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RECOVERY OF MODIFIER COMPOUNDS AND POLAR ORGANIC
COMPOUNDS FROM A POLY(ARYLENE SULFIDE)

RECYCLE MIXTURE

Field of Invention

5 This invention relates to the field of processes for recovering at least one modifier compound and at least one polar organic compound from a poly(arylene sulfide) recycle mixture. In this disclosure, at least one polar organic compound is referred to as POC, and poly(arylene sulfide) is referred to as P(AS).

Background of the Invention

10 The production of P(AS) for a variety of industrial and commercial uses has been known for some time. P(AS) is moldable into various articles including, but not limited to, parts, films, and fibers by means of, for example, injection molding and extrusion molding techniques. These articles have utility in a variety of applications where heat and chemical resistance properties are desired.

15 For example, P(AS) can be utilized as a material for preparing electrical and electronic parts and automotive parts.

 Generally, P(AS) is prepared by contacting reactants comprising at least one dihalogenated aromatic compound, at least one POC, at least one sulfur source, and at least one base under polymerization reaction conditions. Molecular weight modifier compounds can be added to produce high molecular weight P(AS). The most preferred modifier compound is sodium acetate due to its availability and effectiveness.

 There are several problems associated with the current synthesis of P(AS) that cause the production expenses to be high. First, in both quench and flash P(AS) processes, modifiers utilized to synthesize the high molecular weight P(AS) are used once in the process and are not captured and recycled for subsequent use. This constitutes a great expense in the production of P(AS) due to the higher feedstock and waste disposal expense. Secondly, POC utilized in the process can be recovered, but often at a high cost. For example, *n*-hexanol is often utilized to extract *n*-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP), a common POC. Operating the hexanol extractor system can require the handling of as much as 30 to 40 pounds of *n*-hexanol per pound of P(AS) produced causing high equipment and operational



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costs.

There is a need in the P(AS) industry for an efficient process to recover the modifier compound and POC from various streams. This invention provides such a process.

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Summary of Invention

The present invention provides a process to recover at least one modifier compound and at least one POC from a P(AS) recycle mixture.

10 In accordance with the present invention, a process to recover at least one POC and at least one modifier from a P(AS) recycle mixture is provided, said process comprising (or optionally, "consisting essentially of" or "consisting of") separating said P(AS) recycle mixture in a first separation zone to yield methanol and a recycle feedstock mixture, wherein said recycle feedstock mixture comprises said POC and said modifier compound.

Detailed Description of Invention

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In this invention, a process is provided to recover at least one modifier compound and at least one POC from a P(AS) recycle mixture. The P(AS) recycle mixture comprises methanol, at least one modifier compound and at least one POC. The P(AS) recycle mixture is obtained when a P(AS) reaction mixture is contacted with methanol in various different processes described subsequently in this disclosure. P(AS) reaction mixtures useful in this invention can be produced by any method known in the art. Examples of the reaction mixtures useful in this invention are those prepared according to U.S. Patents 3,919,177, 4,038,261, 4,038,262, 4,116,947, 4,282,347 and 4,350,810, the entire disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference.

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Generally, P(AS) reaction mixtures useful in this invention are prepared by contacting a halogenated aromatic compound, at least one POC, at least one sulfur source, at least one base, and at least one modifier compound under polymerization reaction conditions to produce high molecular weight P(AS). The use of modifier compounds in the production of high molecular weight P(AS) is disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,334,701, herein incorporated by reference.

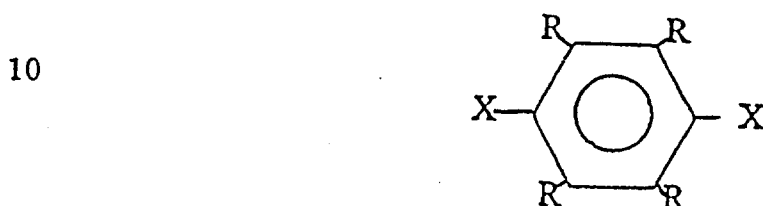
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As used herein, the term "high molecular weight" or "high molecular weight P(AS)" means all P(AS) molecules having molecular weights high enough to

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be commercially desirable and useable in an uncured state. Generally, the melt flow of a high molecular weight P(AS) is less than about 3,000 g/10 minutes. As used herein, the term "low molecular weight" or "low molecular weight P(AS)" means all P(AS) molecules having molecular weights too low to be commercially desirable and, thus, not useable in an uncured state. Generally, the melt flow of a low molecular weight P(AS) is greater than about 3,000 g/10 minutes.

