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(54) Titre : COMPOSITION FIBREUSE ET FIBRE AINSI CONSTITUEE
(54) Title: FIBER COMPOSITION AND FIBER MADE FROM THE SAME

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

A fiber modifier for improving thermo-bonding affinity of a composite fiber to a natural fiber includes a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and combinations thereof. A core and sheath composite fiber including a sheath component made from a fiber composition that contains the above fiber modifier is also disclosed.



ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A fiber modifier for improving thermo-bonding affinity of a composite fiber to a natural fiber includes a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and combinations thereof. A core and sheath composite fiber including a sheath component made from a fiber composition that contains the above fiber modifier is also disclosed.

FIBER COMPOSITION AND FIBER MADE FROM THE SAME**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****1. Field of the Invention**

5 This invention relates to a fiber composition, more particularly to a fiber composition including a fiber modifier containing a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component.

2. Description of the Related Art

10 Disposable hygienic absorbent products, such as disposable diapers, generally include a liquid-permeable surface layer, a liquid-impermeable backsheet, and an absorbent layer interposed between the liquid-permeable surface layer and the liquid-impermeable backsheet. The absorbent layer is typically made from an absorbent material that includes natural fibers such as cellulose
15 fluff pulp fibers, cotton fibers, and rayon fibers, and a super absorbent polymer (SAP). After water is absorbed into the absorbent layer, the absorbent material of the absorbent layer tends to expand and become heavy, and results in an uncomfortable feeling. Thus, in addition
20 to the absorbent material, synthetic fibers are incorporated into the absorbent layer so as to form a supportive structure to fix the absorbent material in place.

25 The synthetic fibers traditionally used for formation of the supportive structure are thermo-bondable bi-component fibers made from polyolefins, polyesters or

combinations thereof. Since these traditional thermo-bondable bi-component fibers have a poor thermo-bonding affinity for the natural fibers, the supportive structure formed by these traditional thermo-bondable bi-component fibers is unable to effectively fix the absorbent material in place. In order to improve adhesion between the thermo-bondable bi-component fibers and the natural fibers, a bi-component fiber disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,981,410 (hereinafter referred to as the '410 patent) has been widely used in the marketplace. Particularly, in the Examples of the '410 patent, the core component of the bi-component fiber is made from polypropylene, and the sheath component of the bi-component fiber includes non-grafted polyethylene and polyethylene grafted with maleic anhydride. The maleic anhydride is used as a modifier for improving the thermo-bonding affinity of the bi-component fiber to natural fibers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the present invention is to provide a new and useful fiber modifier for improving thermo-bonding affinity of a composite fiber to a natural fiber.

According to one aspect of this invention, a fiber modifier includes a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component. The copolymer component is selected from the group consisting of a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid,

and combinations thereof.

According to another aspect of this invention, a fiber composition includes polyethylene and a fiber modifier. The fiber modifier contains a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from the group
5 consisting of a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and combinations thereof.

According to yet another aspect of this invention, a core and sheath composite fiber includes a core component and a sheath component. The sheath component is made from a fiber composition including polyethylene and a fiber modifier. The fiber modifier contains a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from the group
10 consisting of a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and combinations thereof.
15

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

This invention relates to a fiber modifier for improving thermo-bonding affinity of a composite fiber to a natural fiber. The fiber modifier includes a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from the group consisting of a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and
20 combinations thereof.
25

In one preferred embodiment, the content of maleic anhydride in the blend ranges from 3% to 4% by weight.

In another preferred embodiment, the copolymer component is the copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid. Preferably, the weight ratio of ethylene to acrylic acid in the copolymer component ranges from 91:9 to 82:18. More preferably, the weight ratio of ethylene to acrylic acid in the copolymer component ranges from 90:10 to 85:15.

The copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid includes, but is not limited to, Nucrel 2806 (the DuPont Company), PRIMACOR 3460 (the Dow Chemical Company), ESCOR5200 (the ExxonMobil Chemical Company), and the like.

In yet another preferred embodiment, the copolymer component is the copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid. Preferably, the weight ratio of ethylene to methacrylic acid in the copolymer component ranges from 96:4 to 85:15. More preferably, the weight ratio of ethylene to methacrylic acid in the copolymer component ranges from 91:9 to 85:15.

The copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid includes, but is not limited to, Nucrel 0903 and Nucrel 925 (the DuPont Company), and the like.

In addition, non-limiting examples of the natural fiber that may be used for bonding to the composite fiber includes cellulose fibers, such as cotton fibers, Rayon fibers, and cellulose fluff pulp fibers, viscose fibers, and Lyocell, etc.

The preferred embodiment of a fiber composition according to this invention includes polyethylene and a

fiber modifier as described in the preceding paragraphs.

In one preferred embodiment, the weight ratio of polyethylene to the fiber modifier ranges from 95:5 to 88:12. More preferably, the weight ratio of polyethylene to the fiber modifier ranges from 94:6 to 89:11. If the content of the fiber modifier in the fiber composition is higher than 12% by weight, the spinnability of the resulting core and sheath composite fiber is poor. On the other hand, if the content of the fiber modifier in the fiber component is lower than 5% by weight, the thermo-bonding affinity of the resulting core and sheath composite fiber to the natural fiber is not sufficient.

The preferred embodiment of a core and sheath composite fiber according to this invention includes a core component and a sheath component made from a fiber composition as described in the preceding paragraph. In particular, the core component has a melting point higher than that of the sheath component.

Preferably, the sheath component of the core and sheath composite fiber has a melting point ranging from 88°C to 130°C.

Preferably, the core component having a melting point higher than that of the sheath component may be made from a polymer selected from the group consisting of polypropylene (m.p. about 150°C to 170°C), polyamide (m.p. about 210°C to 260°C), polylactic acid (m.p. about 150°C to 170°C), polyester (m.p. about 200°C to 255°C), and

combinations thereof.

The core and sheath composite fiber may be produced by melt-spinning techniques, and can be incorporated with the natural fibers to form a non-woven fabric web.

5 The thermo-bonding affinity of the core and sheath composite fiber according to this invention to the natural fibers will increase with an increase in the content of acryl groups in the fiber modifier. The inventors of the present invention found that the improvement in
10 thermo-bonding affinity of the core and sheath composite fiber to the natural fibers is attributed to hydrogen bonding between carboxylic groups derived from maleic anhydride and carboxylic groups of acrylic acid or methacrylic acid of the fiber modifier, and hydrogen
15 bonding between carboxylic groups derived from maleic anhydride and hydroxyl groups of the natural fibers.

In addition, the copolymer component used in the fiber modifier of this invention, i.e., the copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, the copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic
20 acid, or combinations thereof, has a melting point ranging from 83 to 101°C, which is lower than the melting point of polyethylene (about 130°C). Therefore, compared to the conventional modifier, such as grafted polyethylene, the fiber modifier according to this invention can be prepared
25 through blending at a relatively low temperature. In addition, grafting reaction which is required in preparation of the conventional modifier and which is

relatively unstable and has to be conducted at a relatively high temperature can be omitted. Hence, the manufacture of the fiber modifier of this invention is relatively economical and controllable.

5 Preparation examples and test examples are given below to illustrate the present invention in further detail, but the scope of the invention should not be limited to these examples.

Preparation of the fiber modifier of this invention

10 <Example A1>

A copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid (Nucrel 925, melt index: 25 g/10 min, methacrylic acid content 15wt%, m.p. 92°C, DuPont Company), and a reactant mixture of maleic anhydride (UPC Technology Corp.), methyl ethyl 15 ketone (TT-308, obtained from Lison Chemical company Ltd.), and dicumyl peroxide (0529F, obtained from Lison Chemical Company Ltd.) in a ratio of 4:4:0.2 were fed into an inlet section of a twin-screw extruder (Japan Steel Works Company) at feeding rates of 16 kg/hr and 1.3 kg/hr, respectively. 20 The vacuum level of the twin-screw extruder was set to 0.6 kg/cm². The rotating speed of the two screws of the twin-screw extruder was set to 250 rpm.

The composition of the copolymer and the reactant mixture was subsequently moved to a heating section of 25 the twin-screw extruder. The heating section was divided into 1st to 13th heating zones from the inlet section to an outlet section. The heating temperatures of the 1st to

13th heating zones were separately set to 92°C, 146°C, 182°C, 185°C, 185°C, 186°C, 191°C, 195°C, 201°C, 204°C, 205°C, 213°C, and 215°C. Thereafter, the melted composition left the twin-screw extruder under a temperature of 220°C. A blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, i.e., the fiber modifier of the present invention, was obtained. Melt index: 12 g/10 min. Melting point: 91.04°C.

