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(54) Title: BARRIER WITH SUPERHYDROPHOBIC COATING

(57) Abstract: A barrier of open pore mesh provided with a superhydrophobic coating to prevent wetting when exposed to an aqueous liquid. The disclosed barrier could be a mesh screen or a liquid pervious membrane. The barrier is useful in a filter media containment to permit egress of gas, usually air, from the containment even when subjected to an aqueous liquid containing environ-



BARRIER WITH SUPERHYDROPHOBIC COATING

Cross-Reference to Related Application

[0001] This application claims the benefit pursuant to Title 35 USC § 119(e) to Provisional Application No. 61/506,227, filed July 11, 2011, the entire specification and drawings of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

Background of the Invention

[0002] This disclosure relates to a barrier comprising an open pore mesh or membrane structure with gaseous flow capability for an environment involving the presence of liquid. More particularly, it relates to an open pore mesh or membrane with gaseous flow capability that is particularly immune to flow impairment in the presence of aqueous liquid.

[0003] Various industrial or commercial applications involve handling fluids in a gaseous and/or liquid state. Often they include selective barriers to fluid flow. That is, process barriers or filters possess the capability to permit passage of gas, such as air, but resist consequences of exposure to liquid such as water. One such configuration involves a filter or barrier that permits passage of gas from a contaminant even though exposed to an environment containing aqueous liquid. This disclosure is directed to such a structure with superior properties to maximize effectiveness.

[0004] Open pore mesh configurations are known. Typically, to possess hydrophobic qualities, the pore size must be about 10 microns or less. This configuration is, however, restrictive to air flow. Moreover, it has also been determined that in an environment involving exposure to aqueous liquid, conventional mesh screen tends to “wet” and thereby close the pores of the mesh. That is, the surface tension of the liquid causes it to fill the pores prohibiting passage of gas. In some applications this problem is particularly prevalent because there is essentially no pressure differential across the barrier to force the gaseous medium through the mesh.

[0005] Though numerous and varied applications are contemplated for the structure of the present disclosure, it is illustrated herein with reference to a specific embodiment for which it is considered particularly suitable. It must be understood, however, that the properties of the structure make it suitable for any application involving or dependent upon susceptibility to passage of a gaseous medium, and impervious to the deleterious effect of the presence of an aqueous liquid.

Summary of Disclosure

[0006] The gas pervious barrier of the present disclosure is provided with a superhydrophobic coating to prevent wetting when exposed to an aqueous liquid. The barrier may be a liquid pervious open pore mesh or a membrane. The barrier is useful in a filter media containment to permit egress of gas, usually air, from the containment even when subjected to a liquid containing environment.

Description of the Drawings

[0007] FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional plan view of a water pitcher with a filter assembly illustrative of the principles of the present disclosure;

[0008] FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional plan view of the filter assembly of the water pitcher of FIG. 1.

Detailed Description of Illustrated Embodiments

[0009] FIG. 1 is illustrative of the particular application of the structure of the disclosure to a purification media canister. There is illustrated a water pitcher generally designated 10 with a handle 11 and spout 13. It defines separate volumes 12 and 14 separated by a wall 15. Wall 15 includes an aperture that retains a removable purification canister 16. The pitcher 10 includes a liquid inlet to volume 12 closed by removable cover 18. Liquid is discharged from the volume

14 of pitcher 10 at spout 13. The pitcher 10 and its components may be made of molded plastic. Similarly, the purification canister 16 is a plastic containment.

[0010] Untreated liquid is poured into volume 12 through the inlet normally closed by cover 18. It passes into volume 14 through purification canister 16. Purified liquid is poured out of volume 14 at spout 13 using handle 11.

[0011] Purification canister 16 is illustrated separately in FIG. 2. The canister 16 is elongated and includes generally cylindrical wall 20. It includes an upper or inlet end 22 and a lower, or outlet end 23. It houses a quantity of purification media 24, usually granular activated charcoal.

[0012] Cylindrical wall 20 may include a radial flange 26 to limit insertion of purification canister 16 into the aperture in dividing wall 15. A seal ring 27, seen in FIG. 1, may be employed to provide a fluid tight seal between the canister 16 and the dividing wall 15.

[0013] Outlet end 23 of canister 15 includes a bottom wall 30 with a plurality of apertures 31 in fluid communication with volume 14 of pitcher 10.

[0014] Inlet end 22 of canister 16 includes a truncated conical wall 32 and a circular planar top wall 34. Truncated conical wall 32 includes a plurality of inlet slots 36. Fluid poured into volume 12 is free to pass into purification canister 16 through inlet slots 36. A mesh screen 38 may overlie the slots to prohibit entry of particulate matter or other contaminants and to retain media 24.

[0015] Use of pitcher 10 involves filling the pitcher with liquid poured into volume 12. The poured liquid, usually water, passes through the inlet slots 36 and mesh screen 38 into purification canister 16. The liquid passes through the media 24 and through apertures 31 in bottom wall 30 and into volume 14.

