

Waste Processing Apparatus and Method

Technical Field

[00001] The present invention relates to the treatment of municipal solid waste and the like.

Background of the Invention

[00002] The present invention relates to systems and methods for treating process material and, more particularly, to systems and methods for treating municipal solid waste material, medical waste material, reclaimed paper and the like.

[00003] As a result of increasing scarcity of landfills and more stringent environmental regulations, efforts have been made to reduce the volume of process material, such as municipal solid waste ("MSW") and paper material, such as newsprint and other reclaimed and recycled paper products as a step in the process of disposing of the material, either by depositing it in landfills, incinerating it or recycling it.

[00004] Systems and methods have been developed to break down such material for disposal, or in the case of paper products, use as insulation.

[00005] An example of such a process and device is U.S. Pat. No. 5,190,226, which discloses an apparatus and method for separation, recovery and recycling of MSW. The apparatus includes a rotating drum which is fed at an upstream end by a reciprocating ram, a steam source which is connected to introduce high temperature steam into the drum, and a spiral rib or flight mounted within the drum to transport material deposited in an upstream end of the drum along the length of the drum.

[00006] Another example is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,119,994 that describes a steam treatment vessel held stationary, preferably at an angle to the horizontal.

[00007] One of the disadvantages of the arrangements of the prior art is that portions of the waste product charge in the vessel becomes compacted, either passively by maintaining the vessel at a fixed position with respect to the horizontal, or actively through the use of spiral or helical rib arrangements that urge portions of the charge against active surfaces in a horizontal direction (or a direction parallel to the longitudinal axis of the vessel) as the vessel is rotated. In some instances, the compacted portions of the waste product charge cause portions of the waste product charge to be sequestered from the steam treatment environment.

[00008] Another disadvantage of the prior art is that prior systems and methods do not allow for the most advantageous control and distribution of energy placed into the vessel, and its efficient transfer to the waste charge mass. In addition, each charge of waste products will vary in its constituents, and thereby in its heat capacity and in its energy requirements for effective treatment. In methods of the prior art, either the process parameters (temperature, pressure, or time) had to be varied with each charge of waste, or the consistency of the processed product (i.e., particle size, moisture content, degree of break down and processing generally) varied with batch to batch. This made an economically and technically viable industrial process for the treatment of waste less than efficient.

[00009] Accordingly, it is also advantageous to be able to determine the heat capacity of a given charge of waste products thereby to determine the energy requirements for effective treatment of that charge, in order treatment can be carried out with higher efficiency.

[000010] One method of attempting to reach achieve more efficient treatment is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,397,492 and involves the continual supply of steam during loading, while simultaneously rotating the vessel, so as to break down the waste during loading to a material of roughly uniform density, so that the same mass of waste is processed in each batch. However, this process requires a separate steam treatment during loading which results in greater overall time requirements for each waste batch.

[000011] Accordingly, there remains a need for methods that allow for greater time and energy efficiency while allowing the process of waste in charges that vary in weight and constituents.

[000012] The present invention accordingly represents an improvement over prior art apparatus and methods, such as those described in U.S. Patents Nos. 5,540,391; 5,1126,363; 5,253,764; 5,190,226; 5,361,994; 5,427,650; 5,407,809; and 6,397,492, all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

Summary of the Invention

[000013] The present invention includes an apparatus for processing solid waste products, the apparatus comprising a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel having a first end, a second end and an interior surface, at least one end terminating in a hatch that may be opened to allow access to the interior of the vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of the vessel; a steam inlet for injecting steam disposed at one or both ends; a plurality of substantially straight blades protruding from the interior surface of the vessel, and each the blade extending substantially the entire length of the vessel, so as to be capable of transporting waste material from the bottom of the vessel toward the top of the vessel, and releasing the waste material to

fall to the bottom of the vessel; and at least one actuator for moving the vessel between a position wherein the first end is higher than the second end and a position wherein the second end is higher than the first end (that is, such that the vessel is moved between a position wherein the first end is directed upward from the horizontal, and a position wherein the second end is directed upward from the horizontal).

[000014] The vessel may be supported in any fashion that allows this movement. It is preferred that the vessel be supported by a hinged fulcrum point about which it may be moved.

[000015] The vessel further includes at least one door or hatch, or similar means to access the interior of the vessel for loading and unloading the waste charge, which may be transported to the vessel by a conveyor or other traditional means.