<Example A2>

10 The fiber modifier of Example A2 was prepared in a manner similar to that of Example A1, except that the copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid used in Example A1 was replaced with another copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid (Nucrel 0903, methacrylic acid content 15 9 wt%, m.p. 101°C, DuPont company). Melting point of the fiber modifier obtained from this Example was 98.65°C.

<Example A3>

20 The fiber modifier of Example A3 was prepared in a manner similar to that of Example A1, except that the copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid used in Example A1 was replaced with a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid (Nucrel 2806, acrylic acid content 18 wt%, m.p. 83°C, DuPont company). Melting point of the fiber modifier obtained from this Example was 82.56°C.

25 <Example A4>

 The fiber modifier of Example A4 was prepared in a manner similar to that of Example A1, except that the copolymer

of ethylene and methacrylic acid used in Example A1 was replaced with another copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid (ESCOR5200, acrylic acid content 15 wt%, m.p. 88 °C, ExxonMobil Chemical Company). Melting point of the fiber modifier obtained from this Example was 89.60°C.

Contact Angle Test

Four starting materials, i.e., the fiber modifier obtained from Example A1, polyethylene (LH-520, m.p.: 130 °C, USI Corporation), grafted polyethylene (AMPLIFYGR204, the Dow Chemical Company), and a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid (Nucrel 925, Dupont Company) without maleic anhydride, were separately pressed with a load of 70 kg/cm² by a hydraulic press in a hot mold at 200°C for 15 minutes, and then cooled in a cold mold for 25 minutes.

Four samples SE1 to SE4, which respectively correspond to the four starting materials in the abovementioned order, were obtained. Each of the samples SE1 to SE4 had an area of 10 cm² and a thickness of 3 cm. Each of the samples SE1 to SE4 was subjected to a contact angle test using Face contact anglemeter (Model: CA-D, KYOWA Interface Science Co., Ltd.) for five times, and the contact angle value of deionized water to each sample at each time of the test was determined. Average of the contact angle values of the five times of the test for each sample is shown in Table 1. The larger the contact angle value of deionized water to the sample, the higher will be the hydrophobicity of the sample. Furthermore, the higher the hydrophobicity

of the sample, the poorer will be the thermo-bonding affinity of the sample to natural fibers that are rich in hydroxyl groups.

Table 1

Sample No.	Average of contact angle values
SE1 (Example A1)	50.7
SE2 (Polyethylene)	88.8
SE3 (Grafted polyethylene)	71.3
SE4 (Copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid without maleic anhydride)	76.7

5 According to the results shown in Table 1, the contact angle value of deionized water to SE1 is much smaller than those of deionized water to SE2 to SE4. This demonstrates that compared to conventional modifiers, i.e., grafted polyethylene, and copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid without maleic anhydride, the fiber modifier obtained from Example A1, i.e., the fiber modifier according to this invention, has a more excellent thermo-bonding affinity to the natural fibers. Thus, when the fiber modifier of this invention is applied to the manufacture of a sheath component of a core and sheath composite fiber, the core and sheath composite fiber thus made can be expected to have improved thermo-bonding affinity.

Preparation of a fiber composition for a sheath component

of a core and sheath composite fiber

<Examples B1 to B4>

5 Sheath components of the fiber composition of Examples B1 to B4 for use in a core and sheath composite fiber were prepared by mixing the fiber modifier obtained from Example A1 with polyethylene in different ratios as shown in Table 2 below. The fiber modifier obtained from Example A1 and polyethylene were pre-heated prior to the mixing operation at temperatures of 50°C and 80°C, respectively. Then, the 10 mixtures thus made were separately granulated in an extruder and then melt-spun and drawn into the corresponding sheath components SC1 to SC4 under the conditions (1) and (4) to (11) summarized in Table 5 below.

Thermo-bonding affinity test

15 The sheath components SC1 to SC4 obtained from Examples B1 to B4 were separately placed on a cotton fabric (yarn count: 30 (100% cotton)) fixed on a needle plate, and subsequently subjected to thermosetting treatment together in an oven (model no. R-3, Labortex Co., Ltd.). 20 The thermosetting treatment was conducted at a melting temperature of 135°C for 3 minutes. Thereafter, the thermo-bonding affinity of each of the sheath components SC1 to SC4 to the cotton fabric was observed.

