

METHOD FOR PREPARING ACROLEIN

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to a method for preparing acrolein by catalytic gas
5 phase oxidation. The method includes providing a reaction gas containing propylene,
propane, and a fuel mixtures of at least one of methane and ethane, and contacting it with an
oxidation catalyst to form a mixture containing acrolein.

BACKGROUND

10 Acrolein can be produced commercially by selective oxidation of propylene.
Commercially available propylene can be divided into different grades based on the levels
of other impurities, e.g., refinery grade, chemical grade, and polymer grade. Depending on
the price differential, there can be an advantage to using one grade over the other. While
different grades of propylene can be used as a feed in producing acrolein via catalytic
15 oxidation, changing the propylene grade from one to another can have a significant impact
on the fuel content of the absorber off gas, and can also be prohibitive due to the fact that
acrolein plants are typically designed for a fixed propylene composition. For example, an
existing plant designed for Chemical Grade Propylene (containing 3 to 7 % by volume
propane as the main impurity) faces a few challenges with high purity Polymer Grade
20 Propylene (containing less than 0.5 % by volume propane as the main impurity): (1) a
shortage of propane fuel (an impurity in the propylene) that is used as a fuel for downstream
thermal oxidation of volatile organics prior to venting into the atmosphere; and (2) a
shortage of propane as a ballast gas that moves the reactor feed composition away from the
flammable region.
25 Different propylene grades used as a feed gas for producing acrolein have been
utilized in the art. For example, WO 2014/195157 A1 discloses a method of producing

acrolein with feed gas containing Refinery Grade Propylene and a specified range of sulfur and unsaturated hydrocarbons. The prior art does not, however, disclose a method for preparing acrolein via gas phase oxidation by providing a reaction gas according to the present invention which allows for the use of a high grade of propylene in the reactor feed
5 gas for an existing plant designed for Chemical Grade Propylene without sacrificing production rate or requiring other capital improvements.

Accordingly, there is a need to develop a method that allows for the use of a reactor feed gas containing a high grade of propylene, while not suffering from the drawbacks of the shortage of fuel for downstream thermal oxidation of volatile organics, and shortage of a
10 ballast gas that moves the reactor feed composition away from the flammable region.

STATEMENT OF INVENTION

One aspect of the invention provides a process for preparing acrolein by catalytic gas phase oxidation comprising (a) providing a reaction gas comprising (i) 5 to 10 mol %
15 propylene, (ii) 0.02 to 0.75 mol % propane, and (iii) 0.25 to 1.9 mol % of a fuel mixture comprising at least one of methane and ethane, wherein the molar ratio of the total amount of propane, methane, and ethane to the total amount of propylene is from 0.01:1 to 0.25:1, and (b) contacting the reaction gas with a mixed metal oxide catalyst to form a mixture comprising acrolein, wherein the mixed metal oxide catalyst comprises one or more of
20 molybdenum, bismuth, cobalt, and iron.

Another aspect of the invention provides a process for preparing acrolein by catalytic gas phase oxidation comprising (a) providing a reaction gas comprising (i) 7.5 to 8.2 mol % propylene, (ii) 0.03 to 0.62 mol % propane, and (iii) 0.5 to 1.4 mol % of a fuel mixture comprising at least one of methane and ethane, wherein the fuel mixture comprises
25 sulfur in an amount of less than 30 parts per million by volume of the fuel mixture, wherein the molar ratio of the total amount of propane, methane, and ethane to the total amount of

propylene is from 0.1:1 to 0.18:1, and (b) contacting the reaction gas with a mixed metal oxide catalyst to form a mixture comprising acrolein, wherein the mixed metal oxide catalyst comprises (1) a primary component selected from the group consisting of molybdenum, bismuth, and combinations thereof, and (2) a secondary component selected from the group consisting of cobalt, iron, nickel, zinc, tungsten, phosphorous, manganese, potassium, magnesium, silicon, and aluminum, wherein the primary component and secondary component are in an atomic ratio of from 9:28 to 28:9.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

