

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR GASIFYING FEEDSTOCK

[0001] The invention relates to thermochemical technology and equipment, in particular, to processes and apparatuses for gasifying solid biomass, household and industrial waste, fossil fuels as well as other carbon-containing feedstock using downdraft gasification.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Gasification is a continuous thermal decomposition process in which solid organic or carbonaceous materials (feedstock) break down into a combustible gas mixture. The combustible gas components formed are primarily carbon monoxide (CO), hydrogen (H₂), and methane (CH₄). Other non-combustible gases such as nitrogen (N₂), steam (H₂O), and carbon dioxide (CO₂) are also present in various quantities. The process of gasification involves pyrolysis followed by partial oxidation, which is controlled by injecting air or other oxygen containing gases into the partially pyrolysed feedstock. More specifically, biomass gasification is a sequence of reactions including water evaporation, lignin decomposition, cellulosic deflagration and carbon reduction. An external heat source begins the reaction, but partial oxidation provides heat to maintain the thermal decomposition of the feedstock. If concentrated oxygen is used, the resulting gas mixture is called syngas. If air (which includes nitrogen) is used as the oxidant, the resulting gas mixture is called producer gas. For simplicity, the term "Producer Gas" as used herein shall include both syngas and producer gas. Both gas mixtures are considered a "fuel gas" and can be used as a replacement for natural gas in many processes. They can also be used as a precursor to generate various industrial chemicals and motor fuels. When biomass is used as the feedstock, gasification and combustion of the Producer Gas is considered to be a source of renewable energy.

[0003] As a general matter, gasification offers a more efficient, cost effective and environmentally friendly alternative for extracting potential energy from solid feedstock as compared to combustion. As a result of gasification, the feedstock's potential energy can be converted to Producer Gas, which is cleaner burning, compressible and more portable.

Producer Gas may be burned directly in some engines and burners, purified to produce methanol and hydrogen, or converted via the Fischer-Tropsch and other methods and processes into synthetic liquid fuel.

[0004] There are three common gasification processes: fluidized bed gasification, updraft gasification and downdraft gasification. The present invention is an improved downdraft gasifier. Therefore only a brief description of fluidized bed gasification and updraft gasification are provided and followed by a fuller discussion of current downdraft gasification.

[0005] Updraft Gasification

[0006] The counter-current fixed bed ("updraft") gasifier consists of a fixed bed of feedstock on top of a large grate through which steam, oxygen and/or air flow upward. Updraft gasifiers typically require feedstock that is hardy and not prone to caking or clumping so that it will form a permeable bed. The updraft gasifier consists of a feedstock bed through which the oxidant (steam, oxygen and/or air) flows in from the bottom and exits through the top as gas. Updraft gasifiers are thermally efficient because the ascending gases pyrolyze and dry the incoming biomass, transferring heat so that the exiting Producer Gas is cooled when it exits the gasifier. However, significant amounts of tar are present in the Producer Gas, so it must be extensively cleaned before use, unless it is combusted at the point of generation. The tar can be recycled to the gasifier, but tar removal is complicated and costly. The updraft gasifier has been the standard of coal gasification for 150 years and it is also popular in biomass cooking stoves.

[0007] Fluidized-Bed Gasification

[0008] In a fluidized-bed gasifier, oxidant is blown through a bed of solid particles at a sufficient velocity to keep the solid particles in a state of suspension. The feedstock is introduced to the gasifier, very quickly mixed with the bed material and almost instantaneously heated to the bed temperature either externally or using a heat transfer medium. Most of these fluidized-bed gasifiers are equipped with an internal cyclone in order to minimize char (carried over into the Producer Gas stream) and remove fluidizing

media from the Producer Gas. The major advantages include feedstock flexibility and the ability to easily control the reaction temperature, which allows for gasification of fine grained materials (sawdust, etc.) without the need of pre-processing. Fluidized-bed gasifiers also scale very well to large sizes. Unfortunately, problems with feeding, instability of the bed, build-up of residual carbon and ash sintering in the gas channels occur. Other drawbacks include high tar content of the Producer Gas (up to 500 mg/m³ gas), relatively low efficiency and poor response to load changes. Due to high operating and maintenance costs, this style of gasification is economically limited to large-scale applications, typically in excess of 100 tons per day.

[0009] Downdraft Gasification

[0010] In downdraft gasification, all feedstock, air and gases flow in the same direction - from top to bottom. Although updraft gasification is typically favored for processing of biomass feedstock and fluid bed gasification is typically used in gasification of coal, downdraft gasification process has a number of advantages. One advantage of downdraft gasification is low levels of tar in the resulting Producer Gas because the tars generated during pyrolysis must pass through the Oxidation Zone (defined below) and the char bed in the Reduction Zone (defined below) before exiting the gasifier. The high temperature of the Oxidation Zone and the top of the char bed breaks down the tars (i.e., thermal cracking). The result is a Producer Gas that may be cooled and more easily cleaned for use in reciprocating engines, gas-fired turbines and catalytic reforming processes.

[0011] Current downdraft gasification processes have some significant disadvantages that have prevented widespread adoption. These disadvantages are: (1) the feedstock generally must be pre-processed into standard sizes with similar chemical properties (without mixing different types of feedstock or different size pieces) to enable continuous gasification without bridging (i.e., jamming) the device or disrupting the quality of the Producer Gas; (2) the feedstock must have a standardized range of volatile components; (3) the feedstock must have a standardized calorific content (i.e., btu/lb); (4) generally, the gasifier must be stopped frequently for cleaning and removal of excess char that accumulates at the bottom of the gasifier; (5) the Producer Gas created is of inconsistent

quality, and the gasifier is less productive and less efficient due to temperature changes caused by frequent shutdowns and variations in feedstock; (6) the gasifiers do not allow for reconfiguration during operation and must be shut down every time the oxidation reaction shifts from its designated location in the gasifier; (7) the gasifiers are not thermally stable over long periods of time and lose efficiency (or melt down); and (8) the gasifiers do not allow the location of the oxidation reaction to be moved in tandem with the reduction zone to compensate for different conditions required to gasify different types of feedstock and to generate different ratios of Producer Gas components. But the most significant disadvantage of current downdraft gasifiers is that (9) they require hearth loading such that the Oxidation Zone, also the hottest zone of the gasifier, be designed with a substantial restriction point (i.e., a restriction of approximately one half the diameter of the other sections of the gasifier).

[0012] In an ideal downdraft gasifier, there are three zones: a Pyrolysis Zone, an Oxidation Zone and a Reduction Zone (each defined below). In such an ideal gasifier, (1) the residence time of feedstock could be controlled in the Oxidation Zone (relative to the flow of feedstock through the rest of the gasifier) to allow the maximum amount of feedstock to undergo gasification before passing out of the Oxidation Zone into the Reduction Zone and (2) the Reduction Zone would be designed to cause the hot gas produced in the Oxidation Zone to mix with the char in the Reduction Zone as quickly and as thoroughly as possible to promote thorough gasification. Unfortunately, the restriction area in current gasifiers greatly impedes the overall volume of feedstock that can be moved through such a gasifier and disrupts the overall flow and output of Producer Gas.

[0013] The restriction areas found in prior art gasifiers are commonly referred to as the throat and hearth, which are an intentional design in current downdraft gasifiers as dictated by the prevailing theory, Superficial Velocity Theory.

[0014] Superficial Velocity (SV) is measured as:

[0015] $SV = \text{Gas Production Rate} / \text{Cross Sectional Area} = (m^3/s) / (m^2) = m/s$

[0016] where s = time and m = distance.

[0017] Superficial Velocity Theory, when used to design downdraft gasifiers, dictates that a higher superficial gas velocity in the Oxidation Zone means a cleaner Producer Gas and less char by-product will be produced.

[0018] The physical restriction required by Superficial Velocity Theory in the Oxidation Zone itself limits both the entry and exit of feedstock in traditional downdraft gasifiers. It would be preferable to control the feedstock's velocity in the restriction area independent of its velocity throughout the rest of the gasifier in order to promote complete gasification and to reduce production of char by-product.

[0019] What is needed is a downdraft gasifier design that allows the flow rate of feedstock to be controlled as it passes through the Oxidation Zone with minimal restriction in order to improve the overall volume and flow of feedstock passing through the gasifier.

SUMMARY

[0020] The following is a summary description of the invention. It is provided as a preface to assist those skilled in the art to more rapidly assimilate the detailed discussion, which ensues and is not intended in any way to limit the scope of the claims, which are appended hereto, in order to particularly point out the invention.