Halogenated aromatic compounds suitable for producing reaction mixtures useful in this invention can be represented by the formula



wherein X is a halogen, and R is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, halogens, and alkyl, cycloalkyl, aryl, alkylaryl, and arylalkyl radicals having from about 6 to about 24 carbon atoms. Exemplary halogenated aromatic compounds include, but are not limited to, *p*-dichlorobenzene (DCB), *p*-dibromobenzene, *p*-diiodobenzene, 1-chloro-4-bromobenzene, 1-chloro-4-iodobenzene, 1-bromo-4-iodobenzene, 2,5-dichlorotoluene, 2,5-dichloro-*p*-xylene, 1-ethyl-4-isopropyl-2,5-dibromobenzene, 1,2,4,5-tetramethyl-3,6-dichlorobenzene, 1-butyl-4-cyclohexyl-2,5-dibromobenzene, 1-hexyl-3-dodecyl-2,5-dichlorobenzene, 1-octadecyl-2,4-diiodobenzene, 1-chloro-2-phenyl-4-bromobenzene, 1,4-diiodo-2-*p*-tolylbenzene, 1,4-dibromo-2-benzylbenzene, 1-octyl-4-(3-methylcyclopentyl)-2,5-dichlorobenzene, and mixtures thereof. The preferred halogenated aromatic compound to produce the reaction mixture is DCB, due to availability, ease of use, and high polymerization productivity.

At least one POC must be utilized to produce the reaction mixture. Exemplary POCs include, but are not limited to, cyclic or acyclic organic amides having from about 1 to about 10 carbon atoms per molecule. Exemplary POCs are selected from the group consisting of formamide, acetamide, N-methylformamide, N,N-dimethylformamide, N,N-dimethyl-acetamide, N-ethylpropionamide, N,N-dipropylbutyramide, 2-pyrrolidone, N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP), ϵ -caprolactam, N-methyl- ϵ -caprolactam, N,N'-ethylenedi-2-pyrrolidone, hexamethylphosphoramide,

tetramethylurea, and mixtures thereof. The preferred POC for use in producing the reaction mixture is NMP due to availability and ease of use.

Any suitable source of sulfur can be used to produce the reaction mixture. Exemplary sulfur sources are selected from the group consisting of
5 thiosulfates, substituted and unsubstituted thioureas, cyclic and acyclic thioamides, thiocarbamates, thiocarbonates, trithiocarbonates, organic sulfur-containing compounds selected from mercaptans, mercaptides and sulfides, hydrogen sulfide, phosphorous pentasulfide, carbon disulfides and carbon oxysulfides, and alkali metal
10 sulfides and bisulfides, and mixtures thereof. It generally is preferred to use an alkali metal bisulfide as a source of sulfur wherein the alkali metal is selected from the group consisting of sodium, potassium, lithium, rubidium, and cesium due to availability and ease of use. The preferred alkali metal bisulfide is sodium bisulfide (NaSH) due to availability and low cost.

Suitable bases to produce the reaction mixture are alkali metal
15 hydroxides selected from the group consisting of lithium hydroxide, sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, rubidium hydroxide, cesium hydroxide, and mixtures thereof. If desired, the base can be produced in-situ by reaction of the corresponding oxide with water. The preferred base is sodium hydroxide (NaOH) due to availability and ease of use.

20 At least one modifier compound is utilized to produce the reaction mixture. The modifier compound is selected from the group consisting of alkali metal carboxylates, alkali metal halides which are soluble in POC, water, and mixtures thereof.

