

VALVE VENTED REDUNDANT STEM SEAL SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates in general to valve stem seals and, in particular, to a valve vented redundant stem seal system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

[0002] A gate valve has a body with a central chamber that is intersected by a flow passage. A gate moves within the chamber between the open and closed positions. The gate has a hole through it that aligns with the flow passage while in the open position. The gate may be of a split type, comprising two halves or it may comprise a single slab. A stem extends into engagement with the gate for moving the gate between open and closed positions. The chamber has a central portion, which is intersected by the flow passages, and a stem portion that extends from the central portion.

[0003] In one type, the stem extends into rotatable engagement with a threaded nut or sleeve secured to the gate. Rotating the stem causes the gate to move linearly. In another type, the stem does not rotate. A threaded nut sleeve mounted in the bonnet of the valve engages the stem, and when rotated, causes the stem to move linearly. The threads of the sleeves and stem may slide against each other, or they may employ balls between the grooves for reducing friction.

[0004] Gate valves may be operated manually, such as with a wheel mounted to the stem or the nut sleeve. It is also known to utilize a remote operated vehicle (ROV) to engage and rotate a stem or nut sleeve. Hydraulically powered actuators are also utilized wherein a piston moves the stem linearly without rotation. Electrical actuators are also known that employ an electrical motor and a gear train to rotate a stem or nut sleeve to cause movement of the gate.

[0005] Typically, a seal in the stem portion of the chamber engages the stem to seal pressure within the chamber. The pressure exerted on the stem seal can be quite great, leading the stem seal to fail. When the stem seal fails it will allow fluid or gas to flow out of the valve around the

stem. Some prior art embodiments provide a second seal that will seal the valve stem to the valve body in the event the primary seal fails. This provides redundancy within the valve stem seals that increases the reliability of the seals.

[0006] Where a second seal is used, in the event the first seal leaks, a volume of fluid will be held between the failed first seal and the second seal. Depending on the size of the spacing between the first seal and the second seal, the volume can be quite small. The small volume size allows fluid pressure within the volume to rapidly reach the internal system pressure. This is not a rare condition as many of the environments in which the valves are placed are subject to extreme pressure loads for many years, greatly increasing the likelihood that the primary seal will leak or fail. When the valve is opened, pressure may then quickly vent out past the leaking seal. This can cause further damage to the primary seal so that what had been a small leak becomes a larger failure of the primary seal. A larger failure of the primary seal may eliminate any benefit the leaking primary seal provided, increasing the likelihood of subsequent secondary seal failure. Thus, there is a need for a stem seal with high reliability brought by redundant seals, while allowing for the seals to vent in instances of leakage past the primary seal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] These and other problems are generally solved or circumvented, and technical advantages are generally achieved, by preferred embodiments of the present invention that provide a valve vented redundant stem seal system, and a method for using the same.

[0008] In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a valve having a stem seal assembly is disclosed. The valve includes a valve body defining a flow passage and a body cavity perpendicular to the flow passage. The valve body defines a stem opening extending from an exterior of the body into the body cavity. The valve includes a valve member moveable between an open position and a closed position, the valve member having a hole therethrough which registers with the flow passage when the valve member is in the open position. The valve also includes a valve stem having a valve stem axis coupled to the valve member, the valve stem extending from the body cavity to an exterior of the valve body through the valve stem opening for moving the valve member from the closed position to the open position. A packing assembly is positioned within the valve stem opening to seal the valve stem to the valve body. The packing assembly includes a seal ring having a chevron profile defining a first and a second leg extending from an apex of the chevron radially outward, the first and second legs for sealing to

opposing annular surfaces. The packing assembly includes a back ring having a chevron channel so that an apex of the seal ring may insert into the channel, the back ring having a greater stiffness to radial movement than the first and second legs to limit radial deformation of the first and second legs.

[0009] In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, a gate valve stem packing assembly for sealing a gate valve stem to a gate valve body having a body cavity is disclosed. The packing assembly includes a packing ring situated within the stem opening so that an outer diameter of the packing ring abuts the inner diameter of the stem opening, and an inner diameter of the packing ring abuts an outer diameter of the valve stem. The packing ring defines a first annular recess on the outer diameter of the packing ring and a second annular recess on the inner diameter of the packing ring. The assembly also includes a packer retainer ring positioned coaxial with the packing ring and secured to the valve body so that the packer retainer ring secures the packing ring to the valve body. The packer retainer ring defines a third annular recess on the outer diameter of the packer retainer ring coaxial with and axially above the first annular recess. The packing ring defines a fourth annular recess proximate to the packer retainer ring, the fourth annular recess coaxial with and axially above the second annular recess. A seal is positioned in each annular recess so that each seal prevents passage of fluid in a first direction and vents fluid in a second direction opposite the first direction.

