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VACUUM SEWER SYSTEM AND METHOD

The invention relates to a simplified vacuum sewer system for toilets according to the preamble of claim 1 and to a method of operating such a system according to the preamble 5 of claim 10.

Nowadays ships almost invariably use vacuum sewer toilets. The bowls of such toilets are connected, through a normally-closed sewer valve, to a sewer pipe that is kept under a considerable partial vacuum. Modern marine vacuum 10 sewer systems are almost without exception devised according to US-A-4034421. This kind of system is well suited for systems including a large number of toilets, but is unnecessarily expensive in ships where the number of toilets is relatively small. For instance, freighters or cargo ships 15 usually have only between 5 and 40 toilets. An inexpensive, easy to install and reliable toilet vacuum sewer system for this kind of ship has not been commercially available heretofore.

This invention seeks to provide a simplified vacuum sewer 20 system with low manufacturing and installation costs that is well suited for use in vacuum sewer systems in which the number of toilet bowls is clearly less than 100 units and in which it is unlikely that very many toilet bowls will be flushed at the same time. The invention has particular, but 25 not exclusive, application to ships. What constitutes the invention is defined in the following claim 1.

It is known to use a liquid ring pump for generating a partial vacuum in a sewer system, where moisture and dirt abound. A liquid ring pump utilises an eccentrically rotating 30 ring of liquid which effects the volume increase and decrease of a pumping space in the pump. Such a pump is reliable and operates well, but its efficiency rate is low, which means that its power demand is high. Additionally, a liquid ring

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pump needs an expensive automatic arrangement to ensure that there is always enough liquid (frequently water) in the liquid ring of the pump. The vacuum sewer system according to US-A-4034421, does not use a liquid ring pump, instead a
5 circulation pump runs an ejector pump that produces the required vacuum. This combination operates reliably but its efficiency rate is only about 5%.

The invention is based on the concept that, contrary to the trend of the prior art, a dry rotary vane pump could be
10 used as a vacuum pump. Although this kind of pump is relatively cheap and has good efficiency, dry vane pumps do not, however, tolerate moisture. Thus to make it possible to use a dry rotary vane pump in a vacuum sewer system according to the invention, it is necessary to protect the pump very
15 effectively, by means of a liquid separating means, so that it does not become exposed to humidity. Providing that operating conditions suitable for a dry rotary vane pump can be arranged, a dry rotary vane pump is a surprising but an extremely advantageous component in a vacuum sewer system
20 according to the invention and its power can be as low as 0.4 kW or even less.

For making it easy to install a vacuum sewer system according to the invention in a ship, even in a restricted space, it is important that the component parts of the system
25 have small dimensions and are so formed and arranged, that they may all be easily integrated in a module with small outer dimensions. Such a module suitably has the form of a fully prefabricated rigid unit that may be installed in a ship and simply connected to the shipboard vacuum sewer network and to
30 its electric network. For making this possible, the sewage collecting container has to be relatively small, and consequently, it has to be emptied quite frequently. The emptying of the collecting container may take place to a larger sewage storage tank, to a sewage treatment plant or
35 direct into the sea. In harbour, the emptying may take place to any available sewage transport or adjacent treatment



system.

Because the collecting container of a vacuum sewer system according to the invention must be emptied relatively frequently, it is desirable that the emptying process be automated or an arrangement providing convenient emptying of the collecting container be provided. Therefore, it is helpful that there be a fixed tube and valve system, by means of which the collecting container is emptied. According to the invention, the dry rotary vane pump of the vacuum sewer system is also used in the emptying phase of the collecting container, the suction side of the pump then being connected to the ambient air and the pressure side of the pump to the collecting container, whereby the pump pressure empties the container. Because the dry rotary vane pump is used both for producing vacuum and for emptying the collecting container, the number of elements in the vacuum sewer system may be minimised and the production costs of the system, and particularly the cost of a prefabricated module therefor, can be kept low.

Because it is important that moisture is not sucked into a dry rotary vane pump, one must pay close attention as to how the sewage is to be drawn into the collecting container. Splashing should be avoided, because it may cause liquid to be sucked into the vacuum pump. Therefore, in a preferred embodiment of the invention, the sewer pipes of the toilet bowls are connected to the collecting container through a common end tube, that is connected to the collecting container so that the liquid sewer flow into the collecting container takes place as peacefully as possible. This is accomplished, in a preferred embodiment, by connecting the end tube of the sewer pipe to the collecting container via separating means, in which the sewage is separated from the air accompanying it. In this way the flow speed of the sewage is reduced before the sewage arrives in the interior of the collecting container. The collecting container may be cylindrical and the end tube of the sewer pipe may be mounted to lie against the

circumferential surface of the collecting container. That side of the end tube that is facing the centre of curvature of the circumferential surface of the collecting container then has a plurality of apertures that open to the interior 5 of the collecting container, so that the end tube itself works as a separating device, in which the air accompanying the sewage is bled from the sewage as the sewage approaches its entry point into the collecting container. Desirably the shape of the separating device is such that the sewage flows 10 into the collecting container mainly tangentially, which greatly reduces splashing and other disturbances in the mass of mainly liquid sewage contained in the collecting container.