[0016] It has been determined that meaningful quantities of gas, usually air, are entrained in the liquid, or created by turbulent flow associated with the filling function or released by media 24. It is also deemed desirable to purge the air from the canister as it often impacts the flow through the filter 16. Toward this objective circular planar top wall 34 is provided with a central or vent opening 40. As illustrated, the opening 40 is covered with a treated mesh screen 42 that permits gases within the upper end of canister 16 to escape into volume 12, maximizing usefulness of the purification canister.

[0017] In accordance with the present disclosure, the mesh screen 42 includes a coating on its exterior surface of superhydrophobic material. Screen 42 may be insert molded, heat staked, or ultrasonically sealed or otherwise associated with the planar top wall 34. The superhydrophobic coating on mesh screen 42 may be applied by any suitable means, such as, for example, by spin-coating, ink jet printing, blade casting, dip coating, or aerosol spraying prior to, or after, assembly.

[0018] The superhydrophobic coating renders the mesh 42 resistant to “wetting” or pore closure due to liquid surface tension. With the central opening in top wall 40 and treated mesh screen 42 in place, air within the purification canister 16 is free to pass through the pores of the treated mesh screen 42. Because of the presence of the superhydrophobic layer on the surface of the mesh 42 exposed to the volume 12 of pitcher 10 liquid within the volume 12 or liquid that splashes onto mesh 42 during the filling function is prevented from wetting the mesh material. Accordingly, the pores of the mesh remain open and air may readily purge from canister 16.

[0019] Useful alternatives to the mesh include other forms of filter media such as woven screen, non-woven screen, or membrane. It is contemplated that satisfactory performance can be achieved with a superhydrophobic coated mesh having a coating of thickness of less than 200 nanometers.

[0020] Superhydrophobic coating material is available from Lotus Leaf Coatings, a New Mexico-headquartered corporation licensed to commercialize superhydrophobic coatings developed at Sandia National Laboratory and the University of New Mexico. The coating is

made up of amorphous silica and a custom engineered polymer that does not contain fluorine or per-fluoro compounds. The coating from Lotus Leaf Coatings is described in United States Patent No. 7,485,343, issued February 3, 2009, entitled "Preparation of Hydrophobic Coatings." The entire disclosure is hereby incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth herein. The material contemplated will provide a contact angle of a water droplet typically exceeding 150° with a roll off angle of less than 10°.

[0021] Use of a mesh with a superhydrophobic coating permits use of larger mesh sizes, around 40 microns or larger. Such screens or membrane will perform effectively even with the larger pore or mesh opening size. It has been found that a coated vent 40 with a screen 42 having a mesh the size of 160 microns works effectively.

[0022] It is recognized that air could under ideal circumstances escape canister 16 through inlet slots 36. This path, however, is subject to random closure by quantities of water being poured into volume 12. This disclosure illustrates the advantages of a separate air passage at central opening 40 in planar top wall 34. Moreover, it further discloses means to maximize the advantage of such a separate path through provision of a layer or coating of superhydrophobic material on the mesh or membrane installed in the opening to contain the contents of canister 16.

[0023] The foregoing example is only one application of the arrangement described. It is contemplated that open pore mesh screen or membrane coated with a superhydrophobic layer has numerous applications where passage of a gas through the open pore structure is facilitated even in the presence of a liquid containing environment. Examples contemplated include medical filtration or delivery systems, food processing, industrial filtration and other environments.

[0024] Variations and modifications of the foregoing are within the scope of the present invention. It is understood that the invention disclosed and defined herein extends to all alternative combinations of two or more of the individual features mentioned or evident from the text and/or drawings. All of these different combinations constitute various alternative aspects of the present invention. The embodiments described herein explain the best modes known for practicing the invention and will enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention. The

claims are to be construed to include alternative embodiments to the extent permitted by the prior art.

CLAIMS:

1. A gas pervious barrier resistant to closure when subjected to an aqueous liquid, said barrier coated with a superhydrophobic coating.
2. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 1 wherein said superhydrophobic coating comprises amorphous silicon and a polymer that does not contain fluorine or per-fluoro compounds.
3. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 2 wherein said coating has a thickness of less than 200 nanometers.
4. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 1 wherein said coating has a water droplet contact angle of at least 150°.
5. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 4 wherein said coating has a water droplet roll-off angle of less than 10°.
6. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 1 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.
7. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 6 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.
8. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 2 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.
9. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 8 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.

10. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 3 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.

11. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 10 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.

12. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 4 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.

13. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 12 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.

14. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 5 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.

15. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 14 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.

16. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 1 wherein said barrier is a membrane.

17. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 2 wherein said barrier is a membrane.