[0021] The invention disclosed is a gasifier comprising a plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes. The tubes have an interior wall and exterior wall and a proximal and distal end wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet. The gasifier has three separate reaction zones: (1) a Pyrolysis Zone; (2) an Oxidation Zone beneath the Pyrolysis Zone; and (3) a Reduction Zone beneath the Oxidation Zone. A rotating and vertically adjustable grate is located below, but not attached to, the Reduction Zone. Unlike other gasifiers, this is a partially open core gasifier without an airtight seal on the distal end of the gasifier.

[0022] Optionally, a Drying Zone is placed above the Pyrolysis Zone so the heat of the gasifier can be used to dry feedstock before it enters the gasifier. In operation, feedstock is fed into the Pyrolysis Zone (either directly or by way of the Drying Zone). Gravity causes

the feedstock to move downward through the three reaction zones, with the Producer Gas and carbon ash and residue by-product formed after a biomass feedstock has been gasified ("Biochar") exiting through the grate at the bottom of the gasifier into collection chutes. The Biochar is separated from the Producer Gas by gravity.

[0023] The Producer Gas also exits through the grate and is collected by collection vents on the sides of the collection chutes. The pressure within the collection chutes is a function of pipelines connected to the gas collection vents and machinery attached to those pipelines downstream of the gasifier (i.e., engines, collection chambers, etc.) The pressure of the gasifier is not dependent on the pressure of the collection chutes.

[0023a] In view of the above, according to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a gasifier comprising: a plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes having an interior wall, an exterior wall, a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet; at least three contiguous reaction zones comprising a pyrolysis zone angled toward a central convergence, followed by an oxidation zone wherein a middle portion of the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone is dilated, followed by a reduction zone wherein the interior wall of the tube corresponding to the reduction zone has a greater diameter than the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone; at least two rings of piano air inlets located within the oxidation zone to inject air; and a rotating and vertically adjustable grate positioned below, but not touching, the reduction zone; wherein the gasifier is a partially open core downdraft gasifier used for gasification of feedstock.

[0023b] According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of gasifying feedstock comprising: filling a gasifier with feedstock; said gasifier comprising a plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes having an interior wall, an exterior wall, a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet, a pyrolysis zone, an oxidation zone and a reduction zone; igniting the feedstock to create an oxidation band; injecting oxidant streams into the oxidation zone using at least two rings of piano air inlets; moving feedstock sequentially through the pyrolysis zone where the feedstock begins to fluidize and decompose, then an oxidation zone where the feedstock changes to producer gas and then a reduction zone

where the producer gas mixes with biochar to cool and form additional producer gas; holding feedstock and a bed of biochar inside the gasifier using a rotating and vertically adjustable grate positioned below the reduction zone; removing biochar and producer gas through a bypass and holes in the grate; and refilling the gasifier with feedstock.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [0024]** Fig. 1 shows a cutaway front view of a gasifier.
- [0025]** Fig. 2 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier.
- [0026]** Fig. 3 shows the exterior front view of a gasifier.
- [0027]** Fig. 4 shows the exterior side view of a gasifier.
- [0028]** Fig. 5 shows a cutaway front view of a gasifier with dimensions shown in inches.
- [0029]** Fig. 6 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier with dimensions shown in inches.
- [0030]** Fig. 7 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier illustrating the densest portion of an induced and an entrained gradient.
- [0031]** Fig. 8 shows a cutaway perspective view of a gasifier illustrating the densest portion of an induced and an entrained gradient.
- [0032]** Fig. 9 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier with an oxidation band.
- [0033]** Fig. 10 shows a cutaway perspective view of a gasifier with an oxidation band.
- [0034]** Fig. 11 shows a perspective view of a grate frame.

- [0035] Fig. 12 shows a top view of a grate frame.
- [0036] Fig. 13 shows a perspective view of an assembled grate having a spiral groove.
- [0037] Fig. 14 shows a front view of an assembled grate having holes cut in the grate.
- [0038] Fig. 15 shows a perspective view of removable segment of a grate.
- [0039] Fig. 16 shows a top view of a removable segment of a grate.
- [0040] Fig. 17 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier with arrows depicting the gasification process.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0041] Definitions

[0042] The following list of defined terms is in not intended to be limiting or comprehensive but merely provide a quick reference tool for understanding the invention. Other defined terms are capitalized in other sections of this document where they are used. Capitalized terms, shall include all variants, singular and/or plural versions of the terms used herein.

[0043] “Bed Oxidant Stream” or “Bed Air” means the Oxidant Stream entering the gasifier through inlets (i.e., non Plano Air Inlets) positioned at the top of the Pyrolysis Zone (or the optional Drying Zone).

[0044] “Biochar” means the carbon ash and residue by-product formed after a biomass feedstock has been gasified.

[0045] “Bypass” means the “gap” between the top of the grate located underneath the gasifier and the opening at the bottom of the Reduction Zone, which may also be referred to as the grate pitch.

[0046] “Control System” means an operating system, which includes multiple control mechanisms and coordinated software for a user/operator to adjust variables of a gasifier such as grate rotation and height, input of feedstock and Oxidant Streams.

[0047] “Drying Zone”, with regard to the gasifier, means an area where feedstock is dried prior to entering a Pyrolysis Zone, said Drying Zone being a container of sorts or extension of the gasifier above the Pyrolysis Zone, but alternatively it may be an area and/or component/unit separate from the gasifier. In the context of the gasification process, the “Drying Zone” means the phase where feedstock is dried.

[0048] “Gasifier Flow Lane” means the path, generally toward the middle of a gasifier, where feedstock moves the fastest, is gasified, and the resulting Producer Gas and Biochar continue to move into a Reduction Zone and out of gasifier through a grate.

[0049] “Oxidant Stream” means air or other oxygen containing gases.

[0050] “Oxidation Band”, with regard to a gasifier, means the location where the primary gasification reaction occurs. The Oxidation Band is where the Oxidant Streams converge and, together with the heat from the gasifier and the presence of feedstock, the gasifier quickly oxidizes the feedstock in a narrow band of white hot gas that extends across the diameter of a gasifier. In the context of the gasification process, the “Oxidation Band” means the hottest phase of the gasification reaction.

[0051] “Oxidation Zone”, with regard to the gasifier, means a zone of a gasifier leading up to and away from an Oxidation Band. The overall shape of the Oxidation Zone is of a hollow tube, the tube having an inlet and an outlet of approximately the same size but is dilated in the middle. In the context of the gasification process, the “Oxidation Zone” means a phase where feedstock changes to a gas.

[0052] “Plano Air Inlets” means pressurized air inlets used to inject pressurized Oxidant Streams into a gasifier. In existing gasifiers, tuyeres are used to allow air to passively enter a gasifier, but Plano Air Inlets are instead pressurized to inject Oxidant Streams into the gasifier.

[0053] “Plano Oxidant Stream” or “Plano Air” means an Oxidant Stream entering a gasifier through Plano Air Inlets.

[0054] “Pressure Lock” means a pressure lock assembly with a valve at its top and another valve at its bottom, the pressure lock being located at the top of a gasifier.

[0055] “Pressure Wave” means the differential pressure between the center of the Oxidation Band and the Oxidation Zone wall, which pushes feedstock toward the wall of a gasifier forming an induced gradient of feedstock above the Oxidation Band (“Induced Feedstock Gradient”) and an entrained gradient of Biochar below the Oxidation band (“Entrained Biochar Gradient”).

[0056] “Producer Gas” means the combustible gas mixture created by gasification of feedstock and includes both syngas and producer gas.

[0057] “Purge Oxidant Stream” or “Purge Air” means the Oxidant Stream mixed with feedstock prior to the feedstock entering the Pyrolysis Zone (or the optional Drying Zone).

[0058] “Pyrolysis Zone”, with regard to a gasifier, means the zone of the gasifier where the feedstock begins to fluidize and decompose before passing into the Oxidation Zone. The overall shape of the Pyrolysis Zone may range from a hollow tube to an inverted hollow cone. In the context of a gasification process, the “Pyrolysis Zone” means the phase where feedstock begins to fluidize and decompose.

[0059] “Reduction Zone”, with regard to a gasifier, means the zone of the gasifier where Producer Gas mixes with Biochar, cools and produces additional Producer Gas. The overall shape of the Reduction Zone is that of a hollow tube, being wider than the outlet of the Oxidation Zone. In the context of the gasification process, the “Reduction Zone” means the phase where Producer Gas mixes with Biochar.

