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High-molecular-weight ethylene-propylene reactor blend with a broad molecular weight distribution

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(56) Related Art
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Abstract

High-molecular-weight ethylene-propylene reactor blend with a broad molecular weight distribution

The invention relates to a high-molecular-weight reactor blend comprising polypropylene and an ethylene-propylene copolymer and having an ethylene content in the range from 0.1 to 2% by weight, which has a melt flow index MFR (230/5) of \leq 5 dg/min and a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n in the range from 6 to 20.

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**ORIGINAL
COMPLETE SPECIFICATION
STANDARD PATENT**

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Invention Title: High-molecular-weight ethylene-propylene reactor blend with a broad molecular weight distribution

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

Description

5 High-molecular-weight ethylene-propylene reactor blend with a broad molecular weight distribution

The present invention relates to a high-molecular-weight reactor blend comprising ethylene and propylene units and having an ethylene content in 10 the range from 0.1 to 2% by weight.

The invention also relates to a process for preparing these polymers and for producing moldings, such as pipes, fittings, hollow articles, bars and sheets, from the abovementioned polymers.

15 DE-A-40 19 053 discloses homopolymers with a broad molecular weight distribution. These homopolymers can be converted into with great difficulty, but these pipes have the disadvantage of high brittleness and a rough surface, and therefore have no industrial use.

20 EP-A-573 862 discloses a process for preparing polypropylene with a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n of > 20 and good processing characteristics. Its melt flow index is 2 dg/min; and its intrinsic viscosity is 280 ml/g. This polypropylene is prepared in a gas-phase polymerization.

25 Examples 1 to 4 of EP-A-573 862 describe the preparation of a homo-PP powder with a broad molecular weight distribution. Although the polydispersity M_w/M_n is not given in any of the examples, the intrinsic viscosities (800 ml/g and 67 ml/g) suggest a very large molecular weight spread in the first and second steps.

30 The processes known from the prior art (EP-A-573 862) were repeated in order to check the properties of the materials. It was found that all the polymers had high brittleness and modest processing quality, and showed



inhomogeneity. The production of PP pipes by a conventional extrusion process was on occasions impossible, because the melt viscosity was insufficient for extrusion.

5 It was an object of the present invention to find an improved molding composition with which pipes could be produced on conventional production equipment, and which, besides low brittleness and a smooth surface, possesses high toughness and excellent rigidity and creep performance.

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This object was achieved by means of a reactor blend of the type described at the outset, the distinguishing features of which are that it has a melt flow index MFR (230/5) of ≤ 5 dg/ min and a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n in the range from 6 to 20.

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It was found, surprisingly, that the novel propylene-ethylene copolymer can be processed on conventional production machinery to give pipes which have smooth finished surfaces, good processing quality, and high strength together with good hardness and creep performance.

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The invention also relates to a process for preparing the propylene-ethylene reactor blend by copolymerization of propylene and ethylene in a first step, and polymerization of propylene or, if desired, copolymerization with another 1-olefin having from 4 to 20 carbon atoms, in suspension and 25 at a temperature in the range from 30 to 150°C, and a pressure of from 10 to 100 bar, and a reaction time of from 30 min to 6 h, in the presence of a commercially-available catalyst (e.g. catalyst FT4S of Montell, Milan, Italy), of an organoaluminum compound (B) and, if desired, of an organosilicon compound (C), in a second step. The distinguishing features of the process 30 are that in the first step the suspension medium is also the monomer, and in this step a copolymer is prepared which has a viscosity of from 500 to 1400 ml/g and forms a proportion of from 20 to 80% of the entire polymer,

and that after the second reaction step, the entire polymer has a viscosity of from 200 to 400 ml/g and a polydispersity M_w/M_n of from 6 to 20.

In the first reaction step, a high-molecular-weight ethylene-propylene

5 copolymer is prepared which has a viscosity of from 500 to 1400 ml/g and which forms a proportion of the entire polymer of from 20 to 80% by weight, preferably from 45 to 75% by weight, and particularly preferably from 48 to 65% by weight, whereas in the second reaction step a low-molecular-weight product is prepared which has a viscosity of from 200 to
10 400 ml/g and forms a proportion of the entire polymer of from 80 to 20% by weight, preferably from 55 to 25% by weight, particularly preferably from 52 to 35% by weight.