25 The control group was prepared in a manner similar to that of Examples B1 to B4 except that polyethylene was not mixed with the fiber modifier of Example A1. The thermo-bonding affinity of the control group to the cotton

fabric was likewise observed. Results of the thermo-bonding affinity test are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Sheath component	Polyethylene content (wt%)	Fiber modifier content (wt%)	Thermo-bonding affinity
SC1	88	12	Good
SC2	89	11	Good
SC3	93	7	Good
SC4	94	6	Good
Control group	100	-	Poor
Melting temperature	135°C		

5 According to the results shown in Table 2, addition of the fiber modifier of this invention will improve the thermo-bonding affinity of the sheath component to the cotton fabric (i.e., the natural fibers).

<Examples B5 to B7>

10 Sheath components SC5 to SC7 of Examples B5 to B7 were prepared in a manner similar to that of Example B2 (i.e., the weight ratio for polyethylene to the fiber modifier was 89:11), except that the fiber modifiers used in Examples B5 to B7 were separately obtained from Examples A2 to A4. Comparison between sheath component SC2 and SC5 to SC7, and control group in thermo-bonding affinity to natural fibers

15 Sheath components SC5 to SC7 were subjected to the thermo-bonding affinity test in a manner similar to that

of the sheath component SC2. Results of the thermo-bonding affinity test obtained from the sheath components SC2, SC5 to SC7, and the control group, and acrylic acid or methacrylic acid content of the fiber modifier used therein are summarized in Table 3 for convenience of comparison.

Table 3

Sheath component	Acrylic acid or methacrylic acid content of the fiber modifier	Thermo-bonding affinity
SC2	15wt% of methacrylic acid	Very good
SC5	9wt% of methacrylic acid	Good
SC6	18wt% of acrylic acid	Very good
SC7	15wt% of acrylic acid	Good
Control group	-	Poor
Melting temperature	135°C	

According to the results shown in Table 3, addition of the fiber modifier of this invention will improve the thermo-bonding affinity of the sheath component to the cotton fabric (i.e., the natural fibers). In addition, the results also demonstrate that the higher the acrylic or methacrylic content of the fiber modifier, the better will be the thermo-bonding affinity of the sheath component to the natural fibers.

Thermo-bonding affinity test under a lower melting temperature

Sheath components SC2, SC5 to SC7 and the control group were subjected to the thermo-bonding affinity test in a

manner similar to the abovementioned thermo-bonding affinity test, except that the melting temperature of the oven was lowered to 125°C. Results of the thermo-bonding affinity test obtained from the sheath components SC2, SC5 to SC7, and the control group, and acrylic acid or methacrylic acid content of the fiber modifier used therein are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Sheath component	Acrylic acid or methacrylic acid content of the fiber modifier	Thermo-bonding affinity
SC2	15wt% of methacrylic acid	Very good
SC5	9wt% of methacrylic acid	Good
SC6	18wt% of acrylic acid	Very good
SC7	15wt% of acrylic acid	Good
Control group	-	Poor
Melting temperature	125°C	

The results shown in Table 4 demonstrate that, at a lower melting temperature, addition of the fiber modifier according to this invention is still able to improve the thermo-bonding affinity of the sheath component to the cotton fabric. In other words, by addition of the fiber modifier of this invention, production of the sheath component of the core and sheath composite fiber can be conducted in a power-saving way and at an economical cost. Preparation of a core and sheath composite fiber including a sheath component of the fiber composition

<Example C1>

A core and sheath composite fiber was prepared by melt-spinning and drawing techniques. Raw material of the sheath component included the fiber modifier obtained from Example A1 and polyethylene. The fiber modifier of Example A1 and polyethylene were pre-heated to temperatures of 50°C and 80°C, respectively, and mixed in the same weight ratio as that of Example B2, i.e., 88:11. Raw material of the core component included propylene (6231F, m.p.: 166.1°C, Taiwan Polyplene Co., Ltd.), which was pre-heated to a temperature of 80°C. The raw material of the sheath component and the raw material of the core component were separately fed into extruders, temperatures of heating zones of which were set according to the conditions (1) and (2) summarized in Table 5 below, so as to form the sheath and core components. The sheath and core components were subsequently fed into a melt-spinning machine (available from Fleissner GmbH, Germany) and a drawing machine (available from Oerlikon Neumag GmbH, Germany) in a weight ratio of 65:35 so as to form the core and sheath composite fiber having a size of 1.5 d x 38 mm. The operational conditions of the melt-spinning and drawing machines were set according to the conditions (3) to (7) and (8) to (11) summarized in Table 5 below, respectively.