[000016] The apparatus includes a means for rotating the vessel, such as those known and used in the art, such as trunnion rings and rollers, or chain-driven gear and sprocket systems or a "spud" ring. Any stable method of rotating the vessel at a controlled speed would be suitable. The rotation of the vessel however must also be able to accommodate its movement by the actuator(s) as described herein.

[000017] The arrangement of the blades and the interior of the vessel preferably are such that there are essentially no surfaces against which the charge of waste products may become compressed laterally during rotation of the vessel; i.e., in a direction parallel to the longitudinal axis of the vessel; and that an open central region is provided through substantially the entire length of the vessel (i.e., the treatment space of the vessel). Such an arrangement permits portions of the charge of waste products to be transported from the bottom of the vessel toward the top of

the vessel, and released to fall to the bottom of the vessel through the pressurized steam environment as discreet relatively low density portions to increase the surface area of that portion with respect to the steam environment of the vessel.

[000018] In an alternative embodiment, the blades may be arranged such that adjacent pairs of blades converge toward opposite ends of the vessel. In this variation, it is preferred that each blade be provided with a slight twist along its length such that it provides a slight time between the fall of the portion of the mass on the upper end of the blade as it rises toward the top of the vessel upon rotation, with respect to the portion of the mass on the relatively lower end of the blade. In this regard, the blades are slightly twisted such that ends of adjacent blades that converge are twisted away from one another while ends of adjacent blades that diverge are twisted toward one another.

[000019] The vessel will have many of the same characteristics of those known and used in the art, in terms of being designed to contain large quantities of matter (i.e., several tons) and to hold those contents under pressure.

[000020] The steam inlet(s) is/are provided with steam by steam conduits that are adapted to accommodate movement of the vessel. The steam conduits may be any conduit material appropriate for the transmission of high pressure steam. The conduits are flexible or otherwise provided with sufficiently flexible or articulated joints to accommodate the movement of the vessel, and are typically controlled by one or more valves for selectively introducing steam into and out of the vessel during the processing of the waste. The steam may be provided at any location along the length of the vessel, and several arrangements are known for providing a number of steam inlets along the length of such a vessel. However, the simplest arrangement

is to provide steam inlets at one or both ends of the vessel. The steam provided to the vessel may be saturated steam or super-heated steam, and may be provided statically or as a stream through the vessel, or even in the form of discrete steam pulses into the vessel, such as pulses of super-heated steam.

[000021] The actuators may be any apparatus capable of moving the vessel between a position wherein the first end is higher than the second end and a position wherein the second end is higher than the first end. The actuator typically is adapted to move the vessel between a position wherein the first end is higher than the second end and a position wherein the second end is higher than the first end at such a rate so as to be capable of leveling a charge of solid waste products disposed therein. Examples may include hydraulic actuators and mechanical screw actuators, which may be provided in pairs disposed respectively on either side of the gravitational center of the vessel. The actuators may be for instance, linear mechanical screw actuators, such as those commercially available under the name Joyce ComDrive from Joyce of Dayton, Ohio, and those commercially available from Duff-Norton of Charlotte, North Carolina.

[000022] The apparatus may also include load sensors independent of or associated with the actuator(s). The load sensors may be of any type capable of sensing and recording loads of the magnitude typically associated with waste treatment vessels of the type of the present invention.

[000023] The apparatus optionally includes a microprocessor or PLC controller associated with the load sensors, the microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions so as to determine the load distributed within the vessel, such as at the position of each of the actuators. The microprocessor or PLC

controller further may be adapted to signal the actuators in response to changes in the distribution of a charge of waste products contained in the vessel.

[000024] The apparatus may also include a plurality of thermocouples or thermometers disposed along the length of the vessel. These may have a microprocessor or PLC controller associated with them, the microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions adapted to calculate the amount of energy absorbed by a charge of waste products contained in the vessel over time.

[000025] The apparatus may also include a control system to operate the vessel system and may comprise a computer program code product that controls a computer comprising one or more central processor units (CPUs) interconnected to a memory system with peripheral control components, such as for example, a Pentium® microprocessor, commercially available from Intel Corporation, Santa Clara, Calif.

[000026] Most preferably the apparatus has load sensors associated with or independent of the actuator(s), the load sensors adapted to determine the mass of a charge of waste products contained in the vessel, and a microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions so as to determine the energy absorption per mass of a charge of waste products contained in the vessel.

[000027] The apparatus also includes at least one motor or other means for rotating the vessel. The motor(s) may be connected to the vessel through appropriate drive/transmission means. For instance, the motors may be connected to drive sleeves that surround the vessel, as shown in the figures. Typically, the motor and drive means will be mounted in such an arrangement so as to move along with the

movement of the vessel itself, such as by being mounted on a moveable frame supporting the vessel.