[0060] **Overview of the Gasifier Zones**

[0061] The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for gasifying carbon-containing biomass feedstock. The gasifier comprises a plurality of conjoined and vertically

positioned tubes. The tubes have an interior wall and exterior wall and a proximal and distal end wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet. The gasifier has three separate sequential reaction zones: (1) a Pyrolysis Zone; (2) an Oxidation Zone beneath the Pyrolysis Zone; and (3) a Reduction Zone beneath the Oxidation Zone. A rotating and vertically adjustable grate is located below, but not attached to, the Reduction Zone. Unlike other gasifiers, this is a partially open core gasifier; there is no airtight bottom wall sealing the Reduction Zone or the bottom of the gasifier itself.

[0062] **Figures 1 and 2** show a cutaway front view of a gasifier. This downdraft gasifier is a sequential, co-current flow, gravity-assisted, thermo-chemical phase change gasifier having at least three zones: a Pyrolysis Zone **20**, an Oxidation Zone **30** and a Reduction Zone **40**. The gasifier partially oxidizes a portion of the feedstock, which releases enough heat activation energy to start a thermo-chemical solid-to-gas phase change reaction of the remaining feedstock into Producer Gas. The process of gasification is a sequence of reactions including water evaporation, lignin decomposition, cellulosic deflagration and carbon reduction and is controlled by injecting Oxidant Streams into the partially pyrolysed feedstock. Although the present invention will be described in the context of a method and apparatus for processing biomass, the principles described may be applied to many other types of feedstock and various embodiments will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art.

[0063] The interior of the entire gasifier is lined with silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, refractory alloys, other ceramics or another material having similar properties that is stable at high temperatures. Non-volatile and ungasified materials are separated from the Producer Gas by gravity as these materials fall to the bottom of the gasifier. This high efficiency gasifier converts the chemical potential energy of feedstock into Producer Gas, with the average amount of Biochar generated being about 1%-10% by weight of the original feedstock.

[0064] **Figures 3 and 4** show the exterior front and side views of a gasifier. Feedstock moves downward in the gasifier as gasification takes place. As the gasifier reaches a steady operating state (i.e., the state wherein each zone of the gasifier has reached a steady and

sustained temperature), a vertical temperature gradient forms inside the gasifier and the feedstock stratifies into a sequence of layers or zones roughly corresponding to the Pyrolysis Zone **20**, the Oxidation Zone **30** and the Reduction Zone **40** based on the steps in the gasification process. There are no fixed boundaries between these zones, but instead the boundaries are contiguous. Therefore there are transitional gradients having mixed properties of each of the adjacent zones (i.e., feedstock pyrolysis may begin in the Drying Zone **10** and oxidation may begin in the Pyrolysis Zone **20**). Feedstock is maintained at a level above the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and pulled down through the Pyrolysis Zone **20** by gravity so that descending feedstock replaces feedstock that has been gasified. Gases and feedstock flow in a downward direction inside the gasifier. Solid materials flow through the gasifier by gravity. Gases move downward through the gasifier by pressure differential.

[0065] Solids (e.g., feedstock and Biochar) are held inside the gasifier by a vertically adjustable, rotating grate **50** located just below the Reduction Zone **40** of the gasifier, as shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. The residence time of solids within the gasifier is controlled by the rotational speed of the grate **50**, the vertical position of the grate **50**, and the rate of gasification (i.e., phase change) within the gasifier. The Biochar accumulates on top of the grate **50** and acts as a pseudo-seal for the bottom of the gasifier, which then allows the gasifier to pressurize, and maintain pressurization even as Biochar continuously leaves the gasifier. Biochar falls from the bottom of the gasifier through the rotating grate **50** or out the Bypass **49**. Once the Biochar falls from the grate **50** or the Bypass **49**, it falls into one or more collection chutes **60** below the grate **50** and then into a residue box **90**, where it is removed from the gasifier by an auger **91**.

[0066] In one embodiment, the zones of the gasifier include: the Drying Zone **10**, the Pyrolysis Zone **20**, the Oxidation Zone **30**, the Reduction Zone **40** with a grate **50** located underneath the gasifier. Below the gasifier are gas collection vents **70**, Biochar collection chutes **60** and a Biochar residue box **90**.

[0067] **Figures 5 and 6** show a cutaway front and side view of a gasifier with dimensions.

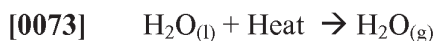
[0068] **The Drying Zone (optional)**

[0069] Overall Description, Size and Functioning.

[0070] In the Drying Zone **10**, moisture within the feedstock is evaporated as it is exposed to radiant heat emitting from the Oxidation Zone **30**. The water vapor flows downward through the Pyrolysis Zone **20** toward the Oxidation Zone **30** along with the Bed Oxidant Stream and the Purge Oxidant Stream being fed into the gasifier. Temperatures in the Drying Zone **10** can vary extensively depending on how the gasifier is operated. By way of example, for woodchips with 25% moisture content, the normal range of temperature in the Drying Zone **10** is about 100 to 300° F. The depth of the Drying Zone **10** in one embodiment may be between zero and six feet tall. This depth may increase with the moisture content of the feedstock, the size of the gasifier and the embodiment of the gasifier used. Radiant heat from the Oxidation Zone **30** drives the evaporative processes. However, preheating the Bed Oxidant Stream and the Purge Oxidant Stream can accelerate the drying process.

[0071] Drying the feedstock inside the gasifier is an endothermic process, and so energy (i.e., heat) is required to dry and release water from the feedstock as steam, which steam assists the reactions occurring below. The wetter the feedstock, the more energy the Drying Zone **10** requires.

[0072] The primary physical change in the Drying Zone **10** is:



[0074] Wherein “H” is Hydrogen, “O” is oxygen, “l” is liquid, and “g” is gas.

[0075] Description of the Feeding Mechanism and Fill Level Indicators

[0076] Because the gasifier becomes pressurized during operation, a Pressure Lock may be used to bring feedstock into the gasifier while maintaining the gasifier’s pressure. A top valve of the Pressure Lock opens to admit feedstock into the Pressure Lock and then closes. The interior of the Pressure Lock pressurizes to match the air pressure of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** (or optional Drying Zone **10**), which may be controlled by a user through the Control

Systems, before a bottom valve opens allowing the feedstock to leave the Pressure Lock and enter the gasifier at the adjusted air pressure.

[0077] The Pressure Lock may be fabricated from materials such as Schedule 40 seamless carbon steel pipe, 150 pound class steel flanges and standard 150 pound class slide gate valves, such as knife-gate valves. This Pressure Lock assembly may be integrated into the equipment design and use a pair of standard industrial knife-gate valves with a pipe between them. The pipe in one embodiment may be 18" schedule 40 pipe orientated vertically. The length of the pipe may be adjusted depending on the feedstock delivery method and desired volume. An example of a Pressure Lock is 72" in length, which will provide 100-120 pounds of feedstock per feedstock dump into the Drying Zone **10** (if applicable) or the Pyrolysis Zone **20**. In one embodiment, attached to the pipe are threaded couplings for receiving (1) a level switch, such as a rotary level switch, limit switch, photon switch, or a laser switch, and (2) a pressure transmitter, and (3) a pressurized air supply line.

[0078] The end user may automate the gasifier feedstock filling process with a timer or by using a microwave sensor or another suitable fill level indicator, to detect the presence of feedstock at the fill level in the gasifier and also in the Pressure Lock ("Fill Level Indicators"). The Drying Zone **10** of the gasifier may have one or more Fill Level Indicators **12** capable of functioning in high temperature environments. Once the Fill Level Indicator **12** detects that the feedstock level is low, the automatic feed mechanism begins. One gasifier design with multiple Fill Level Indicators **12** allows more options in choosing the height of the feedstock bed when using an automatic filling system.

[0079] In one embodiment, the top valve of the Pressure Lock opens and a bucket loading mechanism dumps feedstock into the Pressure Lock until a Fill Level Indicator in the Pressure Lock detects that it is full. The top valve of the Pressure Lock closes and the Pressure Lock pressurizes to match the pressure of the Drying Zone **10** (if applicable) or the Pyrolysis Zone **20**. Then, the bottom valve of the Pressure Lock opens and deposits the feedstock onto a pressurized auger that is connected to the Drying Zone **10** (if applicable) or the Pyrolysis Zone **20**. The auger then deposits the feedstock into the top of the gasifier. The gasifier's control systems determine when to initiate each feedstock fill cycle based on

the signals, such as temperature or pressure changes, received from various sensors and indicators on the gasifier.

