310b are arranged so that they cannot be in the same state, i.e. open or closed at the same time.

In an alternative embodiment, an ingress three-way valve located at the junction of the main ingress pipe 106, first ingress pipe 106a and second ingress pipe 106b may be

substituted for each of the first and second ingress valves 302a, 302b. In addition, a three-way CO₂ valve located at the junction of the main supercritical CO₂ pipe 308, first supercritical CO₂ pipe 308a and second supercritical CO₂ pipe 308b may be substituted for the first and second supercritical CO₂ valves 310a, 310b.

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The supply of waste gas 38 and supercritical CO₂ 302 entering the two canisters 100a, 100b of the recycling system 300 system is controlled by the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b so that one canister 100a, 100b receives waste gas 38 while the other canister 100b, 100a receives supercritical CO₂ 203. Accordingly, one canister 100a, 100b captures agent 12 from the waste gas 38 while agent 12 is removed from the other canister 100b, 100a for re-use in the breathing circuit 2 of the anaesthetic machine.

The states in which the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b operate are swapped simultaneously at regular intervals. In the embodiment of the invention shown in Figure 9, during a first swap the first ingress valve 302a is closed, the first CO₂ valve 310a is opened, the second ingress valve 302b is opened and the second CO₂ valve 310b is closed. At a later point the states of the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b are swapped back to their previous states when the filter material 102 of the first canister 102a is saturated. It is envisaged that in other embodiments of the invention the swap may occur before saturation of the filter material 102. When the states of the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b are first swapped, the first canister 100a no longer receives waste gas 38, but receives supercritical CO₂ 203 instead to release the agent 12 captured in the canister 100a. The second canister 100b no longer receives supercritical CO₂ 203, but receives waste gas 38 instead to capture agent 12.

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Swapping the states of the valves 302a, 302b, 310a, 310b and therefore the functions of the canisters 100a, 100b enables continuous operation of the agent recycling system 300. As mentioned above, the filter material 102 is able to withstand supercritical fluid. Therefore, the material and one or more modules according to an embodiment of the invention may be reused, i.e. be subject to many capture-reclamation cycles, without appreciable decay in their performance. However, in alternative embodiments of the invention, the filter material and/or one or more modules may require replacement after a number of capture-reclamation cycles. The agent 12 recovered by the recycling system 300 may be kept dissolved in supercritical CO₂ 203 which may be injected directly into the breathing circuit 2 of an anaesthetic machine as described above, or returned to a vaporiser (not shown).

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Anaesthetic machines allow anaesthetists to deliver a specific oxygen fraction with an accurately diluted amount of volatile agent 12 to the patient. The invention enables agent 12 to be rapidly administered to the patient with the required concentration. Providing
5 volatile anaesthetic agent 12 directly into the breathing circuit 2 of the anaesthetic machine enables fast induction of the agent 12. The invention also provides an anaesthetist with fine control of the dosage of agent 12. An infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 monitors the concentrations of agent 12 in the inspiratory tube 6 and expiratory tube 8 of the breathing circuit 2. The concentration of agent 12 in the
10 inspiratory tube 6 is monitored to ensure that the correct concentration of agent is administered to the patient. The concentration of agent 12 in the expiratory tube 8 is monitored as an indicator of the depth of anaesthesia. For example, the level of end-tidal agent concentration is a reliable indicator of the depth of anaesthesia. The infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 is linked to a control module (not shown) that controls
15 the delivery of the agent 12 by influencing the function of the delivery valve 332 based on the readings obtained by the infra-red absorption spectra machine 160.

The invention also enables the entire output from the patient to be scavenged for agent 12. Furthermore, the invention provides immediate clearance of agent 12 from the
20 breathing circuit 2 and rapid wake-up of the patient.

Figure 10 illustrates an alternative recycling system 301 which has many features in common with the apparatus described above. The alternative recycling system 301 delivers anaesthetic agent 12 dissolved in supercritical CO₂ 203 and recycles captured
25 waste gas 38 itself, and comprises a chromatography column 210 to separate anaesthetic agent 12 from contaminants. The alternative recycling system 301 is preferably used with a single anaesthetic agent, although further chromatography or fractional distillation methods could be used to allow the use of multiple anaesthetic agents.

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In the alternative recycling system 301 waste gas 38 from a breathing circuit 2 of an anaesthetic machine flows through a main ingress pipe 154 to the first and second canisters 100a, 100b via respective first and second ingress pipes 154a, 154b. In an alternative embodiment, the main ingress pipe 154 may also receive environmental air
35 107 from operating theatres.

According to a method of using the alternative recycling system 301, the first ingress valve 302a is open to allow waste gas 38 into the first canister 100a and the second ingress valve 302b is closed to prevent gas 38 entering the second canister 100b. The gas 38 is processed by the first canister 100a as described above to capture the agent 12 and exits the first canister 100a via its egress port 108a. The processed gas 122 is released into the atmosphere.

The first CO₂ valve 310a is closed to prevent supercritical CO₂ entering the first canister 100a and the second CO₂ valve 310b is open to allow supercritical CO₂ to enter the second canister 100b. Supercritical CO₂ entering the second canister 100b flows through the filter material 102 to reclaim agent 12 bound to the filter material 102 by dissolving the agent 12 in the supercritical CO₂ forming a supercritical solution 250. The supercritical solution 250 exits the second canister 100b through the second supercritical CO₂ egress port 306b, the second CO₂ egress pipe 312b and through the main CO₂ egress pipe 312 into a supercritical solution reservoir 338.

The supercritical solution reservoir 338 supplies supercritical solution 250 to a chromatography column injector 211 which injects aliquots of supercritical solution 250 into a chromatography column 210 via a chromatography column ingress pipe 340. A supply line 227 supplies pure supercritical CO₂ 203 to act as the mobile phase. A chromatography column egress pipe 341 allows fluids to leave the chromatography column 210. The chromatography column 210 separates contaminants from anaesthetic agent 12 and supercritical CO₂, and a mixture of anaesthetic agent 12 and supercritical CO₂ exits the chromatography column 210 via the chromatography column egress pipe 341.

The agent 12 dissolved in supercritical CO₂ flows along the chromatography column egress pipe 341 to a back-pressure regulator 345 which decompressed and warms the mixture. The decompressed mixture flows to a valve 342 which is controlled by a FT-IR device 160 which monitors the fluid in the chromatography column egress pipe 341. When the fluid in the chromatography column egress pipe 341 contains contaminants, the valve 342 releases any contaminants into the atmosphere via a chromatography column egress port 344. When the samples contain agent, the valve 342 directs the fluid flow to a heat accumulator 346 which transfers heat away from the fluid flow so that the anaesthetic agent 12 cools and liquefies for collection in a cyclonic separation chamber 320.

A controllable agent injector 348 controls the injection of liquefied agent into a delivery chamber 316. The FT-IR device 160 monitors the concentration of agent in the delivery chamber 316. The concentration of agent in the delivery chamber 316 may be adjusted
5 by adding more agent 12 by the controllable agent injector 348 or more supercritical CO₂ 203 by a controllable supercritical CO₂ injector 349.

The supercritical CO₂ and agent at a controlled concentration are injected directly from the compression pipe 330 into the breathing circuit 2 by a warmed injector 504. An infra-
10 red absorption spectra machine 160 monitors the concentrations of agent 12 in the inspiratory tube 6 and expiratory tube 8 of the breathing circuit 2. The infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 is linked to a controller 505 to ensure that the correct concentration of agent is administered to the patient. The controller 505 can also be influenced by the clinician. As the supercritical CO₂ is depressurised by the injector 504,
15 it is warmed to prevent icing. This disperses and vaporises the anaesthetic agent 12 into the breathing circuit 2. Only small amounts of CO₂ are used and these are absorbed by the soda lime 36 in the breathing circuit 2.

According to another embodiment, the invention may be used to deliver a supercritical
20 solution of anaesthetic agent dissolved in a supercritical fluid to a medical device. Figure 11 illustrates a cardiac bypass circuit 400 comprising a pulmonary gas exchange 402, which is also known in the art as an oxygenator, which removes waste gas 38 from venous blood 404 while simultaneously oxygenating blood. A pump 406, a suction line 408 and a venous line 410 are used to take venous blood 404 from a patient during an
25 operation. The venous blood 404 taken from the patient is collected in a blood reservoir 412 before entering the pulmonary gas exchange 402.

