

DISPENSING DEVICE

The present invention relates to a dosing and dispensing device for liquid laundry detergents. The device according to the present invention is particularly adapted to pretreat fabrics with a portion of liquid detergent.

Dispensing devices for liquid detergent, which are to be introduced with the fabrics in the washing machine, are well known in the prior art. It is also known that it is possible to achieve a greater effectiveness in respect of stain removal by pretreating the fabrics without consuming a greater amount of liquid detergent. Pretreatment means that a certain amount of detergent is applied directly onto the dirty parts of said fabrics before they are washed in the machine. In the following these devices are called "pretreatment devices". In the following detergent means a detergent composition for the treatment of fabrics. This detergent composition may comprise washing additives, like beaches, enzymes and/or others known in the art.

Various pretreatment devices for liquid detergent are described in the prior art, for example in WO 92/09736 and WO 92/09737. These devices allow an application of said liquid detergent onto the fabrics before the washing cycle either with predetermined outlets or a removable pretreatment applicator respectively. Another approach is represented by EP-A-575 714. This document describes another pretreatment device for liquid detergent with a fixed applicator in form of a roller ball. This roller ball is able to spread the contained liquid detergent only in a predetermined direction.

The pretreating devices mentioned before allow an even spreading of the contained liquid detergent onto the fabric, i.e. the spread quantity is always the same. This way of even spreading does not consider that different stains need a different amount of liquid detergent during pre-
5 treatment. For example, stains can be made of certain constituents which need a more thorough pretreatment to increase its effectiveness. This can be achieved by applying a greater amount of the liquid detergent. A greater quantity is also needed depending on the dimensions of the stain itself. Therefore, we found that the effectiveness of
10 stain removal is increased when a greater amount of pretreating detergent is applied upon the soiled surface of the fabric, since said surface can be pretreated more thoroughly.

It is not possible with the pretreatment devices of the prior art to adjust the amount of liquid detergent on the specific needs. Indeed, the
15 outlets having a fixed aperture or the applicators, being for example a sponge, do not give the possibility to vary the quantity of liquid detergent to be spread on the fabric for a thorough pre-treatment / to control the amount of detergent such that eventual damages to fabrics (i.e. fading, etc.) can be avoided. It is therefore the object of the pre-
20 sent invention to provide a device with an adjustable flow of the contained liquid detergent for the pretreatment.

It is an object of the present invention to obviate / mitigate the problems outlined above.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a
25 container adapted to contain and dispense a product, said container comprising a hollow body, a filling opening, a dispensing opening, a valve and a flexible and resilient support means for said valve, wherein said flexible and resilient support means urges said valve against said

dispensing opening, achieving a leak-tight engagement between said valve and said dispensing opening, said flexible and resilient support means can be resiliently deformed by an external force acting on said valve whereby said leak-tight engagement between said valve and
5 said dispensing opening is disengaged, allowing said contained product to be spread by said valve, said flexible and resilient support means comprises a housing which fits the container and defines said dispensing opening at one extremity, and said housing comprising, in the region of the opposite extremity to said dispensing opening, at least a
10 resiliently deformable means urging said valve against said dispensing opening to achieve said leak-tight engagement characterized in that when the leak-tight engagement between said valve and said dispensing opening is disengaged a fluid flow pathway is created which has a cross-section of greater than 10% of the width of the dispensing opening.
15 ing.

It has been found that the container of the invention is particularly advantageous in that the amount of detergent dosed from the device and the spreading of the detergent onto the surface being treated is surprisingly beneficial. These benefits include quick / advanced control of
20 discharge of the detergent from the device by the application / removal of pressure applied thereto. Additionally the device of the invention is able to provide a rubbing / scrubbing action as well as the application of pressure.

Generally the fluid pathway is disposed at a side of the valve. This has
25 been found to be particularly important in that if the fluid pathway (especially the channel openings) is not offset from the valve (above all from the top surface thereof) so that the fluid pathway (especially

the channel openings) is not to be blocked during dispensing and / or between dispensing operations, e.g. by any residual detergent.

Generally the dispensing opening is located in the bottom part of said device. This allows dosing of the detergent (aided by gravity) onto the
5 surface being treated.

To improve the penetration / spreading of the detergent into the (usually fabric surface) being treated it is preferred that the device (preferably on the flexible portion) comprises a spreading means. Preferably the spreading means is in the form of a ridge. The ridge may be
10 linear or may be curved. Generally a plurality of ridges is present on the device.

