

ACCELERATED TISSUE DISSOLUTION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims the benefit of United States Provisional Patent Application Number 62/931,050 for "Accelerated Tissue Digestion" by Richard M. Hyslop et al., which was filed on November 05, 2019, the entire content of which application is hereby specifically incorporated by reference herein for all that it discloses and teaches.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Increasingly, tissue dissolution has been used as an alternative to incineration for disposal of tissue, proteins, animal carcasses, and human cadavers. Dissolution of tissue using a strong alkali solution, is known as alkaline hydrolysis. The effluent produced is emptied into a sanitary sewer or dried and shipped to a landfill. After the dissolution process, approximately 6% of the original weight of the carcass remains as bones and teeth. The final bones are sterile and easily processed into a form usable as a soil additive or may be placed in an urn at the direction of the family.

SUMMARY

[0003] In accordance with the purposes of the present invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, an embodiment of the method for chemical dissolution of tissue from cadavers hereof, includes: preparing an alkali solution having a chosen quantity of potassium hydroxide, or sodium hydroxide, or a mixture of potassium hydroxide and sodium hydroxide, in ethanol, or a mixture of potassium hydroxide, or sodium hydroxide, or a mixture of sodium hydroxide and potassium hydroxide, water and ethanol; contacting the tissue with the alkali solution; heating the tissue and the alkali solution to a desired temperature; determining when the dissolution of the tissue is complete; and reacting the resulting solution with nitric acid, or carbonic acid, or a mixture of nitric acid and carbonic acid, or another acid, to a chosen pH.

[0004] Benefits and advantages of the present invention include, but are not limited to, providing a method for chemical dissolution of cadavers using a strong alkali

dissolved in ethanol, or dissolved in an ethanol/water mixture, which proceeds in approximately two hours at atmospheric pressure and at a chosen temperature.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[0005] The accompanying FIGURE, which is incorporated in and forms a part of the specification, illustrates the embodiments of the present invention and, together with the description, serves to explain the principles of the invention.

[0006] The FIGURE is a graph of the dissolution time in hours for mice in 10% KOH (curve (a)); 25% KOH (curve (b)); and 40% KOH (curve (c)), for KOH solutions in 100% Ethanol, 50% Ethanol and 50% Water, and for 100% Water.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0007] Briefly, embodiments of the present invention provide methods for the chemical dissolution of tissue from human and other cadavers, such as pets as an example, using ethanolic potassium hydroxide (KOH) and ethanol-water solutions of KOH heated to a desired temperature at atmospheric pressure. After neutralization, to a neutral pH range, the resulting solutions may be applied to the earth for disposal. Further, the solution can be treated using an oxidizer such as hydrogen peroxide, as an example, for additional breakdown of lipids, to obviate the need for waste treatment facilities to handle the lipid's biological oxygen demand. The use of an acid, such as nitric acid, to lower the pH of the heated solution to a level suitable for application to the earth results in a crystalline material, which can readily be separated from the solution, once cooled, thereby reducing the biological oxygen demand for waste treatment facilities. It has been found that crystalline material is formed when the nitric acid is added to the warm dissolution solution (between around 100 °F and 165 °F), when the pH of the solution is lowered to greater than about 6, and the resulting solution temperature is between about 80 °F and 100 °F.

[0008] In what follows, the term "tissue" includes medical waste from humans and animals as well as portions of and entire bodies thereof.

[0009] Carbon dioxide as carbonic acid may also be used to lower the pH for disposal in sewers and waste water treatment facilities, as is the current practice for alkaline hydrolysis. See, e.g., U.S. Patent No. 9,233,405 for "Methods And Apparatuses For Digesting Tissue" by Joseph H. Wilson et al., which issued on

January 12, 2016. Use of ethanol has been found to reduce the dissolution time of the cadavers to approximately two hours for high concentrations of KOH, as compared with 18-24 hours for systems using solely water and alkali.