10 The inventors have now surprisingly found that acrolein can be prepared by catalytic gas phase oxidation of a reaction gas containing a high grade propylene while avoiding the shortage of fuel for downstream thermal oxidation of volatile organics, and the shortage of ballast gas that moves the reactor feed composition away from the flammable region. Such drawbacks are avoided by including a fuel mixture comprising at least one of methane and ethane as a supplement to avoid the effects that would otherwise result from using high grades of propylene containing relatively lower amounts of propane as an impurity. Accordingly, the present invention provides in one aspect a process for preparing acrolein by catalytic gas phase oxidation comprising (a) providing a reaction gas comprising (i) 5 to 10 mol % propylene, (ii) 0.02 to 0.75 mol % propane, and (iii) 0.25 to 1.9 mol % of a fuel mixture comprising at least one of methane and ethane, wherein the molar ratio of the total amount of propane, methane, and ethane to the total amount of propylene is from 0.01:1 to 0.25:1, and (b) contacting the reaction gas with a mixed metal oxide catalyst to form a mixture comprising acrolein, wherein the mixed metal oxide catalyst comprises one or more of molybdenum, bismuth, cobalt, and iron.

25 The inventive process comprises providing a reaction gas that is contacted with an oxidation catalyst to form a mixture containing acrolein. The reaction gas contains

propylene, propane, and a fuel mixture containing at least one of methane and ethane. The reaction gas contains propylene in an amount of from 5 to 10 mol %, preferably from 6.5 to 9 mol %, and more preferably from 7.5 to 8.2 mol %, based on the total volume of the reaction gas. The reaction gas contains propane in an amount of from 0.02 to 0.75 mol %, preferably from 0.02 to 0.65 mol %, and more preferably from 0.03 to 0.62 mol %, based on the total volume of the reaction gas. The reaction gas contains a fuel mixture containing at least one of methane and ethane in an amount of from 0.25 to 1.9 mol %, preferably from 0.4 to 1.6 mol %, and more preferably of from 0.5 to 1.4, based on the total volume of the reaction gas. In certain embodiments, the reaction gas contains methane in an amount of from 0.5 to 1.9 mol %, preferably from 0.8 to 1.6 mol %, and more preferably of from 1.1 to 1.4 mol %, based on the total volume of the reaction gas. In certain embodiments, the molar ratio of the total amount of propane, methane, and ethane in the reaction gas to the total amount of propylene in the reaction gas is from 0.1:1 to 0.25:1, preferably from 0.1:1 to 0.2:1, and more preferably from 0.1:1 to 0.18:1.

The reaction gas further contains an oxidant for the oxidation of propylene to acrolein. Suitable oxidants include, for example, oxygen (O_2). Suitable sources of oxygen include, for example, air or a source that contains a higher purity of O_2 . In certain embodiments, the molar ratio of O_2 to propylene is in the range of from 1.1:2.1, preferably from 1.2:1.6.

The reaction gas of the inventive process is contacted with an oxidation catalyst—a mixed metal oxide catalyst. Mixed metal oxides catalysts that are known in the art, e.g., as described in U.S. Patent No. 6,028,220, U.S. Patent No. 8,242,376, and U.S. Patent No. 9,205,414. Suitable mixed metal oxide catalysts include, for example, those including one or more of molybdenum, bismuth, cobalt, iron, nickel, zinc, tungsten, phosphorous, manganese, potassium, magnesium, silicon, and aluminum. In certain embodiments, the mixed metal oxide catalyst comprises one or more of molybdenum, bismuth, cobalt, and

iron. In certain embodiments, the mixed metal oxide catalyst comprises primary and secondary components in an atomic ratio of from 9:28 to 28:9, preferably from 11:29 to 20:9, and more preferably from 13:28 to 14:9. In certain embodiments, the primary component comprises one or more of molybdenum and bismuth. In certain embodiments, the secondary component comprises one or more of cobalt, iron, nickel, zinc, tungsten, phosphorous, manganese, potassium, magnesium, silicon, and aluminum.