[0080] The Pyrolysis Zone

[0081] Overall Description, Size and Functioning

[0082] The Pyrolysis Zone **20** is directly below the Drying Zone **10** (if a Drying Zone **10** is included) within the gasifier. The Pyrolysis Zone **20** may be increased or decreased in height based on the properties of the predominant type of anticipated feedstock. A taller Pyrolysis Zone **20** will accommodate wetter and/or more complex materials that require more drying and longer pyrolysis times.

[0083] In the Pyrolysis Zone **20**, vapors, oils, and constituent gases are distilled and moved downward by the effects of gravity, pressure differences and steam created in the Drying Zone **10** and the Pyrolysis Zone **20**. The Pyrolysis Zone **20** is endothermic at the top and relies on heat released from below. Toward the bottom of the Pyrolysis Zone **20**, where the temperature increases, the feedstock begins to spontaneously break down as it becomes chemically unstable at the elevated temperatures. Therefore, the decomposition of feedstock occurring in the lower section of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** is exothermic and releases heat. In one embodiment, the Pyrolysis Zone **20** is four to six feet deep.

[0084] Pyrolysis chemistry is highly complex. The principal chemical and physical changes occurring in this zone can be simplified and represented by the following:

[0085] $C_xH_yO_z(s) + \text{Heat} \rightarrow \text{Organic Vapors (formaldehyde, alcohols, tars, etc.)}$

[0086] $C_xH_yO_z(s) \rightarrow CH_4 + H_2 + C(s) + \text{Organic Vapors (tars)} + \text{Heat}$

[0087] Because some Oxygen is present in the Pyrolysis Zone **20** from the Oxidant Streams being fed into the gasifier, oxidation may occur as feedstock approaches the bottom of the Pyrolysis Zone **20**.

[0088] The Oxidation Zone

[0089] Overall Description, Size and Functioning

[0090] The Oxidation Zone **30** is the zone in the gasifier leading up to and away from the Oxidation Band **350** or the general step of the method including formation of the Oxidation Band **350**. The Oxidation Zone **30** is where the Oxidation Band **350** forms and represents the hottest step in the gasification process and is where the cellulosic fraction of the feedstock converts from a solid to a gas.

[0091] The First Gradient (The Induced Feedstock Gradient)

[0092] **Shown in Figures 7 and 8**, during operation, the flow of an Oxidant Stream through Pyrolysis Zone **20** induces a feedstock gradient to form (1) vertically, beginning toward the top of the outside wall of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and ending down at a lower ring of Plano Air Inlets **32** in the Oxidation Zone **30** and (2) horizontally, beginning in the center of the gasifier and ending at the wall of the gasifier (the “Induced Feedstock Gradient”).

[0093] As shown in Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10, this Induced Feedstock Gradient is an increasing and differential density of feedstock becoming denser toward the perimeter of the gasifier wall and above the Oxidation Band **350** (the “Densest Portion”) formed by at least four factors acting in concert: (1) the Pressure Wave from the Oxidation Band **350** pressing feedstock against the interior wall of the gasifier; (2) the geometry of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and the Oxidation Zone **30** (i.e., angles of the walls); (3) the total volume of the Oxidant Stream flowing into the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and the Oxidation Zone **30**; and (4) the relative volume of the Oxidant Stream flowing into each of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and the Oxidation Zone **30**. The Densest Portion of the Induced Feedstock Gradient is illustrated at **200**.

[0094] Feedstock travels through the gasifier at different velocities. Some of the feedstock is steadily progressing down the gasifier in the Gasifier Flow Lane **203**, while other feedstock may pause or slow at various points in the gasifier. Feedstock moves more slowly and/or is suspended within the Induced Feedstock Gradient **200**. The Densest Portion of the Induced Feedstock Gradient **200** is denser and slower moving feedstock than the feedstock in the Gasifier Flow Lane.

[0095] The Densest Portion of the Induced Feedstock Gradient **200** ends at the lower Plano Air Inlets **32** where the Oxidation Zone **30** dilates to a wider diameter. In one embodiment, this dilation is designed to be a Kline-Fogelman step in order to direct and control the rate of flow of gases and solids moving down the gasifier.

[0096] Ordinarily, as gases cross a step such as a Kline-Fogelman step, an eddy is formed. The lower ring of Plano Air Inlets **32** in the Oxidation Zone **30** inject air into the location where the eddy would otherwise form. This incoming air stream collides with the Producer Gas and feedstock coming down the Gasifier Flow Lane **203**, redirects hot gases away from the wall of the gasifier, counteracts the formation of an eddy, and fuels the Oxidation Band **350**.

[0097] As conditions in the gasifier change, the Induced Feedstock Gradient may also change allowing for movement of the Oxidation Band **350** and the Gasifier Flow Lane **203** inside the gasifier. This is not possible in other gasifiers where the Gasifier Flow Lane **203** would be formed against the immovable outer wall of the gasifier.

[0098] The Oxidation Band

[0099] Shown in Figures 9 and 10, the feedstock in the Gasifier Flow Lane **203** travels down through the gasifier into the Oxidation Band **350**. The Oxidation Band **350** is the point where significant heat is liberated by the deflagration of the cellulose matter in the feedstock. Once initiated during start-up, the Oxidation Band **350** is sustained by the addition of Oxidant Streams from the Plano Air Inlets **31, 32** and feedstock descending from above. The Oxidation Band **350** partially oxidizes the feedstock into Biochar and constituent gases of Producer Gas. Tar vapors generated in the Pyrolysis Zone **20** are further decomposed in the presence of steam under the high temperatures of the Oxidation Band **350** into additional Producer Gas.

[00100] As shown in Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10, the overall shape of the Oxidation Zone **30** is of a hollow tube, the tube having an inlet **301** and an outlet **303** of approximately the same size but is dilated in the middle **302**. This is the opposite of traditional downdraft gasifiers

where the Oxidation Zone narrows into a restriction point according to Superficial Velocity Theory.

[00101] In one embodiment, the inlet **301** and the outlet **303** of the Oxidation Zone **30** are half the diameter of the dilated section **302** of the Oxidation Zone **30**. There are at least two rings of Plano Air Inlets **31**, **32**. In one embodiment, a higher ring **31** being approximately 11 inches above the lower ring **32** and a lower ring of Plano Air Inlets **32** being at the widest part of the dilated section **302** of the Oxidation Zone **30**.

[00102] The extremely high temperatures generated by this Oxidation Band **350** produce the heat that drives the chemical and physical reactions in the Pyrolysis Zone **20** and Drying Zone **10** above (if applicable). The Oxidation Band **350** naturally tends to move upward in the gasifier toward the unconsumed feedstock and the Oxidant Stream supply above. Below the Oxidation Band **350** is a mixture of Biochar, which is relatively stable at high temperatures. The gasifier is designed to allow the Oxidation Band **350** to move up and down within the gasifier. In one embodiment, the Oxidation Band **350** may be held in place in the gasifier by using a grate **50** (located below the Reduction Zone **40**) to remove the Biochar beneath the Oxidation Band **350**, counteracting the tendency of the Oxidation Band **350** to move upward. Whenever the grate **50** stops rotating, the Oxidation Band **350** starts rising.

[00103] In one embodiment, a higher ring of Plano Air Inlets **31** positioned above the lower set of Plano Air Inlets **32**, allows additional Oxidant Streams to be injected to the feedstock just before it enters the Oxidation Band **350**. Using the rotational speed of the grate **50**, the rate and ratio of the Bed Oxidant Stream, the Purge Oxidant Stream and the Plano Oxidant Streams, the Oxidation Band **350** can be held at any desired location within the gasifier. In one embodiment, the Oxidation Band **350** is held just below the lower ring of Plano Air Inlets **32**.

[00104] The partial oxidation of feedstock is also complex but can be simplified into the following expressions:

[00105] Feedstock-Bound C + $\frac{1}{2}$ O₂ → CO + Heat

[00106] Feedstock-Bound C + O₂ → CO₂ + Heat

[00107] Feedstock-Bound H + O₂ → H₂O + Heat

[00108] Feedstock-Bound H → H₂

[00109] CO + 3H₂ → CH₄ + H₂O + Heat

[00110] CO₂ + 4H₂ → CH₄ + 2H₂O + Heat

[00111] Solid C Residue + 2H₂ → CH₄ + Heat

[00112] CO + H₂O → CO₂ + H₂ + Heat

[00113] The reactions in the Oxidation Zone **30** are exothermic and release the heat that operates the entire gasifier.

