

MANUFACTURING OF SAND SCREENS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/948,210, filed July 6, 2007, entitled "Manufacturing of Sand Screens" and U.S. Non Provisional Application No. 12/106,849 filed April 21, 2008, entitled "Manufacturing of Sand Screens".

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to recovery of hydrocarbons in subterranean formations, and more particularly to tools, systems, and methods for manufacturing of sand screen assemblies.

BACKGROUND

Hydrocarbon fluids such as oil and natural gas are obtained from a subterranean geologic formation, referred to as a reservoir, by drilling a well that penetrates the hydrocarbon-bearing formation. Once a wellbore has been drilled, the well must be completed before hydrocarbons can be produced from the well. A completion involves the design, selection, and installation of equipment and materials in or around the wellbore for conveying, pumping, or controlling the production or injection of fluids. After the well has been completed, production of oil and gas can begin.

Sand or silt flowing into the wellbore from unconsolidated formations can lead to an accumulation of fill within the wellbore, reduced production rates and damage to subsurface production equipment. Migrating sand has the possibility of packing off around the subsurface production equipment, or may enter the production tubing and become carried into the production equipment. Due to its highly abrasive nature, sand contained within production streams can result in the erosion of tubing, flowlines, valves and processing equipment. The problems caused by sand production can significantly increase operational and maintenance expenses and can lead to a total loss of the well.

One means of controlling sand production is the placement of relatively large grain sand (i.e., "gravel") around the exterior of a slotted, perforated, or other type liner or sand screen. The gravel serves as a filter to help assure that formation fines

and sand do not migrate with the produced fluids into the wellbore. In a typical gravel pack completion, a sand screen is placed in the wellbore and positioned within the unconsolidated formation that is to be completed for production. The sand screen is typically connected to a tool that includes a production packer and a cross-over, and the tool is in turn connected to a work or production tubing string. The gravel is mixed with a carrier fluid and pumped in slurry form down the tubing and through the crossover, thereby flowing into the annulus between the sand screen and the wellbore. The carrier fluid in the slurry leaks off into the formation and/or through the sand screen. The sand screen is designed to prevent the gravel in the slurry (and other contaminants such as sand and silt) from flowing through it and entering into the production tubing. As a result, the gravel is deposited in the annulus around the sand screen where it forms a gravel pack. It is important to size the gravel for proper containment of the formation sand, and the sand screen must be designed in a manner to prevent the flow of the gravel through the sand screen.

Sand screen types may include wire-wrapped and wire-mesh screen. A wire-wrapped screen generally includes a relatively fine wire wrapped and spot welded to an underlying tubular with interstitial spaces between adjacent wires, whereby the interstitial spaces are sized to prevent particles of a predetermined size from passing through the wire-wrapped screen. Examples of wire wrapping techniques are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 3,275,785 and U.S. Patent No. 4,314,129, which are both incorporated herein by reference. The screen generally circumscribes a length of perforated pipe known as a base pipe. Accordingly, a hydrocarbon fluid (e.g., oil) is permitted flows through the wire-mesh screen and a percentage of particulate matter is filtered from passing through. The perforations along the side of the base pipe allow the fluid to enter into a production tubing. In other sand screen embodiments, the screen circumscribes a solid base pipe having an inflow control device for regulating the inflow of fluids into the base pipe.

The present invention includes various embodiments of tools, systems, and processes for the manufacturing of such sand screens.

SUMMARY

Embodiments of the present invention include a wire-wrapping assembly for making a sand screen using wire on a base pipe having a plurality of rods extending along an outside surface of the base pipe. The wire-wrapping assembly may include: (1) a pipe support for supporting the base pipe and applying a rotation around the longitudinal axis of the base pipe; (2) a wire feeder adapted to wrap the wire around the outside of the pipe and the rods in spaced helical coils; (3) a first electrode positioned to engage the wire and weld the wire to each rod as the wire is wrapped around the rods; and (4) a second electrode having a mounting ring and a plurality of separate individual contacts with each individual contact engaging only one of the rods, the mounting ring having an inner diameter larger than an outer diameter of the base pipe, each contact being adapted to move radially inward and outward along the mounting ring to engage and disengage with the rods, wherein the first electrode and second electrode define an electrical circuit as the wire engages each rod to weld the wire to the rods. In general, the base pipe includes an obstruction (e.g., termination ring, load ring, nozzle ring, end ring, etc.) protruding radially outward beyond the outer diameter of the base pipe. The inner diameter of the mounting ring is sufficiently large to permit the obstruction to pass therethrough.