In certain embodiments, the fuel mixture contains methane that is sourced from natural gas that includes impurities that are detrimental to the oxidation catalyst, e.g., catalyst poisons such as various sulfur compound (e.g., H₂S, dimethyl sulfide, carbonyl sulfide, mercaptans, and the like). Gas containing such catalyst poisons are known in the art as “sour gas.” Sour gas can be “sweetened” by removing such sulfur compounds from the natural gas. Sulfur compounds can be removed if their presence has negative impacts on the catalyst performance, or downstream thermal oxidizer. Suitable sulfur removal technologies are known in the art and include, for example, by flowing the natural gas through a fixed bed packed with absorbent materials. In certain embodiments, the fuel mixture contains sulfur in an amount of less than 30 parts per million by volume of the fuel mixture, preferably less than 5 parts per million, more preferably less than 1 part per million, and even more preferably less than 0.1 part per million, by volume of the fuel mixture.

In certain embodiments, the inventive process step of contacting the reaction gas to form a mixture comprising acrolein comprises passing the reaction gas through a reactor tube or through a plurality of reactor tubes in parallel, each of which is filled with the mixed metal oxide catalyst. In certain embodiments, the one or more reactor tubes are charged with the mixed metal oxide catalyst to a length of from 1 to 7 meters, preferably from 2 to 6 meters, and more preferably of from 3 to 5 meters. In certain embodiments, the internal

diameter of each reactor tube is in the range of from 15 to 50 mm, preferably 20 to 45 mm, and more preferably of from 22 to 40 mm.

Some embodiments of the invention will now be described in detail in the following Examples.

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EXAMPLES

Example 1

Characterization of Thermal Oxidation Constraints on Exemplary and Comparative Processes

10 A conventional acrolein process is operated with typical conditions on Chemical Grade Propylene ("CGP"), Polymer Grade Propylene ("PGP"), and PGP with supplemental fuel, as recited in Table 1.

Table 1. Thermal Oxidation Constraints on Exemplary and Comparative Processes

	Operation w/ CGP	Operation w/ PGP	Operation w/ PGP + fuel injection
Relative C ₃ H ₆ Rate (% of maximum)	100	72	100
C ₃ H ₆ Purity (mol %)	94.50	99.50	99.50
C ₃ H ₆ Concentration (mol %)	8.0	8.0	8.0
C ₃ H ₈ Concentration (mol %)	0.47	0.04	0.05
Supplemental C ₁ -C ₃ Fuel Concentration (mol %)	0.00	0.00	1.07
Total C ₁ -C ₃ Fuel Concentration (mol %)	0.47	0.04	1.11
C ₃ H ₆ Conversion (%)	96.0	96.0	96.0

	Operation w/ CGP	Operation w/ PGP	Operation w/ PGP + fuel injection
Total C ₁ -C ₃ fuel:propylene (mol ratio)	0.058	0.005	0.139
AOG ⁺ Heating Value (Btu/SCF)	33	18	33
Thermal Oxidizer Firebox Temperature (°C)	965	964	965
Stack O ₂ (mol %)	2.95	2.94	2.94
Tox Burner Capacity (%)	100	100	100

⁺ “AOG” represents the Absorber Off Gas

The results demonstrate that the process is constrained by energy input to the thermal oxidizer. Operation with the above conditions results in a vapor waste stream containing 30 to 40% of the energy input to the thermal oxidizer. As the purity of the propylene feedstock increases, the energy content in the vapor waste stream decreases. At the extreme case of a polymer grade propylene feed with propylene 99.5% minimum, the energy content in the vapor waste stream is 50% of what it was with CGP. Without any other process changes, the plant production capacity would have to be decreased by 20-30% to maintain the desired thermal treatment conditions.

