

Technical field of the invention

5 The present invention relates to a specific fluid which is a site of energy conversion and which is also a heat-transfer fluid, subsequently termed "specific".

Prior art

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Many heat-transfer fluids are known and used in various applications. Air and water are commonly used owing to their natural availability. Other types of known heat-transfer fluids are organic fluids, molten salts and
15 liquid metals.

When choosing a heat-transfer fluid for a particular application, several criteria should be taken into consideration:

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- Absorptivity of the fluid.
- Temperature range over which it will be used: maximum and minimum temperatures.

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- Persistence of effectiveness over time: aggressiveness of the fluid with respect to the materials used for the installation, risks of corrosion or of fouling, etc.

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- Safety regulations: risks of burns, electrical risks, risks of fire, risks of explosion, toxic risks, risks associated with pressurized equipment, regulations for disposal and
35 recycling of the fluid.

- Technical-economic criteria: investment and running costs.

In the case of a domestic solar collector intended to heat the domestic water of a dwelling, the heat-transfer fluid generally used is a mixture of water and antifreeze. This is because this fluid satisfactorily
5 meets all the abovementioned criteria for this type of application.

However, this fluid has a limited absorptivity and the solar collector must therefore be designed so as to
10 promote the conversion of light to heat. The yield from the solar collector is limited.

US 4 083 490 describes a collector intended to absorb solar radiation, comprising an absorbent medium
15 constituted of ethylene glycol, of water and of a colloidal suspension of graphite having particles of approximately 1 μm . The colloidal suspension of graphite behaves as finely divided black bodies which directly absorb a large amount of radiative energy.

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Summary of the invention

A problem addressed by the present invention is that of providing a specific fluid that is particularly
25 suitable for use in a domestic solar collector. In particular, an objective of the invention is to improve the absorptivity of the specific fluid.

The solution proposed by the invention is a specific
30 fluid, characterized in that it comprises water and mineral powder which strongly scatters solar radiation, the strongly scattering mineral powder having a concentration by mass of between 1% and 3% and a median particle size of between 0.8 and 10 μm .

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It has been noted that, by virtue of these characteristics, the specific fluid is a site of energy conversion and therefore exhibits a high absorptivity.

This fluid, used in a solar collector, therefore makes it possible to improve the energy yield of the collector. In addition, the solar collector can be designed so as to direct the light to the fluid,
5 without other measures promoting energy conversion being necessary.

Advantageously, the particles of the strongly scattering mineral powder have, on average, a light
10 energy scattering coefficient of greater than 0.7, preferably greater than 0.9. Such an energy scattering coefficient can be measured using a reflectometer, for example by means of a method of measurement using an integrating sphere. In such a method, a particle placed
15 at the centre of a substantially spherical collector receives an incident light energy flow. The substantially spherical collector measures the flow of energy scattered by the particle in the entire space. The energy scattering coefficient is defined as the
20 ratio of the total flow scattered to the incident flow. The remainder to 1 of the scattering coefficient constitutes the energy absorption coefficient for the particle.

25 Advantageously, the strongly scattering mineral powder comprises calcium carbonate, or a synthetic or natural mineral powder. According to one embodiment, the strongly scattering mineral powder is calcium carbonate powder.

30 Preferably, the strongly scattering mineral powder has a median particle size of between 1 and 3 μm .

Preferably, the strongly scattering mineral powder is
35 essentially constituted of spheroidal particles. Such shapes promote light scattering.

Preferably, the fluid comprises antifreeze, the concentration by mass of antifreeze being between 0%, limit excluded, and 40%, limit included.

5 An antifreeze fluid is particularly desirable for applications that may be exposed to low temperatures, for example in outside installations, according to the climate in the area where the installation is located. For example, ethylene glycol-based antifreeze fluids
10 are available. Glycol-free organic antifreezes are also available, which have the advantage of a lack of toxicity.

Preferably, the fluid has an energy absorptivity of
15 between 0.1 and 10 cm⁻¹ for solar radiation, preferably of the order of 1 cm⁻¹. This order of magnitude of the absorptivity enables absorption which is almost total after a thickness of approximately 20 to 30 mm. For this, one or more colorants may be added to the
20 specific fluid, for example an organic liquid colorant in a concentration of between 0.2% and 1%. A coloured antifreeze product may also be used for this purpose. The absorptivity should not be too strong to allow heat conversion in the bulk of the fluid, and not a
25 superficial absorption limited to a thin layer of the fluid which would be capable of producing excessive local heating of the superficial layer of the fluid.

Preferably, the fluid comprises a surfactant, the
30 concentration by mass of surfactant being between 0%, limit excluded, and 3%, limit included.

Preferably, the fluid comprises an antifoam, the concentration by mass of antifoam being between 0%,
35 limit excluded, and 3%, limit included.