Apparatus with Tip-Leveling Actuator Only

[000028] Still another variation of the present invention is an apparatus for processing solid waste products, comprising: a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel having a first end, a second end and an interior surface, at least one end terminating in a hatch that may be opened to allow access to the interior of the vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of the vessel; a steam inlet for injecting steam disposed at least one of the ends; a plurality of substantially straight blades protruding from the interior surface of the vessel, and each blade extending substantially the entire length of the vessel (i.e., the contained volume that provides steam treatment and movement of the waste charge) , so as to be capable of transporting waste material from the bottom of the vessel toward the top of the vessel, and releasing the waste material to fall to the bottom of the vessel; and at least one actuator for moving the vessel between a position wherein the first end is higher than the second end and a position wherein the second end is higher than the first end.

Apparatus with Agitating Leveling Means Only

[000029] Yet another variation of the present invention is an apparatus for processing solid waste products, the apparatus comprising: a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel having a first end, a second end and an interior surface, at least one end terminating in a hatch that may be opened to allow access to the interior of the vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of the vessel; a steam inlet for injecting steam disposed at least one of the ends; and at least one actuator for

agitating the vessel so as to be capable of leveling a charge of solid waste products disposed therein.

Method of Treating Waste Involving Free Fall through Low Density Zone

[000030] The present invention also includes a method of processing solid waste products in a vessel having a central longitudinal axis, comprising: loading the vessel with a charge of solid waste products along the bottom of the vessel, the vessel having a plurality of substantially straight blades extending from the interior surface of the vessel and each blade extending substantially the entire length of the vessel; sealing the vessel; introducing steam into the vessel; rotating the vessel so as to cause the charge of solid waste products to be moved from the bottom of the vessel to toward the top of the vessel and allowed to fall through the vessel so as to maintain a low density region of waste substantially along the length of the vessel; and thereafter depressurizing the vessel and unloading the processed waste therefrom.

[000031] Typically, the solid waste products are moved from the bottom of the vessel to toward the top of the vessel and allowed to fall in a series of discreet portions through a relatively low density region of the interior of the vessel.

[000032] It is preferred that the vessel is rotated without substantial compression of the charge of solid waste products along a direction parallel to the central longitudinal axis. It is also preferred that the charge of solid waste products is actively leveled while the vessel is being rotated, or that the vessel is agitated while the vessel is being rotated.

[000033] Another preferred aspect of the present method is that the solid waste products are transported back and forth along a direction parallel to the central

longitudinal axis while the vessel is being rotated. This may be accomplished by tilting the vessel using the actuators, and/or by action of the plurality of blades when the configuration is used wherein the blade pairs converge toward opposite ends.

[000034] It is most preferred that the blades be provided in pairs that converge in alternating fashion toward opposite ends of the vessel to provide an additional side-to side movement of the waste charge mass. Further, the blades may be provided with a twist about their longitudinal axis such that a time delay is provided between the descent of the portions of the waste charge mass that are raised by the relatively higher portion of each angled blade, and the portions of the waste charge mass that are raised by the relatively lower portion of each angled blade, as the vessel rotates.

[000035] It is most preferred that the steam is introduced from both ends of the vessel, and most preferred that the steam is superheated steam introduced in pulses into the vessel using appropriate valve and pressure release systems.

[000036] In another preferred variation of the method of the invention, the mass distribution of the charge of solid waste products is measured while the vessel is rotating, and, optionally the energy absorbed by the charge of solid waste products is measured while the vessel is rotating.

[000037] The method of the present invention may also feature measuring the mass distribution of the charge of solid waste products and measuring the energy absorbed by the charge of solid waste products while the vessel is rotating, and determining the time required to treat the charge of solid waste products from the amount of energy absorbed by the charge of solid waste products over time. This in turn allows the operator to halt the treatment of the charge of solid waste products after the time determined to be required to treat the charge of solid waste products

from the amount of energy absorbed by the charge of solid waste products over time. This may be done by the operator or automatically through feedback control from the microprocessors or PLC controllers.

[000038] The apparatus and method of the present invention offers advantages over prior systems that featured helical or augur arrangements designed to move the charge of solid waste products from one end of the vessel to the other, or other interior arrangements that feature surfaces disposed perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the vessel. These arrangements often result in compression of portions of the waste product charge, preventing the efficient and complete treatment of those portions.