From a structural point of view it is easy to mount the separating device around the circumference of the collecting 15 container against its outer surface, but it is also feasible to place the separating device against the inner surface of the collecting container or join it, for example, to a cover structure of the container, in such a manner that it assumes a proper position, when the cover is mounted in place. This 20 last-mentioned solution has the advantage that the structure of the remainder of the collecting container may then be extremely simple.

If a cylindrical collecting container is mounted with its longitudinal axis slightly offset from a vertical position, 25 the lowest section of the container's oblique bottom forms a space, in which the inlet end of a tube for emptying the container can advantageously be installed. The container can then be emptied much more completely than if the container has a horizontal flat bottom. Setting the collecting container 30 slightly offset from the vertical does not cause difficulties in mounting the end tube of the sewer, because the end tube may, in spite of the offset position of the collecting container, easily be mounted on the circumferential surface of the collecting container or in its close vicinity, so that 35 each section of the end tube still slopes downwardly.

It is also feasible that the collecting container be a cylindrical pressure vessel with convex ends (for example according to DIN 28022). At the lowest point of the bottom of the container a downwardly directed emptying tube may be
5 connected.

The collecting container must always have a large enough space under vacuum, when flushing of any of the toilet bowls takes place. To ensure this, it is recommended to have an automatic emptying system providing, under the control of a
10 level monitor or the like, emptying of the collecting container, when it has become about half full of sewage. If the level monitor is situated inside the collecting container, the air flow caused in the collecting container by the dry rotary vane pump when suction and/or pressure is produced, can
15 be directed along or against the level monitor, so that the air flow keeps it clean from matter that could otherwise stick to it.

It is desirable that the sewage flows into the collecting container mainly in the form of liquid plugs. Such a plug is
20 discharged into the sewer pipe when any of the vacuum toilet bowls is flushed, but the sewer pipe may be so long that the plug does not reach the collecting container during that flushing operation. To make sure that plug flow into the container does occur, a U-shaped trap can be provided in the
25 sewer pipe just upstream of the collecting container, which trap forms a collecting pocket for liquid present in the end portion of the sewer. Sewage collected in the trap forms a liquid plug, and this liquid plug flows into the collecting container pushed by the pressure impulse caused by the next
30 toilet bowl flushing. Thus, the flow of sewage into the collecting container always takes place in the form of liquid plugs, which enhances the functioning of the separating device of the collecting container.

It is advantageous if the dry rotary vane pump has only
35 one air flow connection to the collecting container, through

which connection the collecting container is maintained under partial vacuum as well as under pressure. The air flow created during the vacuum generating phase, in a direction from the collecting container to the dry rotary vane pump, can
5 be led to the pump through a moisture separator, which preferably is so devised, that it works also as a means protecting the collecting container against overfilling, or in other words so that if the collecting container is filled completely, the level of sewage in the system cannot go above
10 the level of the overfilling protecting means. By this means a simple and reliable vacuum sewage system is obtained, that functions in an acceptable manner even under fault conditions.

The invention will be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

15 Figure 1 is a schematic view of a vacuum sewer system according to the invention, and

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show, in end view and front view, respectively, an implementation of the major part of a system according to the invention prepared as a compact module.

20 In the drawings, numeral 1 indicates W.C. toilet bowls installed on board a ship. Each toilet bowl 1 is, through a normally-closed sewer valve 1a, connected to a sewer pipe 2, that is kept under partial vacuum and at its downstream end, by means of an end tube 3 and a check valve 10, communicates
25 with a collecting container 4.

The number of toilet bowls in a system according to the invention is usually at the most 60. It is, however, from the point of view of functional reliability recommendable, that the number of toilet bowls is less than this, for example
30 between 30 and 40, and that the system is so devised, that normally not very many toilet bowls will be flushed at the same time. If necessary, the system may be provided with some form of flush-preventing or flush-delaying means. Such

restrictions and/or restrictive actions are necessary primarily because the power of the vacuum pump of the system is relatively small and the volume of the collecting container 4 is also relatively small. The total volume of the 5 collecting container 4 may be only about 50 litres, but it could be larger than this. The total volume of the interior of the vacuum sewer pipes 2, 3 is typically about 400 ± 100 litres.

