

COATED PTFE MEMBRANE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] PTFE membranes, particularly expanded PTFE (ePTFE) membranes, are used in a variety of liquid and gas filtration applications, including applications that involve treating challenging fluids such as corrosive or chemically active liquids. However, there is a need for porous PTFE membranes that exhibit metal scavenging or metal removal efficiency while providing low flow resistance.

[0002] These and other advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the description as set forth below.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] An embodiment of the invention provides a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm).

[0004] In another embodiment, a method for filtering a metal-containing fluid is provided, the method comprising passing a metal-containing fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) and removes metal from the fluid.

[0005] In another embodiment, a method for filtering a sulfuric peroxide mixture (SPM) fluid is provided, the method comprising passing the fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) and removes particles from the fluid.

[0006] Devices including the membranes, and methods of making the membranes, are also provided in accordance with embodiments of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING(S)

[0007] Figure 1 is a graph showing metal absorption for various embodiments of PFSA coated PTFE membranes according to the present invention, compared to an untreated PTFE membrane, and a commercially available UV treated PTFE membrane.

[0008] Figure 2 is a graph showing metal absorption for various embodiments of PFSA coated PTFE membranes according to the present invention, compared to an untreated PTFE membrane, showing the absorption is due to the coating, rather than sieving.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a porous PTFE membrane comprises a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm).

[0010] A method for filtering a metal-containing fluid according to an embodiment of the invention comprises passing a metal-containing fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) and removes metal from the fluid (e.g., removing Group 2 metals (e.g., Mg and/or Ca), polyvalent metals and/or transition metals (e.g., Cr, Mn, Fe, and/or Ni) from the metal-containing fluid).

[0011] In another embodiment, a method for filtering a sulfuric peroxide mixture (SPM) fluid is provided, the method comprising passing the fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the membrane has a CWST of at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) and removes particles (such as silica-containing particles) from the fluid.

[0012] In an embodiment, a method of making a metal-removing membrane is provided, the method comprising coating a porous PTFE substrate with a coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, and curing the coating at a temperature of less than 250 °C, preferably, less than about 200 °C.

[0013] In yet another embodiment, a method of making a metal-removing membrane is provided, the method comprising coating a porous PTFE substrate with a coating comprising

perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein a cross-linking agent is not used, and the coating is prepared at room temperature; and curing the coating at a temperature of less than 250 °C. Preferably, curing is carried out at a temperature from about 25 °C to about 200 °C.

[0014] Advantageously, in contrast with the preparation of membranes for some applications wherein a metal agent is used, and the metal agent is removed by a post washing process (e.g., using HCl) to meet standards (e.g., in the microelectronics industry), membranes according to the invention can be prepared with a metal agent free coating. Additionally, membranes can be prepared according to the invention in a manufacturing friendly process, e.g., the preparation can be easily incorporated into existing manufacturing processes, resulting in increased speed of preparation.

[0015] The coated porous PTFE membranes according the invention advantageously provide a combination of high metal scavenging or metal removal efficiency and low flow resistance, while remaining wet in the fluid being processed (i.e., the membranes are non-dewetting in the process fluid) and are useful in a wide range of liquid, and gas (including air) filtration applications, including sterile filtration applications. Exemplary applications include for example, diagnostic applications (including, for example, sample preparation and/or diagnostic lateral flow devices), ink jet applications, lithography, e.g., as replacement for HD/UHMW PE based media, filtering fluids for the pharmaceutical industry, metal removal, production of ultrapure water, treatment of industrial and surface waters, filtering fluids for medical applications (including for home and/or for patient use, e.g., intravenous applications, also including, for example, filtering biological fluids such as blood (e.g., virus removal)), filtering fluids for the electronics industry (e.g., filtering photoresist fluids in the microelectronics industry and hot sulfuric peroxide mixture (SPM) fluids), filtering fluids for the food and beverage industry, beer filtration, clarification, filtering antibody- and/or protein-containing fluids, filtering nucleic acid-containing fluids, cell detection (including *in situ*), cell harvesting, and/or filtering cell culture fluids. Alternatively, or additionally, porous membranes according to embodiments of the invention can be used to filter air and/or gas and/or can be used for venting applications (e.g., allowing air and/or gas, but not liquid, to pass therethrough). Porous membranes according to embodiments of the inventions can be used in a variety of devices, including surgical devices and products, such as, for example, ophthalmic surgical products. The inventive membranes are dimensionally stable. In some embodiments, the porous PTFE membranes can be utilized individually, e.g., as unsupported membranes, and in other embodiments, the porous PTFE membranes can be

combined with other porous elements and/or another component, to provide, for example, an article such as a composite, a filter element, and/or a filter.