[000039] The apparatus and method of the present invention in contrast permits the formation of a zone that extends the length of the vessel by leveling the load prior to treatment initiation or shortly after the start of treatment. The blades of the apparatus of the present invention take portions of the waste product charge and successively raise them and allow them to fall through this low density zone, without substantial compression of any portion of the waste product charge, such as is brought about by transportation of the charge along the longitudinal axis of the vessel, or by maintaining the vessel in a titled position with respect to the horizontal.

[000040] In addition, the apparatus and method of the present invention allows both the load and temperature of zones within the vessel to be monitored, such that the

Brief Description of the Drawings

[000041] Figure 1 is a perspective view of an apparatus for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000042] Figure 1a is another perspective view of an apparatus shown in Figure 1.

[000043] Figure 2 is a cross section view of the vessel for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000044] Figure 3 is another perspective view of an apparatus for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000045] Figure 4 is a plan view of an apparatus for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000046] Figure 5 is a cross section view of the vessel for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000047] Figure 6 is a schematic of a waste processing system with which the present invention may be used, for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000048] Figure 7 is a schematic of a waste processing system with which the present invention may be used, for processing solid waste products in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[000049] Figure 8 is a longitudinal view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel, and shows an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein a plurality of straight blades are used in the vessel.

[000050] Figure 9 is an elevation view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel, and shows an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein a plurality of straight blades are used in the vessel.

[000051] Figure 10 is a perspective view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel, and shows an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein a plurality of straight blades are used in the vessel.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

[000052] In accordance with the foregoing summary, the following provides a detailed description of the preferred embodiment, which is presently considered to be the best mode thereof.

[000053] The invention relates to a process for recycling waste. This process is sterilizing high density materials such as glass, plastics, metals and recovering others from municipal solid waste (MSW) and converting paper, cardboard, food waste, etc. to a usable fiber and separating it from other recyclable materials.

[000054] Figure 1 shows an example of an apparatus for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[000055] Figure 1 shows a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel 1 having a first end, a second end and an interior surface, at least one end terminating in a hatch 2 that may be opened to allow access to the interior of the vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of the vessel. It is preferred that the vessel have a hatch on either end such that the vessel may be opened to allow access to the interior of the vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of the vessel the charge of waste products, and so that it may be loaded one end and removed at the other end. This may be done by using a ram that may push the treated charge from the vessel by extending through the vessel.

[000056] Also shown in Figure 1 is a steam inlet 3 for injecting stem disposed at least one of the ends, and preferably at both ends. Steam inlet 3 may be connected to steam conduits (not shown) so as to introduce and maintain steam pressure into the vessel.

Figure 1 also shows a plurality of substantially straight blades 4 protruding from the interior surface of the vessel, and each blade extending substantially the entire

length of the vessel, so as to be capable of transporting waste material from the bottom of the vessel toward the top of the vessel, and releasing the waste material to fall to the bottom of the vessel.

[000057] The vessel may be rotated with respect to upper frame portion 5, such as by virtue of mechanical sleeve drives 6. The apparatus also includes at least one motor or other means for rotating the vessel.

[000058] The motor(s) 7 may otherwise be connected to the vessel through appropriate drive/transmission means, such as to sprocket by a chain or belt.

[000059] Typically, the motor and drive means will be mounted in such an arrangement so as to move along with the movement of the vessel itself, such as by being mounted on a moveable frame 5 supporting the vessel.

[000060] Upper frame portion 5 in turn is supported by lower frame portion 8 that includes fulcrum pivot portion 9. Also shown in Figure 1 are the mechanical screw actuators 10 on either side of fulcrum pivot portion 9 that move the vessel 1 between a position wherein the first end is higher than the second end and a position wherein the second end is higher than the first end. This movement allows the operator to balance the load of the charge of waste products both before and during the steam treatment. Balancing the charge of waste products during the steam treatment permits the operator to render more uniform the heat transfer to the mass, such as by removing cold spots that may develop in the waste charge mass. The actuators 10 may be linked in tandem across frame 8 by drive rods 11 that are driven by respective electric motors 12.

[000061] The actuators 10 may include load sensors to determine the state of balance of the charge of waste products as originally loaded. Should the charge of

waste products be determined to be out of balance upon initial loading, the actuators 10 may be used to redistribute the load to even its balance, either through back-and-forth oscillation or through rapid agitation, to cause the charge of waste products to shift in position within the vessel. The load sensors may provide signals or information to a microprocessor or PLC controller that is provided with programming instructions to access the load at each sensor, and to provide feedback instructions to the actuators.