In certain embodiments, each contact includes a dovetail-shaped protruding profile formed along a surface, and the mounting ring includes a dovetail-shaped groove formed on a face of the mounting ring for each contact, the mounting ring adapted to receive the profile of the contact within the groove to enable sliding of the contact.

In alternative embodiments, each contact includes a dovetail-shaped groove formed along a surface, and the mounting ring includes a dovetail-shaped protruding profile formed on a face of the mounting ring for each contact, the mounting ring adapted to engage the dovetail-shaped groove of each contact with each protruding profile on the face of the mounting ring to enable sliding of the contact.

In yet another embodiment, each contact is connected to the mounting ring by means of a pinned connection.

In further embodiments, a wheel is arranged proximate the contacts of the second electrode, the wheel adapted to apply a force to one contact at a time when such contact engages one of the rods.

The present invention still further includes a method of making a sand screen on a base pipe having an obstruction protruding radially outward from the base pipe. One embodiment of such method includes the following steps: (1) mounting the base pipe for rotation around its longitudinal axis; (2) positioning a plurality of rods along the outer surface of the base pipe; (3) rotating the base pipe and the rods to wrap a wire in spaced helical coils around the base pipe and the rods; (4) welding the wire to the rods as the wire engages the rods; (5) providing a set of contacts for grounding the rods; (6) grounding each individual rod ahead of the wrapped wire through a separate individual contact that engages only said individual rod on the outside surface of the rod adjacent the wire; and (7) moving (e.g., sliding or rotating) the contacts radially outward to clear the obstruction. Another embodiment of such method includes providing a wheel to apply a force against the back of the contact to facilitate a stronger contact engagement to the rod.

Other or alternative embodiments of the present invention will be apparent from the following description, from the drawings, and from the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The manner in which these objectives and other desirable characteristics can be obtained is explained in the following description and attached drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a profile view of a prior art mechanism for manufacturing a wire-wrapped screen as shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,314,129.

Figures 2 illustrates a view of a wire-wrapped sand screen assembly having end rings between the wire-wrapped sections, and an enlarged view of the end ring.

Figures 3A-3B illustrate a cut-away view of an embodiment of a wire wrapping assembly in accordance with the present invention for a sliding welding contact.

Figures 4A-4B illustrate a cross-section view of an embodiment of a wire wrapping assembly in accordance with the present invention for a sliding welding contact.

Figure 5 illustrates a cut-away view of an embodiment of a wire wrapping assembly in accordance with the present invention for a pivoting welding contact.

Figure 6 illustrates a cut-away view of an embodiment of a wire wrapping assembly in accordance with the present invention for providing an improved weld current path.

It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments of this invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, for the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description, numerous details are set forth to provide an understanding of the present invention. However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these details and that numerous variations or modifications from the described embodiments may be possible.

In the specification and appended claims: the terms “connect”, “connection”, “connected”, “in connection with”, and “connecting” are used to mean “in direct connection with” or “in connection with via another element”; and the term “set” is used to mean “one element” or “more than one element”. As used herein, the terms “up” and “down”, “upper” and “lower”, “upwardly” and “downwardly”, “upstream” and “downstream”, “above” and “below”, and other like terms indicating relative positions above or below a given point or element are used in this description to more clearly describe some embodiments of the invention. Moreover, the term “sealing mechanism” includes: packers, bridge plugs, downhole valves, sliding sleeves, baffle-plug combinations, polished bore receptacle (PBR) seals, and all other methods and devices for temporarily blocking the flow of fluids through the wellbore. Furthermore, while the term “coiled tubing” is used throughout, it could actually be replaced by jointed tubing or any relatively small diameter tubing for running downhole.

Generally, various embodiments of the present invention include an improved current path in the welding process in a wire-wrapped sand screen manufacturing operation and a method and apparatus for wrapping wire around a sand screen

assembly wherein the tubular assembly is formed of components having different diameters.