[0016] One example of a suitable PFSA polymer dispersion for use in preparing a coating is available from Solvay Specialty Polymers (Borger, Texas) as Aquivion® PFSA (e.g., AQUIVION PFSA D83-24B, AQUIVION PFSA D83-06A, and AQUIVION PFSA D79-20BS), which is based on a Short Side Chain (SSC) copolymer of Tetrafluoroethylene and a Sulfonyl Fluoride Vinyl Ether (SFVE) $F_2C=CF-O-CF_2-CF_2-SO_2F$. The ionomer dispersions contain its sulfonic acid form. Another example of a suitable PFSA polymer dispersion is a DuPont™ Nafion® PFSA polymer dispersion.

[0017] In preparing the coating, the concentration of PFSA in the coating solution can be varied for different applications. Typically, the concentration is in the range of from about 0.1% to about 3%, more preferably, in the range of from about 0.12% to about 2.2%.

[0018] A variety of porous PTFE substrates and membranes (including commercially available substrates and membranes) can be coated in accordance with the invention.

[0019] Membranes and substrates can be coating as known in the art, for example, but not limited to, dip coating or spraying.

[0020] The membranes can have any suitable pore structure, e.g., a pore size (for example, as evidenced by bubble point, or by K_L as described in, for example, U.S. Patent 4,340,479, or evidenced by capillary condensation flow porometry), a mean flow pore (MFP) size (e.g., when characterized using a porometer, for example, a Porvair Porometer (Porvair plc, Norfolk, UK), or a porometer available under the trademark POROLUX (Porometer.com; Belgium)), a pore rating, a pore diameter (e.g., when characterized using the modified OSU F2 test as described in, for example, U.S. Patent 4,925,572), or removal rating media. The pore structure used depends on the size of the particles to be utilized, the composition of the fluid to be treated, and the desired effluent level of the treated fluid.

[0021] Typically, the coated porous PTFE membranes according to the invention have a pore rating of about 1 micrometers or less, preferably (particularly for non-dewetting applications) in the range of from about 0.05 micrometers to about 0.02 micrometers, or less. For example, the membrane can be a nanoporous membrane, for example, a membrane having pores of diameter in the range of from 1 nm to 100 nm.

[0022] Typically, the coated membrane has a thickness in the range of from about 0.2 to about 5.0 mils (about 5 to about 127 microns), preferably, in the range of from about 0.5 to

about 1.0 mils (about 13 to about 25 microns), though membranes can be thicker or thinner than those values.

[0023] The porous membrane can have any desired critical wetting surface tension (CWST, as defined in, for example, U.S. Patent 4,925,572). CWST can be measured by relying on a set of solutions of certain composition. Each solution has specific surface tension. The solution's surface tension ranges from 25 to 92 dyne/cm in small non-equivalent increments. To measure the membrane surface tension, the membrane is positioned on top of white light table, one drop of a solution of certain surface tension is applied to the membrane surface and the time the drop takes to penetrate through the membrane and become bright white as an indication of light going through the membrane is recorded. Instant wetting is considered when the time the drop takes to penetrate the membrane is ≤ 10 seconds. If the time > 10 seconds, the solution is considered to partially wet the membrane. The CWST can be selected as is known in the art, e.g., as additionally disclosed in, for example, U.S. Patents 5,152,905, 5,443,743, 5,472,621, and 6,074,869.

[0024] Typically, the coated PTFE membrane has a CWST of at least about 27 dynes/cm (about 27×10^{-5} N/cm), more preferably, at least about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm), and in some embodiments, at least about 35 dynes/cm (about 35×10^{-5} N/cm). For example, the coated PTFE membrane may have a CWST in the range of from about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) to about 40 dynes/cm (about 40×10^{-5} N/cm), or more.

[0025] An article such as a filter, filter element and/or composite including the coated porous PTFE membrane can include additional elements, layers, or components, that can have different structures and/or functions, e.g., at least one of any one or more of the following: prefiltration, support, drainage, spacing and cushioning. Illustratively, the filter can also include at least one additional element such as a mesh and/or a screen.

[0026] In accordance with embodiments of the invention, the membrane, filter element, composite and/or filter can have a variety of configurations, including planar, pleated, spiral, and/or hollow cylindrical.

[0027] The membrane, filter element, composite and/or filter is typically disposed in a housing comprising at least one inlet and at least one outlet and defining at least one fluid flow path between the inlet and the outlet, wherein the membrane is across the fluid flow path, to provide a filter device. Preferably, for crossflow applications, the membrane, composite and/or filter is disposed in a housing comprising at least one inlet and at least two outlets and defining at least a first fluid flow path between the inlet and the first outlet, and a

second fluid flow path between the inlet and the second outlet, wherein the membrane is across the first fluid flow path, to provide a filter device. The filter device may be sterilizable. Any housing of suitable shape and providing at least one inlet and at least one outlet may be employed.

