

IMPROVEMENTS IN WATER HEATERS

Field of the invention

[001] This invention relates to water heaters and methods of control thereof.

[002] The invention is applicable to water heaters which are operated at an upper temperature threshold, such as boiling water heaters for providing hot water for beverages.

Background of the invention

[003] Boiling water heaters are usually used to provide hot water for beverages and are required to provide water at close to boiling point. However, the boiling point for water depends on the atmospheric pressure, which can vary according to factors such as weather conditions and altitude. In addition, minimization of power consumption is now an important factor for equipment suppliers and consumers. Having a continuously boiling heater is wasteful of energy, and generates steam which can also be unacceptable for the user. Thus it is now the practice of boiling water heater suppliers to provide a heater which heats the water to a temperature threshold a degree or two below the boiling point. This necessitates the calibration of the heater to the local boiling temperature. Other refinements, such as the ramping down of the temperature as the water approaches the boiling point have also been adopted to prevent temperature overrun from the thermal inertia of the element.

Summary of the invention

[004] According to an embodiment of the invention, there is provided a method of calibrating a water heater, the method including the steps of:

- A. adding water to the tank to a first predetermined water level;
- B. heating the water to a first temperature threshold;
- C. maintaining the temperature at approximately the first temperature threshold for a first period of time;

D. heating the water until the rate of temperature change is less than a first predetermined rate;

E. measuring the temperature (T1) when the state of step D is achieved to determine a first iteration temperature.

[005] The method can include the step of:

F. recording the first iteration temperature measured at step E as the boiling point.

[006] The method can include the steps of:

G. measuring the time for the water to reach the state of step E, and

H. comparing the time with a third predetermined time period.

[007] The method can include the steps of:

I. reducing the power to the element to a level sufficient to maintain the water at the first iteration temperature for a second predetermined period (8 min);

J. applying full power to the element until the state of step D is achieved;

K. measuring the temperature attained at step J;

L. recording the temperature attained measured at step J as the boiling point, wherein steps J, K, and L are carried out instead of or subsequent to, step F.

[008] The method can include the steps of:

M. measuring time to achieve step D,

N. comparing the time measured at step M with a third time period;

and, if the time measured at M exceeds the third time period,

O. measuring the water temperature at the end of the third time period;

P. recording the water temperature measured at step O as the boiling point.

[009] The first predetermined water level is less than the full level.

[010] The first predetermined water level is at a predetermined height above the element.

[011] The invention also provides a controller for implementing the method, and a water heater including such a controller.

Brief description of the drawings

[012] An embodiment or embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

[013] Figure 1 is shows a functional schematic drawing of a boiling water heater embodying the invention;

[014] Figure 2 is a functional block diagram illustrative of functional elements of a controller adapted for use with the present invention; and

[015] Figure 3 is a flow diagram of a first mode of operation of the boiling water heater.

[016] Figure 4 is a flow diagram of both the first and second mode of operation of the boiling water heater.

[017] The following reference numbers are used in the drawings:

FIGURE 1		FIGURE 2		FIGURE 3	
100	TANK	200	CONTROLLER	302	ADD WATER
102	WATER	202	PROCESSOR	304	HEAT
104	ELEMENT	204	BUS	306	MEASURE TEMP
106	SWITCH	206	NVRAM	308	COMPARE TEMP
108	VALVE	208	ROM	310	REDUCE HEAT
110	WATER INLET	210	INPUT I/F	312	START TIMER
112	LEVEL SENSOR 1	212	LEVEL SENSOR	314	TIME
113	LEVEL SENSOR 2	213	UPPER LEVEL SENSOR	316	FULL HEAT
114	OUTLET	216	TEMP SENSOR	318	TEMP/TIME
116	TEMP SENSOR 1	218	SCRATCH PAD	320	MEASURE TEMP
118	TEMP SENSOR 2	220	OUTPUT INTERFACE	322	STORE TEMP
120	CONTROLLER	222	DISPLAY I/F		
122	DISPLAY	224	KEYPAD I/F		
124	KEYPAD	226	SWITCH		

		228	VALVE		
		230	CLOCK		
FIGURE 4					
402	ADD WATER				
404	HEAT				
406	MEASURE TEMP				
408	COMPARE TEMP				
410	REDUCE HEAT				
412	START TIMER				
414	TIME				
416	FULL HEAT				
418	TEMP/TIME				
420	MEASURE TEMP				
424	TIME				
426	FULL HEAT				
428	TEMP/TIME				
430	MEASURE TEMP				
432	STORE TEMP				

Detailed description of the embodiments

[018] The invention will be described with reference to a boiling water heater.