Oxygen and anaesthetic agent 12 are supplied to the pulmonary gas exchange 402 from an anaesthetic machine (not shown in Figure 11) via an oxygen tube 414 and waste gas
30 38 exits the exchange 402 via an exhaust pipe 30. The waste gas 38 contains volatile anaesthetic agent 12 that has not been metabolised or absorbed by the patient. The exhaust pipe 30 is connected to an ingress pipe 106 which is removably connected to the ingress conduit 104 of a canister 100 as shown in Figure 2 and described above. The canister 100 captures the agent 12 by binding the agent 12 to the filter material 102 as
35 the waste gas 38 passed through the filter material, as described above with reference to Figure 2. Waste gas 38 from which agent 12 has been removed by the canister 100 exits

the canister 100 through the egress conduit 108 to which an egress pipe 110 is removably connected. The egress pipe 110 comprises a small activated charcoal filter 120 to capture any residual agent 12 in the processed gas 122 before the processed gas 122 is released from the egress pipe 110 into the atmosphere. Oxygenated blood from which the agent 12 has been removed exits the pulmonary gas exchange 402 via an exchange exit tube 416.

A supercritical solution 418 comprising supercritical CO₂ 203 and volatile anaesthetic agent 12 is stored in a pressurised storage tank 420 which is mounted in a heated sleeve 421 to maintain the temperature above critical temperature. The storage tank 420 supplies a warmed electronically controlled injector valve 432 which is controlled by a controller 433. The supercritical solution 418 is injected directly into the patient's blood flowing through the exchange exit tube 416. The supercritical CO₂ 203 is depressurised by the injector valve 432 and is absorbed into blood with the dispersed and vaporised anaesthetic agent 12. The blood-agent dilution flows from the exchange exit tube 416 into a centrifugal pump 422 which is controlled by the controller 433, and propels the blood containing the agent dilution into an arterial line 424 which feeds the blood-agent dilution into an artery of the patient. The arterial line 424 comprises a bubble trap 426 to prevent gas bubbles from entering the patient's circulatory system.

Samples of blood are taken from the arterial line 424 for analysis. The samples of blood are measured by an infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 to determine the concentration of agent 12 in the blood being returned to the patient. The concentration of agent 12 delivered into the exchange exit tube 416 may then be altered if necessary. The infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 also monitors the waste gas 38 from the pulmonary gas exchange 402 for volatile anaesthetic agent 12, which provides a means of measuring the depth of anaesthesia. In addition, the infra-red absorption spectra machine 160 monitors the processed gas 122 to indicate when the filter material 102 has been saturated with agent 12.

In alternative embodiments of the invention, either of the recycling systems 300, 301 described above may be combined with the cardiac bypass circuit 400 to form a recycling system for reintroducing volatile anaesthetic agent that has been extracted from the blood of a patient by the cardiac bypass circuit 400. In further embodiments of the invention, a mixture of anaesthetic and supercritical CO₂ may be injected into the gas feed to the oxygenator or the arterial line 424 of a cardiac bypass circuit 400. This

invention may also be used in mini-bypass circuits that do not have a venous blood reservoir 412.

In a further embodiment, the invention may be used in a portable anaesthetic machine 500, such as may be used by the military, disaster relief organisations or hospitals, as shown in Figure 12. The portable anaesthetic machine 500 comprises a replaceable pressurised storage tank 502 containing a supercritical solution 503 of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical CO₂. The replaceable storage tank 502 is mounted in a warming sleeve 421 which ensures that the solution is maintained at a supercritical temperature. The warming sleeve is controlled by a warming sleeve controller 507.

The storage tank 502 feeds an injector 504 controlled by an injector system controller 509 which injects solution 503 into a vaporisation chamber 21 which is incorporated into the breathing circuit 2 of the portable anaesthetic machine 500. The unidirectional valve 16 is connected to an inspiratory tube 6 which is arranged to supply gas containing an anaesthetic agent 12 for inhalation by a patient. The portable anaesthetic machine 500 comprises an expiratory tube 8 through which exhaled and unused gases and agent 12 are transported away from the patient via a unidirectional expiratory valve 26 to an expiratory pipe 24.

A CO₂ absorber canister 34 is connected to the expiratory pipe 24. The absorber canister 34 contains lime soda 36 to absorb carbon dioxide from the gas that flows through the canister 34. A ventilator or bag 506 links the CO₂ absorber canister 34 to the vaporisation chamber to complete the breathing circuit 2 and provide a means of pressuring the breathing circuit 2 to deliver a breath to the patient.

The portable anaesthetic machine 500 comprises an infra-red monitoring device. In the presently described embodiment a FT-IR device 160 is used which is arranged to monitor the level of agent 12 flowing in the inspiratory pipe 6 and the expiratory pipe 8. In alternative embodiments of the invention, the infra-red monitoring device may be a dispersive infra-red device to improve portability as dispersive infra-red devices are typically simpler and smaller than a FT-IR device. If the FT-IR device 160 detects that the level of agent in the flowing in each of the inspiratory pipe 6 and the expiratory pipe 8 requires adjustment, it sends a signal 508 to the controller 509 which instructs the injector 504 to increase or reduce the injection of solution 503, as necessary. The

controller 509 also adjusts the ventilator to deliver the required pressure and rate for ventilation as decided by the clinician.

5 A pressure release valve 32 directs waste gas 38 through an ingress pipe 106 to an ingress conduit 104. The waste gas 30 is processed by a canister 100 containing filter material 102 which captures agent 12. Processed gas 122 exits the canister 100 via an egress conduit 108, flows through an activated charcoal filter 120 and vented into the atmosphere.

10 In alternative embodiments of the invention, a catalyst may be deposited onto a ceramic honeycomb structure at the ingress conduit 104 of the canister 100. In this position, the catalyst will act on a supercritical solution as it egresses the canister 100 during reclamation. In further embodiments, the catalyst is introduced as a dopant into an aerogel. It will be clear to those experienced in the art, that many different precious and
15 non-precious metals might be used as a catalyst.

Although particular embodiments of the invention have been disclosed herein in detail with reference to a medical environment, this by way of example only and for the purposes of illustration only. The invention may be used for the capture and reclamation
20 of halocarbons in other industries in which halocarbon capture and/or reuse is desirable or required.

In an alternative embodiment of the invention, exhaust gas from the production area of a factory which uses halocarbons is passed through a canister 100, 101 containing filter
25 material. The halocarbons are captured by the filter material. Once the filter material has been saturated, it may be subjected to supercritical CO₂, as described above, to dissolve the halocarbons in the supercritical CO₂ to produce a supercritical solution. The halocarbons may be separated from the supercritical CO₂ by chromatography and fractional distillation, as described above.

30 Nitrous oxide (N₂O) is an important gas in paediatric and maternal anaesthesia. However, N₂O is unstable under supercritical conditions, but may be controlled when used with a reduction catalyst.

35 In a further embodiment of the invention, the module 90 may comprise a reduction catalyst such as precious or semi-precious metals/metal oxides. In a preferred

embodiment, the metal catalyst is platinum although others such as titanium oxide, tungsten oxide, vanadium oxide, molybdenum oxide, rhodium, palladium may be used. The reduction catalyst may be deposited onto the filter material 102, which may preferably be aerogel or any of the other filter materials described above. Alternatively, 5 the filter material 102 may comprise the reduction catalyst. The reduction catalyst may be loaded with reactant, preferably urea before halocarbon capture or before halocarbon reclamation by supercritical CO_2 extraction. In this way, as waste gas 38 containing agent 12 passes into the module, nitrous oxide may react with the urea ($\text{CO}(\text{NH}_2)_2$) in the presence of the catalyst to form nitrogen (N_2), water (H_2O) and carbon dioxide (CO_2).