Alkali metal carboxylate modifier compounds can be represented by
25 the formula $R^1\text{-COOM}$, where R^1 of the modifier compound is a hydrocarbyl radical having from 1 to about 20 carbon atoms and is selected from the group consisting of alkyl, cycloalkyl, and aryl and combinations thereof such as alkylaryl, alkyl-cycloalkyl, cycloalkylalkyl, arylalkyl, arylcycloalkyl, alkylarylalkyl and alkyl-cycloalkylalkyl, and M is an alkali metal selected from the group consisting of
30 lithium, sodium, potassium, rubidium and cesium. Preferably, in order to have a more efficient polymerization reaction, R^3 is an alkyl radical having from 1 to about 6 carbon atoms or a phenyl radical, and M is lithium or sodium. If desired, the

alkali metal carboxylate modifier compound can be employed as a hydrate or as a solution or dispersion in water. If desired, the alkali metal carboxylate modifier compound can be produced in-situ by a reaction of the corresponding carboxylic acid and an alkali metal hydroxide or carbonate.

5 Suitable alkali metal carboxylate modifier compounds which can be employed to produce the reaction mixture are selected from the group consisting of lithium acetate, sodium acetate, potassium acetate, lithium propionate, sodium propionate, lithium 2-methylpropionate, rubidium butyrate, lithium valerate, sodium valerate, cesium hexanoate, lithium heptanoate, lithium 2-methyloctanoate, 10 potassium dodecanoate, rubidium 4-ethyltetradecanoate, sodium octadecanoate, sodium heneicosanoate, lithium cyclohexanecarboxylate, cesium cyclododecane-carboxylate, sodium 3-methyl-cyclopentanecarboxylate, potassium cyclohexylacetate, potassium benzoate, lithium benzoate, sodium benzoate, potassium *m*-toluate, lithium phenyl-acetate, sodium 4-phenylcyclohexanecarboxylate, potassium *p*- 15 tolylacetate, lithium 4-ethylcyclohexylacetate, and mixtures thereof. The preferred alkali metal carboxylate modifier compound for use in this invention is sodium acetate (NaOAc) due to availability, low cost, and effectiveness.

Alkali metal halide modifier compounds useful in this invention are those which are soluble in the POC or can be made soluble in a mixture of the POC 20 and another modifier compound. For example, lithium chloride can be useful as the modifier compound, since it is soluble in certain POCs, such as, for example, NMP.

At the termination of the polymerization reaction, the reaction mixture comprises high molecular weight P(AS), low molecular weight P(AS), cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers, at least one POC, at least one modifier 25 compound, an alkali metal by-product, and water. The reaction mixture is in a substantially liquid form at reaction temperatures. Alkali metal halide by-product is present as a precipitate.

The first separation zone can comprise any means known in the art to separate the recycle mixture. Preferably, a fractionation column is utilized at 30 sufficient temperatures and pressures to allow substantially all of the methanol to be recovered in one stream and the recycle feedstock mixture to be recovered in a different stream. Both the methanol and recycle feedstock mixture can be reused.

Removal of substantially all of the methanol from the recycle mixture can cause the modifier compound to precipitate. For example, since sodium acetate is not appreciably soluble in NMP, sodium acetate can precipitate when the methanol is removed. Preferably, the separating is conducted in the presence of water in order for the modifier compound to form a solution with water and the POC, so that the solution can be handled more easily. Generally, about 2 to about 10 moles of water per mole of modifier compound are added to adequately form the solution. Preferably, about 3 to about 8 moles of water per mole of modifier compound are added, and most preferably, 4 moles to 6 moles of water per mole of modifier compound are added to adequately form the solution.

In a first embodiment of this invention, a process is provided to produce a P(AS) recycle mixture by contacting methanol with a quench process reaction mixture comprising high molecular weight P(AS), low molecular weight P(AS), cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers, at least one POC, at least one modifier compound, and an alkali metal halide by-product to produce. In a quench process, the reaction mixture is cooled to a temperature below about 240°C, preferably to a temperature in a range of 100°C to 240°C. The quench recovery process is disclosed in U.S. Patents Nos. 4,414,729 and 5,128,445.

The first step of the first embodiment comprises contacting the quench process reaction mixture with methanol to produce a quench process methanol-rich mixture. Methanol must be used to remove a majority of the POC and modifier compound from the quench process reaction mixture.