[0010] About 40 g of KOH will dissolve in 100 mL of ethanol versus about 121 g of KOH in 100 mL water at room temperature. Potassium hydroxide will also dissolve in other low molecular-weight alcohols such as methanol and propanol, but has lower solubility in isopropanol than in ethanol and methanol. Alcohols can participate in an acid-base equilibrium; in the case of ethanol the potassium ethoxide (ethylate) forms: $\text{KOH} + \text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH} \rightarrow \text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OK} + \text{H}_2\text{O}$. Further, as a nucleophile in organic chemistry, KOH serves as a source of OH^- in both inorganic and organic materials. Aqueous KOH also saponifies esters: $\text{KOH} + \text{RCOOR}' \rightarrow \text{RCOOK} + \text{R}'\text{OH}$. Amides are another example of saponification when aqueous KOH is used for the hydrolysis reaction.

[0011] Alternatively, KOH is used in anhydrous form such as in ethanolic KOH (KOH dissolved in ethanol) when reactions are water sensitive or when performing an elimination-type reaction, such as dehydration.

[0012] In embodiments of the present invention, ethanol was initially considered to facilitate more homogenous solutions for more efficient base hydrolysis of the triglyceride esters. Further since alcoholic KOH can react through an elimination type reaction mechanism as opposed to the substitution type mechanism of aqueous KOH, it is anticipated by the inventors that a microenvironment of alcoholic KOH within the tissues of cadavers would lead to additional degradation of the lipids via elimination of hydrogen by the ethoxide.

[0013] Methanol, when oxidized, forms formaldehyde and formic acid, both less desirable for disposal than the acetaldehyde and acetic acid formed as oxidation products of ethanol. Acetone, which is highly flammable, can be formed from oxidation of isopropanol.

[0014] Bases, such as $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ or $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ have poor water and alcohol solubility. NaOH and mixtures of NaOH and KOH can be used, but the presence of sodium in the dissolution products when using NaOH is not considered to be as good a fertilizer. However, if the neutralized dissolution solution is intended to be disposed of in the ocean, as an example, NaOH alone or mixed with KOH would be a good substitute for KOH. Additionally, salt (containing NaCl) water and/or clean sea water

may be used to prepare KOH and NaOH solutions, and solutions containing mixtures of NaOH and KOH, for the dissolution process, if such disposal is anticipated.

[0015] Dissolution is considered to be completed when all the tissue is digested, and only bones and/or teeth remain. This may be determined visually, when the bones are observed to be devoid of tissue, or based on reaction time from previous experience with dissolution or digestion of tissue from similar cadavers. Dissolution time depends on the initial body weight, the quantity and concentration of the chemicals employed, and the temperature of the cadaver and chemicals during the dissolution process. Bones can be dissolved by further reaction with KOH.

[0016] At the request of the family of the deceased, bones may be separated from the dissolution solution, and provided to the family for burial. Other arrangements, where bones, crystalline material, and/or liquid effluent from the deceased may be returned. After dissolution of the cadaver tissues was completed, the bones were observed to be softer.

[0017] Reference will now be made in detail to the present embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying FIGURE. It will be understood that the FIGURE is presented for the purpose of describing particular embodiments of the invention and is not intended to limit the invention thereto. Turning now to the FIGURE, the corrected dissolution times in hours for mice in 10% by weight KOH (curve (a)); 25% by weight KOH (curve (b)); and 40% KOH by weight (curve (c)) for KOH solutions in 100% Ethanol by weight, 50% Ethanol by weight and 50% Water by weight, and for 100% Water by weight, are graphically illustrated.

[0018] The TABLE provides the data used in the FIGURE for the dissolution times for mice using KOH. The temperature for all experiments was between 155 °F and 170 °F.