10

When the canister 100 is saturated with agent 12, it may be flushed with supercritical CO_2 to elute the halocarbon agent 12 as described in Figures 5, 6, 9 and 10. In the present embodiment, due to the presence of nitrous oxide absorbed onto the filter material and the selective reduction catalysts, it will also reduce nitrous oxide. Carbon 15 dioxide is pumped into the canister to achieve supercritical pressure, preferably at 10MPa and 35°C degrees, although higher pressures and temperatures may be required. When the circuit is pressurised, flow through the system when the back pressure regulator opens results in supercritical N_2O diluted in supercritical CO_2 passing through the filter material and catalyst in the presence of urea. Reaction rates are high at 20 supercritical pressure and temperature and in the absence of oxygen. Nitrogen gas and other by-products may be extracted from the agent by chromatographic separation.

It will clear to those skilled in the art that this invention may be used for the selective reduction catalysis of nitrous oxide intermediates (NO_x) including nitrous oxide (N_2O) in 25 situations outside of the reclamation of anaesthetic agents, such as power or heat generation and in the automobile industry.

In other embodiments of the invention other supercritical fluids such as supercritical nitrous oxide (N_2O) may be used. N_2O becomes supercritical at a similar temperature and pressure as CO_2 and behaves in a similar manner to supercritical CO_2 . For example, 30 in an alternative embodiment of the invention described above, supercritical N_2O may be used to dissolve agent 12 bound to the filter material 102 in an alternative canister 100, 101 that has been saturated with agent 12. In these embodiments, it is envisaged that reduction catalysts as described above will be used to reduce N_2O to nitrous and 35 oxygen, and/or supercritical N_2O may be diluted in supercritical CO_2 to stabilise supercritical N_2O .

The aforementioned embodiments are not intended to be limiting with respect to the scope of the appended claims, which follow. Furthermore, features of one or more of the above embodiments may be readily combined with one or more features of another
5 embodiment. It is also contemplated by the inventors that various substitutions, alterations, and modifications may be made to the invention without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the claims.

Claims

1. A method for capturing halocarbon from a gas, the method comprising processing gas containing halocarbon with material which is undamaged by exposure to supercritical fluid.
5
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the method comprises exposing the gas to the material.
- 10 3. The method of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the material is arranged to allow the gas to pass through the material.
4. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the material is a filter material.
- 15 5. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the material is housed in a module which is resistant to supercritical fluid.
6. The method of Claim 5, wherein the module is arranged to withstand fluid at supercritical pressure.
20
7. The method of Claim 6, wherein the supercritical pressure is between about 7MPa and 50MPa.
8. The method of any of Claims 5 to 7, wherein the module is arranged to withstand fluid at supercritical temperature.
25
9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the supercritical temperature is between 30°C and 100°C.
- 30 10. The method of any of Claims 5 to 9, wherein the module is arranged to withstand high internal pressure.
11. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the gas is processed by the halocarbon binding to the material.
35

12. The method of any preceding claim, wherein after processing by the material processed gas passes through a capture agent to capture halocarbon not processed by the material.
- 5 13. The method of Claim 12, wherein the capture agent is activated charcoal.
14. The method of any preceding claim, wherein gas which has been processed by the material is monitored for halocarbon.
- 10 15. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the concentration of halocarbon in processed gas above a saturation threshold indicates that the material is saturated with halocarbon.
- 15 16. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the method comprises stopping the supply of gas to the material is when the material is saturated with halocarbon.
17. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the method comprises switching the supply of gas so that it is processed by alternative material.
- 20 18. The method of Claim 17, wherein the alternative material is housed in a further module.
19. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the gas is atmospheric air from a medical environment.
- 25 20. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the gas is supplied by an anaesthetic machine.
21. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the gas is supplied by a
30 cardiopulmonary bypass machine.
22. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the material comprises an aerogel.
23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the aerogel is functionalised, preferably by the
35 addition of halocarbon.

24. A method for reclaiming halocarbon from a material, the method comprising exposing the material to a supercritical fluid.
25. The method of Claim 24, wherein before exposure to the supercritical fluid the
5 halocarbon is bound to the material.
26. The method of Claim 24 or 25, wherein the material is arranged to allow the supercritical fluid to pass through the material.
- 10 27. The method of any of Claims 24 to 26, wherein the material is a filter material.
28. The method of any of Claims 24 to 27, wherein the material comprises aerogel.
29. The method of any of Claims 24 to 28, wherein the method comprises subjecting
15 the material to supercritical fluid at supercritical pressure.
30. The method of Claim 29, wherein supercritical pressure is between about 7MPa and 50MPa.
- 20 31. The method of any of Claims 24 to 30, wherein the method comprises subjecting the material to supercritical fluid at supercritical temperature.
32. The method of Claim 30, wherein the supercritical temperature is between 30°C and 100°C.
- 25 33. The method of any of Claims 24 to 32, wherein the material is housed in a module which is resistant to supercritical fluid.
34. The method of any of Claims 33, wherein the module is arranged to withstand
30 high internal pressure.
35. The method of any of Claims 24 to 34, wherein the supercritical fluid comprises supercritical carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- 35 36. The method of any of Claims 24 to 35, wherein the supercritical fluid comprises supercritical nitrous oxide (N₂O).

37. The method of any of Claims 24 to 36, wherein the halocarbon is displaced from the material by the supercritical fluid.
- 5 38. The method of any of Claims 24 to 37, wherein the halocarbon is dissolved in the supercritical fluid to form a supercritical solution which carries the halocarbon from the material.
39. The method of Claim 38, wherein the method comprises the step of supplying
10 supercritical solution to a separation system for separating the halocarbon from the supercritical solution.
40. The method of Claim 38 or Claim 39, wherein the supercritical fluid in the supercritical solution acts as a mobile phase.
- 15 41. The method of any of Claims 38 to 40, wherein the separation system comprises at least one chromatography column.
42. The method of any of Claims 38 to 41, wherein the separation system comprises
20 a fractionating column.
43. The method of any of Claims 38 to 42, wherein the halocarbon comprises a plurality of different types of halocarbon, wherein the method comprises separating one or more of the different types of halocarbon.
- 25 44. The method of any of Claims 38 to 43, wherein the method comprises the step of removing non-halocarbon contaminants from the supercritical solution.
45. The method of any of Claims 38 to 44, wherein the method comprises the step of
30 removing nitrous oxide (N₂O) from the supercritical solution.
46. A module for processing halocarbon, the module comprising material for capturing halocarbon from a gas, wherein the module is arranged to withstand supercritical fluid.

47. The module of Claim 46, wherein the module is arranged to allow the gas and supercritical fluid to alternately pass through the material.
48. The module of Claim 47, wherein the gas and the supercritical fluid move through
5 the material in opposite directions.
49. The module of Claim 47, wherein the gas and the supercritical fluid move through the filter material in similar directions.
- 10 50. The module of any of Claims 46 to 49, wherein the module is arranged to withstand supercritical pressures in the range of between about 7MPa and 50MPa.
51. The module of any of Claims 46 to 50, wherein the module is arranged to withstand high internal pressure.
15
52. The module of any of Claims 46 to 51, wherein the material is a filter material.
53. The module of any of Claims 46 to 52, wherein the material comprises aerogel.
- 20 54. The module of any of Claims 46 to 53, wherein the material comprises one or more of silicon dioxide (silica), zeolite (aluminosilicate), carbon and activated carbon.
55. The module of any of Claims 46 to 54, wherein the material is doped with one or more of metal, metal oxide, cellulose, carbon nanotubes, a polymer and/or halocarbon.
25
56. The module of any of Claims 46 to 55, wherein the material comprises granular particles.
57. The module of any of Claims 46 to 55, wherein the material comprises a metal
30 catalyst.
58. The module of Claim 57, wherein the metal catalyst comprises platinum.
59. The module of any of Claims 46 to 58, wherein the material comprises a reactant.
35

60. The module of Claim 59, wherein the reactant comprises one or more of urea, anhydrous ammonia and aqueous ammonia.

61. The module of any of Claims 46 to 60, wherein the module comprises a housing
5 which houses the material.

62. The module of any of Claims 46 to 61, wherein the module comprises a first conduit to allow the ingress and egress of gas and supercritical fluid.

