

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR AMMONIA PURIFICATION

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 63/425,583, filed November 15, 2022, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0002] The present disclosure generally relates to systems and methods for ammonia purification. More particularly, the systems and methods use a unique arrangement of a caustic wash, a water wash, an ammonia stripper and a caustic fractionator to recover ammonia otherwise lost during conventional purification.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Conventional ammonia purification attempts to first separate ammonia (NH_3) and hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) from a refinery or chemical plant sour water stream, which often encounters difficulties in achieving a good separation of the hydrogen sulfide from the ammonia. This usually occurs when a simple two column sour water stripping system is used that generates a primarily hydrogen sulfide stream in the first column and a primarily ammonia stream in the second column. In addition, conventional ammonia purification processes often lose a certain amount of ammonia during the purification.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] The detailed description is described below with reference to the accompanying drawing, in which like elements are referenced with like reference numbers, and in which:

[0005] **FIG. 1A** is a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a caustic scrubber system with a caustic wash for ammonia purification.

[0006] **FIG. 1B** is a schematic diagram illustrating another embodiment of a caustic scrubber system with a caustic wash for ammonia purification.

[0007] **FIG. 2** is a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a compression train system with a water wash for ammonia purification.

[0008] **FIG. 3** is a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of an ammonia stripper system for ammonia purification.

[0009] **FIG. 4** is a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a caustic fractionator system for ammonia purification.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0010] The subject matter of the present disclosure is described with specificity, however, the description itself is not intended to limit the scope of the disclosure. The subject matter thus, might also be embodied in other ways, to include different structures, steps and/or combinations similar to and/or fewer than those described herein, in conjunction with other present or future technologies. Although the term “step” may be used herein to describe different elements of methods employed, the term should not be interpreted as implying any particular order among or between various steps herein disclosed unless otherwise expressly limited by the description to a particular order. Other features and advantages of the disclosed embodiments will be or will become apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art upon examination of the following figures and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional features and advantages be included within the scope of the disclosed embodiments. Further, the illustrated figures and dimensions described herein are only exemplary and are not intended to assert or imply any limitation with regard to the environment, architecture, design, or process in which different embodiments may be implemented. To the extent that temperatures and/or pressures are referred to in the following

description, those conditions are merely illustrative and are not meant to limit the disclosure. All streams described herein are carried by physical lines.

[0011] The systems and methods disclosed herein overcome the disadvantages encountered by conventional ammonia purification processes by using a unique arrangement of a caustic wash, a water wash, an ammonia stripper, and a caustic fractionator to recover ammonia otherwise lost during conventional purification. The disclosed systems and methods remove the residual hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants from the ammonia-rich stream to generate a high-quality anhydrous ammonia product stream that can be sold as an ammonia commodity product. The use of a base (sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide) to clean up another base (ammonium hydroxide) and the recovery of ammonia from the spent caustic is also unique.

[0012] In one embodiment, the present disclosure includes a system for ammonia purification, which comprises: i) a caustic scrubber in fluid communication with a feed gas stream, a caustic solution stream, a first ammonia vapor stream and a second ammonia vapor stream for producing a scrubbed ammonia stream and a spent caustic stream; ii) a compression train system with at least two compression stages for separating the scrubbed ammonia stream into a non-condensable vapor stream and an anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream; iii) an ammonia stripper for separating a sour water liquid stream into the first ammonia vapor stream and a liquid effluent stream; iv) a caustic fractionator in fluid communication with the spent caustic stream for producing a liquid bottom stream and an overhead vapor stream; v) a condenser in fluid communication with the overhead vapor stream for producing a two-phase stream comprising water and ammonia; and vi) a reflux drum for separating the two-phase stream into a liquid water stream and the second ammonia vapor stream.

[0013] In another embodiment, the present disclosure includes a method for ammonia purification, which comprises: i) introducing a feed gas stream, a caustic solution stream, a first ammonia vapor stream and a second ammonia vapor stream into a caustic scrubber for producing a scrubbed ammonia stream and a spent caustic stream; ii) separating the scrubbed ammonia stream into a sour water liquid stream, a non-condensable vapor stream and an anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream; iii) separating the sour water liquid stream into the first ammonia vapor stream and a liquid effluent stream; iv) introducing the spent caustic stream into a caustic fractionator for producing a liquid bottom stream and an overhead vapor stream; v) introducing the overhead vapor stream into a condenser for producing a two-phase stream comprising water and ammonia; and vi) separating the two-phase stream into a liquid water stream and the second ammonia vapor stream.