An antifoam product makes it possible in particular to prevent the formation of bubbles that may increase the

surface reflectivity of the fluid, and therefore to decrease its total absorption.

According to one embodiment, the concentration by mass
5 of mineral powder is 3%, the concentration by mass of antifreeze is 30%, the concentration by mass of surfactant is between 0.2% and 0.3% and the concentration by mass of antifoam is between 0.2% and 0.3%.

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Preferably, the fluid also comprises a bactericidal product. A bactericidal product is particularly desirable for applications in installations that have to remain at ambient temperature for significant
15 periods of time, for example for solar heating installations that only operate for part of the year.

The invention also proposes the use of a specific fluid in a device for converting light radiation to heat, in
20 which a light ray is directed towards said specific fluid, the specific fluid being the site of an energy conversion.

The invention also proposes a device for converting
25 light radiation to heat, comprising a specific fluid arranged in such a way as to be able to receive light radiation so as to be the site of an energy conversion. Advantageously, this device comprises a solar collector.

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Certain aspects of the invention are based on the idea of using a filler of strongly light-scattering powder in suspension in an energy-converting fluid, so as to cause a phenomenon of multiple light scattering in the
35 fluid. Such a phenomenon is capable of substantially increasing the distance of actual propagation of the light in a given volume of fluid and of making the distribution of the flow of light, in the fluid,

homogeneous. Thus, the scattering of the light radiation by the particles of the scattering powder, combined with the absorption of the radiation which occurs essentially in the liquid, makes it possible to
5 produce an energy conversion and heating of the fluid in substantial volumes. This heating in bulk volume is particularly suitable for applications in which it is desired to heat a relatively high flow rate of liquid at a relatively moderate temperature. Certain aspects
10 of the invention are based on the idea of using a scattering powder, the particle size of which is comparable to the wavelengths of the main components of solar radiation, in order to promote resonance phenomena capable of improving the effective scattering
15 cross section of the particles.

It is recalled that, in solar radiation, most of the energy lies in a spectral range of from approximately 0.5 to approximately 1.6 μm , in particular between 0.5
20 and 0.7 μm .

The invention will be understood more clearly, and other objectives, details, characteristics and advantages thereof will emerge more clearly, during the
25 following description of one particular embodiment of the invention, given only by way of nonlimiting illustration.

Detailed description of an embodiment of the invention

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In one embodiment, the invention proposes a specific fluid which is in particular suitable for use in a domestic solar collector. This specific fluid comprises:

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- water,
- calcium carbonate powder,
- optionally, an antifreeze and/or a colorant,

- optionally, a bactericide,
- optionally, a surfactant, and
- optionally, an antifoam.

5 All the percentages indicated below are percentages by mass.

The concentration of calcium carbonate powder and the median particle size thereof are determined taking into
10 account, on the one hand, the absorptivity of the specific fluid and, on the other hand, the ability of the powder to be suspended in the specific fluid. Tests carried out by the inventors have shown that the absorptivity of the specific fluid, and therefore the
15 yield of the solar collector, increases as the concentration of powder increases, and then reaches 98% or more. This is due to the fact that, by virtue of the characteristics of the invention, the specific fluid is a site of energy conversion.

20 These tests have also shown that the median particle size of the powder has an influence on its ability to be suspended and to remain in suspension in the circulating heat-transfer fluid. In the context of this
25 description, the term "median particle size" is intended to mean the particle size verified on a Malvern Mastersizer 2000 laser instrument, the metrology of which is in accordance with standard ISO 13320 (calibration using a certified reference
30 material (CRM)).

The results of these tests are in particular the following:

- 35 - Test 1 (control): The composition tested was only water. The intensity absorbed was virtually zero.

- Test 2: The composition tested was a mixture of water (98%) and calcium carbonate powder (2%) having a median particle size of 10 μm . The intensity absorbed is 40% for a water height of 3 cm.
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- Test 3: The composition tested was a mixture of water (95%), calcium carbonate powder (2.5%) having a median particle size of 10 μm and antifreeze (2.5%).
10 The intensity absorbed is 80% for a water height of 3 cm.
- Test 4: The composition tested was a mixture of water (between 66.7% and 66.8%), antifreeze (30%), calcium carbonate powder (3%) having a median particle size of 2 μm and surfactant (between 0.2% and 0.3%). The presence of the surfactant makes it possible to keep the powder in suspension for a longer period of time.
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The inventors deduced from these tests that the concentration of calcium carbonate powder should be between 1% and 3% and that the powder should have a median particle size of between 0.8 and 10 μm . For example, the powder is Durcal 1 or Durcal 2 powder sold by the company Omya SAS.
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Such a powder is constituted of calcium carbonate having a high purity, for example greater than 98%, and a very high luminosity.
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According to one embodiment, the powder has a CIE whiteness, measured according to DIN 6174, such that the parameter L^* is equal to a value between 94 and 98, and/or such that the parameter a^* is equal to a value between 0.1 and 1.5, and/or such that the parameter b^* is equal to a value between 0.5 and 4, and preferably
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such that the parameter L^* is equal to a value between 94 and 98, the parameter a^* is equal to a value between 0.1 and 1.5, and the parameter b^* is equal to a value between 0.5 and 4. The CIE L^* , a^* , b^* whiteness
5 measured according to DIN 6174 is more preferably substantially equal to 97.5/0.5/2.4.