Generally the ridge height is about the same as that of a deformed valve. In this way it has been found that the valves may be activate efficiently (i.e. without being closed due to valve "implosion" following
15 an excess of rubbing force.

Generally the ridges are positioned in a different area to that of the valves. This allows a user, after the dosing of the product, to rub the fabric without further dispensing (and / or with a smaller amplitude of the pretreatment movement). Preferably to achieve this aim the
20 valves are positioned away from the centre of the device.

In order to be capable of being used by a consumer generally the device comprises a gripping means. The gripping means preferably comprises the main body of the device, into which the detergent is poured. The main body of the device is preferably shaped so that it is
25 capable of fitting into a hand of a user yet may contain sufficient detergent for a pre-treatment and laundry step. The main body thus has

a volume of from 50-200cm³. The main body may comprise any geometrical shape but is generally based on an ovoid, tapering towards its upper opening (into which the detergent is poured) and also at its lower end (which adjoins onto the flexible portion).

- 5 Generally the device is made of elastic plastic material. The main body may comprise PP, PE or PET (both injected or blow moulded). The ridges and the valves may comprise any rubber or elastomer suitable for being welded, melted or glued onto the main body.

- Generally the valve is removable affixed to the container. This allows
10 for several advantages to be realised including the replacement of a faulty valve and / or the use of a particular valve in connection with a certain detergent formulation / surface being treated.

- According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a process for pretreating and washing fabrics in a washing machine
15 with the dosing and dispensing device according to any of the preceding claims, characterized in that it comprises of the following steps: a dose of the total quantity of liquid detergent to be utilized during the pretreatment and washing cycle is introduced into the dosing and dispensing device; pretreatment of the fabrics is executed with a controlled quantity of the liquid detergent dosage contained in said device
20 and dispensed from said device through said cut; the thus pretreated fabrics are placed in the drum of the washing machine together with said dosing and dispensing device and with other non-pretreated fabrics.

- 25 Most preferably the device is for a laundry cleaning formulation and for use in dispensing same onto a clothing surface.

Preferably the laundry cleaning formulation comprises a bleach, e.g. in an amount of from 0.001% to 99.99%, preferably 0.001% to 20%, preferably 4% to 18%, e.g. most preferably about 4.5% or 13%, by weight, of bleach. The bleach is preferably peroxide bleach, most preferably hydrogen peroxide. Peroxide sources other than H_2O_2 can be used.

Preferably the laundry cleaning formulation comprises a surfactant. Where present the composition comprises from 0.001% to 99.99%, preferably 0.05% to 15%, e.g. about 7%, by weight of surfactant.

10 The surfactant is, for example, an anionic or nonionic surfactant or mixture thereof (most preferably a nonionic surfactant). The nonionic surfactant is preferably a surfactant having a formula $RO(CH_2CH_2O)_nH$ wherein R is a mixture of linear, even carbon-number hydrocarbon chains ranging from $C_{12}H_{25}$ to $C_{16}H_{33}$ and n represents the number of repeating units and is a number of from about 1 to about 12. Examples of other non-ionic surfactants include higher aliphatic primary alcohol containing about twelve to about 16 carbon atoms which are condensed with about three to thirteen moles of ethylene oxide.

Other examples of nonionic surfactants include primary alcohol ethoxylates (available under the Neodol trade name from Shell Co.), such as C_{11} alkanol condensed with 9 moles of ethylene oxide (Neodol 1-9), C_{12-13} alkanol condensed with 6.5 moles ethylene oxide (Neodol 23-6.5), C_{12-13} alkanol with 9 moles of ethylene oxide (Neodol 23-9), C_{12-15} alkanol condensed with 7 or 3 moles ethylene oxide (Neodol 25-7 or Neodol 25-3), C_{14-15} alkanol condensed with 13 moles ethylene oxide (Neodol 45-13), C_{9-11} linear ethoxylated alcohol, averaging 2.5 moles of ethylene oxide per mole of alcohol (Neodol 91-2.5), and the like.