Generally, the quench process reaction mixture is contacted with methanol at a temperature sufficient to remove a majority of the modifier compound and POC. Preferably, the quench process reaction mixture is contacted with methanol at a temperature in a range of about 20°C to about 50°C. In this temperature range, losses of methanol are minimized. Generally, about 1.5 to about 15 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS) are used to recover the modifier compound and the POC. Preferably, about 7 to about 11 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS) are used, and most preferably, 8 to 10 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS). The preferred ranges are established to adequately and economically remove the modifier compound and POC from the quench process

reaction mixture.

Generally, the quench process reaction mixture is contacted with methanol a sufficient number of times to adequately remove a majority of the modifier compound and the POC. Preferably, the quench process reaction mixture is contacted with methanol in at least three repetitions. The quench process reaction mixture can be contacted with methanol by any method known in the art. For example, counter-current washing techniques can be utilized. In counter-current washing, the quench process reaction mixture flows in one direction, and methanol flows in the opposite direction.

The second step of the first embodiment of this invention comprises separating the quench process methanol-rich mixture to produce a high molecular weight P(AS) product, a recycle mixture, and optionally, a low molecular weight P(AS) stream. The recycle mixture comprises methanol, POC, and modifier compound. The low molecular weight P(AS) stream comprises low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers.

The separation can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are not limited to, screening, centrifugation, and filtration.

The high molecular weight P(AS) product can be contacted with water to produce a water-washed high molecular weight P(AS) product and an alkali metal halide by-product stream. The alkali metal halide by-product stream comprises water, methanol, and alkali metal halide by-product. The water-washed high molecular weight P(AS) product and alkali metal halide by-product then are separated by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are not limited to, centrifugation and filtration.

Various additives can be mixed with the high molecular weight P(AS) product obtained in the present invention. Common additives include, but are not limited to, inorganic fillers (e.g., glass fiber, carbon fiber, titanium oxide, calcium carbonate, etc.) antioxidants, heat stabilizers, ultraviolet absorbers, coloring agents, and mixtures thereof.

If necessary, other polymers such as, for example, polyamides, polysulfones, polycarbonates, polyether sulfones, polyethylene terephthalates,

polybutylene terephthalates, polyethylenes, polypropylenes, polytetrafluoro-ethylenes, polyether ester elastomers, and polyether amide elastomers also can be added.

If desired, the high molecular weight P(AS) product can also be
5 cured by heating at temperatures up to about 480°C to provide cured products having improved properties and high thermal stability and good chemical resistance.

The recycle mixture is then separated in the first separation zone as discussed previously.

The alkali metal halide by-product stream can be separated in a
10 second separation zone to produce methanol and a brine stream, wherein the brine stream comprises water and alkali metal halide by-product. The second separation zone can comprise any means known in the art to separate the alkali metal halide by-product stream. Preferably, a fractionation column is utilized at sufficient temperatures and pressures to allow methanol to be recovered in one stream and the
15 brine to be recovered in a different stream. The methanol can be reused.

In a second embodiment of this invention, another process is provided to produce said P(AS) recycle mixture. The first step of the second embodiment comprises contacting the quench process reaction mixture with at least one POC at a temperature sufficient to dissolve substantially all of the low molecular weight
20 P(AS) and cyclic and linear oligomers to produce a quench process POC-rich mixture.

The POC can be any POC previously discussed in this disclosure, and preferably, is NMP due to its availability and ease of use. Generally, the POC is at a temperature in a range of about 100°C to about 220°C. Preferably, the POC is at
25 a temperature in a range of about 135°C to about 200°C, most preferably, 150°C to 175°C. At temperatures below about 135°C, the solubility of low molecular weight P(AS) in POC is significantly lower. At temperatures above 200°C, if NMP is used as the POC, the vapor pressure of NMP can require that the contacting be conducted in a pressure vessel. The higher the temperature of contacting the reaction mixture
30 with the POC, the greater the amount of low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers that can be removed from the reaction mixture.

Preferably, sufficient POC can be added during contacting to produce

a POC-rich mixture that adequately dissolves the low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers. This allows removal of substantially all of the low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers from the quench process reaction mixture, thus producing a higher purity high molecular weight P(AS) product. Preferably, about 2 to about 7 moles of POC per mole of P(AS) are added for adequate removal. Most preferably, 3 to 6 moles of POC per mole of P(AS) are used.