10 63. The module of Claim 62, wherein the module comprises a second conduit to allow the ingress and egress of gas and supercritical fluid, wherein the first conduit allows gas to ingress into the module and supercritical fluid to egress the module; and the second conduit allows gas to egress the module and supercritical fluid to ingress into the module.

15

64. The module of any of Claims 46 to 62, wherein the module comprises a first pair of conduits and a second pair of conduits, wherein the first pair of conduits allow the ingress and egress of gas, and the second pair of conduits are arranged to allow the ingress and egress of supercritical fluid.

20

65. The module of any of Claims 46 to 64, wherein the module comprises an air intake duct arranged to allow atmospheric air to be processed by the material.

66. The module of any of Claims 46 to 65, wherein the module is a canister.

25

67. A halocarbon recycling system comprising at least one module as claimed in any of Claims 46 to 66.

68. A method for separating one or more substances from a supercritical solution, the
30 method comprising separating halocarbon from a supercritical solution comprising halocarbon and supercritical fluid.

69. The method of Claim 68, wherein the method comprises supplying the supercritical solution to a separation system.

35

70. The method of Claim 69, wherein the method comprises using supercritical fluid as the mobile phase in the separation system.
71. The method of any of Claims 68 to 70, wherein the method comprises supplying
5 supercritical fluid to the separation system.
72. The method of any of Claims 68 to 71, wherein of the method comprises producing a product which is monitored for one or more halocarbons.
- 10 73. The method of Claim 72, wherein the method comprises collecting the product if the product contains one or more halocarbons.
74. The method of Claims 72 or Claim 73, wherein the method comprises disposing of the product if the product does not contain halocarbon.
15
75. The method of any of Claims 72 to 74, wherein the method comprises the step of removing one or more halocarbons from the product.
76. The method of any of Claims 68 to 74, wherein the method comprises the step of
20 collecting halocarbon separated from the supercritical fluid.
77. The method of any of Claims 68 to 76, wherein the method comprises using a cyclonic collector to collect the halocarbon.
- 25 78. The method of any of Claims 68 to 77, wherein the method comprises the step of separating contaminants from the supercritical solution.
79. The method of any of Claims 68 to 78, wherein the contaminants comprise of one or more of water, urea, ammonia and formaldehyde.
30
80. The method of any of Claims 68 to 79, wherein the supercritical solution comprises a plurality of different types of halocarbons, and the method comprises separating one or more of the different types of halocarbons from the supercritical solution.
35

81. The method of any of Claims 68 to 80, wherein one or more of the separating steps is performed by chromatography.
82. The method of Claim 81, wherein the method of chromatography is based on
5 polarity, molecular size or molecular weight.
83. The method of any of Claims 68 to 82, wherein one or more of the separating steps is performed by fractionation.
- 10 84. The method of Claim 83, wherein fractionation is driven by carbon dioxide.
85. The method of any of Claims 68 to 84, wherein the halocarbon is an anaesthetic agent.
- 15 86. A separation system for retrieving one or more substances from a supercritical solution, wherein the separation system is arranged to separate halocarbon from a supercritical solution comprising halocarbon and supercritical fluid.
87. The system of Claim 86, wherein the separating system comprises separating
20 means to which supercritical solution is supplied.
88. The system of Claim 86 or Claim 87, wherein the separating means comprises at least one chromatography column into which supercritical solution is supplied.
- 25 89. The system of any of Claims 86 to 88, wherein the separating means comprises at least one fractionation column into which supercritical solution is supplied.
90. The system of any of Claims 86 to 89, wherein the system comprises monitoring means for monitoring the product produced by the separating means.
30
91. The system of Claim 90, wherein the monitoring means comprises an infrared spectroscopy sensor.
92. The system of Claim 91, wherein the infrared spectroscopy sensor is a Fourier
35 transform infrared spectroscopy device.

93. The system of any of Claims 86 to 92, wherein the system comprises a controller for controlling the output of the separating means, wherein the controller directs the output of the separating means to a collection module if the product contains halocarbon.

5 94. The system of Claim 93, wherein the collection module is arranged to separate one or more of the halocarbon types.

95. The system of Claim 93 or 94, wherein the system comprises a collection module control means for controlling the input of product into the collection module.

10

96. The system of any of Claims 93 to 95, wherein the system comprises a collection module monitoring means for monitoring the halocarbon type entering the collection module.

15 97. The system of Claim 96, wherein the collection module monitoring means comprises an infrared spectroscopy sensor.

98. The system of Claim 97, wherein the infrared spectroscopy sensor is a Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy device.

20

99. The system of any of Claims 91 to 96, wherein the collection module comprises at least one cyclonic collector.

100. A method of delivering anaesthetic agent to a medical device, wherein the
25 anaesthetic agent is dissolved in a supercritical fluid.

101. The method of Claim 100, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is injected into a breathing circuit, preferably the inspiratory limb of the breathing circuit.

30

102. The method of Claim 100 or Claim 101, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is delivered to an anaesthetic machine.

103. The method of Claim 102, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the
35 anaesthetic agent is delivered into the backbar of the anaesthetic machine.

104. The method of Claim 100, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is delivered to a cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

5 105. The method of Claim 104, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is delivered to the gas flow to the oxygenator of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

10 106. The method of Claim 104, wherein the supercritical fluid containing the anaesthetic agent is injected into the arterial line of the cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

107. The method of any of Claims 100 to 106, wherein the method comprises capturing anaesthetic agent from a medical device.

15 108. The method of Claim 107, wherein the method comprises monitoring the level and/or concentration of anaesthetic agent returned to the medical device.

20 109. A system for delivering a supercritical solution of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid to a medical device.

110. The system of Claim 109, wherein the system comprises a cartridge containing the supercritical solution of anaesthetic agent dissolved in supercritical fluid.

25 111. The system of Claim 109 or 110, wherein the system comprises delivery means for delivering the supercritical solution to the medical device.

112. The system of Claim 111, wherein the delivery means comprises an injector for delivering the supercritical solution.

30 113. The system of any of Claims 109 to 112, wherein the system is arranged to deliver the supercritical solution to an anaesthetic machine or a cardiopulmonary bypass machine.

35 114. The system of any of Claims 109 to 113, wherein the system comprises at least one sensor for monitoring the level of anaesthetic agent in the system.

115. The system of Claim 114, wherein the at least one sensor comprises an infrared spectroscopy sensor.

116. The system of Claim 115, wherein the infrared spectroscopy sensor is a Fourier
5 transform infrared spectroscopy device.

117. The system of any of Claims 108 to 116, wherein the system comprises a control module for controlling the amount of anaesthetic agent delivered by the system.

10 118. A method of recycling halocarbon, the method comprising:
processing gas containing halocarbon with halocarbon-binding material to bind halocarbon to the material; and
exposing the material to supercritical fluid to dissolve halocarbon bound to the material in the supercritical fluid to form a supercritical solution.

15

119. The method of Claim 118, wherein the gas is processed by passing the gas through the material.

120. The method of Claim 118 or Claim 119, wherein the supercritical fluid passes
20 through the material.

121. The method of any of Claims 118 to 120, the method comprising monitoring the concentration of halocarbon in the processed gas, and switching from the processing step to the exposing step at a predetermined concentration of halocarbon.

25

122. The method of any of Claims 118 to 121, wherein the processing and exposing steps alternate.

123. The method of any of Claims 118 to 122, wherein the method comprises the step
30 of separating halocarbon from the supercritical solution.

124. The method of any of Claims 118 to 123, wherein the method comprises delivering supercritical solution to a medical device.

35 125. The method of any of Claims 118 to 124, wherein the gas containing halocarbon is provided by a medical device.

126. A recycling system for recycling halocarbon, the recycling system comprising halocarbon-binding material for capturing halocarbon from a gas, wherein the system is arranged to expose the material (i) to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

127. The recycling system of Claims 126, wherein the system is arranged to switch between exposing the material to gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and exposing the material to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon

128. The recycling system of Claim 126 or Claims 127, wherein the system is arranged to alternately expose the material to (i) gas containing halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid.

129. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 128, wherein the material is housed in a plurality of modules.