[000062] Figure 1 also shows rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel 1 with the first end raised with respect to the second end, such as would be the position for loading the vessel with the aid of input conveyor 13. This position may also be used to discharge the waste products after treatment onto discharge conveyor 14, or to urge the charge of waste products toward the second end in order to level the load of waste products during processing. The position of vessel 1 may of course be varied along the range of positions from horizontal to any angle between the maximum tilt angle shown in Figure 1, and its corresponding opposite.

[000063] Figure 1a is another perspective view of an apparatus shown in Figure 1, showing the discharge or second end lower than the input or first end.

[000064] Figure 3 shows, using the same reference numbers shown in Figure 1, a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel 1 as depicted in Figure 1 with the first end and the second end at about the same height such that the vessel is horizontal. This position is typical of those at which the vessel would be maintained during operation, with relatively small adjustments being made to urge the charge of waste products toward either end in order to level the load of waste products. This view also shows

the second hatch 2a (having steam inlet 3a) which is used as an exit hatch for the treated waste product charge.

[000065] Conversely, Figure 4 shows a top plan view of the rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel 1 as depicted in Figure 1 with the second end raised with respect to the first end, such as may be necessary to move the charge of waste products toward the first end in order to level the load of waste products.

[000066] Figure 5 is a longitudinal cross section view of the vessel system for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, using the same lead lines from the Figures 1 and 2 and taken along line 5 - 5 of Figure 4. Figure 5 shows the angling of one of the blades such as 16a – 16d) shown in Figure 2 (a cross-section along line 2 -2 of Figure 4), and also shows that neighboring pairs of blades converge alternately toward opposite ends of the vessel. This view also shows that the vessel may additionally comprise frusto-conical sections at either end to assist in loading and unloading the vessel, and to help maintain portions of the charge of waste products oriented in the portion of the vessel provided with the blades for agitation. Figures 2 and 5 also show that the blades are preferably slightly twisted such that ends of adjacent blades that converge are twisted away from one another while ends of adjacent blades that diverge are twisted toward from one another.

[000067] Figures 8, 9 and 10 show views of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel as described herein, and shows an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein a plurality of straight blades are used in the vessel.

[000068] Figure 8 shows a longitudinal view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel 20 in place of vessel 1 as described herein, wherein a plurality of straight

blades 21 is used in the vessel. The blades 21 are mounted on individual mounting brackets 22 that serve to hold the blades 21 away from interior surface 23. Figure 8 is a view taken from line 8 -8 of Figure 9. The mounting brackets 22 may also be used to mount the twisted blades as described herein.

[000069] Figure 9 is an elevation view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel 20, and shows in phantom a plurality of straight blades 21 and mounting brackets 22 holding the blades 21 away from interior surface 23.

[000070] Figure 10 is a perspective view of the cylindrical portion of a treatment vessel 20, and shows in phantom a plurality of straight blades 21 and mounting brackets 22 holding the blades 21 away from interior surface 23.

[000071] Figure 6 is a schematic of a waste processing system with which the present invention may be used, for processing solid waste products in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention that permits one-way steam flow through the vessel. This figure shows the various components of a system designed to provide the vessel with steam, and the ancillary components of the preferred embodiment. This figure also shows the positions of valves and gauges using standard indicia, such as control valves, check valves, thermocouples, strainers, pressure gauges, motors and pumps.

[000072] Figure 7 is a schematic of a waste processing system with which the present invention may be used, for processing solid waste products in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention that permits two-way steam flow through the vessel that may be provided in pulses. This figure also shows the positions of valves and gauges using standard indicia, such as control valves, check valves, thermocouples, strainers, pressure gauges, motors and pumps. This

schematic provides an example of a system that permits steam, particularly superheated steam, to be provided in pulses to the vessel of the present invention.

[000073] The views of Figures 3 and 4 are used for illustrative purposes only, and it will be understood that the vessel may be tilted to lesser degrees during processing in order to make lesser adjustments in the load distribution through leveling, and that such movement may be relatively rapid or slower and/or repetitive, depending upon the load situation presented.

[000074] Figure 2 also shows an example of a line 17 representing the top of a waste product charge as it would appear once leveled within the vessel 1. The waste product charge leaves a zone of space 18 above it such that a steam region extends the length of the vessel through which successive portions of the waste products will pass as the vessel rotates. It is preferred that the interior of the vessel be substantially free of structure presenting surfaces that are not substantially parallel to the central longitudinal axis of the vessel.