Generally, the quench process reaction mixture is contacted with the POC at a temperature sufficient to dissolve substantially all of the low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear oligomers. The quench process reaction mixture can be contacted with the POC multiple times to further remove the low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers.

Contacting times between the quench process reaction mixture and the POC should be sufficient to dissolve substantially all of the low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear oligomers. Contact times as short as 1 minute can be adequate to remove low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers from the quench process reaction mixture.

The second step in the second embodiment comprises separating the quench process POC-rich mixture to produce a quench process solid stream and a quench process liquid stream. The quench process solid stream is in a substantially solid form and comprises the high molecular weight P(AS), the POC, modifier compound, and the alkali metal halide by-product. The high molecular weight P(AS) is in a substantially granular form. The quench process liquid stream is in a substantially liquid form and comprises the POC, the modifier compound, and substantially all of the low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers. The low molecular weight P(AS) is in the form of fine solids.

The separation should be completed at a temperature similar to the temperature at which the POC was contacted with the quench process reaction mixture. If the quench process POC-rich mixture is cooled, the low molecular weight P(AS) and linear and cyclic oligomers can precipitate on the high molecular weight P(AS) product, thereby decreasing the efficiency of removal. This separation can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example,

screening can be used.

The third step of the second embodiment comprises contacting the quench process solid stream with methanol to produce a quench process methanol-rich P(AS) product mixture. Methanol must be used to remove a majority of the POC and modifier compound from the quench process solid stream.

Generally, the quench process solid stream is contacted with methanol at a temperature sufficient to remove a majority of the modifier compound and POC. Preferably, the quench process solid stream is contacted with methanol at a temperature in a range of about 20°C to about 50°C. In this temperature range, losses of methanol are minimized. Generally, about 1.5 to about 15 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS) are used to recover the modifier compound and the POC. Preferably, about 7 to about 11 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS) are used, and most preferably, 8 to 10 pounds of methanol per pound of P(AS). The preferred ranges are established to adequately and economically remove the modifier compound and POC from the quench process solid stream.

Generally, the quench process solid stream is contacted with methanol a sufficient number of times to adequately remove a majority of the modifier compound and the POC. Preferably, the quench process solid stream is contacted with methanol in at least three repetitions. The quench process solid stream can be contacted with methanol by any method known in the art. For example, counter-current washing techniques can be utilized. In counter-current washing, the quench process solid stream flows in one direction, and methanol flows in the opposite direction.

The fourth step of the second embodiment comprises separating the quench process methanol-rich P(AS) product mixture to produce a high molecular weight P(AS) product and a recycle mixture. The recycle mixture comprises methanol, POC, and modifier compound.

The recycle mixture can be separated in the first separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

The high molecular weight P(AS) product can be contacted with water to produce a water-washed high molecular weight P(AS) product and an alkali metal halide by-product stream. The alkali metal halide by-product stream can be

treated in the second separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

In a third embodiment of this invention, another process is provided to produce the P(AS) recycle mixture. The first step in the third embodiment comprises contacting the quench process liquid stream with methanol to produce a
5 quench process methanol-rich low molecular weight P(AS) mixture. The same conditions as used in contacting the quench process solid stream with methanol can be used.

The second step in the third embodiment comprises separating the quench process methanol-rich low molecular weight P(AS) mixture to produce a
10 low molecular weight P(AS) product and the P(AS) recycle mixture. The P(AS) recycle mixture comprises the methanol, POC, and modifier compound. The low molecular weight P(AS) product comprises the low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers. The separation can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are not
15 limited to, centrifugation and filtration.

The recycle mixture can be separated in the first separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

The low molecular weight P(AS) product can be contacted with water to produce a water-washed low molecular weight P(AS) product and an alkali metal
20 halide by-product stream. The alkali metal halide by-product stream can be treated in the second separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

In a fourth embodiment of this invention, a process is provided to produce the P(AS) recycle mixture from contacting a flash process reaction mixture with methanol. In a flash recovery process, the reaction mixture is subjected to low
25 pressure evaporation to remove a majority of the POC. If desired, the POC can be recycled for subsequent polymerizations after condensation. After flash recovery, a flash process reaction mixture is produced comprising high molecular weight PAS, low molecular weight P(AS), cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers, alkali metal halide by-product, modifier compound, and POC.