130. The recycling system of Claim 129, wherein the system is arranged so that each module of the plurality of modules is arranged to expose the material housed in the module to (i) gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

131. The recycling system of Claim 129 or Claim 130, wherein each module of the plurality of modules is arranged to switch between exposing the material housed in the module to (i) gas containing halocarbon to capture the halocarbon; and (ii) supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

132. The recycling system of any of Claims 129 to 131, wherein the system is arranged to supply gas to one or more modules of the plurality of modules to capture halocarbon at the same time as supercritical fluid passes through at least one of the other modules to dissolve halocarbon.

133. The recycling system of any of Claims 129 to 132, wherein the system is arranged to switch the modes of one or more of the modules of the plurality of modules between exposing the material (i) to gas containing halocarbon to capture the

halocarbon; and (ii) to supercritical fluid to dissolve the halocarbon in a supercritical solution.

134. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 133, wherein the recycling system
5 comprises a gas ingress means for supplying gas containing halocarbon to the material.

135. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 134, wherein the system comprises control means for controlling the flow of gas to the material.

10 136. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 135, wherein the system comprises a gas egress means for carrying processed gas away from the material.

137. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 136, wherein the recycling system comprises monitoring means for monitoring the concentration of halocarbon in the
15 processed gas, and the monitoring means is arranged to send a control signal to the control means.

138. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 137, wherein the recycling system comprises a supercritical fluid ingress pipe for supplying supercritical fluid to the material
20

139. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 138, wherein the system comprises a supercritical fluid egress pipe for carrying supercritical fluid in which halocarbon is dissolved away from the material.

25 140. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 139, wherein the recycling system delivers the supercritical solution to a medical device.

141. The recycling system of any of Claims 126 to 140, wherein the gas containing halocarbon is supplied from a medical device.

30

142. A system or method for capturing halocarbon from a gas as described herein with reference to one or more of the drawings.

143. A system or method for reclaiming halocarbon from material as described herein
35 with reference to one or more of the drawings.

144. An apparatus or method for separating halocarbon or other substances from a supercritical fluid as described herein and/or with reference to one or more of the drawings.

5 145. An apparatus or method of delivering anaesthetic agent to a medical device, as described herein and/or with reference to one or more of the drawings.

146. An apparatus or method for recycling halocarbon as described herein and/or with reference to one or more of the drawings.

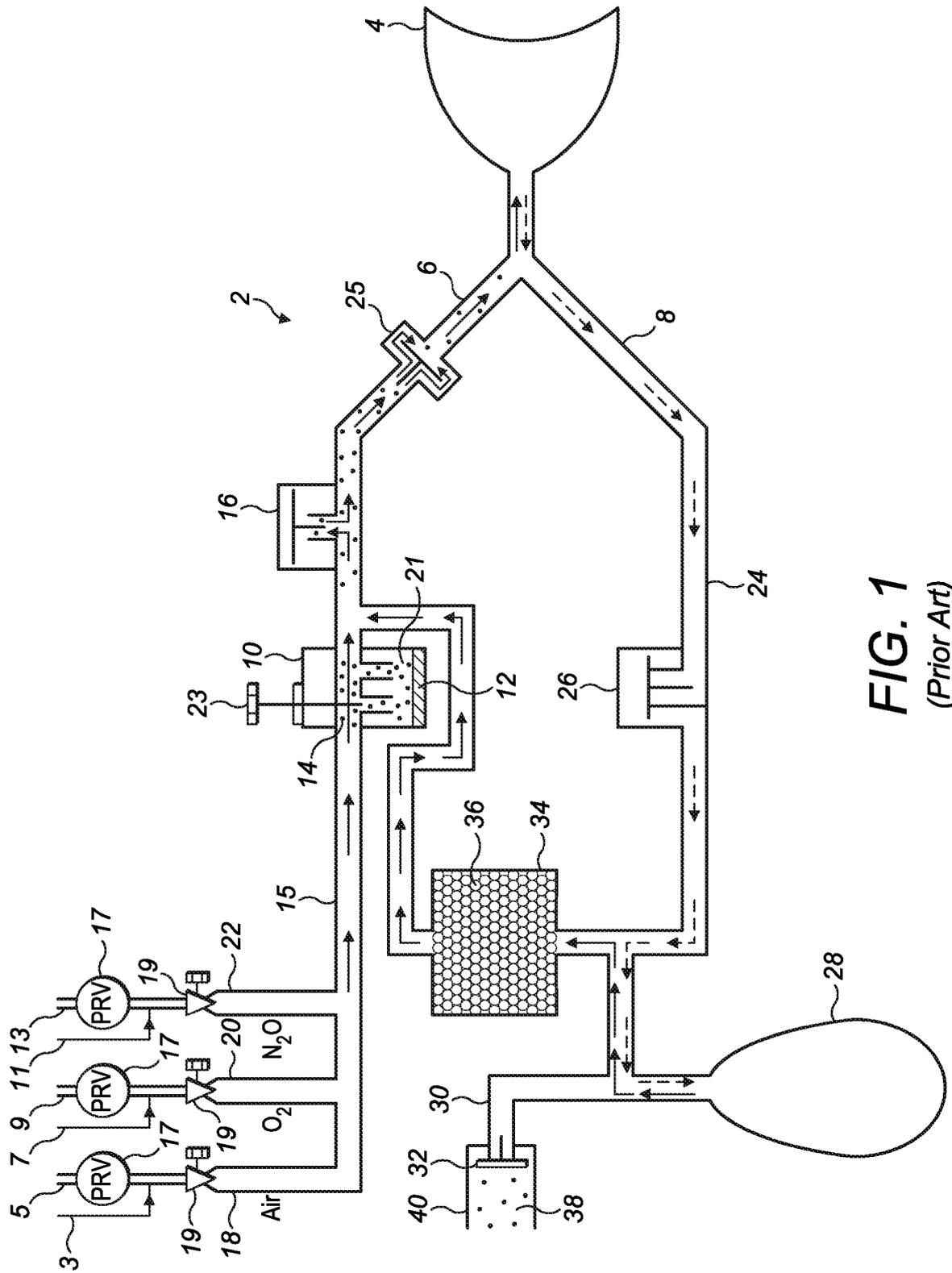


FIG. 1
(Prior Art)