[0010] In accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention, a seal ring for a gate valve is disclosed. The seal ring includes an annular seal stand off having a first end and a second end. The seal ring also includes a seal ring having a chevron profile positioned on the seal standoff so that the second end of the seal stand off inserts into the chevron profile. The seal ring defines a first and a second leg extending from an apex of the chevron radially outward, the first and second legs for sealing to opposing annular surfaces. An energizing spring having a chevron profile is interposed between the seal stand off and the seal ring, the energizing spring exerting an expanding force on legs of the seal ring so that the seal ring will remain in sealing contact with the opposing annular surfaces. The energizing spring may be deflected in response to a fluid pressure on the seal ring opposite the energizing spring to allow fluid flow past the seal ring. The seal ring includes a back ring having a chevron channel so that an apex of the seal ring may insert into the channel, the back ring having a greater stiffness to radial movement than the first and second legs of the seal ring to limit radial deformation of the first and second legs of the seal ring. The first end of the seal stand off has a substantially flat portion positioned on a supportive

shoulder of the packing assembly and the second end of the seal stand off is in operative engagement with the chevron profile. The seal ring is formed of a polymer and the back ring is formed of a polymer having a greater hardness than the polymer of the seal ring. The channel of the back ring extends only partially to distal ends of each leg of the seal ring. A width of the back ring is smaller than the distance between the seal ring legs, and the back ring does not sealing engage the stem. The channel of the back ring extends from the apex of the seal ring over only part of the seal ring.

[0011] An advantage of a preferred embodiment is that it provides true redundant sealing while still allowing for pressure relief venting when needed. Thus, any leakage past the primary seal does not cause damage to, or further failure of, the primary seal when fluid vents past the primary seal when the valve is opened. Still further, the seals operate independently to reduce the wear on the seal assembly and prolong the life of the seal assembly.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] So that the manner in which the features, advantages and objects of the invention, as well as others which will become apparent, are attained, and can be understood in more detail, more particular description of the invention briefly summarized above may be had by reference to the embodiments thereof which are illustrated in the appended drawings that form a part of this specification. It is to be noted, however, that the drawings illustrate only a preferred embodiment of the invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope as the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

[0013] Figure 1 is a partial sectional view of a gate valve in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0014] Figure 2 is a detail view of a portion of the gate valve stem as indicated on Figure 1 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0015] Figure 3 is a detail view of a gate valve stem seal as indicated on Figure 2 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] Figure 4 is a top view of a back ring of the gate valve stem seal of Figure 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0017] The present invention will now be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings which illustrate embodiments of the invention. This invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the illustrated embodiments set forth herein. Rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those skilled in the art. Like numbers refer to like elements throughout, and the prime notation, if used, indicates similar elements in alternative embodiments.

[0018] In the following discussion, numerous specific details are set forth to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without such specific details. Additionally, for the most part, details concerning valve construction, uses, and the like have been omitted inasmuch as such details are not considered necessary to obtain a complete understanding of the present invention, and are considered to be within the skills of persons skilled in the relevant art.

[0019] Referring to Figure 1, gate valve 11 has a body 13 and a flow passage 15 that extends transversely through body 13. Valve 11 has a gate 17 with a hole 19 therethrough. Gate 17 can be designed in one piece or two pieces. Gate 17 may be split into two slabs; each slab of gate 17 must either be open or closed at the same time. Gate 17 is shown in the closed position in Figure 1. Valve 11 shown in FIG. 1 is a rising-stem type valve; however, this invention can similarly be used on non-rising-stem type valves. When gate 17 is in the open position, hole 19 of gate 17 registers with flow passage 15 of body 13 thereby allowing flow through valve 11. When gate 17 is closed as shown, hole 19 no longer registers with flow passage 15, blocking flow of fluid through passage 15 and valve 11. Flow passage 15 intersects a central cavity or chamber 21 located in body 13. A counterbore is formed in flow passage 15 at each intersection with chamber 21. A seat ring 27 locates in each counterbore to seal flow passage 15 to gate 17 while gate 17 is in the closed position. Gate valve 11 also includes a stem 29 coupled to gate 17. Stem 29 has an axis 25 passing through a center of stem 29. Stem 29 is linearly moveable without rotation along axis 25 to actuate gate 17 between the open and closed positions. In the illustrated embodiment, a biasing assembly 31 couple to body 13 around stem 29 to bias stem 29 and gate 17 to the closed position. As illustrated, valve 11 is hydraulically actuated. A remotely operated

vehicle may interface with biasing assembly 31 to move stem 29 and gate 17 from the closed position shown, to an open position wherein hole 19 registers with flow passage 15. A packing assembly 33 provides sealing for stem 29 where stem 29 passes through body 13. A person skilled in the art will understand that gate valve 11 is an exemplary valve. The disclosed embodiments contemplate and include any valve having a stem passing through a valve body to operate a valve member located within the body.