[000075] The operation of the vessel can be appreciated from the cross-section of the apparatus shown in Figure 3, Figure 2 showing vessel 1, interior surface 15 and blades 16a – 16d.

[000076] The blades may be straight and substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the vessel, or, as shown in Figure 2, preferably may be angled such that neighboring blade pairs (e.g., 16a and 16b) converge toward one end of the vessel, while successive blade pairs (e.g., 16b and 16c) converge toward the opposite end of the vessel, as seen in Figure 2. The straight blades permit portions of the waste charge to be raised vertically and dropped vertically as the vessel rotates. The angled blades as described above further cause an alternating side-to-side

movement of successive portions of the waste charge, as the vessel rotates, by allowing successive portions of the waste charge to fall at an angle to the vertical such that the successive portions are moved gently from side to side without compaction.

[000077] After the vessel is loaded with the charge of waste products, the door through which the charge was loaded is shut, steam is introduced continually into the vessel, and the vessel becomes pressurized. Fresh steam may be continuously fed into the vessel from the loading end, and after a predetermined processing pressure is reached, steam may be allowed to escape the vessel into the discharge steam line.

[000078] The temperature and pressure of the vessel are monitored, and the flow of steam is regulated to keep the process within predetermined processing ranges (typically around 50 psi, at 300 degrees F). The vessel is rotated at a predetermined speed (depending on the size of the vessel), and after a predetermined amount of time (typically 20 to 45 minutes), the pressure is released and the processed waste is removed.

[000079] The temperature of the charge of waste products may be monitored by thermometers or thermocouples disposed along the length of the vessel. The temperature readings are taken and applied to determine the temperature of portions of the charge of waste products. The thermometers or thermocouples may provide signals or information to a microprocessor or PLC controller that is provided with programming instructions to access the temperature at each thermometers or thermocouples, and to provide feedback instructions to the actuators. This information may be used as feedback control to the actuators 9 in order to adjust the

charge of waste products within the vessel so as to increase heat transfer to portions of the charge not receiving effective heat treatment, in order to maintain overall efficient heat transfer to the charge of waste products overall.

[000080] A given charge of waste products may contain a wide variety of constituents, such as wood, paper, organic matter, water, etc. Each charge of waste products presents its own heat capacity and transfer profile, while there is required an overall heat absorption of the mass in order to provide an effective treatment of the waste products charge.

[000081] The information from the thermometers or thermocouples may also be used to determine the heat absorption over time as the charge of waste products heats up initially. This allows the operator (or a microprocessor or PLC controller) to extrapolate the energy needs for that charge of waste products and, based upon a comparison of the heat transfer profile, to also determine the approximate qualitative constituent make-up of the charge of waste products, and thus allow the determination of the treatment time necessary to treat that particular charge.

[000082] In operating the vessel of the present invention, the vessel may be tilted so as to present the input hatch 2 upward with respect to the horizontal, and to allow a charge of waste products to be placed into the vessel with the aid of conveyor 13. The hatch 2 is then closed and the waste products 17 charge (see Figure 2) may optionally be leveled by a reciprocating action of the actuators 10 prior to introduction of steam, or upon initial introduction of steam.

[000083] Once the hatch 2 is sealed, steam is placed into the vessel through inlets 3 and/or 3a to provide a pressurized steam environment in the vessel 1. Examples of systems used to produce and inject the steam are shown in Figures 6 and 7.

[000084] The vessel 1 is then rotated and the blades 16a – 16d (or blades 21 in Figures 8 – 10) act to raise portions of the waste products charge 17 from the bottom to the top of the vessel, and then release them to fall through the a zone of the steam environment 18 of relatively low density (i.e., that space not occupied by the waste products 17 as seen in Figure 2. This zone increases in volume as the waste products 17 shrinks during the processing.

[000085] The cylindrically shaped vessel 1 has a number of blades to function as a stirring apparatus to homogenize heat and circulate the waste vertically and/or horizontally, and at least one opening to load and discharge waste (i.e., hatches 2 and 2a, respectively). The conical structures at the openings enhance the input of the waste products charge and the discharge of the treated waste. These structures also serve to maintain the waste in the central horizontal region of the vessel. The vessel may be tilted by its longitudinal axis with respect to the horizontal position for effective waste loading into the vessel by the gravity force. This tilting may also be used during the processing to level the waste products charge.