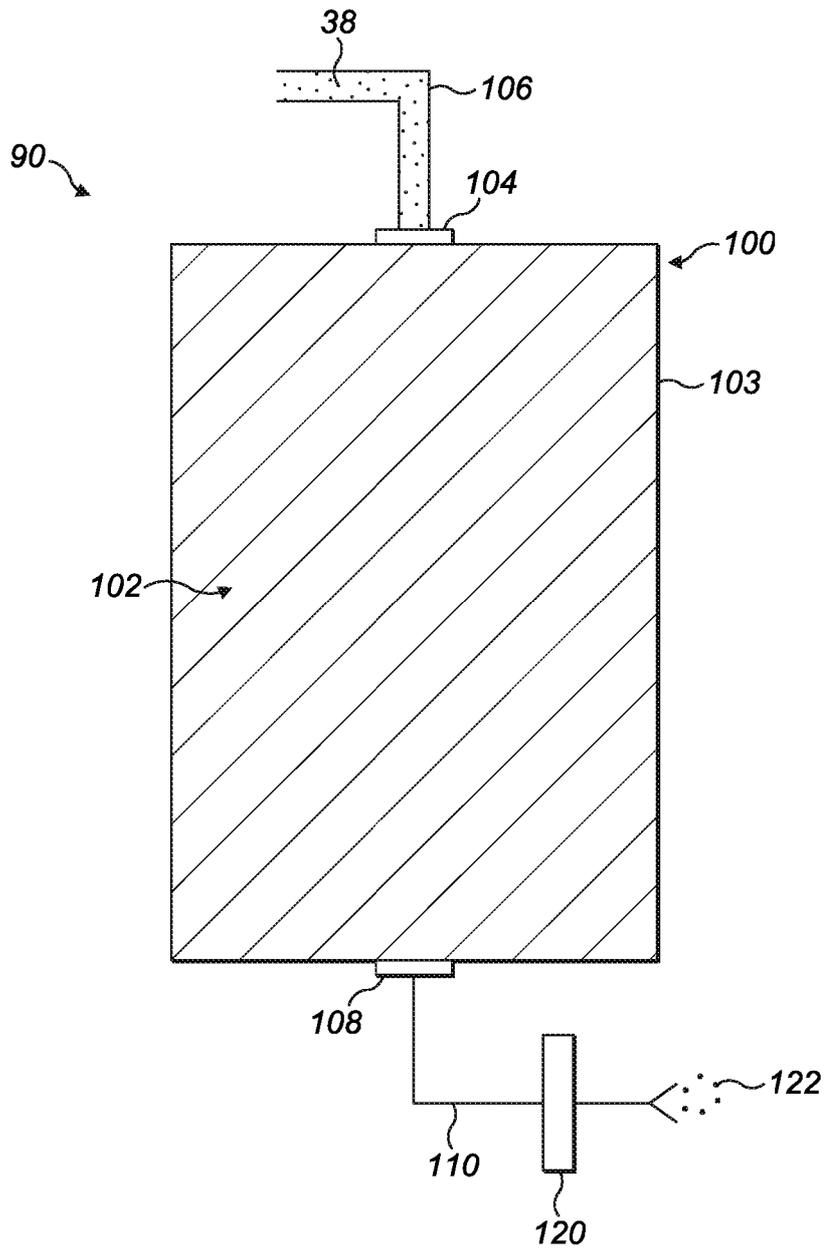


FIG. 2

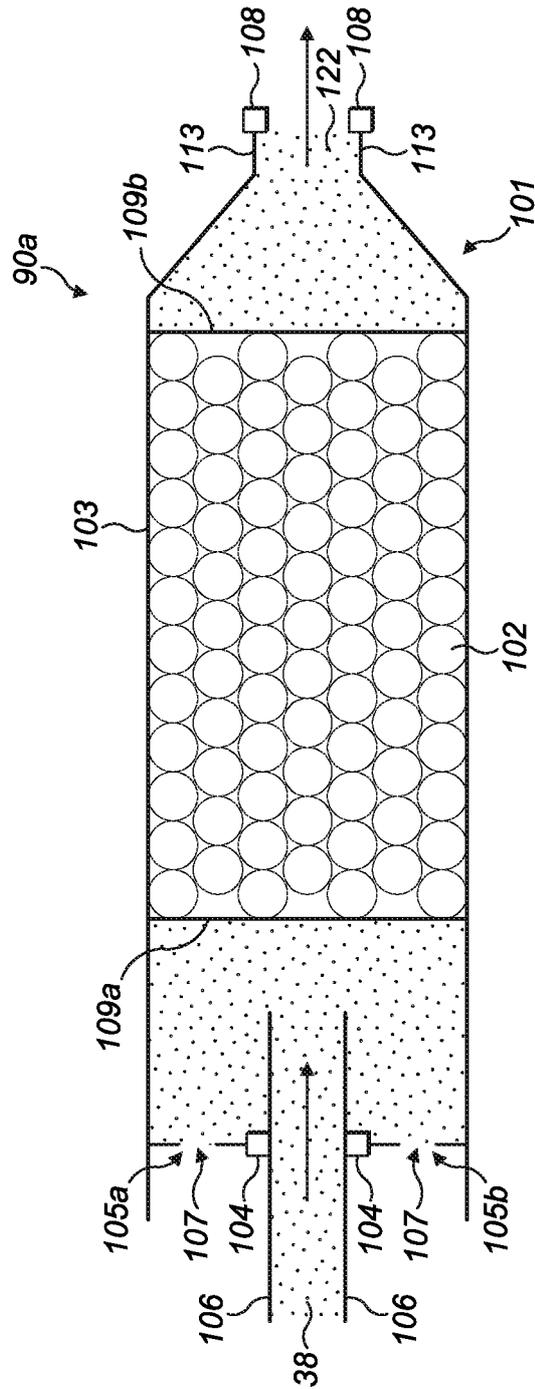


FIG. 3

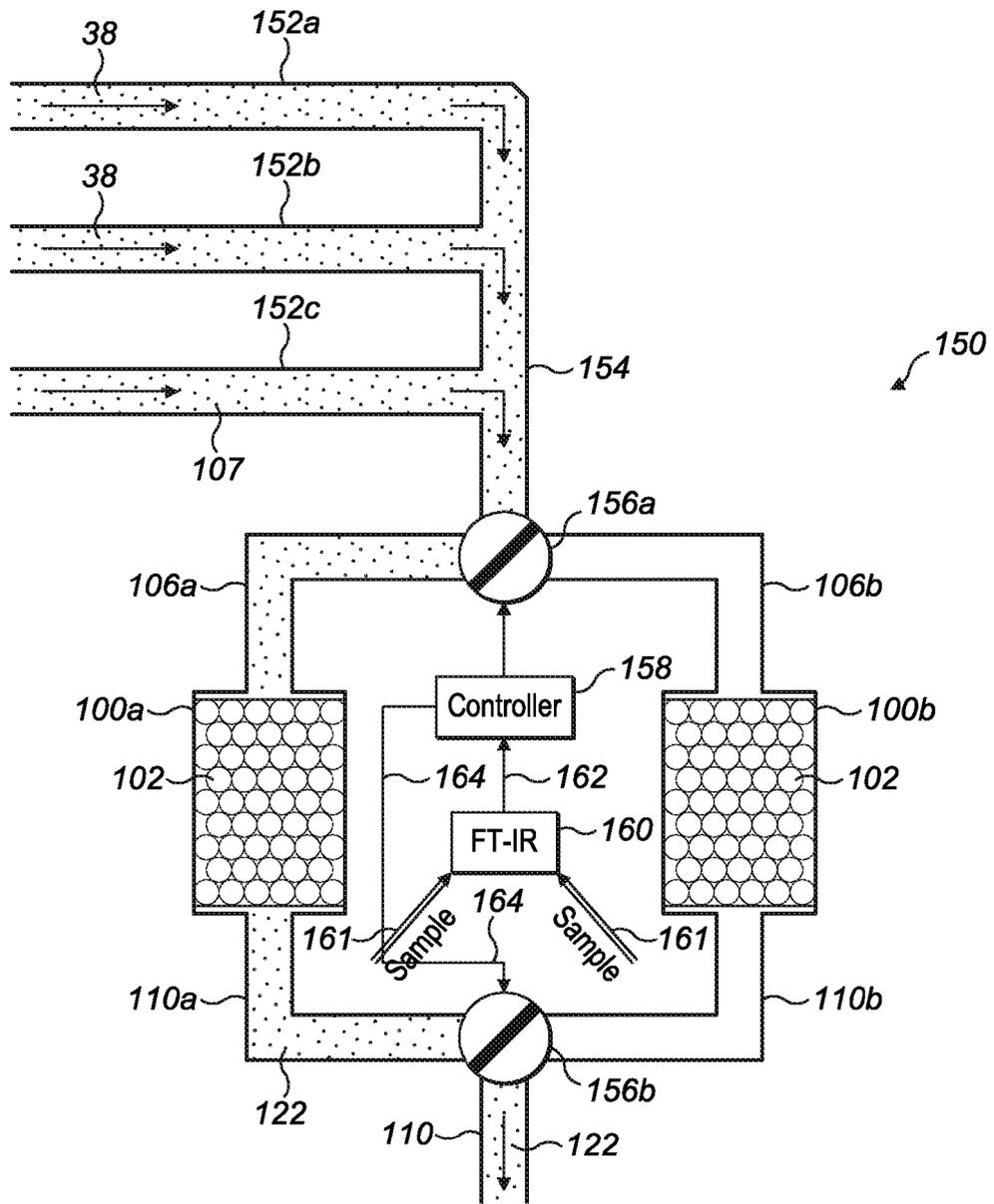