[0020] Referring to Figure 2, packing assembly 33 is shown in more detail. Packing assembly

33 includes at least one seal 35, four of which are shown in Figure 2: a first seal 35A; a second seal 35B; a third seal 35C; and a fourth seal 35D. As shown in Figure 3, each seal 35 includes a stand off 37, an energizing spring 39, a seal ring 41, and a back ring 43. Seal stand off 37 comprises an annular ring or protrusion having a first end 45 and a second end 47. First end 45 of seal stand off 37 has a substantially flat portion 49 so that seal stand off 37 may be positioned on a supportive cylindrical shoulder within packing assembly 33. Second end 47 of seal stand off 37 is opposite first end 45 and comprises a protrusion in contact with energizing spring 39 to properly position seal ring 41 against back ring 43 and limit undesired axial compression of seal ring 41. Seal stand off 37 will provide a support for seal 35, preventing excessive compression of seal 35 by reacting to forces directed from second end 47 toward first end 45. Seal stand off 37 will be formed of a material having sufficient resistance to compression so that seal stand off

37 will not collapse during operational use of seal 35.

[0021] Seal ring 41 comprises an inverted V-shaped, chevron shaped member, or chevron profile so that an apex 51 of the V-shape and the second end 47 of seal stand off 37 face in the same direction. Seal ring 41 also includes a first leg 53 and a second leg 55. First leg 53 and second leg 55 extend toward first end 45 of seal stand off 37. In addition, a width between distal ends 57, 59 first leg 53 and second leg 55, respectively, is greater than the width between first and second legs 53, 55 of seal ring 41 at apex 51. Thus, seal ring 41 is wider proximate to first end 45 of seal stand off 37 than at apex 51. In the example shown, the exterior surfaces of legs 53, 55 incline at a first angle α from apex 51 to a junction 52. Legs 53, 55 incline at a second angle β from junction 52 to distal ends 57, 59. Junction 52 is spaced closer to apex 51 than to

distal ends 57, 59. Angle β is smaller than angle α relative to an axis 54 bisecting legs 53, 55 and passing through apex 51. When energized, distal ends 57, 59 may contact at least one of stem 29 (Figure 2) and body 13. Seal ring 41 has an interior surface 42 facing seal stand off 37 and an exterior surface 44 facing back ring 43. Seal ring 41 may be formed of a fluorocarbon material such as Teflon. A person skilled in the art will understand that other materials having similar properties to the fluorocarbon material disclosed herein are contemplated and included in the disclosed embodiments.

[0022] Energizing spring 39 is an annular spring interposed between seal ring 41 and seal stand off 37. Energizing spring 39 has a V-shaped cross-sectional profile similar to that of seal ring 41 so that a surface of energizing spring 39 may contact interior surface 42 of seal ring 41. An apex 61 of energizing spring 39 will face in the same direction as second end 47 of seal stand off 37 and apex 51 of seal ring 41. Energizing spring 39 includes a first leg 63 and a second leg 65 that run parallel to and generally in contact with first leg 53 and second leg 55, respectively. Energizing spring 39 has a spring constant such that energizing spring 39 will resist compression of first leg 63 and second leg 65 toward seal stand off 37 during normal operating conditions. Preferably, when seal 35 is placed within packing assembly 33, seal ring 41 and energizing spring 39 will undergo a slight displacement toward each other of first legs 53, 63 and second legs 55, 65 of seal ring 41 and energizing spring 39, respectively. This displacement causes energizing spring 39 to exert a reactive force against compression of energizing spring 39, and thus compression of seal ring 41, toward seal stand off 37. As a result, when placed within packing assembly 33, energizing spring 39 will cause first and second legs 53, 55 of seal ring 41 to seal to at least one of stem 29 and body 13. In the illustrated embodiment, energizing spring 39 is formed of a cobalt-chromium-nickel alloy such as ELGILOY®. A person skilled in the art will understand that other materials having similar properties to the cobalt-chromium-nickel alloy disclosed herein are contemplated and included in the disclosed embodiments.