[019] Figure 1 shows a boiling water heater controlled by a method implementing an embodiment of the invention.

[020] As shown in Figure 1, the tank 100 contains water 102 which has been admitted to the tank at inlet 110 via control valve 108. A first level sensor 113 is provided to determine when there is a first predetermined level of water in the tank. A second level sensor 112 is provided to indicate to controller 120 when the water has reached the full position. Controller 120 then turns off the valve 108 and stops the water entering the tank 100.

[021] Additional level sensors can be provided to determine when intermediate levels are reached. For example, a third level sensor can be provided to indicate that a minimum level of water is present above the element 104. Thus, if the water level is below this minimum level, the element 104 is inhibited by controller

120 from being turned on. A further level sensor can be provided to indicate when the water has fallen below a level at which the controller is programmed to initiate refill. This can prevent the refill starting immediately water is drawn off.

[022] A continuous level monitor can be provided in the form of a pair of capacitor plates running from the upper level to the bottom of the tank or the minimum level. The capacitance varies with the amount of water between the plates. The capacitance can be measured by known techniques such as applying a HF signal and calculating the capacitance from the measured parameters and adjusting for temperature effects on the dielectric characteristics of the water. The capacitor plates can be formed as concentric cylindrical surfaces with a space between which fills with water to the height of the water in the tank.

[023] One or more temperature sensor 116, 118 measure the temperature of the water in the tank. Where more than one temperature sensors is provided, they can be located at differing heights within the tank 100. For example, a sensor can be located proximate the minimum water level below which the controller 120 inhibits the element 104. The temperature sensor 116 is located below the fill level. The temperature sensor 118 is located below the predetermined level detected by level detector 113.

[024] Water can be drawn off via tap 114.

[025] The controller 120 can include a display 122 and a user interface such as keypad 124. Other interfaces such as touch screen, infrared or wireless interfaces can also be used.

[026] The controller 120 can be provided with a scrollable function menu which the user can control by one or more function buttons.

[027] The controller 120 receives input signals from the temperature sensors 116, 118, and from the levels sensors 112, 113. In response to the input conditions meeting operating criteria, the controller controls the inlet valve 108 and the power switch 106.

[028] Figure 2 schematically illustrates a functional block diagram of a controller adapted for use with the inventive heater.

[029] A processor 202 and its peripheral elements are interconnected by a bus 204. The controller included, for example, a ROM adapted to store programming for the processor 202, an NVRAM 206, a scratch pad memory 218 a clock 230, a user input interface such as keypad interface 224, a display interface 222. In addition input interface 210 and output interface 220 are connected to the processor via the bus 204.

[030] The level sensors and temperature sensors are connected to the input interface 210, and the control outputs for the switch control 226 and the valve control 228 are connected to the output interface 220.

[031] The input interface and the output interface can be part of a common interface such as a USB interface.

[032] Figure 3 is a flow diagram of a first mode of operation of the boiling water heater.

[033] In a first step 302, water is added to tank 100 to a predetermined level, such as the level 111 determined by level sensor 113 and the water inlet is then shut off. Full heat is then applied at step 304 via the heating element 104 and the temperature is monitored at step 306 until it reaches a first predetermined temperature threshold T1 (308), which, in this embodiment has been chosen as 88°C. A thermostat can be used to maintain this temperature. When T1 is reached, the power supplied by the element 104 is reduced to a level sufficient to maintain the temperature at approximately at T1 at step 310. This can be done by reducing the duty cycle of the heating element 104, ie, by switching the element on and off for periods of time to reduce the average power delivered by the element 104.

[034] A timing function is initiated at step 312 when the temperature reaches T1 and the temperature is held at T1 for a predetermined period, for example, 4 minutes (314).

[035] Thereafter, at step 316, full heat is again reapplied and the rate of temperature change is monitored at step 318 until it falls to a threshold rate, 0.1C/2.56 sec in this embodiment.

[036] The rate can be measured for a number of iterations, eg, 8 samples at 2.56 sec intervals at step 318, and when the rate is below the threshold rate for 8

successive samples, the temperature is measured at step 320. This temperature is taken to be the boiling point and is stored in a memory. This can be volatile memory 218 or non-volatile memory 206.