FIG. 4

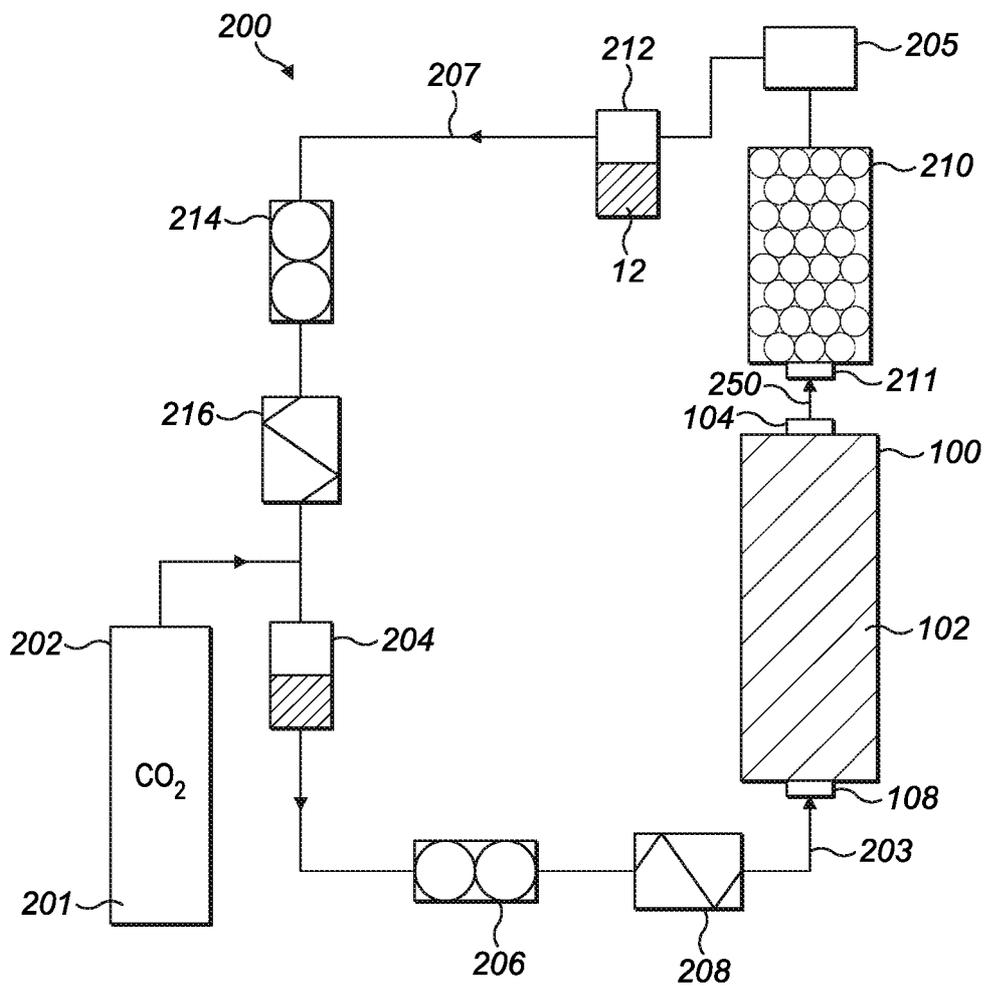


FIG. 5

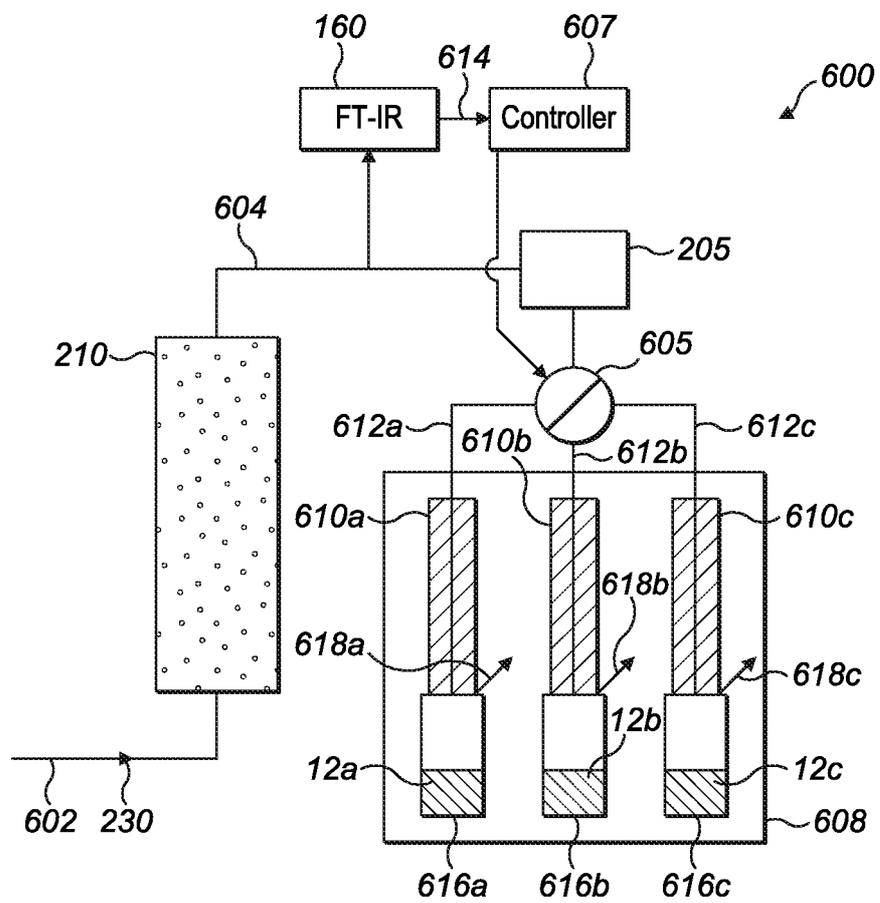


FIG. 7