[0023] Back ring 43 may be an annular ring positioned adjacent seal ring 41 opposite energizing ring 39 and seal stand off 37. Back ring 43 has a generally square shaped cross sectional profile. Preferably, back ring 43 defines a channel 67 adjacent to seal ring 41. Channel 67 may have a V-shaped profile matching the profile of exterior surface 44 formed by seal ring 41 so that channel 67 may abut apex 51 and a portion of exterior surface 44 of seal ring 41. Channel 67 may extend at least part way along exterior surface 44 of first and second legs 53, 55 of seal ring 41. In the embodiment shown, back ring 43 extends along legs 53, 55 less than half of the length

of legs 53, 55 from ends 57, 59 to apex 51. The tips of back ring 43 are approximate with junction 52. Back ring 43 may have a width less than the width at distal ends 57, 59 of first and second legs 53, 55, respectively, of seal ring 41. Thus, back ring 43 preferably does not seal to either stem 29 or body 13. Back ring 43 may also have a substantially flat surface 69 opposite surface 49 of first end 45 of seal stand off 37. Surface 69 may be positioned proximate to an oppositely facing shoulder 56 within packing assembly 33 so that surface 69 may land on the shoulder 56 during operational use of seal 35. In the illustrated embodiment, back ring 43 may be formed of a polyether ether ketone (PEEK) material of sufficient strength to resist yielding or deformation during operational uses that may compress back ring 43 between seal ring 41 and shoulder 56 of packing assembly 33. Preferably, back ring 43 has hardness greater than the hardness of seal ring 41. A person skilled in the art will understand that other materials having similar properties to the PEEK thermoplastic disclosed herein are contemplated and included in the disclosed embodiments. In an embodiment, back ring 43 bonds to seal ring 41. In another embodiment, back ring 43 does not bond to seal ring 41.

[0024] Back ring 43 also includes a plurality of bumps 60 formed on one or both of the inner diameter surface and the outer diameter surface of back ring 43. For example, second seal 35B of Figure 2 includes bumps 60 formed on the outer diameter of back ring 43 proximate to packing ring 71 as shown in Figure 3. In other seal 35 placements, bumps 60 may be formed on the inner diameter of back ring 43. Bumps 60 may be formed of the same material as back ring 43 and integral with back ring 43. Each bump 60 has a generally trapezoidal shaped cross sectional profile, and extends a fractional portion of the circumference of the back ring 43 as shown in Figure 4. Each bump 60 forms a channel 62 with an adjacent bump 60. Fluid under a higher pressure proximate to surface 69 of back ring 43 vents through channels 62 to flow to an area of lower pressure proximate to interior surface 42 of seal ring 41. Thus, bumps 60 extend the useful life of seal 35 by preventing catastrophic failure of seal 35 due to a buildup of pressure in the non-sealing direction.

[0025] In an operation, seal 35 will perform both sealing and venting functions. As shown in Figure 3, seal 35 provides a sealing function in response to fluid or gas pressure on interior surface 42 of seal ring 41. As gas or fluid pressure attempts to move from interior surface 42 to exterior surface 44 in Figure 3, a seal initially energized by energizing spring 39 will prevent

passage of fluid or gas past distal ends 57, 59 of seal ring 41. Increasing fluid or gas pressure will exert a force on energizing spring 39 and interior surface 42 of seal ring 41, pushing distal ends 57, 59 and first and second legs 53, 55 of seal ring 41 into tighter sealing contact with the surfaces to which seal ring 41 is sealed. Thus, as pressure increases on interior surface 42, the seal force of seal ring 41 will increase.

[0026] As fluid pressure increases on interior surface 42 of seal ring 41, pushing distal ends 57,

59 into tighter sealing contact with adjacent surfaces, back ring 43 will exert a reactive force on exterior surface 44 through channel 67. The portions of legs 53, 55 from junction 52 to distal ends 57, 59 are not directly restrained from flexing outward by back ring 43. Increased fluid pressure applied to interior surface 42 may cause first and second legs, 53, 55 to collapse against adjacent surfaces, or in extreme cases, force portions of first and second legs 53, 55 to extrude between sides of back ring 43 and adjacent surfaces of packing assembly 33 and at least one of stem 29 and body 13. To counteract this, channel 67 will exert a reactive force to compression of seal ring 41 against back ring 43 caused by increased fluid pressure on interior surface 42. The matching profile of channel 67 and exterior surface 44 will allow channel 67 to resist permanent deformation of seal ring 41. By preventing or limiting permanent deformation of seal ring 41 in situations where high pressure is exerted on interior surface 42, back ring 43 aids in prolonging the operational life of seal ring 41 and thus seal 35.