[000086] According to the invention, steam inlets are connected to one or more saturated or superheated steam supply and to a steam receiver. In this way, the vessel is pressurized and depressurized from one or more openings. Each opening may be provided with a pressure lock and bidirectional steam flow conduits and valves. The apparatus may also include an optional steam vacuum pump at each opening for rapid depressurizing of the vessel. Rotating union valves may also be included to enable steam flow in- out of the vessel as the vessel is rotating or tilting. These features are shown schematically in Figures 6 and 7.

[000087] Load cells that are attached to or independent of the actuator(s) and connected to the frame structure detect when the process material within the vessel is non-uniformly distributed along the vessel's horizontal axis. Uniform distribution of waste in the vessel is attained by rotating the vessel on its latitude axis in accordance with and by the reference to load cell signals.

[000088] As the vessel rotates, the temperature is monitored to determine the change in temperature of the waste products charge over time. A plurality of temperature sensors may be used to send feedback to the control to achieve homogenous temperature in the vessel. The feedback control system and controller may include PLC or microprocessors that accept data from the temperature and load sensors and provide feedback control to the vessel rotation and the actuators to reposition and redistribute the waste charge load as required for efficient processing.

[000089] It is preferred that the heated and pressurized vessel is rotated bidirectionally, and at a constant or variable speed depending on the waste type, to attain homogenous heat transfer during the treatment cycle. As the waste shrinks due to the pressure and temperature, the volume of the waste charge decreases. The open space, such as the volume of space 18, increases by shrinkage in the vessel and serves as a hot region to provide heat treatment to portions of the waste charge that are raised and allowed to fall through this relatively low density region. This provides most complete and efficient exposure of the waste to the steam environment.

[000090] This temperature data may also be used to determine the overall absorption of energy over time which in turn allows the operator to characterize the waste products qualitatively (e.g., in terms of overall makeup of organic matter,

paper, etc.) through pre-determined data on waste product constituents, and thereby to extrapolate the amount of time a given charge of waste products will require to complete processing. This information may be stored and fed back into the control system to determine a time when the processing may be stopped automatically or through a signal to the operator.

[000091] As a result of steam condensation during this process, sludge may develop, and to avoid mixing the recycled waste with the sludge, one or more gaps or perforations may be provided in the blades (preferably near the interface between the blades 16a – 16d and the interior surface 15; see e.g. blades 16b and 16d having perforations and gaps, respectively) to allow the sludge to remain at the bottom of the vessel and the stirring mechanism and the chamber keeps the sludge at the bottom of the vessel. This may also be done by using the mounting arrangement shown in Figures 8 – 10. The perforations shown in Figure 2 may also be used in the straight blades shown in Figures 8 – 10, and the mounting arrangement shown in Figures 8 – 10 may also be used with the blade type and arrangement shown in Figure 2.

[000092] Due to the fact that the amount of sludge would vary depending on the steam type and quality, superheated, dry steam, may be used in place of conventional saturated steam to reduce the amount of sludge.

[000093] Also, during rotation of the vessel, the thermocouples determine whether the waste products charge has developed relatively cold regions, such as through the make up of the charge itself, or through compaction, that is retarding the rate of heat transfer to that region. If a relatively cold region is detected, the vessel may be tilted and/or oscillated by the actuators to redistribute the mass along the length of

the vessel. Also, in the event the waste products charge otherwise becomes unbalanced, the actuators may tilt and/or oscillate the vessel to redistribute the mass along the length of the vessel. This may be done through PLC controllers or microprocessors operating in conjunction with the thermocouples and actuators.

[000094] Through the action of the actuators, the waste charge can be maintained relatively evenly distributed along the length of the vessel during processing, so that the blades are able to raise portions of the waste products charge that are substantially uniformly distributed along the length of the vessel, and to allow those portions to descend through a relatively low density zone created and maintained along the length of the treatment volume of the vessel.

[000095] The tilting pivot point is preferably located at the center of gravity to balance the weight at horizontal position and to incline the vessel at an adjustable bidirectional angle relative to its horizontal position. Mechanical linear actuators, chain systems, hydraulic actuators, pinion rack systems, and scissors systems, etc. are types of mechanisms that may be used in providing the tilting movement.

[000096] This system therefore prevents and dynamically rectifies unbalanced loads and any other sources of localized compaction of the waste products charge, and allows efficient treatment of the waste products charge by creating and maintaining a low density zone through which individual portions of the waste products charge are passed with increased efficiency and without compaction of portions of the waste products charge as occurs in other treatment vessel systems with active transport systems or vessels that permit portions of the waste products charge to remain compressed or in a state of non-uniform distribution.