The partial vacuum and the pressure required in the 10 vacuum sewer system illustrated is provided by a dry sliding-vane rotary pump 5, the suction side 5a of which is connected to the collecting container 4 via a check valve 7, a liquid separator 6 and tubes 6a and 18. The pressure side 5b of the sliding-vane pump 5 includes a remote-controlled three-way 15 valve 22 and tubes 27a and 27 connected to the atmosphere. The partial vacuum generated by the pump 5 in the sewer system 2, 3 and in the collecting container 4 is usually about 50% of the atmospheric pressure.

For emptying sewage 17 from the collecting container 4, 20 the suction side 5a of the pump 5 is, through a remote-controlled three-way valve 21, connected to the atmosphere. The inflow of ambient air is represented by the arrow 21a and the pressure side 5b of the pump 5 is connected, through the remote-controlled three-way valve 22 and through the tube 6a, 25 to the collecting container 4. The pressure generated by the pump 5 then acts on the sewage 17, because the pressure cannot escape through the check valve 10. The pressure forces sewage 17 in the container 4 into a tube 8 and through it and a further check valve 29 to some other location, for example 30 through a tube 8a to a treatment plant in a harbour, through a pipe 8b to a treatment plant or a larger storage tank on board the ship, or through a pipe 8c to the sea.

When any of the toilet bowls 1 is flushed, about 1 litre or less of rinse water is led to the toilet bowl and 35 practically at the same time the sewer valve 1a of the toilet

bowl is opened. The partial vacuum present in the sewer pipe 2 then causes the atmospheric pressure to push the rinse water and other matter present in that toilet bowl into the sewer pipe 2, in which a sewage plug moving at high speed, is 5 formed. This plug, or possibly a plug created earlier in the sewer pipe moves rapidly into a curved tube 9 connected to the collecting container 4. The tube 9 operates as a separating device due to the fact that matter heavier than air, because of the action of centrifugal force, is moved to that side of 10 the curved tube 9 that is outwards from its centre of curvature, while air present with the plug finds its way to the side of the curved tube 9 facing its centre of curvature. That side of the tube 9 is contacting the container 4 and is provided with apertures 12 through which the air is discharged 15 into the collecting container 4. Finally, the sewage plug, flowing now rather slowly, passes into the collecting container 4 mainly tangentially through an outlet opening 9a marking the end of the tube 9.

The sewer pipes 2 leading from the toilet bowls 1 20 communicate with the end tube 3, in which there is provided a U-shaped curve 19 forming a liquid-collecting trap. In this trap at least a part of any liquid remaining in the sewer pipe is collected, forming there a liquid plug, which ensures that each sewage discharge which passes into the curved tube 9 25 includes a liquid plug.

The level of sewage 17 preferably does not rise to above half the depth of the collecting container 4 so that sewage can enter the container 4 without excessive splashing, because the apertures 12 and 9a of the separating device created by 30 the tube 9 are always above the sewage level.

A level monitor 16 is provided in the collecting container 4 that monitors the amount of sewage 17 present. The sliding-vane pump 5 generates air flows, when partial vacuum is generated as well as when pressure is generated, in 35 the container 4. By means of the air guide pipe 18 at the

collecting container end of the tube 6a, these air flows are led along the surface of the level monitor 16, whereby the monitor is cleaned of matter that might possibly stick to it.

The liquid separator 6, shown only schematically, forces the air flow flowing through it to the pump 5 to make several sharp changes in flow direction, whereby, because of the action of centrifugal force, any liquid drops present are separated from the air. The velocity of the air flow through the separating means 6 is also essentially slowed down at the points, where the cross-sectional area of the flow duct is large, which also is likely to cause a separating out of water drops flowing with the air. The separated liquid flows through the lower part of the tube 6a back to the collecting container 4. If the collecting container 4, in the case of a disturbance, is filled up totally, in other words to such a high level that the liquid level rises up to the device 6, a float 24 present therein closes the connection to the upper part of the pipe 6a. This prevents the liquid from rising higher than the device 6.

The cylindrical collecting container 4 has in the embodiment illustrated a slightly oblique disposition, so that its longitudinal axis 13 forms an angle A to the vertical. This ensures the inlet end 14 of the outlet tube 8 of the collecting container 4 is in close vicinity to the lowest part of the obliquely mounted collecting container 4. This gives the advantage that the collecting container is effectively completely emptied, only an extremely small amount of sewage remaining therein at the point 15, following a full emptying operation.

A collecting and separating device 25 for, for example, condensed liquid, is shown connected to the lower end of the mainly vertical tube 27. Any liquid collected in the device 25 is, in a known manner by means of partial vacuum, led through a pump 27b to the sewer 3 and therethrough to the collecting container 4. In the device 25 one may use

technical solutions of the kind shown in US-A-4057076, US-A-4280528, SE-B-398654 or GB-A-1312601.