[0027] As shown in Figure 3, seal 35 provides a venting function to fluid or gas pressure on exterior surface 44 of seal 41. In the event that fluid or gas leaks around seal ring 41 during prolonged use of valve 11, fluid or gas may become trapped in a volume adjacent exterior surface 44. The fluid may be trapped in a volume between second seal 35B and fourth seal 35D. Alternatively, the fluid may be trapped in a volume of between the second seal 35B and load ring assembly 99. Continued operation of valve 11 may quickly raise the pressure of the trapped volume of fluid on exterior surface 44 to that of the pressure on interior surface 42 of seal ring 41. When gate 17 moves to the open position, allowing fluid flow through flow passage 15 of valve 11, a pressure differential arises between exterior surface 44 and interior surface 42 of seal ring 41, such that a higher pressure exists on the side of exterior surface 44. The narrower width of back ring 43 relative to the width of seal ring 41 and channels 62 formed by bumps 60 will allow the trapped fluid to flow past back ring 43. Bumps 60 maintain a separation between the

inner diameter of packing ring 71 at annular recess 87 and back ring 43, providing a flow path for the trapped volume of fluid that allows for venting of the fluid under suitable situational conditions. The fluid pressure may then exert a force on exterior surface 44 of seal ring 41 overcoming the spring force of energizing spring 39. The higher pressure on exterior surface 44 may compress first and second legs 53, 55 of seal ring 41 to seal stand off 37, removing distal ends 57, 59 from sealing contact with the adjacent surfaces. The trapped fluid or gas may then flow past seal ring 41 to the low pressure side of interior surface 42.

[0028] Once sufficient pressure has vented past seal ring 41, the spring force of energizing spring 39 will overcome the force exerted on exterior surface 44 by the fluid or gas pressure and move distal ends 57, 59 of first and second legs 53, 55, respectively, back into sealing contact with the adjacent surfaces. Seal stand off 37 positions seal ring 41 a sufficient distance from the supporting shoulder in contact with flat portion 49, allowing this displacement of seal ring 41. In addition, seal stand off 41 prevents axial movement of seal ring 41 during this pressure venting operation. Thus, seal 35 provides a seal to high pressure forces exerted against interior surface 42 of seal ring 41 and a vent to high pressure forces exerted against exterior surface 44 of seal ring 41. Following venting, energizing ring 39 may return seal ring 41 to the energized position, preventing flow from interior surface 42 to exterior surface 44 when valve 11 is closed.

[0029] As shown in Figure 2, packing assembly 33 includes four seals 35 in this example. Packing assembly 33 also includes a metal packing ring 71, and a metal packing retainer ring 73. Packing ring 71 lands on an upward facing annular shoulder 75 of body 13 formed within a stem opening 77 that allows passage of stem 29 into cavity 21. Packing ring 71 includes an aligning annular surface 79 on an inner diameter of packing ring 71. Aligning surface 79 is conical and extends from a downward facing shoulder 81 of packing ring 71 into opening 77. Downward facing shoulder 81 is adapted to land on annular shoulder 75 of body 13 so that packing ring 71 will be coaxial with axis 25. Packing ring 71 includes a first annular recess 83 formed on an outer diameter of packing ring proximate to annular shoulder 81. First annular recess 83 extends from the outer diameter of packing ring 71 inward to outwardly facing cylindrical surface 84 and from downward facing shoulder 81 to downward facing recess shoulder 85. First annular recess 83 will have a size and shape such that first seal 35A may be placed within first annular recess 83. First seal 35A will substantially fill first annular recess 83 and be positioned so that first end 49 (Figure 3) of first seal 35A will abut upward facing shoulder 75 of body 13

(Figure 2). Surface 69 of back ring 43 of first seal 35A will be proximate to but optionally may not contact downward facing recess shoulder 85. Preferably, distal end 59 of second leg 55 seal ring 41 of first seal 35A will contact and seal to outward facing shoulder 84 of packing ring 71 within first annular recess 83. Similarly, distal end 57 of first leg 53 of seal ring 41 of first seal 35A will contact and seal to a surface of body 13. Thus, first seal 35A will seal against movement of fluid from cavity 21 to an exterior of body 13, and will vent fluid from an exterior of body 13 into cavity 21.

[0030] Packing ring 71 also defines a second annular recess 87 on an inner diameter of packing ring 71. Second annular recess 87 extends from the inner diameter surface to land at a radially inward facing shoulder 89 and from an upward facing shoulder 91 toward cavity 21 to land at an upward facing recess shoulder 93. Packing ring 71 also includes an annular portion 95 extending from an upper end of packing ring 71 near a center of the width of packing ring 71 so that packing ring 71 defines upward facing shoulder 91 on an inner diameter side of annular portion 95 and an upward facing shoulder 97 on an outer diameter side of annular portion 95. A load ring assembly 99 will be positioned on exterior facing shoulder 91 and extend upward a portion of the length of annular protrusion 95. Load ring assembly 99 may comprise any suitable assembly adapted to transfer load from second seal 35B to packing ring 71. In the illustrated embodiment, load ring assembly 99 does not transfer a load applied to second seal 35B to fourth seal 35D so that second seal 35B and fourth seal 35D operate independently of each other. In an exemplary embodiment, load ring assembly 99 comprises a stem assembly similar to "Segmented Seal Ring and Support for Same" as disclosed in pending U.S. Patent Application No. 13/281,526, filed October 26, 2011, and incorporated by reference in its entirety herein. A person skilled in the art will recognize that other suitable annular stem assemblies may be used provided that the stem assembly allows for independent loading of second seal ring 35B and fourth seal ring 35D.