TABLE

Experiment	Time(h)	Mice(g)	KOH(g)	H ₂ O(g)	EtOH(g)	%KOH	Corrected Time(h)
1	2.15	25	6.25	0.00	25.0	25	2.15
2	5.25	31.68	7.92	31.68	0.00	25	6.65
3	2.30	33	8.25	16.50	16.50	25	3.04
4	2.37	35.3	14.12	17.65	17.65	40	2.37
5	1.62	35.55	14.22	0.00	35.55	40	1.63
6	4.57	37.61	15.04	37.61	0.00	40	4.87
7	6.55	41.85	4.19	41.85	0.00	10	6.55
8	3.62	44.46	4.45	22.23	22.23	10	3.85
9	2.68	45.85	4.59	0.00	45.85	10	2.94

[0019] As may be observed from the FIGURE and the TABLE, the dissolution times for the mice cadavers depend on the concentrations of KOH in the solutions in water, ethanol, and in mixtures of water and ethanol, and on the quantities of ethanol in the KOH solutions. For example, with no ethanol in the KOH/water solution the dissolution time for the 40% by weight KOH solution is 1.37 times faster than that for the 10% by weight KOH solution, whereas the 100% ethanol, 10% by weight KOH solution is 2.23 times faster than the 10% by weight KOH solution with no ethanol present. The entries in the column containing the corrected time in hours has not been adjusted for the different weights of the mice, but has been corrected for the resulting different amounts of KOH used in grams in both the TABLE and the FIGURE. For example, the 2.68 hours for dissolution for Experiment 9 has been multiplied by 4.59/4.19 to yield 2.94 hours.

[0020] The shortest measured dissolution time of 1.63 h occurred with a 40% KOH solution in 100% ethanol.

[0021] Solutions were prepared having 10%, 25%, and 40% by weight of KOH in 100% H₂O, 50% H₂O and 50% ethanol, and 100% ethanol, having solvent weights equal to the weight (in g) of the cadavers (mice). All experiments were performed in glass, wide-mouthed bottles. Slight agitation (shaking or rocking of the bottles or vessels) or stirring was employed. Sonication or sonication combined with rocking of the solution may also be used. The temperature was raised from room temperature to the desired temperature using at least one heating element external to the vessels

over a period of about 1 h; however, the temperature can be increased more rapidly, if desired. Temperatures were kept below 200 °F. The cadaver may be placed in contact with the fully mixed alkaline solution, or with the desired volume of H₂O, followed by addition of the ethanol (or ethanol then H₂O) to which the appropriate weight of KOH is added; that is, with the alkaline solution as it is being prepared. The cadavers were not necessarily covered by the solutions. The dissolution processes were open to ambient conditions and, as stated above, reactions were terminated, when visual observation determined that only bones remained in the solution. Covering the bottles containing the heated solutions without actually sealing the glass vessels used was determined to be helpful as evaporation of the alcohol was at least partially prevented.

[0022] After dissolution was completed, solutions were dark in color, non-viscous, and had an odor of ammonia. After the tissue has reacted and, either prior to or after neutralization, bones may be collected in a filter basket. Implants may also be collected, as may teeth.

[0023] Following dissolution, the solutions were neutralized (pH ~ 7) while warm with 67% HNO₃ solution. The pH was measured using a pH meter. Other mineral acids, such as HCl and H₂SO₄ were not used since these acids are not good fertilizers, but could be used. Phosphoric acid was found to be very slow in neutralizing the dissolution mixtures. If the solutions will receive further treatment at a waste water facility, carbon dioxide can be used to neutralize the solutions to an acceptable level, typically, a maximum pH of 10.5.

[0024] As stated above, neutralization was performed while the solution was still warm. If the solution was neutralized after being cooled, a highly viscous solution having a fatty surface layer resulted. However, if the warm solution is neutralized, and the pH kept above about 6, a watery solution from which crystalline material can be filtered is the product.

[0025] Hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂ (30%)) was added to the dissolution solution after the reaction was completed, and the solution neutralized in pH. To bleach cleave long-chain fatty acids, the volume of added H₂O₂ was approximately 70 – 100% of the weight of the cadaver. The resulting solutions may be used directly as soil fertilizer. Hydrogen peroxide may also be added to the dissolution solution before neutralization.

[0026] The foregoing description of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed, and obviously many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical application to thereby enable others skilled in the art to best utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims appended hereto.