[037] According to a further embodiment of the invention, shown in Figure 4, steps 302 to 320 are repeated as steps 402 to 420. Steps 322 can optionally be repeated. The temperature is measured at 420. Then at step 424, this is held for a time period, in this embodiment 8 minutes. Full heat is then applied at 426, and the temperature change rate monitored at 428 until a predetermine rate is reached, again 0.1C/2.56 sec is chosen in this embodiment. The temperature is measured at step 430 and stored in memory at step 432. Preferably, this temperature is stored in non-volatile memory 206.

[038] The double calibration including both steps 302 to 322 and 424 to 432 assist in providing consistent and repeatable calibration temperatures. In particular, this process can be applied across a range of boiling water heaters, for example, 3 to 40 litre capacities.

[039] This calibration process can be carried out when the heater has not been previously calibrated.

[040] Following step 318 or 418, the water should boil at greater than 92°C. Preferably the system can be set to require that the element has been at full power for greater than a further predetermined period, such as 1 minute.

[041] In the event that boiling is not detected at 318, 418 or 428, the timer will run for a further predetermined time period, say 10 minutes, and the temperature then recorded will be taken as the boiling point. This time period commences when the temperature exceeds a selected threshold value such as 92°C for mode 1 operation (i.e. 318 & 418) and for mode 2 operation after the 8 minute time period (i.e. 424).

[042] When the heater has been calibrated, incremental filling from level 111 to the full level commences as the controller 120 opens valve 108. In this process, water is added until the temperature falls below a chosen value while the heater is at full power. When the water temperature falls to the chosen value, the water inlet is shut off by the controller closing valve 108 and is held closed until the temperature

risers to a value within an acceptable temperature range suitable for use with hot beverages. This process is repeated until the full level is reached.

[043] A calibration reset button can be provided on the controller. This can be used to initiate a calibration process by selecting the calibration item from the menu on the display 122. On initial start up, the unit will calibrate at a low water level, but once commissioned the unit can be re-calibrated anywhere between low level and high level by activating the relevant push buttons.

[044] Where ever it is used, the word “comprising” is to be understood in its “open” sense, that is, in the sense of “including”, and thus not limited to its “closed” sense, that is the sense of “consisting only of”. A corresponding meaning is to be attributed to the corresponding words “comprise”, “comprised” and “comprises” where they appear.

[045] It will be understood that the invention disclosed and defined herein extends to all alternative combinations of two or more of the individual features mentioned or evident from the text. All of these different combinations constitute various alternative aspects of the invention.

[046] While particular embodiments of this invention have been described, it will be evident to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the essential characteristics thereof. The present embodiments and examples are therefore to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive, and all modifications which would be obvious to those skilled in the art are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

Claims

1. A method of calibrating a water heater, the method including the steps of:
 - A. adding water to the tank to a first predetermined water level;
 - B. heating the water to a first temperature threshold;
 - C. maintaining the temperature at approximately the first temperature threshold for a first period of time;
 - D. heating the water until the rate of temperature change is less than a first predetermined rate;
 - E. measuring the temperature (T1) of the water when the state of step D is achieved to determine a first iteration temperature.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1, including the step of:
 - F. recording the first iteration temperature measured at step E as the boiling point.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1, including the steps of:
 - G. measuring the time for the water to reach the state of step E, and
 - H. comparing the time with a third predetermined time period.
4. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including the steps of:
 - I. reducing the power to the element to a level sufficient to maintain the water at the first iteration temperature for a second predetermined period (8 min);
 - J. applying full power to the element until the state of step D is achieved;
 - K. measuring the temperature attained at step J;
 - L. recording the temperature attained measured at step J as the boiling point, wherein steps J, K, and L are carried out instead of or subsequent to, step F.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4, including the steps of
 - M. measuring time to achieve step J ,
 - N. comparing the time measured at step M with a third time period;and, if the time measured at M exceeds the third time period,
 - O. measuring the temperature at the end of the third time period;
 - P. recording the temperature measured at step O as the boiling point.
6. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the first predetermined water level is less than the full level.
7. A method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the first predetermined water level is at a predetermined height above the element.
8. A controller for a boiling water heater, the controller including a processor programmed to implement the method of any one of claims 1 to 7.
9. A boiling water heater including a controller as claimed in claim 8.
10. A method of controlling a boiling water heater substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
11. A controller for a boiling water heater substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
12. A boiling water heater substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.