The presence of antifreeze makes it possible to prevent freezing of the heat-transfer fluid in the event of a
10 negative temperature. It is, for example, the antifreeze sold under the name Neutragard. The concentration of antifreeze may be between 0 and 40%, for example 30%.

15 The surfactant makes it possible to improve the ability of the powder to be suspended and to remain in suspension in the heat-transfer fluid. The concentration of surfactant may be between 0 and 3%, advantageously between 0.2% and 0.3%.

20 Finally, the antifoam makes it possible to prevent the formation of foam, which could be detrimental to the correct operating of the solar collector. The concentration of antifoam may be between 0 and 3%,
25 advantageously between 0.2% and 0.3%. The antifoam is, for example, Agitan 305 (registered trademark).

An example of specific fluid according to one embodiment of the invention is:

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- water, quantity to make up 100%
- Neutragard antifreeze, 30%
- Durcal 1 powder, 3%
- surfactant, 0.2% to 0.3%
- 35 - Agitan 305 antifoam, 0.2% to 0.3%.

This specific fluid is suitable for a domestic solar collector. In particular, the various components do not

present any health risk (in the event of the heat-transfer fluid leaking into the water heater), are available relatively inexpensively, do not present any risk of damage to the installation and can be disposed
5 of or recycled without difficulty. In addition, compared with water, it has a greater absorptivity, which improves the yield of the solar collector.

The specific fluid can also be used in any other
10 application, for example domestic or industrial, in which light radiation must be converted to heat. It may involve a natural or artificial, and visible or infrared, light ray.

15 Although the invention has been described in connection with a particular embodiment, it is quite obvious that it is in no way limited thereto and that it comprises all the technical equivalents of the means described and also the combinations thereof if the latter fall
20 within the context of the invention.

In particular, the invention is not limited to calcium carbonate powder, but is broadened to other natural or synthetic mineral powders.

25 During the manufacture of the specific fluid, the mineral powder can be added in the form of a dry powder or of a liquid suspension.

CLAIMS

1. Specific fluid, characterized in that it comprises water and mineral powder which strongly scatters solar radiation, the strongly scattering mineral powder having a concentration by mass of between 1% and 3% and a median particle size of between 0.8 and 10 μm , the particles of the strongly scattering mineral powder having, on average, a light energy scattering coefficient of greater than 0.7.
2. Specific fluid according to the preceding claim, in which the strongly scattering mineral powder comprises calcium carbonate, or a synthetic or natural mineral powder.
3. Specific fluid according to the preceding claim, in which the strongly scattering mineral powder is calcium carbonate powder.
4. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, in which the strongly scattering mineral powder has a median particle size of between 1 and 3 μm .
5. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, in which the strongly scattering mineral powder is essentially constituted of spheroidal particles.
6. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, in which the strongly scattering mineral powder has a CIE whiteness, measured according to DIN 6174, such that the parameter L^* is equal to a value between 94 and 98, and/or such that the parameter a^* is equal to a value between 0.1 and 1.5, and/or such that the parameter b^* is equal to a value between 0.5 and 4.
7. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, comprising antifreeze, the concentration by

mass of antifreeze being between 0%, limit excluded, and 40%, limit included.

8. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding
5 claims, which has an energy absorptivity of between 0.1 and 10 cm^{-1} for solar radiation.

9. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding
claims, comprising a surfactant, the concentration by
10 mass of surfactant being between 0%, limit excluded, and 3%, limit included.

10. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding
claims, comprising an antifoam, the concentration by
15 mass of antifoam being between 0%, limit excluded, and 3%, limit included.

11. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding
claims, in which the concentration by mass of mineral
20 powder is 3%, the concentration by mass of antifreeze is 30%, the concentration by mass of surfactant is between 0.2% and 0.3% and the concentration by mass of antifoam is between 0.2% and 0.3%.

25 12. Specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, also comprising a bactericidal product.

13. Use of a specific fluid according to one of the preceding claims, in a device for converting light
30 radiation to heat, in which a light ray is directed towards said specific fluid, the specific fluid being the site of an energy conversion.

14. Device for converting light radiation to heat,
35 comprising a specific fluid arranged in such a way as to be able to receive light radiation so as to be the site of an energy conversion, characterized in that the specific fluid is according to one of Claims 1 to 12.

15. Device according to Claim 14, comprising a solar collector.