Caustic Scrubber System

[0014] Referring now to **FIG. 1A**, a schematic diagram illustrates one embodiment of a caustic scrubber system **100A** with a caustic wash for ammonia purification. A feed gas stream **102** comprising hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans, other contaminants and ammonia passes through a caustic scrubber **104**, where the feed gas stream **102** is contacted with a caustic solution stream **103** of sodium hydroxide and water in a counter current flow arrangement. The caustic solution stream **103** can range from about 1 wt% NaOH to over 50 wt% NaOH in water. Alternatively, the caustic solution stream **103** can range from about 1 wt% KOH to over 50 wt% KOH in water. As the feed gas stream **102** is contacted with the caustic solution stream **103**, the hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants are removed from the ammonia rich vapor generating a scrubbed ammonia stream **106** that is sent to the compression train system **200** illustrated in **FIG. 2** and a spent caustic stream **108** that is sent to a pump **110** to provide the pressure necessary for operation of the downstream caustic fractionator system **400**

illustrated in **FIG. 4**. The caustic solution **103** thus, removes hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants from the ammonia-rich feed gas stream **102**.

[0015] Referring now to **FIG. 1B**, a schematic diagram illustrates another alternative embodiment of a caustic scrubber system **100B** with a caustic wash for ammonia purification. There may be times when the caustic scrubber **104** needs to operate at a lower temperature than that available with the feed gas stream **102** and the caustic solution stream **103** temperatures and flow rates. When cooler temperatures are required, the caustic scrubber system **100B** may be effectively used. The pump **110** capacity is increased so that a portion of the spent caustic stream **108** may be diverted through a recycle cooler **112** and the cooled spent caustic stream **114** returned to the caustic scrubber **104**. Another portion of the spent caustic stream **108** is sent from pump **110** to the downstream caustic fractionator system **400** illustrated in **FIG. 4** for its operation. If additional pressure is required for proper operation of the caustic scrubber **104**, then a compressor may be added to the feed gas stream **102**.

Compression Train System

[0016] Referring now to **FIG. 2**, a schematic diagram illustrates one embodiment of a compression train system **200** with a water wash for ammonia purification. The compression train system **200** may include up to four compression stages. Each compression stage contains a compressor suction drum, an ammonia compressor, and a condenser cooler. Each condenser cooler effectively functions as a heat exchanger that may be air cooled (as shown) or water cooled. Feed to the compression train system **200** includes the scrubbed ammonia stream **106** and, optionally, an independent liquid water stream **202**. Additional independent liquid water streams **202** may be included via a respective water spray nozzle after each ammonia compressor and/or each condenser cooler to increase the removal of impurities in the sour water liquid stream **217**. A first

condenser cooler **203** may be optionally included to cool the scrubbed ammonia stream **106** and (optional) liquid water stream **202**.

[0017] The first stage compressor suction drum **204** separates the scrubbed ammonia stream **106** and the (optional) liquid water stream **202** into a waste water liquid stream **206** that is purged from the compression train system **200** and a caustic vapor stream **207** that is sent to a first stage ammonia compressor **208**. The first stage ammonia compressor **208** raises the pressure of the caustic vapor stream **207**, which is then sent downstream to a second condenser cooler **210**. The cooled condensed stream **212**, which contains vapor and potentially some liquid (primarily liquid water with some ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants), is sent to a second stage compressor suction drum **214**. The second stage compressor suction drum **214** separates the cooled condensed stream **212** into a sour water liquid stream **217** that is sent to the ammonia stripper system **300** illustrated in **FIG. 3** and an ammonia vapor stream **216** that is sent to a second stage ammonia compressor **218**.

[0018] After removal of most of the water from the ammonia vapor stream **216**, the ammonia vapor stream **216** is compressed in the second stage ammonia compressor **218** in preparation for liquification of the ammonia. The liquefaction can require multiple compression and cooling stages to achieve the appropriate temperature and pressure required for liquification of the ammonia. The second stage ammonia compressor **218** raises the pressure of the ammonia vapor stream **216**, which is sent downstream to a third condenser cooler **220**. The cooled condensed stream **222** is then sent to an ammonia separator **224** where it is separated into a non-condensable vapor stream **226** and an anhydrous ammonia liquid stream **228**. Additional pressure and cooling may be required for the anhydrous ammonia liquid stream **228** to meet the required product pressure and temperature requirements.