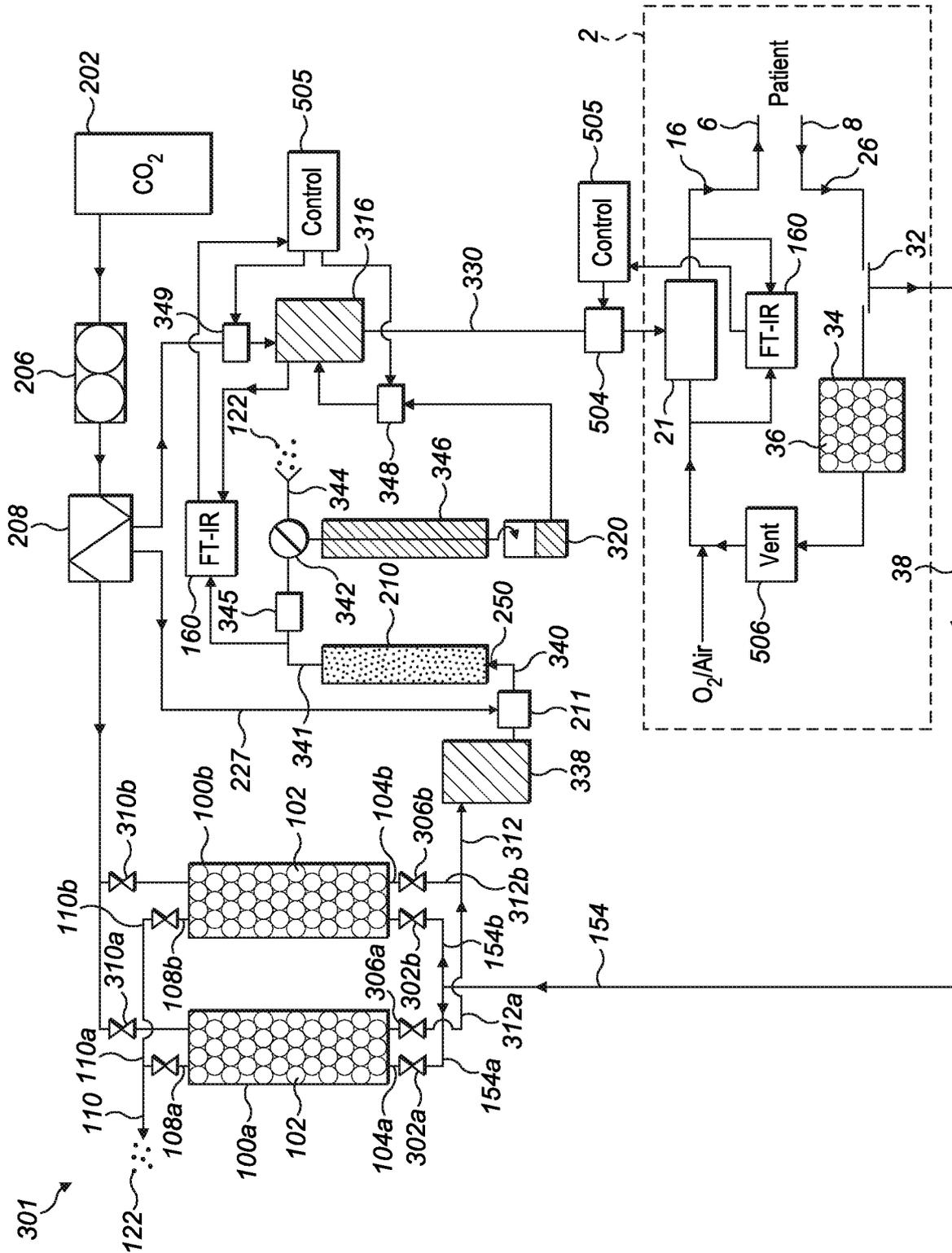


FIG. 10

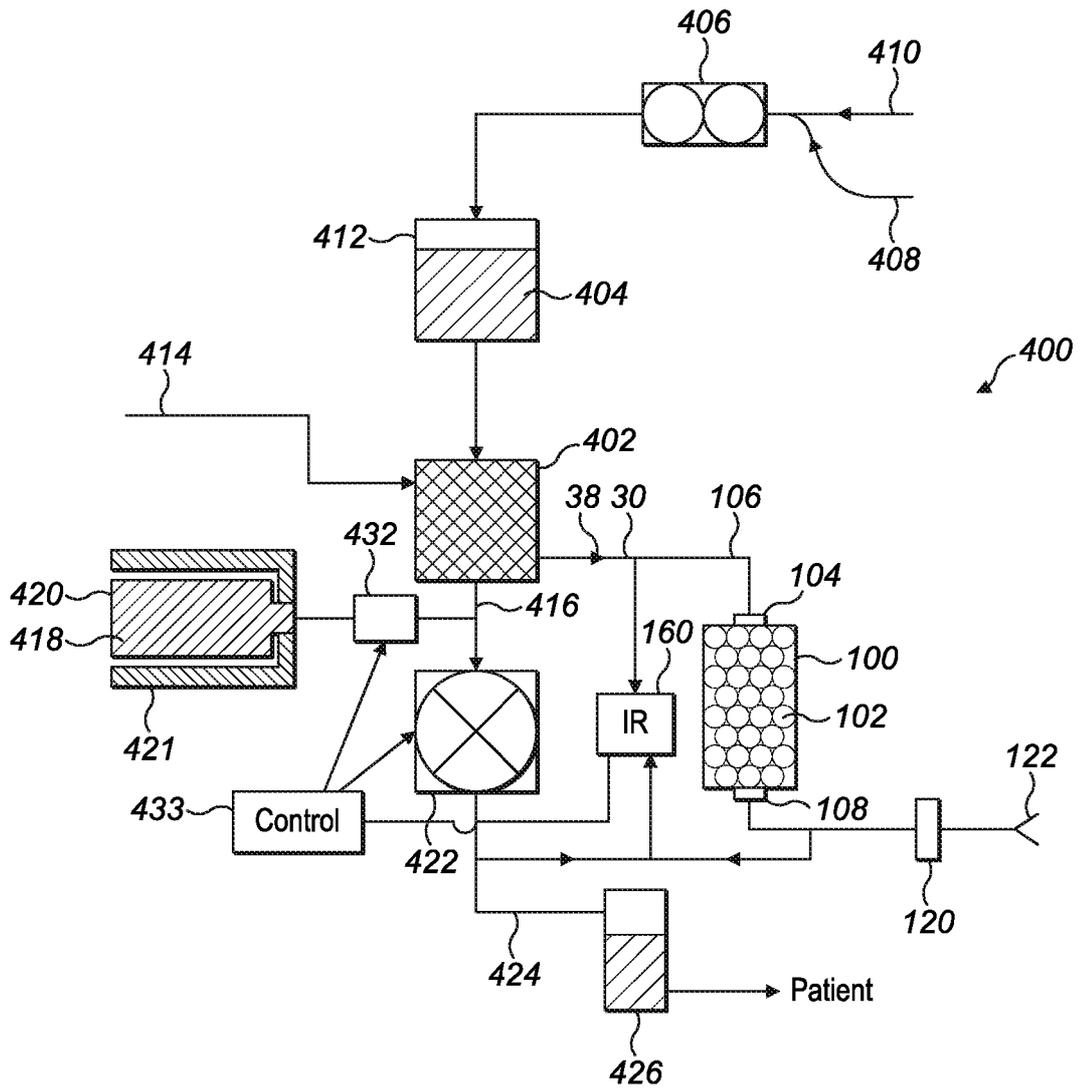


FIG. 11

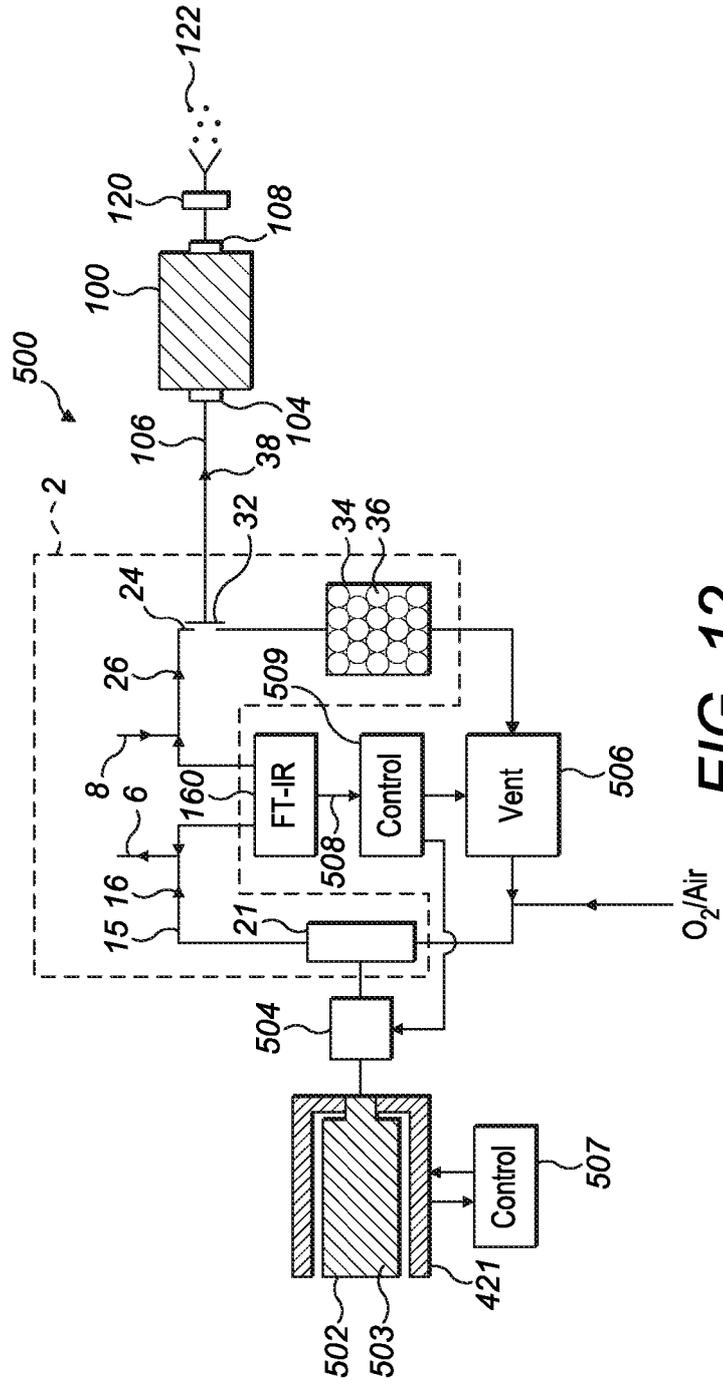


FIG. 12