[0031] Second seal 35B will substantially fill second annular recess 87 and be positioned so that first end 49 (Figure 3) of second seal 35B will abut upward facing shoulder 93 of packing ring 71 (Figure 2). Surface 69 of back ring 43 of second seal 35B will be proximate to but may not contact a downward facing surface 101 of load ring assembly 99. Preferably, distal end 59 of second leg 55 of seal ring 41 of second seal 35B will contact and seal to an outer diameter surface of stem 29. Similarly, distal end 57 of first leg 53 of seal ring 41 of second seal 35B will contact and seal to inward facing shoulder 89 of second annular recess 87 of packing ring 71.

Thus, second seal 35B will seal against movement of fluid from cavity 21 to an exterior of body 13 along stem 29, and will vent fluid into cavity 21 along stem 29 from an exterior of body 13.

[0032] Packer retainer ring 73 includes an annular protrusion 103 extending from a lower portion of packer retainer ring 73 towards cavity 21. Annular protrusion 103 has a width such that annular protrusion 103 will substantially fill a gap between annular protrusion 95 of packing ring 71 and an inner diameter surface of opening 77. As illustrated, the outer diameter of annular protrusion 103 is flush with the outer diameter of packing ring 71. Annular protrusion 103 will define a third annular recess 105 extending from the outer diameter of annular protrusion 103 toward annular protrusion 95 to land at an outward facing shoulder 107. Third annular recess 105 will extend from an end of annular protrusion 103 away from cavity 21 to land at a downward facing shoulder 109.

[0033] Third annular recess 105 will have a size and shape such that a third seal 35C may be placed within third annular recess 105. Third seal 35C will substantially fill third annular recess 105 and be positioned so that first end 49 (Figure 3) of third seal 35C will abut downward facing shoulder 109 of third annular recess 105 (Figure 2). Surface 69 of back ring 43 of third seal 35C will be proximate to but may not contact upward facing shoulder 91 of packing ring 71. Preferably, distal end 57 of first leg 53 of seal ring 41 of third seal 35C will contact and seal to outward facing shoulder 107 within third annular recess 105. Similarly, distal end 59 of second leg 55 of seal ring 41 of third seal 35C will contact and seal to a surface of body 13. Thus, third seal 35C will seal against movement of fluid from an exterior of body 13 to cavity 21, and will vent fluid from cavity 21 to an exterior of body 13.

[0034] Packer retainer 73 defines a downward facing shoulder 111 extending from a base of annular protrusion 103 to an inner diameter of packer retainer ring 73 proximate to stem 29. Annular protrusion 95 of packing ring 71 has a width that extends a portion of the width between annular protrusion 103 of packer retainer ring 73 and the inner diameter of packer retaining ring 73 such that a fourth annular recess 113 exists between annular protrusion 95, downward facing shoulder 111 of packer retainer ring 73, and an upper surface 115 of load ring assembly 99. Fourth annular recess 113 extends from an area proximate to stem 29 inward to inward facing surface 117 of annular protrusion 95.

[0035] Fourth annular recess 113 will have a size and shape such that a fourth seal 35D may be

placed within fourth annular recess 113. Fourth seal 35D will substantially fill fourth annular recess 113 and be positioned so that first end 49 (Figure 3) of fourth seal 35D will abut upper surface 115 of load ring assembly 99 (Figure 2). Surface 69 of back ring 43 of fourth seal 35D will be proximate to but may not contact downward facing shoulder 111 of packer retaining ring 73. Preferably, distal end 57 of first leg 53 of seal ring 41 of fourth seal 35D will contact and seal to inward facing surface 117 of annular protrusion 95 of packing ring 71 within fourth annular recess 113. Similarly, distal end 59 of second leg 55 of seal ring 41 of fourth seal 35D will contact and seal to a surface of stem 29. Thus, fourth seal 35D will seal against movement of fluid from cavity 21 to an exterior of body 13, and will vent fluid into cavity 21.