The polymerization is carried out in a bulk process in two reaction steps,

15 where the propylene monomer is simultaneously starting material and suspension medium.

The novel process is carried out in a particular embodiment as two-step

polymerization preceded by prepolymerization. Both the first and the
20 second reaction step, and the prepolymerization, may be carried out either as a discontinuous or a continuous operation, continuous operation being preferred. Before the prepolymerization, component B and component C are mixed with one another and then brought into contact with the catalyst. In the presence of these active components, propylene is prepolymerized
25 in suspension or in bulk. The prepolymerization in the liquid monomer is preferred. The reaction time is from 4 to 10 min, the prepolymerization temperature is in the range from 10 to 25°C.

The prepolymer is then transferred to the first reaction step of the

30 polymerization, and polymerized in liquid propylene at a temperature of from 55 to 100°C, with a reaction time of 0.5 to 3.5 h. A phase ratio is set of from 2.5 to 4 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP, preferably of 3.3 l of

liquid propylene per kg of PP. In the first reaction step, ethylene is metered in continuously at a rate which maintains a C₂ concentration in the liquid phase of from 0.1 to 2% by weight, preferably from 0.1 to 1.5% by weight. To regulate the molecular weight, hydrogen is metered in.

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After the first reaction step, the multiphase system is transferred to the second reaction step and polymerized there at a temperature of from 55 to 100°C. The second reaction step takes place in a second reactor, in which a phase ratio of from 1 to 2.5 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP, preferably of 1.9 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP, is set. According to the invention, it is preferable, in the described process, to set different phase ratios in the two reactors. In the second step, no ethylene is metered in. For molecular weight regulation, hydrogen is metered in also in the second step.

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15 The temperatures and the hydrogen concentrations in the two reactors may be the same or different. The ethylene concentration is different in the two reactors. Suitable reactors are stirred reactors and loop reactors.

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It is possible to evaporate the monomer between the two reactors and to meter in the still polymerizationally-active catalyst/PP system into the second reactor. This also makes it possible to set a lower hydrogen concentration in the second reactor than in the first.

25

Component B is trimethylaluminum, triisobutylaluminum or triethylaluminum, triethylaluminum and triisobutylaluminum being preferred, and triethylaluminum being particularly preferred.

30

Component C is cyclohexylmethyldimethoxysilane, biscyclopentyl-dimethoxysilane or diphenyldimethoxysilane, cyclohexylmethyl-dimethoxysilane and biscyclopentylmethoxysilane being preferred.

Component B is employed in a concentration of from 0.001 to 10 mmol/l,

preferably from 0.1 to 5 mmol/l. Component C is employed in a ratio R to component B. This ratio is calculated as the quotient obtained by dividing the concentration of B by the concentration of C, each in mol /l. The ratio R is from 1 to 200, preferably from 2 to 100, and particularly preferably from

5 2.5 to 75.

According to the invention, preference is given to products with an MFR (230/5) of from 0.01 to 5 dg/min, those with an MFR (230/5) of from 0.02 to 2 dg/min being particularly preferred. The novel reactor blend consists of
10 from 0.5 to 2% by weight of ethylene units and from 99.5 to 98% by weight of propylene units.

After the second reaction step, the mixture of propylene, hydrogen, and ethylene if present, is worked up. Fast evaporation of the liquid monomer in one step is preferable. The purified copolymer is then dried in an inert gas stream, and it is ensured that the copolymer is free from monomer. The resultant high-molecular-weight copolymer is mixed with stabilizers, lubricants, fillers, pigments etc., and granulated using an extruder or compounder.

20

The evaporated monomer mixture is condensed and separated by distillation into propylene, ethylene if present, and hydrogen. The distillation should be arranged so that a hydrogen concentration of < 150 ppm, particularly preferably < 40 ppm, is ensured. The monomer purified in this way is then metered back into the first reactor.