To avoid the rate reduction from the energy input limitation, natural gas (or C₁ to C₃ fuel) is injected into the process at a 0.14:1 molar ratio with propylene. The energy no longer provided by the “impurities” in the propylene is replaced with energy from lower cost methane. This allows the plant to operate with a high purity feedstock while maintaining the operating rate, realizing a reduction in energy cost to operate the thermal treatment unit, and avoiding capital modification of thermal treatment unit.

Example 2***Characterization of Flammability Constraints on Exemplary and Comparative Processes***

One hazard inherent in the oxidation of propylene is the management of hazards associated with the flammability of propylene. This hazard can be managed by operating with a reactor feed composition outside of the flammable region by some margin of safety. The distance between the operating point and the flammable region is defined as the approach to the flammable limit. Margins of safety exist to cover error in flammable boundary correlations, errors in determination of reactor feed composition, and to prevent reactor trips associated with disturbances in reactor feed flows. The reactor feeds are manipulated such that the feed composition is moved above the upper flammable limit without passing through the flammable region. When one is above the flammable limit, increasing fuel content tends to increase the oxygen required to create a flammable mixture (more fuel increases the distance to the flammable limit). In a propylene partial oxidation process, propylene concentration cannot be increased independently because oxygen is required in a particular molar ratio (typically greater than 1.4:1) to propylene to complete the desired chemical reaction. Because of the oxygen to propylene constraint, the oxygen concentration must also increase when C₃ concentration increases. The net result of increasing propylene concentration at constant oxygen to propylene ratio is moving closer to the flammable region. A conventional acrolein process with Absorber Off Gas recycle is operated with typical conditions, as recited in Table 2.

Table 2. Flammability Constraints on Exemplary and Comparative Processes

	Operation w/ CGP	Operation w/ PGP	Operation w/ PGP + fuel injection
Relative C ₃ H ₆ Rate (% of maximum)	100	94.5	100
C ₃ H ₆ Purity (mol %)	94.50	99.50	99.50
C ₃ H ₆ Concentration (mol %)	7.7	7.4	7.7
C ₃ H ₈ Concentration (mol %)	0.58	0.05	0.05
Supplemental C ₁ -C ₃ Fuel Concentration (mol %)	0.00	0.00	1.28
Total C ₁ -C ₃ Fuel Concentration (mol %)	0.58	0.05	1.33
C ₃ H ₆ Conversion (%)	96.5	96.5	96.5
Total C ₁ -C ₃ fuel:propylene (mol ratio)	0.075	0.007	0.173
AOG Heating Value (Btu/SCF)	28	15	28
Thermal Oxidizer Firebox Temperature (°C)	899	899	898
Stack O ₂ (mol %)	2.1	2.1	2.1
Tox Burner Capacity (%)	70	100	70
Approach to Flammable Limit	minimum	minimum	> minimum
Compressor Capacity (%)	100	100	100

The results demonstrate that the process is simultaneously constrained by the ability of the compressor to pump mixed gas (air + recycle) to the reactor, the propylene concentration in the reactor feed, and the oxygen in the reactor outlet. Each one of these constraints represents a significant boundary. In turn, it is not possible to increase the capacity of a compressor without making capital investment. Operating too closely to the flammable region risks a process disturbance that could cause fire with significant safety and economic impact. If adequate excess oxygen is not maintained in the reactor outlet, it may cause the catalyst to age prematurely or cause incomplete conversion of propylene to acrolein and high levels of propylene fed to the thermal oxidizer. Thus, in a process constrained as defined above and operated at the conditions defined above, the maximum operating rate has to be reduced by 5% (on propylene basis) when the propylene purity increases. By injecting natural gas into the propylene at 0.17:1 C₁ to C₃:C₃H₆ molar ratio, the maximum rate can be maintained with higher purity of propylene. In addition, the “approach to flammability limit” is moved further away from the flammable region. The advantage of having an inert fuel present in the reactor is regained.