30 Conditions employed during the flash recovery process can vary appreciably but preferably reduced pressures can be employed. Generally, pressure in the flash recovery process should be sufficient to evaporate about 30% to about

90% of the POC, typically, a pressure reduction of approximately 200 psig is required. Pressures as low as 0.05 psig can be employed although the pressure generally is not below one psig. Temperatures of the reaction mixture from the reactor usually range from about 200°C to about 325°C. Temperatures in a flash
5 recovery vessel after pressure reduction generally range from about 90°C to about 200°C depending upon the pressure in the flash recovery vessel.

Various methods of flash recovery of P(AS) are known in the art including U.S. Patent Nos. 3,478,000 and 3,956,060.

The first step of the fourth embodiment comprises contacting the
10 flash process reaction mixture with methanol to produce a flash process methanol-rich mixture. The procedures for contacting the flash process reaction mixture with methanol is the same as discussed previously for the quench process reaction mixture.

The second step of the third embodiment comprises separating the
15 flash process methanol-rich mixture to produce a P(AS) product and a recycle mixture. The recycle mixture comprises methanol, POC, and modifier compound. The P(AS) product comprises high molecular weight P(AS), low molecular weight P(AS), and cyclic and linear P(AS) oligomers. The separation can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are
20 not limited, centrifugation and filtration.

The recycle mixture can be separated in the first separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

The P(AS) product can be contacted with water to produce a water-washed P(AS) product and an alkali metal halide by-product stream. The alkali
25 metal halide by-product stream can be treated in the second separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

In a fifth embodiment of this invention, another process is provided to produce the P(AS) recycle mixture from a flash process reaction mixture. The first step of the fifth embodiment comprises contacting the flash process reaction
30 mixture with at least one POC at a temperature sufficient to dissolve a majority of the low molecular weight P(AS) and cyclic and linear oligomers to produce a flash process POC-rich mixture. The flash process reaction mixture is contacted with

POC by the same method discussed previously for the quench process reaction mixture.

5 The second step of the fifth embodiment comprises separating the flash process POC-rich mixture to produce a flash process solid stream and a flash process liquid stream. The flash process solid stream is in a substantially solid form and comprises insoluble P(AS), the POC, modifier compound, and the alkali metal halide by-product. The flash process liquid stream is in a substantially liquid form and comprises soluble P(AS) and the POC. The separating can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are not
10 limited, centrifugation and filtration.

The third step of the fifth embodiment comprises contacting the flash process solid stream with methanol to produce a flash process methanol-rich P(AS) product mixture. The flash process solid stream is contacted with methanol by the same method discussed previously for the quench process solid stream.

15 The fourth step of the fifth embodiment comprises separating the flash process methanol-rich P(AS) product mixture to produce a high molecular weight P(AS) product and the recycle mixture. The recycle mixture comprises methanol, the POC, and modifier compound. The separation can be accomplished by any process known in the art. For example, such processes can include, but are
20 not limited, centrifugation and filtration.

The recycle mixture can be separated in the first separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

The high molecular weight P(AS) product can be contacted with water to produce a water-washed high molecular weight P(AS) product and an alkali
25 metal halide by-product stream. The alkali metal halide by-product stream can be treated in the second separation zone as discussed previously in this disclosure.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

The following example shows that methanol can be separated from
30 NMP by fractionation.

75 grams of methanol and 75 grams of NMP (Fisher Purified Grade) were added to a 250 milliliter round bottom flask containing boiling chips. The

flask was attached to a vacuum jacketed fractionating column. Heat was applied to the round bottom flask using a heating mantle. The vacuum jacketed fractionating column heated slowly due to internal reflux. A vapor started to flow through a condenser and into a receiver to produce an overhead liquid stream. The flow of vapor slowed until the temperature of the fractionating column increased with further heating of the round bottom flask. Upon reaching the boiling point of NMP, the flow of the overhead liquid stream resumed. Then, the vacuum jacketed fractionating column was cooled to room temperature. Heating of the round bottom flash was then terminated.