The following Examples illustrate the invention. The following polymer analysis methods were used to characterize the products which were prepared:

30

Melt flow index MFR (230/5)

according to DIN 53735

Viscosity number [ml/g]

determined at 135°C in decalin

Creep	according to DIN 53759
Impact strength	according to DIN 8078
Ratio M_w/M_n	by gel permeation chromatography in orthodichlorobenzene at 135°C on a Waters 150C chromatograph.
5	

Example 1

Continuous polymerization is carried out in two 16 l reaction vessels arranged in series. Both reactors are provided with 10 l of liquid propylene. Cocatalyst B is triethylaluminum in 1 mmol/l concentration; the stereoregulator C is cyclohexylmethyldimethoxysilane in 0.1 mmol/l concentration. The hydrogen concentration in the liquid phase is set at 40 ppm by volume.

15 In the first reactor, a mixture of propylene and ethylene is polymerized at 70°C in the presence of the Montell FT4S catalyst. Catalyst, cocatalyst, ethylene, propylene and hydrogen are continuously replenished. 3.8 g of ethylene are metered in per kg of propylene. The polymerization is continued as far as a solids content of 224 g of PP per liter of suspension, which gives a phase ratio of 3.3 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP. Hydrogen is replenished at a rate which maintains a concentration of 40 ppm in the liquid phase.

20 The copolymer obtained in the first reactor is transferred together with the catalyst into the second reactor, into which hydrogen and propylene are then metered. The hydrogen concentration in the liquid phase is 420 ppm by volume. The reaction temperature in the second reactor, as in the first, is 70°C. The polymerization is continued as far as a solids content of 324 g of PP per liter of suspension, giving a phase ratio of 1.9 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP.

The catalyst yield, calculated after isolating the polymer from the second reactor as powder, is 16 kg of PP/g of catalyst. Measurements showed a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n of 9.0, an MFR of 0.8 dg/min and a viscosity number of 570 ml/g. IR spectroscopic measurements showed 5 0.5% by weight of C₂ units. The proportion which is soluble in cold xylene is measured as 3.3% by weight.

Comparative Example 1

The procedure was as in Example 1, but the phase ratio was set to the 10 same value in reactor 1 and reactor 2, and the same hydrogen concentration was set in both reactors. Ethylene was not metered in to either reactor. An M_w/M_n value of 4.0 was determined.

Example 2

15 The powder obtained from Example 1 was granulated under inert gas in a twin-screw extruder with a screw diameter of 53 mm at about 240°C, 0.15% of [®]Irganox 1010 and 0.15% of [®]Hostanox PAR 24 being added as stabilizers. A colorant mixture was also added. The M_w/M_n value determined for the resultant granules was 8.0.

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Example 3

25 The granules from Example 2 were converted on a pipe extrusion unit with a 60mm grooved-barrel extruder and a vacuum spray tank, giving pipes of dimensions 32 x 4.5 mm (internal diameter = 32 mm, wall thickness = 4.5 mm). The throughput rate was 150 kg/h, and the melt temperature was set at 210°C.

30 It was established that the processing ran without difficulty and that both the internal and external pipe surfaces were very smooth. The pipe surface was characterized by comparison with pipes produced from granules with narrow molecular weight distribution (see Comparative Example 1, M_w/M_n

= 4) using the same pipe extrusion unit under the same conditions. Pipes produced from the granules of Example 2 satisfied the requirements of DIN 8078 (General Quality Requirements and Testing) with respect to the flexural impact test and the creep rupture strength test.

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	Test temperature	Test stress	Minimum time-to-failure according to DIN 8078	Measured time-to-failure
	95°C	3.5 N/mm ²	> 1000 h	> 1200 h
10	120°C	3.0 N/mm ²	> 200 h	> 250 h

The creep rupture strength tests were carried out according to DIN 8078 (95°C, σ 3.5 N/mm²) and with reference to DIN 8078 (120°C, σ 3.0 N/mm²). The pipes produced from the granules of Example 2

15 exceeded the required minimum times-to-failure of DIN 8078, as can be seen from the values given above, and had surfaces of excellent quality. The pipes produced for comparison using granules from Comparative Example 1 failed in the creep rupture strength test.