Wire-wrapping machines for wrapping and welding wire around a tubular structure (e.g., a perforated base pipe) using pipe handling/rotating support equipment are known in the industry. With reference to Figure 1, U.S. Patent No. 4,314,129 describes the known art as follows:

Pipe base 10 is provided with a plurality of perforations 11. A plurality of rods 12 extend along the outside surface of the pipe base, generally parallel to its longitudinal axis. The rods are usually equally spaced around the outside of the pipe base. Wire 14 is shown being wrapped around the pipe base and rods to form a screen. The wire feeding means is not shown but is of conventional construction usually comprising a drum from which the wire is fed. Usually, some sort of braking arrangement is used to hold the wire in tension to cause it to bend around the pipe and the rods.

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To wrap the wire on the pipe and rods, relative rotation between the pipe and rods and the wire feeding means is necessary. Usually, the wire feeding means is fixed and the pipe and rods are rotated. At the same time the pipe and rods are moved longitudinally at a speed which along with the speed of rotation provides the desired spacing between the adjacent coils of wire. Alternatively, . . . the wire feeding means can be moved longitudinally of the pipe and rods while the pipe and rods are rotated.

In accordance with this invention first electrode 16 is positioned to engage the wire as it is wrapped on the pipe and provide a welding current that causes the wire and the rod it engages to fuse together. The electrode is disc-shaped and rolls along the wire. To complete the circuit, means are provided to connect the rods to ground a short distance ahead of the wrapped wire.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, such means comprise second or ground electrode 18. The ground electrode includes a plurality of contact assemblies 20. Each assembly includes contact 22. . . for engaging one of the rods that extends along the surface of the pipe base. . . . Each individual contact assembly is attached to plate 28. . . along a line extending radially from the center of the pipe base. Each contact engages one of the rods located on the outside of the pipe base.

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Electrode 18 including contacts 22 should be made of a material having good electrical conductivity, such as brass. This reduces the tendency for any welding to occur between the contacts and the rods. The rods are generally of steel, often stainless steel. Housing . . . for the rod assembly as well as mounting plate 28 should also be made of a material having good electrical conductivity. The

ground electrode assembly is mounted on rotating head. . . for rotation with the pipe and the rods. A commutator or the like (not shown) connects the electrode to ground.

Embodiments of the present invention improve the known art (including, but not limited to, the processes and tools described in U.S. Patent No. 4,314,129) by providing mechanical means to: (a) adjust the contacts radially outward to overcome obstructions protruding from the base pipe, (b) allow the welding current to have a more optimal path, and (c) other advantages described and/or apparent herein.

With regard to Figure 2, a sand screen assembly 100 is shown having a wire-wrap section 102 formed around a base pipe 104, wherein the wire-wrap section is bounded by radially protruding termination rings 106 (e.g., load sleeves or torque sleeves). Other radially protruding obstructions may include nozzle rings (as for inflow control or injection) or shunt tube assemblies or other external hardware.

With respect to Figures 3A-3B and 4A-4B, one embodiment of the present invention includes an improved wire-wrapping assembly (e.g., as that described above and as shown in Figure 1) for wrapping and welding a base pipe 104 with wire 109 across a set of axial rods 108, where the base pipe includes a radially protruding obstruction 106. The improved wire-wrapping assembly includes a mounting ring or plate 200 for holding a plurality of grounding electrode contacts 204. Each contact 204 includes: (a) a dovetail-shaped profile 204A for mating with a corresponding groove 208 in the mounting ring 200, and (b) a contact profile for engaging each axial rod 108. In alternative embodiments, the contact may include the corresponding groove and the mounting ring may include the dovetail-shaped profile.

In operation, to wire-wrap the base pipe 104, the contact 204 is in engagement with the axial rod 108 to provide sufficient grounding to weld the wire 109 to the axial rod 108 (as shown in Figures 3A and 4A). As the screen section is being wrapped and a protruding obstacle 106 is encountered, the contact 204 is permitted to slide along the groove 108 of the mounting ring 200 radially outward to clear the obstruction (as shown in Figures 3B and 4B). When coming to the obstruction, the wrapping process is stopped and the wire-wrapping assembly can be moved to a new position on the base pipe 104 even with an obstruction in place. Once clear, the contact 204 can slide radially inward to re-engage the rod 108.

In other embodiments, the wire-wrapping assembly may further include a biasing member (e.g., a spring) connected to each contact for biasing the contact radially inward. The biasing member would permit the contact to slide radially outward to overcome the protruding obstruction, then apply a sufficient force to move the contact back into engagement with the axial rod.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, with respect to Figure 5, instead of sliding engagement, the grounding electrode contacts 206 are in rotating engagement with the mounting ring 200. Each contact 206 includes a pin 207 for connection to the ring 200 such that the contact is free to rotate as much as ninety (90) degrees to move the contact completely away from the base pipe 104 and to permit clearance of any protruding obstruction. While prior art wire-wrapping machines included contacts with a very limited degree of pivot to account for minor eccentricities or ovality or other imperfections in the underlying base pipe, this embodiment permits a high degree of pivot in the contact as required for the wire-wrapping assembly to clear larger obstructions.