[0036] As illustrated in Figure 2, second seal 35B and fourth seal 35D are positioned so that the seals seal to stem 29 to prevent flow of fluid out of cavity 21 along stem 29 while allowing fluid that may leak past second seal 35B to vent back into cavity 21. This provides a redundant sealing system that is more effective than prior art sealing methods. Similarly, the combined second and fourth seals 35B, 35D provide fluid venting that prevents damage to the seals where fluid pressure within cavity 21 is suddenly released. Similarly, first seal 35A and third seal 35C are positioned to prevent fluid flow into cavity 21 along body 13. Unlike seals 35B and 35D, seals 35A and 35C do not provide redundant protection. Instead, first and third seals 35A, 35C, respectively, provide opposite direction sealing. This potentially reduces the amount of fluid that may pass between an exterior of body 13 and cavity 21. In addition, first and third seals 35A, 35C, respectively, provide opposite direction venting that protects both seals from damage in the event of a sudden pressure change in the area sealed. A person skilled in the art will understand that the sealing and venting directions of each seal may be switched by flipping the position of each seal as needed.

[0037] Accordingly, the disclosed embodiments provide numerous advantages over the prior art. For example, the disclosed embodiments provide a redundant sealing system that provides two independent and verifiable seals along the stem of the valve. This greatly improves effectiveness and reliability over prior art stem seals. In addition, the disclosed embodiments provide a venting mechanism to allow for release of fluid that has leaked past the seals to vent in response to quick changes in fluid pressure within the valve cavity. This prevents damage to the first seal that may be caused by known leakage issues in all valve sealing mechanisms. In turn, this prolongs the life of the seal.

[0038] It is understood that the present invention may take many forms and embodiments. Accordingly, several variations may be made in the foregoing without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. Having thus described the present invention by reference to certain of its preferred embodiments, it is noted that the embodiments disclosed are illustrative rather than limiting in nature and that a wide range of variations, modifications, changes, and substitutions are contemplated in the foregoing disclosure and, in some instances, some features of the present invention may be employed without a corresponding use of the other features. Many such variations and modifications may be considered obvious and desirable by those skilled in the art based upon a review of the foregoing description of preferred embodiments. Accordingly, it is appropriate that the appended claims be construed broadly and in a manner consistent with the scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

1. A valve having a stem seal assembly comprising:
 - a valve body defining a flow passage and a body cavity perpendicular to the flow passage;
 - the valve body further defining a stem opening extending from an exterior of the body into the body cavity;
 - a valve member moveable between an open position and a closed position, the valve member blocking the flow passage in the closed position, and allowing flow through the flow passage in the open position;
 - a valve stem having a valve stem axis coupled to the valve member, the valve stem extending from the body cavity to an exterior of the valve body through the valve stem opening for moving the valve member from the closed position to the open position;
 - a spring energized first seal ring positioned within the valve stem opening to seal the valve stem to the valve body, the first seal ring comprising:
 - a chevron profile defining a first and a second leg extending radially outward from an interior radius defined in an apex of the chevron profile, the first and second legs sealing the stem and the body to opposing annular surfaces;
 - a back ring having a chevron channel that receives the apex of the chevron profile, the back ring having a greater stiffness to radial movement than the first and second legs to limit radial deformation of the first and second legs; and
 - an annular seal standoff having a first end and a second end, wherein the first end is positioned on a supportive shoulder of the stem seal assembly and the second end inserts into the interior radius defined in the apex of the chevron profile to support the chevron profile on the standoff;
 - a second seal ring positioned within the valve stem opening to seal the valve stem to the valve body; and
 - a load ring assembly stationarily mounted to and defining a portion of the valve body between the first seal ring and the second seal ring that isolates the first seal ring and the second seal ring so that a force applied to the first seal ring in a direction toward the second seal ring transfers to the load ring assembly.
2. The valve of claim 1, wherein the first seal ring further comprises:
 - an energizing spring interposed between the seal stand off and the chevron profile, the energizing spring exerting an expanding force on the legs of the chevron profile so that the chevron profile will remain in sealing contact with the opposing annular surfaces; and

wherein the energizing spring may be deflected in response to a fluid pressure on the chevron profile opposite the energizing spring to allow fluid flow past the chevron profile.

3. The valve of claim 1, wherein the chevron profile is formed of a polymer and the back ring is formed of a polymer having a greater hardness than the polymer of the chevron profile.

4. The valve of claim 1, wherein the channel of the back ring extends only partially to distal ends of each leg of the chevron profile.

5. The valve of claim 1, wherein:
a width of the back ring is smaller than a distance between outer side of distal ends of the seal ring legs; and

an inner gap is located between the back ring and the stem and an outer gap is located between the back ring and the body.

6. The valve of claim 1, wherein the channel of the back ring extends from the apex of the chevron profile over only part of the chevron profile.

7. The valve of claim 1, wherein:
the chevron profile has two exterior angled portions meeting at a junction; and

the angled portion from the apex to the junction has a larger angle relative to an axis passing through the apex than the angled portion from the junction to the distal ends of each seal ring leg.