Table 5

Conditions	
(1) Temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the sheath component	room temperature, 200°C, 240°C, 240°C, 240°C
(2) Temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the core component	260°C, 260°C, 260°C, 260°C, 260°C
(3) Weight ratio of the sheath component to the core component	65%/35%
(4) Temperature of heat transfer fluid (Therminol®)	260°C
(5) Spinneret type	600H (for sheath and core components)
(6) Oil peak up percentage (OPU)	0.3
(7) Take-up speed (m/min)	1350
(8) Draw ratio	4.2
(9) Drawing temperature	60°C to 85°C
(10) Thermosetting temperature	85°C to 115°C
(11) Drying temperature of filament bundles (Two dryer system)	113°C

<Comparative Example 1>

5 A core and sheath composite fiber was made in a manner similar to that of Example C1, except that the sheath component was made only from polyethylene, and that temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the sheath component were 200°C, 200°C, 240°C, 240°C and 240°C.

<Comparative Example 2>

10 A core and sheath composite fiber was made in a manner similar to that of Example C1, except that the sheath component was made from 89 wt% of polyethylene and 11 wt%

of a conventional modifier (Amplifygr204, The Dow Chemical Company), that the conventional modifier was pre-heated to a temperature of 80°C, and that temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones for formation of the sheath component were 200°C, 200°C, 235°C, 240°C and 240°C.

<Comparative Example 3>

Commercially available modified polyethylene/polypropylene composite fiber (the CHISSO Corporation) was used as the core and sheath composite fiber of Comparative Example 3.

<Example C2>

A core and sheath composite fiber was prepared by melt-spinning and drawing techniques. Raw material of the sheath component included 8 wt% of the fiber modifier obtained from Example A1, and 92 wt% of polyethylene. Raw material of the core component included polyester (CSS-910, m.p.: 255°C, Far Eastern Textile Ltd., Taiwan), which was pre-heated to a temperature of 140°C. The raw material of the sheath component and the raw material of the core component were separately fed into extruders, temperatures of heating zones of which were set according to the conditions (1) and (2) summarized in Table 6 below, so as to form the sheath and core components. The sheath and core components were subsequently fed into a melt-spinning machine (available from Fleissner GmbH, Germany) and a drawing machine (available from Oerlikon Neumag GmbH,

Germany) in a weight ratio of 55:45 so as to form the core and sheath composite fiber having a size of 2.0 d x 38 mm. The operational conditions of the melt-spinning and drawing machines were set according to the conditions (3) to (7) and (8) to (11) summarized in Table 6 below, respectively.

Table 6

Conditions	
(1) Temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the sheath component	room temperature, 200°C, 240°C, 240°C, 240°C
(2) Temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the core component	295°C, 300°C, 300°C, 305°C, 305°C
(3) Weight ratio of the sheath component to the core component	55%/45%
(4) Temperature of heat transfer fluid (Therminol®)	260°C (for sheath component)/280°C (for core component)
(5) Spinneret type	600H (for sheath and core components)
(6) Oil peak up percentage (OPU)	0.3
(7) Take-up speed (m/min)	1350
(8) Draw ratio	3.1
(9) Drawing temperature	50°C to 90°C
(10) Thermosetting temperature	65°C to 115°C
(11) Drying temperature of filament bundles (Two dryer system)	113°C

<Comparative Example 4>

A core and sheath composite fiber was made in a manner

similar to that of Example C2, except that the sheath component was made only from polyethylene, and that temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones of the extruder for formation of the sheath component were
5 250°C, 250°C, 255°C, 255°C and 255°C.

<Comparative Example 5>

A core and sheath composite fiber was made in a manner similar to that of Example C2, except that the sheath component was made from 90 wt% of polyethylene and 10 wt%
10 of a conventional modifier (Amplify GR-204, The Dow Chemical Company) and that temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones for formation of the sheath component were 250°C, 250°C, 255°C, 255°C and 255°C, respectively.