Other examples of nonionic surfactants suitable for use in the present invention include ethylene oxide condensate products of secondary aliphatic alcohols containing 11 to 18 carbon atoms in a straight or branched chain configuration condensed with 5 to 30 moles of ethylene oxide. Examples of commercially available non-ionic detergents of the foregoing type are C₁₁₋₁₅ secondary alkanol condensed with either 9 moles of ethylene oxide (Tergitol 15-S-9) or 12 moles of ethylene oxide (Tergitol 15-S-12) marketed by Union Carbide, a subsidiary of Dow Chemical.

10 Octylphenoxy polyethoxyethanol type nonionic surfactants, for example, Triton X-100, as well as amine oxides can also be used as a non-ionic surfactant in the present invention.

Other examples of linear primary alcohol ethoxylates are available under the Tomadol trade name such as, for example, Tomadol 1-7, a C₁₁ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO; Tomadol 25-7, a C_{12-C15} linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO; Tomadol 45-7, a C_{14-C15} linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO; and Tomadol 91-6, a C_{9-C11} linear alcohol ethoxylate with 6 moles EO.

Other examples of linear primary alcohol ethoxylates are available under the Lutensol trade name such as, for example, Lutensol A3N, a C₁₃₋₁₅ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 3 moles EO; Lutensol LA60, a C₁₃₋₁₅ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO. Also Genapol such as, for example, Genapol LA3, a C₁₃₋₁₅ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 3 moles EO; Genapol LA070, a C₁₃₋₁₅ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO.

Tomadol 45-7, a C₁₄-C₁₅ linear primary alcohol ethoxylate with 7 moles EO; and Tomadol 91-6, a C₉-C₁₁ linear alcohol ethoxylate with 6 moles EO.

5 Other nonionic surfactants are amine oxides, alkyl amide oxide surfactants.

Preferred anionic surfactants are frequently provided as alkali metal salts, ammonium salts, amine salts, aminoalcohol salts or magnesium salts. Contemplated as useful are one or more sulfate or sulfonate compounds including: alkyl benzene sulfates, alkyl sulfates, alkyl ether
10 sulfates, alkylamidoether sulfates, alkylaryl polyether sulfates, monoglyceride sulfates, alkylsulfonates, alkylamide sulfonates, alkylaryl sulfonates, olefinsulfonates, paraffin sulfonates, alkyl sulfosuccinates, alkyl ether sulfosuccinates, alkylamide sulfosuccinates, alkyl sulfosuccinamate, alkyl sulfoacetates, alkyl phosphates, alkyl ether
15 phosphates, acyl sarconsinates, acyl isethionates, and N-acyl taurates. Generally, the alkyl or acyl radical in these various compounds comprise a carbon chain containing 12 to 20 carbon atoms.

Other surfactants which may be used are alkyl naphthalene sulfonates and acyl / oleoyl sarcosinates and mixtures thereof.

20 The laundry cleaning formulation may comprise various optional ingredients, including enzymes, builders, solvents, dye transfer inhibition agents, dye catchers, preservatives, anti-oxidants, anti-static agents, fragrances, odour absorbing components, optical brighteners, acidifying agents, alkalizing agents, thickeners (e.g. hydroxyethylcellulose
25 and / or xanthan gum).

The container of the invention is further described by reference to the following Figures in which:

Figure 1 is a plan view of a device in accordance with the invention;

Figures 2 and 3 are cross-sectional views of a portion of a device in
5 accordance with the invention;

Figure 4 is a plan view of a second embodiment of a device in accordance with the invention;

Figure 5 is a plan view of an exploded second embodiment of a device in accordance with the invention;

10 Figure 6 is an underside view of a second embodiment of a device in accordance with the invention; and

Figures 7 and 8 are cross-sectional views of a third embodiment of a device in accordance with the invention.

15 From Figures 1 to 3 the first embodiment of a device 1 can be seen . Device 1 comprises a main body section 2 in the form of a modified portion of a sphere / spheroid. The main body 2 is able to act as a handle for use by a consumer. The main body has an opening (not shown) for introduction of detergent into the device and release of de-
20 tergent in a (laundry) washing cycle.

The main body 2 has a valve 3 disposed on its lower surface.

The valve 3 has a fluid pathway 4 that may be opened by the application of pressure (contact and / or translational) on a surface.

Application of pressure on a surface onto a terminal shaped dome 5 of the valve stem 6 of the valve 3, causes movement of the valve stem 6 and in turn an adjoined sealing portion 7 of the valve stem 6 away from a valve seat 8. This movement is performed against a biasing
5 force applied by a deformable spring 9 working against a portion of the valve housing 10. When the sealing portion 7 is moved away from the valve seat 8 the fluid pathway 4 is created. In doing so fluid can flow from the main body 2 of the device 1 through the valve 3.