[000097] It is apparent that while specific embodiments of the invention is disclosed, various modifications of the apparatus or parameters of the process may be made which will be within the spirit and scope of the invention. Therefore the spirit and scope of the present invention should be determined by reference to the claims below.

What is claimed is:

Apparatus with Straight blades and Tip-Leveling Actuator

1. An apparatus for processing solid waste products, said apparatus comprising:
a rotatably mounted cylindrical vessel having a first end, a second end and an interior surface, at least one end terminating in a hatch that may be opened to allow access to the interior of said vessel and sealably closed to allow pressurization of said vessel;
a steam inlet for injecting steam into at least one of said ends;
a plurality of substantially straight blades protruding from said interior surface of said vessel, and each said blade extending substantially the entire length of said vessel, so as to be capable of transporting waste material from the bottom of said vessel toward the top of said vessel, and releasing the waste material to fall to the bottom of said vessel; and
at least one actuator for moving said vessel between a position wherein said first end is higher than said second end and a position wherein said second end is higher than said first end.
2. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said plurality of substantially straight blades are substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of said vessel.
3. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said plurality of substantially straight blades are configured such that adjacent pairs of blades converge toward opposite ends of said vessel.
4. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said plurality of substantially straight blades are twisted such that ends of adjacent pairs of blades that converge are

twisted away from one another while ends of adjacent blades that diverge are twisted toward from one another.

5. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said blades are provided with perforations.

6. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said blades are mounted so as to provide a space between said blades and said interior surface.

7. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said at least one actuator comprises a pair of mechanical screw actuators disposed respectively on either side of the gravitational center of said vessel.

8. An apparatus according to claim 1 additionally comprising load sensors adapted to sense the load on either side of the gravitational center of said vessel.

9. An apparatus according to claim 6 additionally comprising a microprocessor or PLC controller associated with said load sensors, said microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions so as to determine the load on each of said at least one actuator and adapted to signal said at least one actuator in response to changes in the distribution of a charge of waste products contained in said vessel.

10. An apparatus according to claim 1 additionally comprising a plurality of thermocouples disposed along the length of said vessel.

11. An apparatus according to claim 10 additionally comprising a microprocessor or PLC controller associated with said plurality of thermocouples, said microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions adapted to calculate the amount of energy absorbed by a charge of waste products contained in said vessel over time.

12. An apparatus according to claim 11 additionally comprising load sensors associated with said at least one actuator, said load sensors adapted to determine the mass of a charge of waste products contained in said vessel, and a microprocessor or PLC controller having programming instructions so as to determine the energy absorption per mass of a charge of waste products contained in said vessel.

Method of Treating Waste Involving Free Fall through Low Density Zone

13. A method of processing solid waste products in a vessel having a central longitudinal axis, comprising:

loading the vessel with a charge of solid waste products along the bottom of said vessel, the vessel having a plurality of substantially straight blades extending from said interior surface of said vessel and each said blade extending substantially the entire length of said vessel;

sealing the vessel;

introducing steam into said vessel;

rotating said vessel so as to cause said charge of solid waste products to be moved from the bottom of said vessel to toward the top of said vessel and allowed to fall through said vessel so as to maintain a low density region of waste substantially along the length of said vessel; and

thereafter depressurizing the vessel and unloading the processed waste therefrom.

14. A method according to claim 13 wherein said vessel is rotated without substantial compression of said charge of solid waste products along a direction parallel to said central longitudinal axis.

15. A method according to claim 13 wherein said charge of solid waste products is actively leveled while said vessel is being rotated.
16. A method according to claim 13 wherein said solid waste products are transported back and forth along a direction parallel to said central longitudinal axis while said vessel is being rotated.
17. A method according to claim 13 wherein said solid waste products are moved from the bottom of said vessel to toward the top of said vessel and allowed to fall in a series of discrete portions.
18. A method according to claim 13 wherein said steam is superheated steam introduced in pulses into said vessel.
19. A method according to claim 13 additionally comprising measuring the mass distribution of said charge of solid waste products and measuring the energy absorbed by said charge of solid waste products while said vessel is rotating, and determining the time required to treat said charge of solid waste products from the amount of energy absorbed by said charge of solid waste products over time.
20. A method according to claim 18 additionally comprising halting the treatment of said charge of solid waste products after the time determined to be required to treat said charge of solid waste products from the amount of energy absorbed by said charge of solid waste products over time.