10 Fractions of the overhead liquid stream were collected in small vials. These fractions and a sample of liquid remaining in the round bottom flask were analyzed using gas chromatography. Analyses of the fractions indicated that 99.547 % by weight of the overhead liquid stream collected was methanol and 0.453 % by weight was NMP. Analysis of the sample of the liquid in the round bottom flask
15 was found to be 100% NMP.

 Thus, methanol can be removed efficiently from NMP.

Example 2

 This example shows separation of a recycle mixture to produce methanol and a recycle feedstock mixture.

20 A recycle mixture containing 78.03 wt. % NMP, 15.90 wt.% methanol, and 6.07 wt.% sodium acetate was fed to a laboratory continuous distillation kettle at a continuous rate of 504.20 cm³/hr. A small quantity of NMP was initially added to the kettle. The kettle was heated until the recycle mixture reached reflux at which point the kettle temperature was approximately 210°C, and
25 the temperature throughout the column was about 66-208°C. A methanol stream was recovered through an overhead splitter and routed to an overhead condenser, and then to an overhead receiver. The overhead splitter was set to collect for 0.2 minutes and to discharge to the overhead receiver for 5 seconds. The recycle feedstock mixture was pumped from the kettle at a rate of 87.40 cm³/hr. After
30 approximately one hour, samples were collected of the methanol stream and the recycle feedstock mixture in the bottom of the kettle.

 The recycle feedstock mixture and methanol stream were analyzed by

gas chromatography. The recycle feedstock mixture contained 99.50 wt.% NMP, 0.29 wt.% methanol, and 0.21 wt.% of other compounds. The methanol stream contained 99.73 wt% methanol, 0.08 wt.% NMP, and 0.19 wt.% other compounds.

During the experiment, it was noted by visual inspection that the sodium acetate accumulated in the bottom of the distillation kettle and column.

This example teaches that methanol can be removed efficiently from sodium acetate and NMP.

Example 3

This example demonstrates that water can be added to a recycle mixture to help prevent the accumulation of sodium acetate in the bottom of the distillation kettle.

The same procedures as disclosed in Example 2 were utilized except the recycle mixture contained 14.60 wt.% methanol, 72.00 wt.% NMP, 4.60 wt.% sodium acetate, and 8.8 wt.% water. The kettle temperature was approximately 190-198°C, and the temperature throughout the column was approximately 68-102°C. The overhead splitter was set to collect for 0.3 minutes and to discharge to the overhead receiver for 5 seconds

Samples of the methanol stream and the recycle feedstock mixture were collected after 8.66 hours of distillation and analyzed by gas chromatography. The recycle feedstock mixture contained 97.53 wt.% NMP, 0.00 wt.% methanol, 1.63 wt.% water, and 0.16 wt.% of other compounds. The methanol stream contained 97.36 wt% methanol, 0.03 wt.% NMP, 2.60 wt. % water, and 0.02 wt.% other compounds. Negligible precipitation of sodium acetate was observed in the bottom of the distillation kettle. Ion chromatograph was used to determine the amount of sodium acetate in the recycle feedstock mixture. 0.69 % by weight sodium acetate was found.

This experiment illustrates that the addition of water to the recycle mixture substantially prevents the accumulation of sodium acetate in the bottom of the distillation kettle. An exact mass balance was not achieved in this experiment for the sodium acetate since the distillation was not continued for a long enough duration.

CLAIMS

1. A process to recover at least one polar organic compound and at least one modifier from a P(AS) recycle mixture comprising said at least one polar organic compound, said at least one modifier and methanol, said process comprising passing said P(AS) recycle mixture along with water to a separation zone; and

recovering polar organic compound and modifier as a recycle feedstock mixture.

2. A process according to claim 1 wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture is produced by a process comprising:

1) contacting a quench process reaction mixture with methanol to produce a quench process methanol-rich mixture;

wherein said quench process reaction mixture comprising high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers, at least one polar organic compound, at least one modifier compound, and an alkali metal halide by-product;

2) separating said quench process methanol-rich mixture to produce a high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product, said P(AS) recycle mixture, and optionally, a low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) stream;

wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture comprises methanol, said polar organic compound, and said modifier compound; wherein said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) stream comprises low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) and cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers.