The body portion 2 also comprises a plurality of curved spreading
10 ridges 11 on its lower surface.

In use a dose of the total quantity of liquid detergent to be utilized during the pretreatment and washing cycle is introduced into the device 1. Pretreatment of fabrics is executed with a controlled quantity of the liquid detergent dosage contained in said device 1 being dis-
15 pensed from said device 1 through said valve 3. This is achieved by pressing and rubbing the device 1 on the fabric surface to be treated, thus causing release of detergent and spreading of same (aided by the ridges 11) on the surface being treated. The thus pretreated fabrics are placed in the drum of the washing machine together with said dos-
20 ing and dispensing device 1 and with other non-pretreated fabrics. A washing cycle may then be operated.

From Figures 4 to 6 the second embodiment of a device 1 can be seen. Device 1 comprises a main body section 2 in the form of a modified portion of a sphere / spheroid. The main body 2 is able to act as a
25 handle for use by a consumer. The main body has an opening 12 for introduction of detergent into the device and release of detergent in a (laundry) washing cycle.

The main body 2 has a valve 3 disposed on its lower surface.

The valve comprises a compressible member 3a which has an outwardly facing / terminally domed section 3b and a compressible cylindrical section 3c. The compressible cylindrical section 3c comprises a
5 concertinaed cylinder. The compressible member 3a comprises a resilient material such as silicone rubber.

The valve 3 comprises a housing 3d in which the compressible member 3a sits. The housing 3d is in the form of a cylinder having one or more apertures in its cylindrical sides. The housing comprises two termini
10 3e, 3f in the form of flanges. A first flange 3e abuts against the main body 2 of the device 1 and secures the valve 3 thereto as well as providing a seat for the compressible member 3a. A second flange 3f provides a seat which supports the compressible cylindrical section 3c of the compressible member 3a.

15 As will be appreciated due to the way that the first flange 3e abuts against the main body 2 of the device 1 the connection of the flange 3e and the main body 2 may be disrupted. Namely the flange 3e (and thus the whole valve 3) may be disconnected from the device 1.

In its inactivated status the terminal domed section 3b of the compressible member 3a is urged against the first flange 3e. Thus the
20 valve 3 is closed.

Application of pressure on a surface causes movement of the terminal shaped dome 3b away from engagement with the first flange 3e. This movement is performed against a biasing force applied by the compressible cylindrical section 3c working against the second flange 3f.
25 When the terminal shaped dome 3b is moved away from the first

flange 3e a fluid pathway 4 is created. In doing so fluid can flow from the main body 2 of the device 1 through the valve 3 (movement occurs through the apertures of the valve housing 3d).

5 The body portion 2 also comprises a plurality of curved spreading ridges 11 on its lower surface.

In use a dose of the total quantity of liquid detergent to be utilized during the pretreatment and washing cycle is introduced into the device 1. Pretreatment of fabrics is executed with a controlled quantity of the liquid detergent dosage contained in said device 1 being dispensed from said device 1 through said valve 3. This is achieved by
10 pressing and rubbing the device 1 on the fabric surface to be treated, thus causing release of detergent and spreading of same (aided by the ridges 11) on the surface being treated. The thus pretreated fabrics are placed in the drum of the washing machine together with said dosing and dispensing device 1 and with other non-pretreated fabrics. A
15 washing cycle may then be operated.

From Figures 7 and 8 the third embodiment of a device 1 can be seen. Device 1 comprises a main body section 2 in the form of a modified portion of a sphere / spheroid. The main body 2 is able to act as a
20 handle for use by a consumer. The main body has an opening 12 for introduction of detergent into the device and release of detergent in a (laundry) washing cycle.

The main body 2 has a valve 3 disposed on its lower surface.

25 The valve comprises a compressible member 3a which has an outwardly facing / terminally domed section 3b and a compressible cylindrical section 3c. The compressible cylindrical section 3c comprises a

concertinaed cylinder. The compressible member 3a comprises a resilient material such as silicone rubber.