[00114] The Second Gradient (The Entrained Biochar Gradient)

[00115] Also shown in Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10, just below the Oxidation Band **350**, the beginning of a second gradient of Biochar forms (1) vertically, beginning just below the lower ring of Plano Air Inlets **32** in the Oxidation Zone **30** and extending down along the wall of the Oxidation Zone **30** into the Reduction Zone **40** (2) horizontally, from the center of the gasifier to the wall of the gasifier (the “Entrained Biochar Gradient”). As Biochar leaves the Oxidation Band **350**, the diameter of the Oxidation Zone **30** narrows to approximately the same size as the inlet **301** to the Oxidation Zone **30**. The Pressure Wave from the Oxidation Band pushes the Biochar against the narrowing wall of the Oxidation Zone. The Densest Portion of the Entrained Biochar Gradient is illustrated at **300**. The Pressure Wave slows the movement of the Densest Portion of the Biochar in the Entrained Biochar Gradient **300** relative to Biochar in the Gasifier Flow Lane **203**. The Gasifier Flow Lane **203** remains intact even though the feedstock has changed phase, and Producer Gas and Biochar are now moving downward instead of feedstock.

[00116] The Densest Portion of the Entrained Biochar Gradient **300** runs down along the wall of the Oxidation Zone **30** into the Reduction Zone **40**. As the Reduction Zone **40** is

wider than the Oxidation Zone **30**, the entrance to the Reduction Zone **40** forms another step. In one embodiment, the angled of the wall of the Oxidation Zone **30** and the inlet to the Reduction Zone **40** form a Kline-Fogleman step. As the Producer Gas crosses the step into a wider Reduction Zone **40** (i.e., a diameter expansion in the Reduction Zone **40**), an eddy forms in the Reduction Zone **40**. This eddy encourages mixing between the Producer Gas and Biochar in the Reduction Zone **40**.

[00117] Simulation of a Throat and Hearth

[00118] *Unlike traditional downdraft gasifiers, this downdraft gasifier does not have a restriction zone in the Oxidation Zone **30**, but instead the Oxidation Zone **30** increases in size. Nearly all current downdraft gasifiers apply the Superficial Velocity Theory and are, therefore, constructed with a restriction in the Oxidation Zone **30** in order to achieve a useable quality Producer Gas. Additionally, most current downdraft gasifiers use a vacuum to pull Producer Gas through the gasifier.*

[00119] The two gradients that are formed in this gasifier, the Induced Feedstock Gradient above the Oxidation Band **350** and the Entrained Biochar Gradient below the Oxidation Band **350** work together to simulate a throat and hearth inside the gasifier. The advantages of this approach are that the Oxidation Band **350** can move up or down in the gasifier without damaging or possibly destroying the gasifier itself, and the inside of the gasifier can adapt to different types and mixtures of feedstock. Other gasifiers with a fixed throat and hearth must be calibrated to a small range of feedstock, cannot be easily adjusted to accommodate other feedstock types, and cannot be adjusted during operation to accommodate changes.

[00120] The Reduction Zone

[00121] Overall Description, Size and Functioning

[00122] As shown in Figures 1, 2, 7, and 8, the Reduction Zone **40** of the gasifier is equal to or greater in diameter than the outlet **303** of the Oxidation Zone **30**. The two primary functions of the Reduction Zone **40** are to gasify residual carbon from the Biochar and to cool the Producer Gas. Both functions occur by the same mechanism, namely the

endothermic reactions of Producer Gas constituents and the solid carbon contained within the Biochar.

[00123] As discussed above, when Producer Gas and Biochar enter the Reduction Zone **40**, a turbulent eddy forms across the step between the Oxidation Zone **30** outlet **303** and the wider Reduction Zone **40**. This turbulence in the Reduction Zone **40** causes much better mixing of Producer Gas with Biochar in the Reduction Zone **40** than in other gasifier designs. This allows for nearly complete gasification of the carbon in the bed, and maximizes the cooling effect. In one embodiment, the Reduction Zone **40** of the gasifier maintains about a 2 to 6 foot bed of Biochar above the grate **50**.

[00124] Producer Gas exits typical downdraft gasifiers at temperatures around 1,500° F or higher. Producer Gas exits this gasifier at temperatures less than 1,500° F. In one embodiment, it exits at temperatures less than 1,000° F. Also, the thick bed of Biochar allows about 90 to 99% of the fuel carbon to exit this gasifier as Producer Gas, depending on the feedstock.

[00125] The reduction reactions occurring in downdraft gasifiers have been well studied and are understood to involve:

[00126] Carbon + CO₂ + Heat → 2CO

[00127] Carbon + H₂O + Heat → CO + H₂

[00128] Carbon + 2H₂O + Heat → CO₂ + 2H₂

[00129] CO₂ + H₂ + Heat → CO + H₂O

[00130] **The Gasifier Grate**

[00131] The grate **50** of the gasifier may be made of stainless steel or another suitable material that is both durable, heat resistant and non-reactive such as silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, refractory alloys or other ceramics, the grate having a top and a bottom face. In one embodiment and shown in Figures 3 and 4, the bottom face of the grate and shaft may be mounted on an elevating platform **80** that moves up and down and is

controlled by variable control systems. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the top face of the grate **50** is positioned below the lower edge of the Reduction Zone **40**. In one embodiment, the Bypass is a gap of .25 to 2 inches between the Reduction Zone **40** and the top face of the grate **50**.

[00132] The Spiral Groove

[00133] **Figure 11** shows the gasifier grate **50** which provides support for all of the solids in the gasifier. In one embodiment, the grate **50** has a frame **505** and two faces, a top face and a bottom face.

[00134] **Figures 11 and 12** show the top face of the grate **50** has a spiral groove **501**. The spiral groove **501** is oriented in the gasifier so that it faces the Reduction Zone **40**. The spiral groove **501** has a starting point at the center of the grate and a tail continuing outward to the edge of the grate **50**. Therefore in one embodiment the spiral groove spans the entire top face of the grate. The purpose of the spiral groove **501** is that it naturally moves Biochar outward from the center of the grate **50** to the edge of the grate **50** as the grate **50** rotates opposite the direction of the spiral groove **501**. The Biochar follows the tail of the spiral groove **501** as the grate **50** turns in the opposite direction until the Biochar is forced from the Reduction Zone **40** through the Bypass.

[00135] In one embodiment of the Reduction Zone **40**, silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, a refractory alloy, other ceramics or some other heat resistant, high density, course material, lines the walls of the Reduction Zone **40**. This heat resistant, high density, course material acts as file to grind away at any Biochar that is pressed against and dragged along the outer wall of the Reduction Zone **40** by the rotating grate **50**. This combination of having a spiral groove **501** in the grate forcing Biochar toward and along the course wall of the Reduction Zone **40** assists in grinding large chunks of char into small enough pieces that they escape the Bypass. A person having ordinary skill in the art will recognize that different types of spirals may be used (e.g., Archimedean, logarithmic, etc.).

[00136] In one embodiment, the spiral groove **501** in the grate is a “v” shaped Archimedean groove **502**, where the outer edge of one groove in the spiral meets the inner

edge of the adjacent groove to form a raised edge. A purpose of the “v” shaped groove is to avoid having any 90° angles, which would otherwise create hot spots or thermally unstable sections of the grate **50**.

[00137] Raising and Lowering the Grate / Bypass

[00138] In one embodiment, the grate **50** can be raised and lowered to create a higher or lower Bypass, allowing larger items that have inadvertently entered the gasifier and/or materials that have not gasified to be removed without shutting the gasifier down (e.g., brick, rocks, etc.). In an embodiment with a spiral groove **501** in the grate **50**, these foreign bodies will be forced to the wall of the Reduction Zone **40**, and then the grate **50** can be lowered to allow them to be discharged through the Bypass. This design allows for the gasifier to remain in service and still remove large, ungasified objects from the Reduction Zone **40**. The ability to raise and lower the grate **50** can also be used if maintenance is ever required inside the gasifier. In addition, the Bypass **49** functions to control Producer Gas flow out of the Reduction Zone **40**, the Bypass **49** acting similar to a valve. For example, a short Bypass increases resistance to Producer Gas flow through the grate **50** and causes pressure to build in the gasifier.

[00139] Elliptical Holes in the Grate

[00140] **Figures 13 and 14**, show the assembled grate. **Figures 15 and 16** show the grate “pie slice” segments **502**. **Figures 13 and 14** show a perspective and front view of an assembled grate having elliptical holes **503**. In one embodiment the elliptical holes **503**, such as kidney-shaped or oval-shaped holes are distributed symmetrically across the grate **50** (except there are no holes in the center of the grate above the mechanical shaft that lifts and rotates the grate). The purpose of the holes **503** is both to allow Biochar and Producer Gas to pass through the grate into the Biochar collection chute **60** below.