The operation of the vacuum sewer system and the tube and valve system is monitored and controlled by a control centre 5 23, receiving, through electric cables 26, data relating to the operational conditions of the different units of the system. Some of this data is provided by a pressure controlled relay 35 connected via a tube 33 to the sewer 3 downstream of the check valve 10 or directly to the container 10 4. Also shown is a pressure gauge 34 connected in parallel with the relay 35.

Figures 2 and 3 show how the component parts of a system according to the invention, in other words the parts 3-29 and 33-35 of Figure 1 may be arranged in a prefabricated module 15 having a frame 30 for mounting the described equipment and for fixing the component parts in place. A mounting module of this kind can be designed to be so compact that it requires a floor area of less than 0.5 m².

The invention is not limited to the embodiments 20 illustrated since several variations and modification thereof are feasible within the scope of the following claims. Thus, for example, although a sliding-vane rotary pump has been shown schematically in Figure 1 and referred to as integer 5 in the foregoing specific description, any other suitable form 25 of dry rotary vane pump is not ruled out in the practising of the invention.



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CLAIMS

1. A simplified vacuum sewer system comprising a limited number of toilet bowls (1), preferably at the most 60 toilet bowls, which through a sewer pipe (2) are connected to a
5 common sewage collecting container (4), and means for generating and maintaining a considerable partial vacuum in the sewer pipe (2) and in the collecting container (4), characterised in that the sewage collecting container is a relatively small reservoir (4) which has to be frequently
10 emptied and the volume of which is preferably at the most 100 litres, in that a dry rotary vane pump (5) including a protective liquid separating means (6, 9) works as a partial vacuum generating device, and in that this device includes a rigidly installed tube and valve system (6a, 8, 21, 22) by
15 means of which the pressure side of the dry rotary vane pump (5) periodically can be connected to the collecting container (4) for emptying the container to another location by means of the pressure created by the dry rotary vane pump (5).

2. A system according to claim 1, characterised in that
20 the sewer pipes (2) of the toilet bowls (1) are connected to the collecting container (4) through a common end tube (3), which communicates with the collecting container (4) via a separating device (9), in which air accompanying the sewage in the sewer pipe can be drawn off, thereby reducing the flow
25 speed of the sewage before the sewage arrives in the interior of the collecting container (4) through the outlet opening (9a) of the device (9).

3. A system according to claim 2, characterised in that the collecting container (4) is cylindrical and the separating
30 device (9) of the sewer end tube is a curved tube (3) contacting the circumferential surface (11) of the collecting container (4), preferably at its outside, which tube (9), at the side that is closer to its centre of curvature, has a plurality of apertures (12) opening to the interior of the



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collecting container (4), through which apertures air separated from the sewage can pass into the container.

4. A system according to claim 3, characterised in that the longitudinal axis (13) of the cylindrical collecting container is offset (A) from a vertical position and that the tube (9) working as a separating device is mounted to follow the circumferential surface of the collecting container with a downward slope.

5. A system according to claim 4, characterised in that in the collecting container (4) there is an outlet tube (8), the inlet end (14) of which is in close vicinity to the lowest part (15) of the obliquely mounted collecting container (4).

6. A system according to any of claims 2 to 5, characterised in that in the collecting container (4) there is a level monitor (16) which is arranged to transmit a signal activating an emptying sequence, when the collecting container (4) contains sewage (17) to a pre-set depth below the outlet opening (9a) of the device (9).

7. A system according to claim 6, characterised in that in the emptying phase of the collecting container (4), the pressure created by the dry rotary vane pump (5) is arranged to be led to the collecting container (4) in the form of a relatively rapid air flow (via 18) that is directed against the level monitor (16) for cleaning the monitor (16) from matter sticking to it.

8. A system according to any of the preceding claims, characterised in that in the end tube (3) of the sewer pipe there is, close to the collecting container (4), a U-shaped tube (19), which acts as a collecting trap for liquid remaining in the sewer, sewage collected in the trap subsequently being available to form a liquid plug.

9. A system according to any of the preceding claims,





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characterised in that the dry rotary vane pump (5) has a single air duct (6a) connecting it to the collecting container (4), through which duct (6a) the collecting container (4) is put under partial vacuum during filling as well as under 5 pressure during emptying, and in that during the vacuum generating phase, the air flow from the collecting container (4) in the direction to the pump (5) is led to the pump (5) through a moisture separating device (6), which preferably also works as a means protecting the system from overfilling 10 of the collecting container (4).

10. A method of operating up to 60 toilet bowls (1), in a vacuum sewer system, which method involves evacuating sewage material (17) from the bowls into a collecting container (4) via sewer piping (2, 3, 9) using vacuum pumping means (5) 15 creating sub-atmospheric pressure in the container and piping, characterised in that the vacuum pumping means is a dry rotary vane pump (5) connected via a moisture trap (6, 24) to said collecting container (4), and in that the dry rotary vane pump (5) is also used for periodically generating supra-atmospheric 20 pressure in the container (4) for emptying the same.