As stated in Example C1 and Comparative Examples 1 and
15 2, by virtue of addition of the fiber modifier according to this invention, the temperatures set sequentially in five heating zones for formation of the sheath component can start from room temperature. In addition, as stated in Example C1 and Comparative Example 2, the pre-heating
20 temperature required for the fiber modifier of this invention was 50°C, while the pre-heating temperature required for the conventional modifier was 80°C. These facts demonstrate that production of the sheath component of the core and sheath composite fiber can be conducted
25 in a power-saving way and at an economical cost through addition of the fiber modifier of this invention.

Similar results and observations can be obtained from

Example C2 and Comparative Examples 4 and 5.

Evaluation of Physical Properties of Core and Sheath Composite Fiber

5 Results of the physical properties of the core and sheath composite fibers obtained from Example C1 and Comparative Examples 1 to 3 are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

	Example C1	Comparative Example 1	Comparative Example 2	Comparative Example 3
Denier (d)	1.61	1.60	1.70	1.65
Length (mm)	38.3	38.0	38.0	38.6
Number of crimp (CN)	13.3	12.7	14.3	13.8
Degree of crimp (CD, %)	12.2	12.6	14.5	15.0
Crimp elasticity (CS, %)	71.7	72.4	80.2	70.3
Hot air shrinkage (HAS, %) $\leq 4.5\%$	1.4	1.2	2.5	3.1
Oil peak up percentage (OPU)	0.3	0.3	0.3	-

10 In addition, results of the physical properties of the core and sheath composite fibers obtained from Example C2 and Comparative Examples 4 and 5 are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

	Example C2	Comparative Example 4	Comparative Example 5
Denier(d)	2.76	2.4	2.20
Length(mm)	40.3	39.0	39.0
Number of crimp (CN)	13.3	12.0	13.0
Degree of crimp (CD, %)	18.3	15.5	14.5
Crimp elasticity (CS, %)	82.2	80.0	-
Hot air shrinkage (HAS, %) $\leq 4.5\%$	1.1	1.2	1.5
Oil peak up percentage (OPU)	0.3	0.3	0.3

According to the results shown in Tables 7 and 8, addition of the fiber modifier of this invention has no adverse effect on the physical properties of the core and sheath composite fiber.

Thermo-Bonding Test

<Example D1>

20 g of the core and sheath composite fibers obtained from Example C1 (30 wt%) and Rayon fibers (70 wt%, 2d x 38 mm, Vicunha Textil SA Company) were carded twice in a carding machine. The carded cotton mesh thus made was heated in an oven at 145°C for 3 minutes so as to form a non-woven fabric web having a basis weight of 100 g/m². The non-woven fabric web was cut into specimens (FD1), each of which has a size of 30 cm x 5 cm.

<Comparative Examples 6 to 8>

Specimens of the non-woven fabric web of Comparative Examples 6 to 8 (CF6 to CF8) were made in a manner similar to Example D1, except that the core and sheath composite fibers were separately obtained from Comparative Examples 1 to 3.

Breaking strength and elongation of the specimens obtained from Example D1 (FD1) and Comparative Examples 6 to 8 (CF6 to CF8) were determined by a tensile strength test machine (INSTRON-4301) and results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

	Breaking strength (kg)	Elongation (%)
FD1	6.0	15.3
CF6	2.2	13.1
CF7	5.3	11.2
CF8	5.2	18.2

According to the results shown in Table 9, specimens of Example D1 (FD1) have a breaking strength almost three times that of specimens of Comparative Example 6 (CF6). This demonstrates that addition of the fiber modifier of this invention into the sheath component will greatly enhance the thermo-bonding affinity of the core and sheath composite fiber to the natural fiber.

In addition, specimens of Example D1 (FD1) have a breaking strength comparable with or even better than those

of the specimens of Comparative Examples 7 and 8 (CF7 and CF8). This demonstrates that the fiber modifier according to this invention can achieve the same or even better level of thermo-bonding improvement than that of the conventional modifier containing grafted polyethylene.