[00141] Pie Slice Inserts to the Grate

[00142] In one embodiment, the “pie slice” segments **502**, **504**, sit on a frame **505** of the grate **50**. When each of the segments **504** is inserted into the frame **505**, the grate is formed. This embodiment allows for replacement of a segment **504** rather than the entire grate **50** in

the event part of the grate **50** becomes damaged, and also allows the gasifier to be fitted with customized segments **504** designed for particular types of feedstock.

[00143] Grate with Multiple Features

[00144] Figure 15 shows a perspective view of removable segment of a grate. In one embodiment, the grate **50** also has a spiral groove **501** cut as a “v” **502** and elliptical, kidney or oval-shaped holes **503** cut through the spiral groove **501**. Figure 16 shows a top view of a removable segment of a grate.

[00145] **Controlling the Gasifier Using the Grate**

[00146] The shaft supporting and rotating the grate **50** can be formed of one or more pieces, depending on the size of the grate **50**. The rotational speed of the grate **50** may be calibrated by a Control System, but typically ranges from 0.0001 RPM to 1 RPM, depending on the non-volatile components of the feedstock and the rate of production of Producer Gas. Since the Oxidation Band **350** effectively rides on top of the bed of Biochar in the Reduction Zone **40**, if the bed of Biochar in Reduction Zone **40** gets too thick, the Oxidation Band **350** will rise into the Pyrolysis Zone **20**. Using thermocouples or other sensors to monitor the location of the Oxidation Band **350**, the gasifier's Control System discussed below can be programmed to speed up the rotation of the grate **50** and remove Biochar at a higher rate, which reduces the height of the Biochar bed and lowers the Oxidation Band **350** back to appropriate locations. Conversely, the gasifier's Control System can slow the grate **50** if the bed of Biochar becomes too shallow and, consequently, the Oxidation Band **350** moves too close to the grate.

[00147] **Char Collection Chute**

[00148] Shown in Figures 1, 2, 5 and 6, below the gasifier is a Biochar collection chute **60**, which may be made of steel, stainless steel or another strong, thermally stable, non-porous material. As Biochar exits the bottom or sides of the grate **50**, it falls down the Biochar collection chute **60** below the gasifier. The Biochar collection chute **60** is arranged at an angle from the direction of the flow of Biochar in the Gasifier Flow Lane **203**. In one embodiment, the angle is less than 90°, measured from the direction of Biochar flow in the

Gasifier Flow Lane **203**. In one embodiment, the angle is 45° to 80°, measured from the direction of Biochar flow in the Gasifier Flow Lane **203**. In one embodiment, at least two Biochar collection chutes **60** are symmetrically arranged with respect to center axis of the gasifier.

[00149] Producer Gas Collection Vents / Horns

[00150] Shown in Figures 1, 2, 5 and 6, two or more Producer Gas collection vents **70** are positioned within the Biochar collection chute **60** symmetrically around the axis of the grate **50**. The opening to the Producer Gas collection vents **70** faces downward so the Biochar does not fall directly into them as the Biochar falls from the grate **50**. As the Producer Gas and Biochar fall into the Biochar collection chute **60**, the Biochar separates from the Producer Gas by gravity, and the Producer Gas exits through the Producer Gas collection vents **70**.

[00151] The Biochar Residue Box

[00152] Shown in Figure 6, the Biochar residue boxes **90** are at the bottom of the Biochar collection chutes **60**. The Biochar falls down a Biochar collection chute **60** into a Biochar residue box **90**.

[00153] The Biochar residue box has a tube-style auger **91** called the “Residue Auger.” The Residue Auger **91** moves the Biochar into a pocket valve **92** that is bolted to the end of a cross pipe spool, which is bolted to the Residue Auger **91**. In one embodiment, the pocket valve **92** is a standard, air-actuated 8” or 10” ball valve where the ball is sealed on one end. When in the “up” position, the ball forms a bucket. The Residue Auger **91** is controlled by the gasifier’s Control System so that while the pocket valve **92** is in the up position, the Residue Auger **91** deposits Biochar into the pocket valve **92**. When the Control System stops this process, the Residue Auger **91** stops and the pocket valve **92** rotates to the “down” position, dumping its contents into an external collection bin or some other secondary removal system. Because the ball on the pocket valve **92** is closed on one end, the pocket valve **92** remains sealed at all times and prevents Producer Gas from leaking out of the

Biochar residue box **90**. A small amount of Producer Gas does escape, but can be vented safely by a high-point vent pipe or drawn out by vacuum pump.

[00154] Feedstock Requirements

[00155] The gasifier can gasify a very broad range of feedstock. To determine whether a given feedstock or blend of materials will gasify effectively, the feedstock must be porous enough to allow Oxidant Stream to flow through it, have a suitable calorific density (btu/ft³), have a suitable bulk density and a suitable chemical makeup. A person having ordinary skill in the art would recognize a suitable feedstock. In one embodiment of the gasifier, a suitable feedstock may be: (1) 25% or more chemically-bound oxygen content (molecular basis), (2) 10% or less ash content, (3) 30% or less moisture content, and (4) greater than 15 lbs/ft³ bulk density. There is some interaction between these variables.

[00156] All forms of biomass contain the basic chemical structure of C_xH_yO_z. This molecular structure is inherently unstable at elevated temperatures and will readily break down when heated. This is the fundamental driver of all types of biomass gasifiers. This molecular breakdown is highly exothermic and produces the heat necessary to sustain the further breakdown of biomass. Therefore, practically all forms of biomass are suitable feedstock for the gasifier, provided they meet the porousness and bulk density requirements.

[00157] **Startup and Shutdown**

[00158] On start-up, the gasifier is filled up to the middle of the Oxidation Zone **30** with feedstock. A layer of hot charcoal (in one embodiment a layer just a few inches in height) is added to the top of the feedstock through the top of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** or Drying Zone **10** (if applicable). The gasifier is then filled with feedstock to the gasifier's Fill Level Indicator and the gasifier's Control System is started.

[00159] Over the next several hours, the gasifier will begin to heat up, and a thermal gradient will start forming. Some low quality gas will be made almost immediately and Producer Gas production will gradually increase and improve as the gasifier heats up.

[00160] If the gasifier is operated for an adequate period of time, the lining inside the gasifier will become saturated with heat and the gasifier can be restarted without additional hot charcoal even after several hours of downtime. This is referred to as a “warm-start”. In many cases, the gasifier can be shut down for more than 2-3 days and still retain enough internal heat for a warm start simply by restarting the Oxidant Streams. Producer Gas flow from the gasifier stops when the Oxidant Streams stop.

[00161] Gasifier Control System

[00162] Optimizing the gasifier’s operation requires precise real-time adjustments to control the location of the Oxidation Band **350**. For example, if a mechanical device were inserted in the Oxidation Band **350** to adjust the rate of the materials leaving or entering, the 3,000° F temperatures (approximate) in the Oxidation Band **350** would destroy the mechanical device. Therefore, a grate **50** is used to control the removal of Biochar from the gasifier as it can be placed adjacent to the much cooler Reduction Zone **40**. The changes to the height of the Biochar bed caused by increasing the rate of removal of Biochar from the Reduction Zone **40** induce some of the necessary changes to adjust the vertical location of the Oxidation Band **350**. The variables mentioned below may each be adjusted to induce changes in the Oxidation Band **350**.

[00163] Several methods and systems may be used as part of the overall Control System to induce changes to and to control the Oxidation Band **350**. The Control System uses various algorithms to monitor and adjust the gasifier. The Control System may include subsystems capable of real-time adjustments and account for other methods that may only be adjusted while the gasifier is offline. Adjustments while the gasifier is offline may include: (1) adjusting the physical size and height of the Drying Zone **10** (or removing it); (2) adjusting the size of the holes **503** in the grate **50** (in one embodiment, by replacing its interchangeable segments **504**). The Control System may include subsystems to implement real-time adjustments during operation of the gasifier related to: (a) the type of feedstock entering the gasifier; (b) the rate that feedstock enters the gasifier; (c) the fill level of the feedstock in the Drying Zone **10**, if applicable; (d) the temperature of the Drying Zone **10**, if applicable; (e) the volume, speed and pressure of Oxidant Stream delivered through the

inlets at the top of the Pyrolysis Zone **20** (or Drying Zone **10**, if applicable); (f) the volume, speed and pressure of Oxidant Stream delivered through the rings of Plano Air Inlets **31, 32**; (g) the overall pressure of the gasifier; (h) the differential pressure between the various zones of the gasifier; (i) the location of the Oxidation Band **350** in the gasifier; (j) adjusting the rotational speed of the grate **50**; (k) the vertical position of the grate **50** (i.e., adjusting height of the Bypass); (l) the thickness of the Biochar bed in the Reduction Zone **40**; (m) testing and sampling the constituent components of the Producer Gas exiting the gasifier; (n) the temperature of the Producer Gas exiting the gasifier; and (o) the Producer Gas collection vent pressure and the pressure of the Producer Gas leaving the gasifier (the above examples, being “Variables”).