[0028] The housing can be fabricated from any suitable rigid impervious material, including any impervious thermoplastic material, which is compatible with the fluid being processed. For example, the housing can be fabricated from a metal, such as stainless steel, or from a polymer. In an embodiment, the housing is a polymer, such as an acrylic, polypropylene, polystyrene, or a polycarbonated resin.

[0029] The following examples further illustrate the invention but, of course, should not be construed as in any way limiting its scope.

EXAMPLE 1

[0030] This example demonstrates a method of preparing a membrane according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0031] A 0.25% PFSA solution (AQUIVION PFSA 24; D83-24B Solvay Plastics) is prepared in a methanol-water medium to obtain a polymer solution. A commercially available PTFE substrate ((membrane) Sumitomo Electric Fine Polymer, Inc., nominal pore size 50 nm) is dip-coated with the polymer solution until fully wet, removed from the solution and drained for about 2 minutes, and restrained and dried at 150 °C for 10 minutes followed by washing in room temperature DI water for 12 hours, and tested.

[0032] The results (compared to an untreated (control) PTFE membrane and a commercially available UV treated PTFE membrane) are as follows:

Media	Untreated PTFE	Commercially available UV treated PTFE	PFSA coated PTFE
CWST (dynes/cm)	27	32	35
Flow (L/min/ft ² /psid)	1.07	1.16	0.88
IPA K _L , Water K _L (psi)	46.7, NA	48.2, 51.5	57.3, 35.5
SPM CWST	27	32	35

(dynes/cm)			
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[0033] This example shows CWST is increased (thus, the membrane is non-dewetting), with little reduction in flow, in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

EXAMPLE 2

[0034] This example shows the metal removal efficiencies for two PFSA coated PTFE membranes (prepared with different concentrations of PFSA) according to embodiments of the invention, compared to an untreated (control) PTFE membrane, and a commercially available UV treated PTFE membrane.

[0035] Two PFSA coated PTFE membranes are prepared as generally described in Example 1, wherein one membrane is dip-coated in a 0.25% PFSA solution (AQUIVION PFSA D83-24B) prepared in a methanol-water medium, and another membrane is dip-coated in a 0.5% PFSA solution (AQUIVION PFSA D83-24B) prepared in a methanol-water medium

[0036] The fluid samples separately contain the following metals: Li, Na, K (Group 1 metals); Mg, Ca (Group 2 metals); Al, Pb (Group 3 metals), and Cr, Mo, Mn, Fe, Ni, Cu, Zn (Transition metals).

[0037] As shown in Figure 1, embodiments of membranes according to the invention, as compared to an untreated membrane and a commercially available UV treated membrane, efficiently remove various Group 2 metals and various transition metals.

EXAMPLE 3

[0038] This example shows the metal removal efficiencies for two PFSA coated PTFE membranes (prepared with different concentrations of PFSA) according to embodiments of the invention.

[0039] Two PFSA coated PTFE membranes are prepared as generally described in Example 1, wherein one membrane is dip-coated in a 0.25% PFSA solution (AQUIVION PFSA D83-24B) prepared in a methanol-water medium, and another membrane is dip-coated in a 0.5% PFSA solution (AQUIVION PFSA D83-24B) prepared in a methanol-water medium

[0040] The fluid samples separately contain the following metals: Li, Na, K (Group 1 metals); Mg, Ca (Group 2 metals); Al, Pb (Group 3 metals), and Cr, Mo, Mn, Fe, Ni, Cu, Zn (Transition metals).

[0041] As shown in Figure 2, embodiments of membranes according to the invention as compared to an untreated membrane, more efficiently remove Group 2 metals, as well as various Group 3 and various transition metals, and showing the absorption is due to the coating, rather than sieving.

EXAMPLE 4

[0042] This example shows the PFSA coating on the PTFE membrane is not cross-linked, as the coating is not removed by soaking in solvent.

[0043] PTFE membranes are weighed using a 7 digit balance.

[0044] Membranes are coated using a 24% w/w (stock) PFSA solution as generally described in Example 1 to provide non-cross-linked membranes.

[0045] Cross-linked membranes are prepared using a 24% w/w (stock) PFSA solution, wherein the membranes are dried at about 260 °C.

[0046] The dried control, non-cross-linked, and cross-linked membranes are weighed.