20 Example 4

Propylene is polymerized to PP in a pilot polymerization plant. The catalyst (FT4S from Montell), triethylaluminum and cyclohexylmethyldimethoxysilane are mixed with one another, and prepolymerization is carried out continuously in liquid propylene in the prepolymerization reactor. The

25 mixture of catalyst, triethylaluminum, cyclohexylmethyldimethoxysilane, propylene and polypropylene is metered into the first reactor. Propylene is additionally added to the first reactor via a storage vessel. Hydrogen and ethylene are dissolved in the liquid propylene and are metered into the reactor via this stream. A concentration of 40 ppm of hydrogen in the liquid

30 propylene is set. 17 metric tons per hour of propylene are supplied in the first reactor, and 1.8 kg of ethylene per metric ton of propylene is metered in. In the reactor, propylene is converted to PP in the presence of the FT4S

catalyst. The reaction mixture is continuously removed from the first reactor and metered into the second reactor. A further 7 metric tons per hour of propylene are metered into the second reactor. In this propylene stream, a hydrogen concentration of 420 ppm is set. No ethylene is

5 metered into the second reactor. After passing through the second reactor, the reaction mixture is worked up in a flash-distillation vessel, by reducing the pressure to 18 bar, and the PP is separated from the gaseous components. The gaseous propylene is condensed, distilled and then conducted back to the storage tank. 0.9 mmol of Al, 0.18 mmol of donor

10 and 5 mmol of catalyst (measured as mmol of Ti) are metered in per liter of liquid propylene metered into the first reactor.

In the first reactor, a phase ratio of 3.3 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP is set; in the second reactor, this ratio is set at 1.9 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP. The amounts of heat extracted from the reactors were in the ratio 1.4 : 1 (1st reactor:2nd reactor). The resultant PP product has a polydispersity M_w/M_n of 7.0.

Comparative Example 2

20 The procedure of Example 4 was followed, but a phase ratio of 3.3 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP was set in both the first and the second reactors. The amounts of heat extracted from the two reactors were in the ratio of 3.4 : 1 (1st reactor:2nd reactor).

25 The resultant PP product has a polydispersity M_w/M_n of 4.8. The PP powder obtained in this manner was granulated as in Example 2, pipes were produced from the granulate as in Example 3 and were subjected to a pipe creep test as in Example 3. The pipes have a very rough surface and do not fulfil the requirements of section 3.5 of DIN 8078.

30 The pipes were subjected to various creep tests corresponding to DIN 53759: the required values were not achieved.

Example 5

The procedure of Example 4 was followed, but dicyclopentylmethoxy-silane was used as stereoregulator at a concentration of 0.036 mmol of dicyclopentylmethoxysilane per l of liquid propylene. 40 ppm of hydrogen were metered into the first reactor. In the gas stream entering the second reactor, a concentration of 3500 molar ppm of hydrogen was set. The catalyst yield achieved was 20 kg pf PP/g of catalyst. The end product had a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n of 10.5 and an MFR (230/5) of 0.8 dg/min. 1.8 kg of ethylene were metered into the first reactor per tonne of propylene.

Granulation and pipe production were carried out as in Examples 2 and 3. In the pipe test, the requirements of section 3.5 of DIN 8078 were satisfied. The pipes were subjected to various creep performance tests corresponding to DIN 53759: The requirements of DIN 8078 (creep rupture strength and flexural impact test on the pipe) were satisfied.

	Test temperature	Test stress	Minimum time-to-failure	Measured time-to-failure
20			according to DIN 8078	
	95°C	3.5 N/mm ²	> 1000 h	> 2000 h
	120°C	3.0 N/mm ²	> 200 h	> 320 h

The minimum times-to-failure for PP-R pipes required in DIN 8078 were significantly exceeded. The pipes have very good creep rupture strength and extremely smooth surfaces.