The valve 3 comprises a housing 3d (integrated into the main body 2) in which the compressible member 3a sits. The housing 3d is in the form of a cylindrical cage having one or more apertures in its cylindrical sides. The housing comprises a terminus 3e in the form of a flange.

The flange 3e is movable between a first and a second position. It is hingedly joined at one end to a side of the housing 3d and has a free end. In its first position the flange extends into the volume of the housing 3d. When the compressible member 3a is inserted into the housing 3d it pushes the flange 3e downwards, through an arc until the free end abuts against a portion of the housing 3d, locking in place. In this way the flange 3e and the housing 3d provide support for the compressible member 3a.

This arrangement has been found to be beneficial for several reasons. Firstly it allows a much more simplistic manufacturing / moulding technique. This is particularly beneficial in that the number of moulded parts is reduced with much fewer components. This advantage may be realised because of the movement capability of the flange 3e. Additionally in use this arrangement aids to ensure that the compressible member 3a may only move along one axis ensuring more effective release of detergent and sealing after use. This is at least partly achieved by a reduction in flexing of the housing 3d in use.

In its inactivated status the terminal domed section 3b of the compressible member 3a is urged against the main body 2. Thus the valve 3 is closed.

Application of pressure on a surface causes movement of the terminal shaped dome 3b away from engagement with the main body 2. This movement is performed against a biasing force applied by the compressible cylindrical section 3c working against the flange 3e. When
5 the terminal shaped dome 3b is moved away from the first flange 3e a fluid pathway 4 is created. In doing so fluid can flow from the main body 2 of the device 1 through the valve 3 (movement occurs through the apertures of the valve housing 3d).

The body portion 2 also comprises a plurality of curved spreading
10 ridges 11 on its lower surface.

In use a dose of the total quantity of liquid detergent to be utilized during the pretreatment and washing cycle is introduced into the device 1. Pretreatment of fabrics is executed with a controlled quantity of the liquid detergent dosage contained in said device 1 being dispensed from said device 1 through said valve 3. This is achieved by
15 pressing and rubbing the device 1 on the fabric surface to be treated, thus causing release of detergent and spreading of same (aided by the ridges 11) on the surface being treated. The thus pretreated fabrics are placed in the drum of the washing machine together with said dosing and dispensing device 1 and with other non-pretreated fabrics. A
20 washing cycle may then be operated.

CLAIMS

1. A container adapted to contain and dispense a product, said container comprising a hollow body, a filling opening, a dispensing opening, a valve and a flexible and resilient support means for said valve, wherein said flexible and resilient support means urges said valve against said dispensing opening, achieving a leak-tight engagement between said valve and said dispensing opening, said flexible and resilient support means can be resiliently deformed by an external force acting on said valve whereby said leak-tight engagement between said valve and said dispensing opening is disengaged, allowing said contained product to be spread by said valve, said flexible and resilient support means comprises a housing which fits the container and defines said dispensing opening at one extremity, and said housing comprising a resiliently deformable means urging said valve against said dispensing opening to achieve said leak-tight engagement characterized in that when the leak-tight engagement between said valve and said dispensing opening is disengaged a fluid flow pathway is created which has a cross-section of greater than 10% of the width of the dispensing opening.
2. A container according to claim 1 wherein said flow pathway is disposed at a side of the valve.
3. A container according to claim 1 wherein said flexible and resilient support means comprises a spring located under said valve, said spring pressing said valve against said dispensing opening to achieve said leak-tight engagement during the periods of non-use of said container.

4. A container according to claim 1 wherein said flexible and resilient support means is made of a material selected from the group consisting of: injected resins, elastomeric polymers and a combination thereof.
5. A container according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the container comprises a spreading / scrubbing means.
6. A container according to claim 5, wherein the spreading / scrubbing means is in the form of a ridge, which is linear or curved.
7. A container according to claim 1 wherein said container is made of a rigid or flexible material.
- 10 8. A container according to claim 1 wherein said container can be a bottle or a tube.
9. A container according to claim 1 wherein said container can be a dosing and/or dispensing device.
10. A container according to claim 1 wherein said valve has a terminal
15 shaped dome.
11. Use of a container according to any one of claims 1 to 10 in a detergent dispensing operation.
12. Use according to claim 11, wherein said use comprises a first step in which the container is operated on a soiled area of a fabric to be
20 cleaned before a second step in which the fabric to be cleaned and the container are inserted into an automatic washing machine for an automatic wash cycle.