18. A gas pervious barrier as claimed in claim 3 wherein said barrier is a membrane.

19. A canister comprising:
a housing having a fluid inlet and a fluid outlet;
a filter medium housed within said canister;
a separate passage for egress of a gaseous medium;
a gas pervious barrier, said barrier coated with a superhydrophobic layer.

20. A canister as claimed in claim 19 wherein said superhydrophobic coating comprises amorphous silicon and a polymer that does not contain fluorine or per-fluoro compounds.

21. A canister as claimed in claim 20 wherein said coating has a thickness of less than 200 nanometers.

22. A canister as claimed in claim 19 wherein said coating has a water droplet contact angle of at least 150°.

23. A canister as claimed in claim 22 wherein said coating has a water droplet roll-off angle of less than 10°.

24. A canister as claimed in claim 19 wherein said barrier comprises an open pore mesh.

25. A canister as claimed in claim 24 wherein said open pore mesh has a mesh size exceeding ten (10) microns.

1/2

FIG. 1

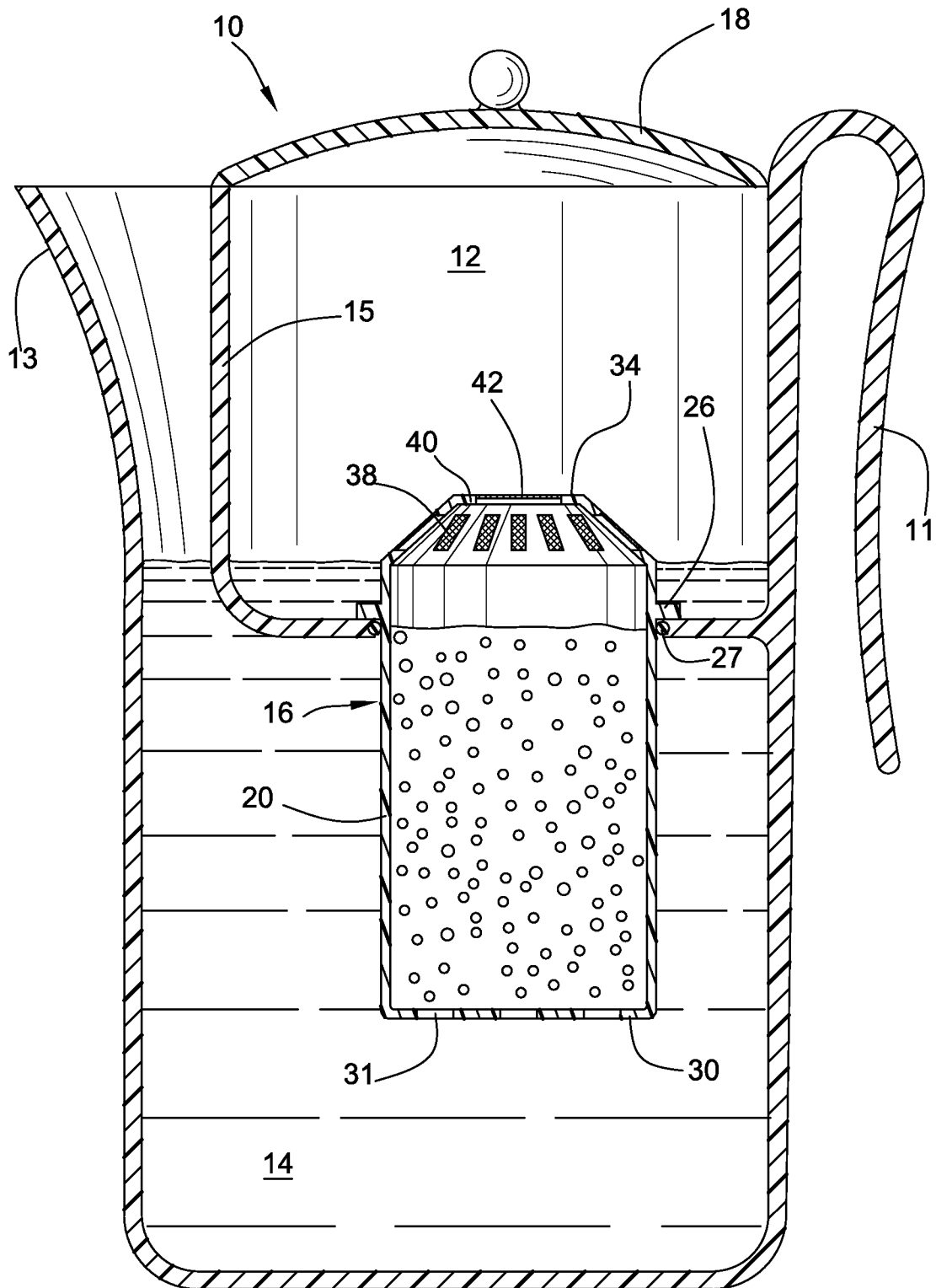


FIG. 2