Example 6

The procedure of Example 4 was followed, but diphenyldimethoxysilane was used as stereoregulator. An M_w/M_n value of 6.1 was measured for the powder. The DIN creep test was passed and the pipe surface was smooth.

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Apart from a correction at page 1, the foregoing description is as originally lodged – and is retained in this form to preserve the fullness of the initial disclosure. The restricted scope of the invention is as defined in the proposed amended claims immediately below.

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The Claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A process for preparing a high-molecular-weight reactor blend comprising polypropylene and an ethylene-propylene copolymer and having an ethylene content in the range from 0.1 to 2% by weight, a melt flow index MFR (230/5) of ≤ 5 dg/min and a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n in the range from 6 to 20 by copolymerization of propylene and ethylene in a first step, and polymerization of propylene or, if desired, copolymerization with another 1-olefin having from 4 to 20 carbon atoms, in suspension and at a temperature in the range from 30 to 150°C, and a pressure of from 10 to 100 bar, and with a reaction time of from 30 min to 6 h, in the presence of a catalyst, of an organoaluminum compound (B) and of an organosilicon compound (C), in a second step, wherein, in the first step, the suspension medium is also the monomer, and in this step an ethylene-propylene copolymer is prepared which has a viscosity of from 500 to 1400 ml/g and forms a proportion of from 20 to 80% of the entire polymer, and that after the second reaction step, the entire polymer has a viscosity of from 200 to 400 ml/g and a polydispersity M_w/M_n of from 6 to 20 and wherein a prepolymerization is carried out, where component B and component C are mixed with one another before the prepolymerization and are then brought into contact with the catalyst, and where propylene is prepolymerized in the presence of these active components and in suspension, with a reaction time of 4 to 15 min, and at a temperature in the range from 10 to 25°C.
2. A process as claimed in claim 1, which has an MFR (230/5) in the range from 0.02 to 2 dg/min and a molecular weight distribution M_w/M_n in the range from 7 to 18, and which includes from 0.1 to 1.5% by weight of ethylene units.
3. The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, in the first reaction step, a polypropylene is prepared which forms a proportion by weight of from 45 to 75% by weight of the entire polymer.
4. The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, in the second reaction step, a low-molecular-weight polypropylene is prepared which has a viscosity of from 200 to 400 ml/g



and forms a proportion of from 55 to 25% by weight of the entire polymer.

5. The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, in the second reaction step, a low-molecular-weight polypropylene is prepared which has a viscosity of from 200 to 400 ml/g and which forms a proportion of from 52 to 35% by weight of the entire polymer.

6. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein, in the first reaction step, the polymerization is carried out in liquid propylene at a temperature of from 55 to 100°C and with a reaction time of from 0.5 to 3.5 h.

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7. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein, in the first reaction step, a phase ratio in the range from 2.5 to 4 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP is set.

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8. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein, in the first reaction step, an ethylene concentration in the liquid phase of from 0.1 to 2% by weight is set.

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9. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein, in the second reaction step, the polymerization is carried out at a temperature in the range from 55 to 100°C, where a phase ratio is set of from 1 to 2.5 l of liquid propylene per kg of PP.

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10. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein different phase ratios are set in the first and in the second reaction step.

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11. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein trimethylaluminum, triisobutylaluminum or triethylaluminum is employed as component B.

12. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein cyclohexylmethyldimethoxysilane, biscyclopentyldimethoxysilane or diphenyldimethoxysilane is employed as component C.

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13. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein component B is



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employed in a concentration of from 0.001 to 10 mmol/l, preferably from 0.1 to 5 mmol/l.

14. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein component C is employed in a ratio R to component B which is calculated as the quotient obtained by 5 dividing the concentration of B by the concentration of C, each in mol/l, and which is in the range from 1 to 200.

15. A high molecular weight reactor blend prepared in accordance with any one of the preceding claims.

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DATED this 26th day of October 2000.

HOECHST AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT

By Its Patent Attorneys

15 DAVIES COLLISON CAVE