[00164] Variable Frequency Drives

[00165] In one embodiment of the gasifier, the Control System can gradually increase or decrease a Variable or start or stop any changes to the Variable entirely. For example, the Control System may need to slightly slow the rotational speed of the grate **50** at one time and then completely stop it at another point. As a person having ordinary skill in the art will recognize, electric motors and drives operate in two general ways some are fixed speed drives and others are variable frequency (speed) drives (“VFDs”). In one embodiment of the gasifier, a VFD is therefore attached to an on/off timer and used to control the rotational speed of the grate **50**. By starting and stopping the VFD, the Control System may simulate a slow grate **50** rotation while maintaining sufficient torque from the VFD to rotate the grate **50**.

[00166] In other applications, such as the Oxidant Stream control system, where a higher torque is not required, the VFD may be used without an on/off timer.

[00167] Grate Control

[00168] The Control System adjusts the rotational velocity of the grate **50** to adjust several of the Variables, including the differential pressure between the Oxidation Zone **30** and the Reduction Zone **40**. An example of the latter is that the differential pressure of the Reduction zone may be maintained by simply controlling the RPM setting of the grate **50**.

[00169] Oxidant Stream Flow Control

[00170] The rate at which Biochar leaves the gasifier also controls the vertical differential pressure across the gasifier (the thickness of the Biochar bed partly determines the pressure of the gasifier because the Biochar forms a pseudo-seal at the bottom of the gasifier). The vertical differential pressure across the gasifier, from the top of the Drying Zone **10** through to the bottom of the grate **50** is therefore controlled, in part, simply by increasing or decreasing the rotational speed of the grate **50**, which ejects Biochar from the Reduction Zone **40**. Described another way, if Biochar is not ejected fast enough from the gasifier it accumulates in the Reduction Zone **40** and the decreased remaining volume increases the pressure of the Producer Gas in the Reduction Zone **40** and the Oxidation Zone **30**. In one embodiment, the vertical differential pressure of the gasifier is controlled by the height of the Bypass; as the height of the Bypass increases (i.e., by lowering the grate **50**) the greater the flow of Producer Gas and Biochar from the gasifier.

[00171] The rate of Producer Gas generation is proportional to the concentration of Oxygen in the Oxidant Streams and the flow rate of the Oxidant Streams being introduced to the gasifier. The Control System measures and regulates the Oxidant Streams using standard methods known in the art.

[00172] Figure 17 shows a cutaway side view of a gasifier with arrows depicting the gasification process. Three types of Oxidant Streams enter the gasifier through three separate, corresponding inlet points: Purge Oxidant Streams, Bed Oxidant Streams and Plano Oxidant Streams. The Purge Oxidant Stream is the Oxidant Stream that is introduced to the feedstock and enters the gasifier with the feedstock through the Pressure Lock. The Purge Oxidant Stream also prevents tarry gases from back-flowing into the Pressure Lock. The Bed Oxidant Stream enters the gasifier through inlets **11** located at the top of the gasifier. The Plano Oxidant Streams enter the gasifier through the Plano Air Inlets **31, 32** located in rings around the perimeter of the Oxidation Zone **30**. The Control System monitors and adjusts each of these Oxidant Streams to control the total amount of Oxygen in each zone of the gasifier and the rate of Producer Gas being generated. The Control System can adjust the volume and velocity of this Oxidant Stream to adjust for feedstock having

differing moisture contents, bulk densities, or even because of changes in the BTU value of a feedstock. The Control System allows for the changes to be made while the gasifier is in operation, so that it does not need to be shut down or be reconfigured.

[00173] The more Oxygen fed to the gasifier the faster the feedstock is gasified in the Oxidation Zone. The faster the reaction, the more Biochar is produced and accumulates in the Reduction Zone **40**.

[00174] Implementing a Control System for variable control of the grate **50** and the Oxidant Stream in the gasifier also ensures the consistency and quality of the Producer Gas.

[00175] Thermocouples and Ceramic Lining

[00176] There are several different redundant control methods used in the gasifier, and most function as a means by which more precise control can be achieved throughout the process. In one embodiment, an effective control method is to monitor the thermal gradient, or profile, as indicated by the temperatures of each zone. These temperatures are obtained by way of embedded thermocouples inside of the lined wall of the gasifier. This temperature gradient, or profile, is a very good indicator of where each zone is and where it is moving toward within the gasifier. In one embodiment, the Control System uses this information to change the balance of Oxidant Stream at any given zone or to physically change the height of the bed of Biochar in the Reduction Zone **40** by way of the grate **50** rotation and bypass to help maintain and/or sustain each zone above it.

[00177] One embodiment improves the consistency of the Producer Gas by lining the entire gasifier with silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, refractory alloy, other ceramics or another material that is stable at high temperatures. This lining helps to evenly distribute and conduct heat out from the Oxidation Band **350** and allows the use of thermocouples while protecting them from the reactions occurring inside the gasifier.

[00178] The Control System may use all of the different methods and combine said methods into an algorithmic controller. The latter does not only allow for redundancy throughout the Control System but also ensures much greater reliability and efficiency. It furthermore ensures that the Producer Gas is of constant and high quality.

[00179] The application and method of gasification described above also provides an effective way of controlling the height of the Reduction Zone 40. A problem in other gasifiers is that the Oxidation Band 350 is limited to one location within the gasifier, and moving it disrupts the function of the process substantially or destroys the gasifier. In one embodiment of this gasifier, the Oxidation Band 350 can move up into the Pyrolysis Zone 20 or down into the Reduction Zone 40 and still be controlled and/or maintained by way of where the Control System allows the Oxidant Stream to be placed and amount of Biochar being removed. Disruption to the height of the feedstock, or the differential pressure across the gasifier can therefore be controlled by way of the grate 50 rotation without risking the Oxidation Band's 350 collapse.

[00180] Gas Produced

[00181] During operation, the gasifier will create Producer Gas having a calorific density of 125 to 145 btu/ft³. This quality of Producer Gas will continue to be produced for so long as sufficient Oxidant Stream and suitable feedstock are made available to the gasifier. In one embodiment, the gasifier converts between 12 and 120 tons of feedstock per day.

[00182] It is clear that while this gasifier is quite different in design than other gasifiers, it also substantially improves the output and quality of Producer Gas, as well as the overall efficiency of the process over other downdraft gasifiers on the market today.

[00183] Miscellaneous

[00184] All references, including publications, patent applications, and patents, cited herein are hereby incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each reference were individually and specifically indicated to be incorporated by reference and were set forth in its entirety herein.

[00185] The use of the terms “a” and “an” and “the” and similar referents in the context of describing an invention (especially in the context of the following claims) are to be construed to cover both the singular and the plural, unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The terms “comprising,” “having,” “including,” and “containing” are to be construed as open-ended terms (i.e., “including, but not limited to,”)

unless otherwise noted. Recitation of ranges as values herein are merely intended to serve as a shorthand method of referring individually to each separate value falling within the range, unless otherwise indicated herein, and each separate value is incorporated into the specification as if it were individually recited herein. All methods described herein can be performed in any suitable order unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context. The use of any and all examples, or exemplary language (e.g., “such as”) provided herein, is intended merely to better illuminate the invention and does not pose a limitation on the scope of the invention (i.e., “such as, but not limited to,”) unless otherwise claimed. No language in the specification should be construed as indicating any non-claimed element as essential to the practice of the invention.

[00186] Preferred embodiments of this invention are described herein. Variations of those preferred embodiments may become apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art upon reading the foregoing description. The inventors expect that skilled artisans will employ such variations as appropriate, and the inventors intend for the invention to be practiced other than as specifically described herein. Accordingly, this invention includes all modifications and equivalents of the subject matter recited in the claims appended hereto as permitted by applicable law. Moreover, any combination of the above-described elements in all possible variations hereof is encompassed by the invention unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context.