In still another embodiment of the present invention, with reference to Figure 6, the grounding electrode contacts 204 engaging the axial rods 204 connected to the base pipe 104 are located on a rotating mounting ring 200 (or plate) as described above. The rotation of this ring 200 may be synchronized with the rotation of the base pipe. The contacts engaging the axial rods have some degree of freedom to move radially during the wrapping process either to account for minor eccentricities or ovality or other imperfections in the underlying base pipe or even to move substantially outward to account for obstructions along the base pipe such as end rings (all described above). A wheel device 210 is included in the wire-wrapping assembly to align with the contact 204 as it moves into the spot welding position. A force F is applied against the contact 204 by the wheel 210 to more readily secure the contact 204 against axial rod 204. This facilitates formation of a more direct current path than known from existing technology.

While the invention has been disclosed with respect to a limited number of embodiments, those skilled in the art will appreciate numerous modifications and variations therefrom. It is intended that the appended claims cover such modifications and variations as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. Wire-wrapping assembly for making a sand screen using wire on a base pipe having a plurality of rods extending along an outside surface of the base pipe, the wire-wrapping assembly comprising:

a pipe support for supporting the base pipe and applying a rotation around the longitudinal axis of the base pipe;

a wire feeder adapted to wrap the wire around the outside of the pipe and the rods in spaced helical coils;

a first electrode positioned to engage the wire and weld the wire to each rod as the wire is wrapped around the rods; and

a second electrode having a mounting ring and a plurality of separate individual contacts with each individual contact engaging only one of the rods, the mounting ring having an inner diameter larger than an outer diameter of the base pipe, each contact being adapted to move radially inward and outward along the mounting ring to engage and disengage with the rods, the contacts being disengaged from the rods during movement past protruding members;

wherein the first electrode and second electrode define an electrical circuit as the wire engages each rod to weld the wire to the rods.

2. The wire-wrapping assembly of claim 1, wherein the base pipe includes an obstruction protruding radially outward beyond the outer diameter of the base pipe, and

wherein the inner diameter of the mounting ring is sufficiently large to permit the obstruction to pass therethrough.

3. The wire-wrapping assembly of claim 2, wherein each contact includes a dovetail-shaped protruding profile formed along a surface, and

wherein the mounting ring includes a dovetail-shaped groove formed on a face of the mounting ring for each contact, the mounting ring adapted to receive the profile of the contact within the groove to enable sliding of the contact.

4. The wire-wrapping assembly of claim 2, wherein each contact includes a dovetail-shaped groove formed along a surface, and

wherein the mounting ring includes a dovetail-shaped protruding profile formed on a face of the mounting ring for each contact, the mounting ring adapted to engage the dovetail-shaped groove of each contact with each protruding profile on the face of the mounting ring to enable sliding of the contact.

5. The wire-wrapping assembly of claim 1, further comprising:
a wheel arranged proximate the contacts of the second electrode, the wheel adapted to apply a force to one contact at a time when such contact engages one of the rods.

6. The wire-wrapping assembly of claim 2, wherein each contact is connected to the mounting ring by means of a pinned connection.

7. A method of making a sand screen on a base pipe having an obstruction protruding radially outward from the base pipe, comprising:
mounting the base pipe for rotation around its longitudinal axis;
positioning a plurality of rods along the outer surface of the base pipe;
rotating the base pipe and the rods to wrap a wire in spaced helical coils around the base pipe and the rods;
welding the wire to the rods as the wire engages the rods;
providing a set of contacts for grounding the rods;
grounding each individual rod ahead of the wrapped wire through a separate individual contact that engages only said individual rod on the outside surface of the rod adjacent the wire; and
moving the contacts radially outward to disengage the contacts from grounding against the rods while clearing the obstruction.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein moving the contacts further comprises sliding the contacts radially outward along a groove to clear the obstruction.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein moving the contacts further comprises rotating the contacts radially outward along a groove to clear the obstruction.

10. The method of claim 7, further comprising applying a force against the individual contact engaging the rod.