8. The valve of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of bumps circumferentially spaced apart on the back ring, defining a plurality of fluid channels, allowing fluid to vent past the surface of the chevron profile.

9. The valve of claim 1, wherein the second seal comprises a spring energized seal.

10. A valve stem packing assembly for sealing a valve stem to a valve body having a body cavity, the packing assembly comprising:

a first spring energized seal ring positioned within a valve stem opening extending axially through the body to seal the valve stem to the valve body, the first seal ring comprising:

a chevron profile defining a first and a second leg extending radially outward from an interior radius defined in an apex of the chevron profile, the first and second legs sealing the stem and the body to opposing annular surfaces;

a bump formed on an outer surface of the first seal ring opposite an end of the seal ring that seals to the valve stem and the valve body, the bump forming one or more fluid channels, allowing fluid to vent past the sealing surface of the first seal ring; and

an annular seal standoff having a first end and a second end, wherein the first end is positioned on a supportive shoulder of the stem seal assembly and the second end inserts into the interior radius defined in the apex of the chevron profile to support the chevron profile on the standoff;

a second seal ring positioned within the valve stem opening to seal the valve stem to the valve body; and

a load ring assembly mounted to and forming a part of the body having a first end in engagement with the first seal ring and a second end in engagement with the second seal ring, such that an axial force applied to the first seal ring transfers to load ring assembly, an axial force in an opposite direction on the second seal ring transfers to the load ring assembly.

11. The valve stem packing assembly of claim 10, wherein the first seal further comprises:

an energizing spring having a chevron profile interposed between the seal stand off and the seal ring, the energizing spring exerting an expanding force on the legs of the seal ring so that the seal ring will remain in sealing contact with the opposing annular surfaces;

wherein the energizing spring may be deflected in response to a fluid pressure on the seal ring opposite the energizing spring to allow fluid flow past the seal ring; and

a back ring having a chevron channel that receives an apex of the seal ring, the back ring having a greater stiffness to radial movement than the first and second legs of the seal ring to limit radial deformation of the first and second legs of the seal ring.

12. The valve stem packing assembly of claim 11, further comprising a plurality of bumps circumferentially spaced apart on the back ring, defining a plurality of fluid channels, allowing fluid to vent past the sealing surface of the seal ring.

13. The valve stem packing assembly of claim 11, wherein the first seal ring further comprises a bump formed on an outer surface of the back ring opposite an end of the seal ring that seals to the valve stem and the valve body, the bump forming one or more fluid channels so that fluid may vent past the sealing surface of the first seal ring.

14. The valve stem packing assembly of claim 11, wherein:
the seal ring is formed of a polymer; and

the back ring is formed of a polymer having a greater hardness than the polymer of the seal ring.

15. The valve stem packing assembly of claim 10, wherein the second seal ring comprises a spring energized seal.

16. A seal for a valve stem comprising:

an annular seal stand off having a first end and a second end;

a seal ring having a chevron profile positioned on the seal standoff so that the second end of the seal stand off inserts into the chevron profile;

wherein the seal ring defines a first and a second leg extending from an apex of the chevron profile radially outward, the first and second legs sealing to opposing annular surfaces of the valve stem and a valve body;

an energizing spring having a chevron profile interposed between the seal stand off and the seal ring, the energizing spring exerting an expanding force on the legs of the seal ring so that the seal ring will remain in sealing contact with the opposing annular surfaces;

wherein the energizing spring may be deflected in response to a fluid pressure on the seal ring opposite the energizing spring to allow fluid flow past the seal ring;

a back ring having a chevron channel that receives an apex of the seal ring, the back ring having a greater stiffness to radial movement than the first and second legs of the seal ring to limit radial deformation of the first and second legs of the seal ring;

wherein the first end of the seal stand off has a substantially flat portion positioned on a supportive shoulder of the packing assembly and the second end of the seal stand off is in operative engagement with the chevron profile;

wherein the seal ring is formed of a polymer and the back ring is formed of a polymer having a greater hardness than the polymer of the seal ring;

wherein the channel of the back ring extends only partially to distal ends of each leg of the seal ring;

wherein a width of the back ring is smaller than a distance between outer sides of the distal ends of the seal ring legs;

wherein an inner gap is located between the back ring and the stem and an outer gap is located between the back ring and the valve body;

wherein the channel of the back ring extends from the apex of the seal ring over only part of the seal ring; and

a plurality of circumferentially spaced apart bumps formed on an outer surface of the back ring, defining a plurality of fluid channels so that fluid may vent past the sealing surface of the seal ring.

17. The seal of claim 16, wherein:

the seal ring has two angled exterior portions meeting at a junction; and

the angled portion from the apex to the junction has a larger angle relative to an axis passing through the apex than the angled portion from the junction to the distal ends of each seal ring leg.