[00187] While the disclosure above sets forth the principles of the present invention, with the examples given for illustration only, one should realize that the use of the present invention includes all usual variations, adaptations and/or modifications. within the scope of the claims attached as well as equivalents thereof. Those skilled in the art will appreciate from the foregoing that various adaptations and modifications of the just described embodiments can be configured without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention. Therefore, it is to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced other than as specifically described herein.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

Claim 1: A gasifier comprising:

A plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes having an interior wall, an exterior wall, a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet;

at least three contiguous reaction zones comprising a pyrolysis zone angled toward a central convergence, followed by an oxidation zone wherein a middle portion of the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone is dilated, followed by a reduction zone wherein the interior wall of the tube corresponding to the reduction zone has a greater diameter than the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone;

at least two rings of plano air inlets located within the oxidation zone to inject air; and

a rotating and vertically adjustable grate positioned below, but not touching, the reduction zone;

wherein the gasifier is a partially open core downdraft gasifier used for gasification of feedstock.

Claim 2: The gasifier of claim 1 further comprising a housing positioned around the exterior wall of the plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes.

Claim 3: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein the interior wall has a lining made of material that is stable at temperatures suitable for gasification, further wherein the material comprises silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, ceramic or a refractory alloy.

Claim 4: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising non plano air inlets, wherein a bed oxidant stream enters the gasifier through the non plano air inlets and a purge oxidant stream enters the gasifier with the feedstock.

Claim 5: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein the gasifier is pressurized during operation.

Claim 6: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising an oxidation band that forms just below at least one of the at least two rings of plano air inlets.

Claim 7: The gasifier of claim 6, further comprising an induced feedstock gradient that forms above the oxidation band and an entrained biochar gradient that forms below the oxidation band during use of the gasifier.

Claim 8: The gasifier of claim 7, wherein the induced feedstock gradient and the entrained biochar gradient simulate a throat and hearth gasifier.

Claim 9: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising a drying zone.

Claim 10: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising at least one fill level indicator in the pyrolysis zone and an automatic feed mechanism that is activated when the at least one fill level indicator detects a low feedstock level.

Claim 11: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein the dilated portion of the tube in the oxidation zone is a Kline-Fogelman step.

Claim 12: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising a gasifier flow lane and an oxidation band during use.

Claim 13: The gasifier of claim 12, wherein the gasifier flow lane changes size inside the gasifier and further wherein the oxidation band moves up and down within the gasifier.

Claim 14: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein at least one of the at least two rings of plano air inlets is located around the dilated portion of the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone.

Claim 15: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein the interior wall of the tube corresponding to the reduction zone having a greater diameter than the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone is a Kline-Fogleman step.

Claim 16: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising a bed of biochar in the reduction zone just above the grate during use of the gasifier, wherein the feedstock and the bed of biochar are held inside the gasifier by the grate.

Claim 17: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising a bypass between the reduction zone and the grate.

Claim 18: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising at least one biochar collection chute and a residue box under the grate for collecting biochar that falls from the distal end of the gasifier.

Claim 19: The gasifier of claim 18, further comprising two or more producer gas collection vents symmetrically positioned on the at least one biochar collection chute.

Claim 20: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising at least two biochar collection chutes and residue boxes symmetrically arranged with respect to the conjoined and vertically positioned tubes of the gasifier.

Claim 21: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising a control system for operating the gasifier.

Claim 22: The gasifier of claim 21, wherein the control system vertically adjusts and rotates the grate and controls a residence time of the feedstock and biochar within the gasifier.

Claim 23: The gasifier of claim 21, further comprising sensors that function to monitor variables in the zones of the gasifier.

Claim 24: The gasifier of claim 1, wherein the grate is durable, heat resistant and non-reactive, and the grate has a top face and a bottom face, and the top face of the grate has no right angles with respect to the vertically positioned tubes of the gasifier, and the top face of the grate further comprises a pattern that is a spiral groove that begins at the center of the grate and spans the entire top face of the grate.

Claim 25: The gasifier of claim 1, further comprising holes in and distributed symmetrically across the grate, wherein biochar falls from the distal end of the gasifier through the grate.

Claim 26: The gasifier of claim 1, further wherein the grate has a top face and a bottom face, the bottom face of the grate is a frame and the top face of the grate comprises a plurality of replaceable segments sitting on the frame.

Claim 27: A method of gasifying feedstock comprising:

Filling a gasifier with feedstock; said gasifier comprising a plurality of conjoined and vertically positioned tubes having an interior wall, an exterior wall, a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the proximal end provides an inlet and the distal end provides an outlet, a pyrolysis zone, an oxidation zone and a reduction zone;

Igniting the feedstock to create an oxidation band;

Injecting oxidant streams into the oxidation zone using at least two rings of plano air inlets;

Moving feedstock sequentially through the pyrolysis zone where the feedstock begins to fluidize and decompose, then an oxidation zone where the feedstock changes to producer gas and then a

reduction zone where the producer gas mixes with biochar to cool and form additional producer gas;

Holding feedstock and a bed of biochar inside the gasifier using a rotating and vertically adjustable grate positioned below the reduction zone;

Removing biochar and producer gas through a bypass and holes in the grate; and

Refilling the gasifier with feedstock.

Claim 28: The method of claim 27, wherein the interior wall has a lining made of material that is stable at temperatures suitable for gasification comprising silica carbide, silica oxide, aluminum oxide, ceramic or a refractory alloy.

Claim 29: The method of claim 27, further comprising injecting air into the gasifier by non plano air inlets.

Claim 30: The method of claim 29, wherein a bed oxidant stream enters the gasifier through non plano air inlets and a purge oxidant stream enters the gasifier with the feedstock.

Claim 31: The method of claim 27, further comprising pressurizing the gasifier during operation.

Claim 32: The method of claim 27, further comprising simulating a throat and hearth gasifier by forming through use of the gasifier, an induced feedstock gradient above the oxidation band and an entrained biochar gradient below the oxidation band wherein the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone has a middle portion that is dilated, followed by a reduction zone wherein the interior wall of the tube corresponding to the reduction zone has a greater diameter than the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone.

Claim 33: The method of claim 32, wherein at least one of the at least two rings of plano air inlets is located around the dilated portion of the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone.

Claim 34: The method of claim 33, wherein at least one of the at least two rings of plano air inlets is positioned above the plano air inlets located around the dilated portion of the tube corresponding to the oxidation zone to allow additional oxidant streams to be injected into the feedstock.

Claim 35: The method of claim 27, further comprising mixing producer gas and biochar in the reduction zone wherein the mixing is accomplished by eddy formation in the reduction zone.

Claim 36: The method of claim 27, wherein the grate is durable, heat resistant and non-reactive.

Claim 37: The method of claim 27, wherein the grate has a top face and a bottom face, the top face having a center and no right angles with respect to the vertically positioned tubes of the gasifier, further wherein the grate is patterned with a spiral groove that begins at the center of the top face of the grate and spans the entire top face of the grate.

Claim 38: The method of claim 37, further comprising holes in and distributed symmetrically across the grate.

Claim 39: The method of claim 38, wherein the holes in the grate are elliptical-shaped, kidney-shaped or oval-shaped.

Claim 40: The method of claim 37, wherein the bottom face of the grate is a frame further comprising a plurality of replaceable segments sitting on the frame.

Claim 41: The method of claim 37 further comprising rotating the grate in the opposite direction of the spiral groove.

Claim 42: The method of claim 41 further comprising moving biochar outward from the center of the top face of the grate to an edge of the grate and forcing the biochar out of the reduction zone through a bypass.

Claim 43: The method of claim 27 further comprising removing materials that have not gasified during operation of the gasifier by using a bypass.

Claim 44: The method of claim 27 further comprising monitoring and adjusting gasifier variables using a control system and sensors.

Claim 45: The method of claim 44 wherein the system variables comprise (a) feedstock type, rate of delivery and fill levels; (b) temperature within the zones; (c) volume, speed and pressure of oxidant streams; (d) pressure within the gasifier zones; (e) location of the oxidation band; (f) vertical position and rotational speed of the grate; (g) removal of biochar; (h) thickness of a biochar bed; (i) testing and sampling constituent components and temperature of producer

gas exiting the gasifier; and (j) producer gas collection vent pressure and pressure of producer gas leaving the gasifier.

Claim 46: The method of claim 44 further comprising holding the oxidation band at any desired location within the gasifier by using the control system to adjust the removal rate of biochar from the grate.

Claim 47: The method of claim 46 further comprising holding the oxidation band at any desired location within the gasifier by using the control system to adjust the rate and ratio of a bed oxidant stream, a purge oxidant stream and the plano oxidant streams.

Claim 48: The method of claim 44, further comprising adjusting a vertical differential pressure across the gasifier by the rotational speed of the grate, to control the rate biochar is expelled from the reduction zone.

Claim 49: The method of claim 27, wherein the bed of biochar is a pseudo-seal for the distal end of the gasifier.