Claims:

1. A process for decomposing formates in formate-containing compositions of matter, which comprises reacting formate-containing compositions of matter in the presence of at least one heterogeneous catalyst comprising lanthanum and at a temperature of from 80 to 180° C. and a pressure of from 0.1 to 60 bar,

wherein the formate-containing compositions of matter have a pH of from 6.5 to 10,

the catalyst is a lanthanum oxide/copper/copper oxide/aluminum oxide catalyst, comprising 4 to 15 wt % of lanthanum reckoned as La_2O_3 and based on the total weight of the catalyst,

the formate-containing composition of matter comprises carbonyl compounds formed by an aldol reaction of alkanals with formaldehyde and/or their corresponding hydrogenation products, and

at least 50 wt % of formate is decomposed.

2. The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the decomposition of the formates is effected in the presence of hydrogen.

3. The process as claimed claim 1, wherein the decomposition of the formates is effected in the presence of a tertiary amine.

4. The process as claimed claim 1, wherein the formate-containing composition of matter comprises compounds comprising at least two methylol groups.

5. The process as claimed in claim **1**, wherein the formate-containing composition of matter comprises hydroxypivaldehyde and neopentyl glycol.

6. The process as claimed in claim **2**, wherein the formate-containing composition of matter comprises hydroxypivaldehyde and neopentyl glycol.

7. The process as claimed in claim **3**, wherein the formate-containing composition of matter comprises hydroxypivaldehyde and neopentyl glycol.

8. The process as claimed in claim **1**, wherein the catalyst consists of:

4 to 15 wt % of lanthanum oxide,

40 to 65 wt % of copper oxide,

15 to 30 wt % of aluminum oxide and

5 to 20 wt % of copper.

9. The process as claimed in claim **6**, wherein the catalyst consists of:

4 to 15 wt % of lanthanum oxide,

40 to 65 wt % of copper oxide,

15 to 30 wt % of aluminum oxide and

5 to 20 wt % of copper.

10. The process as claimed in claim **7**, wherein the catalyst consists of:

4 to 15 wt % of lanthanum oxide,

40 to 65 wt % of copper oxide,

15 to 30 wt % of aluminum oxide and

5 to 20 wt % of copper.