5 <Example D2>

20 g of the core and sheath composite fibers obtained from Example C2 (30 wt%) and Rayon fibers (70 wt%, 2d x 38 mm, Vicunha Textil SA Company) were carded twice in a carding machine. The carded cotton mesh thus made was heated in an oven at 145°C for 3 minutes so as to form a non-woven fabric web having a basis weight of 100 g/m². The non-woven fabric web was cut into specimens (FD2), each of which has a size of 30 cm x 5 cm.

10 <Comparative Examples 9 and 10>

Specimens of the non-woven fabric web of Comparative Examples 9 and 10 (CF9 and CF10) were made in a manner similar to Example D2, except that the core and sheath composite fibers were separately obtained from Comparative Examples 4 and 5.

Breaking strength and elongation of the specimens obtained from Example D2 (FD2) and Comparative Examples 9 and 10 (CF9 and CF10) were determined by a tensile strength test machine (INSTRON-4301) and results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

	Breaking strength (kg)	Elongation (%)
FD2	4.0	13.2
CF9	0.5	21.6
CF10	3.8	15.6

According to the results shown in Table 10, specimens of Example D2 (FD2) have a breaking strength almost eight times as high as that of specimens of Comparative Example 9 (CF9). This demonstrates that addition of the fiber modifier of this invention into the sheath component will greatly enhance the thermo-bonding affinity of the core and sheath composite fiber to the natural fiber.

In addition, specimens of Example D2 (FD2) have a breaking strength comparable with or even better than those of the specimens of Comparative Example 10 (CF10). This demonstrates that the fiber modifier according to this invention can achieve the same or even better level of thermo-bonding improvement than that of the conventional modifier containing grafted polyethylene.

In view of the foregoing, addition of the fiber modifier of this invention in the fiber composition will enhance the thermo-bonding affinity of the composite fiber thus made to the natural fiber. Besides, addition of the fiber modifier of this invention in the fiber composition will enable the sheath component of the composite fiber to be

prepared at a lower temperature. Hence, production cost of the composite fiber can be decreased.

While the present invention has been described in connection with what are considered the most practical and preferred embodiments, it is understood that this invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments but is intended to cover various arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the broadest interpretation and equivalent arrangements.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A fiber modifier, comprising a blend of maleic anhydride and a copolymer component selected from the group consisting of a copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid,
5 a copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic acid, and combinations thereof.
2. The fiber modifier of claim 1, wherein the content of maleic anhydride in said blend ranges from 3% to 4% by weight.
- 10 3. The fiber modifier of claim 1, wherein said copolymer component is the copolymer of ethylene and acrylic acid, and wherein the weight ratio of ethylene to acrylic acid in said copolymer component ranges from 91:9 to 82:18.
- 15 4. The fiber modifier of claim 3, wherein the weight ratio of ethylene to acrylic acid in said copolymer component ranges from 90:10 to 85:15.
5. The fiber modifier of claim 1, wherein said copolymer component is the copolymer of ethylene and methacrylic
20 acid, and wherein the weight ratio of ethylene to methacrylic acid in said copolymer component ranges from 96:4 to 85:15.
6. The fiber modifier of claim 5, wherein the weight ratio of ethylene to methacrylic acid in said copolymer
25 component ranges from 91:9 to 85:15.
7. A fiber composition, comprising polyethylene and a fiber modifier as claimed in claim 1.

8. The fiber composition of claim 7, wherein the weight ratio of polyethylene to said fiber modifier ranges from 95:5 to 88:12.
9. The fiber composition of claim 8, wherein the weight ratio of polyethylene to said fiber modifier ranges from 94:6 to 89:11.
10. A core and sheath composite fiber, comprising a core component and a sheath component made from a fiber composition as claimed in claim 7, wherein said core component has a melting point higher than that of said sheath component.
11. The core and sheath composite fiber of claim 10, wherein the weight ratio of polyethylene to said fiber modifier in said sheath component ranges from 95:5 to 88:12.
12. The core and sheath composite fiber of claim 11, wherein the weight ratio of polyethylene to said fiber modifier in said sheath component ranges from 94:6 to 89:11.
13. The core and sheath composite fiber of claim 10, wherein the melting point of said sheath component ranges from 88°C to 130°C.
14. The core and sheath composite fiber of claim 10, wherein said core component is made from a polymer selected from the group consisting of polypropylene, polyamide, polylactic acid, polyester, and combinations thereof.