Ammonia Stripper System

[0019] Referring now to **FIG. 3**, a schematic diagram illustrates one embodiment of an ammonia stripper system **300** for ammonia purification. The sour water liquid stream **217** from the compression train system **200** is sent to an ammonia stripper **302** to separate the sour water stream **217** into an ammonia vapor stream **304** and a liquid effluent stream **306** comprising stripped water. The ammonia vapor stream **304** may include trace quantities of hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants that are contained in the sour water liquid stream **217**. The ammonia vapor stream **304** may be returned to the caustic scrubber **104** in **FIG. 1A** or **FIG. 1B** for reprocessing and recovery of ammonia and removal of hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants. In the event there are very little to no mercaptans in the sour water liquid stream **217**, the ammonia vapor stream **304** may be returned, instead, to the compression train system **200** in **FIG. 2** and thereby save reprocessing of the ammonia vapor stream **304** in the caustic scrubber **104**. The liquid effluent stream **306** may be sent to a cooler **310** and then a pump **312** to provide the liquid effluent stream **314** at the pressure and temperature required for downstream processing. Alternatively, the liquid effluent stream **306** may be sent the pump **312** followed by cooler **310**.

[0020] An independent live steam stream **308** may also be used to strip ammonia from the sour water liquid stream **217** and improve the overall recovery of ammonia. For very large systems or alternate energy sources, a reboiler may be used to generate the live steam required for stripping ammonia from the sour water liquid stream **217**. The live steam stream **308** flow rate may be adjusted to meet the requirements for the liquid effluent stream **314**.

Caustic Fractionator System

[0021] Referring now to **FIG. 4**, a schematic diagram illustrates one embodiment of a caustic fractionator system **400** for ammonia purification. The spent caustic stream **108** from the caustic scrubber system **100A** or **100B** is pumped to a caustic fractionator **402** for processing and recovery of ammonia. The spent caustic stream **108** enters the caustic fractionator **402**, which produces a liquid bottom stream **404** comprising water, caustic, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans, and other contaminants and an overhead vapor stream **406** comprising ammonia and some water vapor. The liquid bottom stream **404** is used as a feed for a reboiler **408**, which produces a reboiler vapor stream **410** primarily comprising heated water and ammonia and a reboiler liquid stream **412** primarily comprising heated water, caustic, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans, and other contaminants. The reboiler vapor stream **410** flows counter current to the spent caustic stream **108** in the bottom of the caustic fractionator **402** to facilitate stripping the ammonia, which flows to the upper portion of the caustic fractionator **402**. Alternatively, the reboiler **408**, the reboiler vapor stream **410** and the reboiler liquid stream **412** may be replaced with live steam introduced into the bottom of the caustic fractionator **402** to facilitate stripping the ammonia.

[0022] The reboiler liquid stream **412** may be sent to a cooler **414** and then a pump **418** to provide the reboiler liquid stream **412** at the temperature and pressure required for downstream processing. Alternatively, the reboiler liquid stream **412** may be sent to the pump **418** followed by the cooler **414**. The overhead vapor stream **406** passes through a condenser **420** that produces a two-phased stream **422** comprising water and ammonia. The two-phase stream **422** is fed to a reflux drum **424**, which separates the two-phase stream **422** into an ammonia vapor stream **426** and a liquid water stream **428**. The ammonia vapor stream **426** may be recycled by sending it to the caustic scrubber **104** in **FIG. 1A** or **FIG. 1B** for reprocessing and recovery of ammonia and

removal of hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, mercaptans and other contaminants. The liquid water stream **428** is pumped to the top of the caustic fractionator **402** with a pump **430** and may be used as a reflux, which flows counter current to the vapors in the caustic fractionator **402** and washes out some of the caustic vapors.

[0023] By routing the spent caustic stream **108** through the caustic fractionator **402**, the spent caustic stream **108** can be partially separated into the ammonia vapor stream **426** comprising a small amount of hydrogen sulfide and caustic and the liquid bottom stream **404** comprising most of the caustic, carbon dioxide, mercaptans, other contaminants and a trace amount of ammonia.

[0024] While the present disclosure has been described in connection with presently preferred embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that it is not intended to limit the disclosure of those embodiments. It is, therefore, contemplated that various alternative embodiments and modifications may be made to the disclosed embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure defined by the appended claims and equivalents thereof.