3. A process according to claim 1 wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture is produced by a process comprising:

1) contacting a quench process reaction mixture comprising high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers, at least one POC, at least one modifier, and an alkali metal halide by-product with at least one polar organic compound at a temperature sufficient to dissolve substantially all of said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) and cyclic and linear oligomers to produce a quench process polar organic compound-rich mixture;

- 2) separating said quench process polar organic compound-rich mixture to produce a quench process solid stream and a quench process liquid stream; wherein said quench process solid stream is in a substantially solid form and comprises said high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), said polar organic compound, said modifier compound, and said alkali metal halide by-product; wherein said quench process liquid stream is in a substantially liquid form and comprises substantially all of said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) and cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers, said polar organic compound, and said modifier compound;
- 3) contacting said quench process solid stream with methanol to produce a quench process methanol-rich poly(arylene sulfide) product mixture; and
- 4) separating said quench process methanol-rich poly(arylene sulfide) product mixture to produce a high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product and said P(AS) recycle mixture; wherein said recycle mixture comprises methanol, said polar organic compound, and said modifier compound.

4. A process according to claim 3 wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture is produced by a process comprising:

- 1) contacting said quench process liquid stream with methanol to produce a quench process methanol-rich low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) mixture;
- 2) separating said quench process methanol-rich low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) mixture to produce a low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product and a second P(AS) recycle mixture; wherein said second P(AS) recycle mixture comprises methanol, said polar organic compound, and said modifier compound; and wherein said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product comprises said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) and cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers.

5. A process according to claim 1 wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture is produced by a process comprising:

1) contacting a flash process reaction mixture with methanol to produce a flash process methanol-rich mixture;

wherein said flash process reaction mixture comprises high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product, low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers, at least one POC, at least one modifier, and an alkali metal halide by-product

2) separating said flash process methanol-rich mixture to produce a poly(arylene sulfide) product and said P(AS) recycle mixture;

wherein said poly(arylene sulfide) product comprises high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), and cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers;

wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture comprises methanol, said polar organic compound, and said modifier compound.

6. A process according to claim 1 wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture is produced by a process comprising:

1) contacting a flash process reaction mixture comprising high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide), cyclic and linear poly(arylene sulfide) oligomers, at least one POC, at least one modifier, and an alkali metal halide by-product with at least one polar organic compound at a temperature sufficient to dissolve a majority of said low molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) and cyclic and linear oligomers to produce a flash process polar organic compound-rich mixture;

2) separating said flash process polar organic compound-rich mixture to produce a flash process solid stream and a flash process liquid stream;

wherein said flash process solid stream is in a substantially solid form and comprises insoluble poly(arylene sulfide), said polar organic compound, said

modifier compound, and said alkali metal halide by-product;
wherein said flash process liquid stream is in a substantially liquid form and comprises soluble poly(arylene sulfide) and said polar organic compound;
3) contacting said flash process solid stream with methanol to produce a flash process methanol-rich poly(arylene sulfide) product mixture; and
4) separating said flash process methanol-rich poly(arylene sulfide) product mixture to produce a high molecular weight poly(arylene sulfide) product and said P(AS) recycle mixture;
wherein said P(AS) recycle mixture comprises methanol, said polar organic compound, and modifier compound.

7. A process according to claim 6 further comprising recycling said flash process liquid stream to a poly(arylene sulfide) polymerization process.
8. A process according to any preceding claim wherein said recycle feedstock mixture is recovered as a liquid.
9. A method according to any preceding claim wherein said water is added in an amount sufficient to form a solution of said at least one modifier compound in said separation zone.
10. A method according to any preceding claim wherein said water is added in an amount within the range of 2-10 moles of said water per mole of said modifier compound.
11. A method according to any preceding claim wherein said water is added in an amount within the range of 3-8 moles of said water per mole of said modifier compound.
12. A process according to any preceding claim wherein said P(AS) is poly(phenylene sulfide) and said polar organic compound is NMP.