[0047] The membranes are soaked in the same solvent (methanol) solution used to make the coated membranes. One set of coated membranes is soaked in room temperature solvent solution, another set of coated membranes is soaked in 40 °C solvent solution. The use of 40 °C solvent solution helps speed up solvation of any byproduct.

[0048] The membranes are rinsed in fresh solvent 3 times, dried, and weighed again.

[0049] The weights of the control membrane and the non-cross-linked coated membrane soaked in room temperature and 40 °C solvent solutions are the same as the original weights, while the weights of the cross-linked coated membranes soaked in room temperature and 40 °C solvent solutions are less than the original weight, showing that the membrane is cross-linked.

[0050] All references, including publications, patent applications, and patents, cited herein are hereby incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each reference were individually and specifically indicated to be incorporated by reference and were set forth in its entirety herein.

[0051] The use of the terms “a” and “an” and “the” and “at least one” and similar referents in the context of describing the invention (especially in the context of the following claims) are to be construed to cover both the singular and the plural, unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The use of the term “at least one” followed by a list of one or more items (for example, “at least one of A and B”) is to be construed to mean one item selected from the listed items (A or B) or any combination of two or more of the listed items (A and B), unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The terms “comprising,” “having,” “including,” and “containing” are to be construed as open-ended terms (i.e., meaning “including, but not limited to,”) unless otherwise noted. Recitation of ranges of values herein are merely intended to serve as a shorthand method of referring individually to each separate value falling within the range, unless otherwise indicated herein, and each separate value is incorporated into the specification as if it were individually recited herein. All methods described herein can be performed in any suitable order unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context. The use of any and all examples, or exemplary language (e.g., “such as”) provided herein, is intended merely to better illuminate the invention and does not pose a limitation on the scope of the invention unless otherwise claimed. No language in the specification should be construed as indicating any non-claimed element as essential to the practice of the invention.

[0052] Preferred embodiments of this invention are described herein, including the best mode known to the inventors for carrying out the invention. Variations of those preferred embodiments may become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon reading the foregoing description. The inventors expect skilled artisans to employ such variations as appropriate, and the inventors intend for the invention to be practiced otherwise than as specifically described herein. Accordingly, this invention includes all modifications and equivalents of the subject matter recited in the claims appended hereto as permitted by applicable law. Moreover, any combination of the above-described elements in all possible variations thereof is encompassed by the invention unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context.

CLAIM(S):

1. A method for filtering a metal-containing fluid, the method comprising passing a metal-containing fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the non-crosslinked coating is prepared by coating the porous PTFE substrate with a PFSA polymer solution having a concentration of PFSA polymer in the range of from about 0.1 to about 3%, and curing the PFSA polymer solution at a temperature of less than about 200 °C, and the membrane has a CWST of about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) to about 40 dynes/cm (about 40×10^{-5} N/cm) and a pore diameter in the range of 1 nm to 100 nm, and removing metal from the fluid.

2. A method for filtering a sulfuric peroxide mixture (SPM) fluid, the method comprising passing the fluid through a porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the non-crosslinked coating is prepared by coating the porous PTFE substrate with a PFSA polymer solution having a concentration of PFSA polymer in the range of from about 0.1 to about 3%, and curing the PFSA polymer solution at a temperature of less than about 200 °C, and the membrane has a CWST of about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) to about 40 dynes/cm (about 40×10^{-5} N/cm) and a pore diameter in the range of 1 nm to 100 nm, and removing particles from the fluid.

3. The method of claim 1 or 2, wherein the fluid is a fluid used in the electronics industry.

4. The method of any one of claims 1-3, comprising removing Group 2 metals and/or transition metals from the fluid.

5. A porous PTFE membrane comprising a porous PTFE substrate having a non-crosslinked coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer, wherein the non-crosslinked coating is prepared by coating the porous PTFE substrate with a PFSA polymer solution having a concentration of PFSA polymer in the range of from about 0.1 to about 3%, and curing the PFSA polymer solution at a temperature of less than about 200 °C,

and the membrane has a CWST of about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) to about 40 dynes/cm (about 40×10^{-5} N/cm) and a pore diameter in the range of 1 nm to 100 nm.

6. A method of making a metal-removing membrane, the method comprising coating a porous PTFE substrate having a pore diameter in the range of 1 nm to 100 nm with a coating comprising perfluorosulfonic acid (PFSA) polymer solution having a concentration of PFSA polymer in the range of from about 0.1 to about 3%; and, curing the PFSA polymer solution at a temperature of less than about 200 °C for 10 minutes, and obtaining a membrane with a non-crosslinked coating comprising PFSA polymer and a CWST of about 30 dynes/cm (about 30×10^{-5} N/cm) to about 40 dynes/cm (about 40×10^{-5} N/cm).