CLAIMS

1. A system for ammonia purification, which comprises:
 - a caustic scrubber in fluid communication with a feed gas stream, a caustic solution stream, a first ammonia vapor stream and a second ammonia vapor stream for producing a scrubbed ammonia stream and a spent caustic stream;
 - a compression train system with at least two compression stages for separating the scrubbed ammonia stream into a non-condensable vapor stream and an anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream;
 - an ammonia stripper for separating a sour water liquid stream into the first ammonia vapor stream and a liquid effluent stream;
 - a caustic fractionator in fluid communication with the spent caustic stream for producing a liquid bottom stream and an overhead vapor stream;
 - a condenser in fluid communication with the overhead vapor stream for producing a two-phase stream comprising water and ammonia; and
 - a reflux drum for separating the two-phase stream into a liquid water stream and the second ammonia vapor stream.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the compression train system comprises:
 - a first stage compressor suction drum for separating the scrubbed ammonia stream into a wastewater liquid stream and a caustic vapor stream;
 - a first stage ammonia compressor for raising the pressure of the caustic vapor stream;
 - a first stage heat exchanger downstream of the first stage ammonia compressor for cooling the caustic vapor stream;

a second stage compressor suction drum downstream of the first stage heat exchanger for separating the caustic vapor stream into a third ammonia vapor stream and the sour water liquid stream;

a second stage ammonia compressor for raising the pressure of the third ammonia vapor stream;

a second stage heat exchanger downstream of the second stage ammonia compressor for cooling the third ammonia vapor stream; and

an ammonia separator downstream of the second stage heat exchanger for separating the third ammonia vapor stream into the non-condensable vapor stream and the anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises about 1 wt% NaOH to about 50 wt% NaOH in water.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises greater than 50 wt% NaOH in water.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises about 1 wt% KOH to about 50 wt% KOH in water.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises greater than 50 wt% KOH in water.

7. The system of claim 2, further comprising a pre-stage heat exchanger in fluid communication with the scrubbed ammonia stream and upstream of the first stage compressor suction drum.

8. The system of claim 7, further comprising another liquid water stream in fluid communication with the scrubbed ammonia stream and upstream of the pre-stage heat exchanger.
9. The system of claim 7, wherein the pre-stage heat exchanger, the first stage heat exchanger and the second stage heat exchanger each comprise an air-cooled condenser cooler.
10. The system of claim 1, further comprising an independent live steam stream in fluid communication with the ammonia stripper.
11. A method for ammonia purification, which comprises:
- introducing a feed gas stream, a caustic solution stream, a first ammonia vapor stream and a second ammonia vapor stream into a caustic scrubber for producing a scrubbed ammonia stream and a spent caustic stream;
 - separating the scrubbed ammonia stream into a sour water liquid stream, a non-condensable vapor stream and an anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream;
 - separating the sour water liquid stream into the first ammonia vapor stream and a liquid effluent stream;
 - introducing the spent caustic stream a caustic fractionator for producing a liquid bottom stream and an overhead vapor stream;
 - introducing the overhead vapor stream into a condenser for producing a two-phase stream comprising water and ammonia; and
 - separating the two-phase stream into a liquid water stream and the second ammonia vapor stream.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the scrubbed ammonia stream is separated into the non-condensable vapor stream and the anhydrous ammonia liquid product stream by a compression train system with at least two compression stages.
13. The method of claim 11, wherein the sour water liquid stream is separated into the first ammonia vapor stream and the liquid effluent stream by an ammonia stripper.
14. The method of claim 11, wherein the two-phase stream is separated into the liquid water stream and the second ammonia vapor stream by a reflux drum.
15. The method of claim 11, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises about 1 wt% NaOH to about 50 wt% NaOH in water.
16. The method of claim 11, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises greater than 50 wt% NaOH in water.
17. The method of claim 11, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises about 1 wt% KOH to about 50 wt% KOH in water.
18. The method of claim 11, wherein the caustic solution stream comprises greater than 50 wt% KOH in water.
19. The method of claim 12, further comprising introducing another liquid water stream into the compression train system at one of a position upstream of the at least two compression stages and a position downstream one of the at least two compression stages.
20. The method of claim 13, further comprising introducing an independent live steam stream into the ammonia stripper.