THERMOGRAPHY BASED SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR DETECTING COUTERFEIT DRUGS

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates in general to the field of counterfeit detection systems. In particular, the present invention relates to a system and method for detecting counterfeit of pharmaceutical products. More particularly, the present invention relates to thermography based system and method for detecting counterfeit of pharmaceutical products, which operates in the MWIR or LWIR range.

Background of the Invention

The pharmaceutical industry is a multi-billion dollar international commercial field. Like many industries however, many of the products of the pharmaceutical industry fall prey to counterfeiters who manufacture substandard or fake imitation products, and sell them for a fraction of their real market price. Worldwide, the percentage of drugs that are counterfeit has become high enough to seriously impact the revenue of major pharmaceutical companies. Even more serious is the potential health risks involved for the consumer of counterfeit drugs.

Besides the infringement of intellectual property rights as well as the breaking of other governmental laws, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) does not yet have an all encompassing solution to the pharmaceutical industry's counterfeit problem.

There have been several attempts by the prior art to overcome the problem of counterfeit drugs, however, each of the prior art solutions has drawbacks associated with it. Some prior art technologies utilize RFID and bar coding to read the package labels to determine the authenticity of

the contents contained therein. This, however, does not necessarily provide accurate results since the product itself is not directly analyzed.

The prior art has also developed drug authenticating procedures based on the concept of the spectral signature. Every drug has a unique spectral signature (or, fingerprint) determined by its molecular composition. Infrared (IR) spectroscopy is used to determine whether the molecular composition of the sample product is identical to known spectral signature of the authentic product. IR spectroscopy is the subset of spectroscopy that deals with the Infrared region of the electromagnetic spectrum. Infrared spectroscopy exploits the fact that molecules have specific frequencies at which they rotate or vibrate in relation to discrete energy levels.

US 6,395,538 deals with the fields of bio-manufacturing and infrared spectroscopy, particularly, quality monitoring and control of a biomaterial, for instance in a biologically active pharmaceutical ingredient. Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy is used to monitor the production of a biomolecule and to fingerprint, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the biomolecule at different stages of a biomanufacturing process. US 6,395,538, which as said relates to a spectroscopy based system, is also not concerned with counterfeit drugs on the commercial level, and therefore the system is not concerned with overcoming difficulties such as determining the authenticity of a plurality of pharmaceutical products contained within a sealed package.

US 6,853,447 pertains to the screening and identification of materials such as pharmaceutical or food products being packaged in an automated machine. The invention utilizes an array of imaging spectrometers. The system of US 6,853,447 performs spectroscopy in the near IR and short IR spectra. In contrast to thermography which detects the level of the IR

emission from an object and the distribution of the IR emission from the object, spectroscopy checks IR reflection from the product, or more particularly, the spectral distribution of the reflection in the frequency domain. The determination of the spectra of US 6,853,447 allows only inspection of the external surface of a product, and cannot relate to the body of the product. Therefore, when applying the spectroscopy of US 6,853,447, each drug has to be inspected individually, outside of its container. This makes it problematic to operate when the pharmaceutical product is in a liquid state. Additionally, many capsules are coated by a thin layer of, for instance, gelatin, which blocks the near IR detector device from determining the authenticity of the drug. Moreover, utilizing such a method on a commercial scale is costly due to the amount of time required for each inspection.

US 6,771,369 relates to the validation and identification of packaged pharmaceuticals in a retail setting. A chemical analysis and validation system preferably utilizes visual (Vis) and near infrared (NIR) spectroscopy to analyze and identify the contents of the filled prescription vial by measuring the chemical signature of the items. Other variations can also be used, for example, various forms of optical spectroscopy, UV-Vis, UV-Vis-NIR, infrared or Raman spectroscopy. The system of US 6,771,369, similar to that of US 6,853,447, produced by the same company, performs detection only in the near and shortwave IR spectra. As described above, operation in these spectra only allow detection of the external surface of a product, therefore, each drug must be inspected individually, outside of the container. On a commercial scale, such a limitation is a severe hindrance to the efficiency of counterfeit checking. Moreover, it is problematic to check a pharmaceutical product in the liquid state. Additionally, as described herein above, many capsules are coated

by a thin layer of, for instance, gelatin, which blocks the detector device from determining the authenticity of the drug.

US 7,126,685 describes an optical absorption spectroscopy method comprising providing a container such as a pharmaceutical bottle containing a sample, rotating the container, directing a beam comprising one or more wavelengths consisting of visible wavelengths, infrared wavelengths and ultraviolet wavelengths, and measuring characteristics of the beam after it passes through the container. US 7,126,685 does not deal with detection of counterfeit drugs, let alone on a commercial scale, and therefore does not provide solutions to the above-mentioned counterfeit problems of the industry.

In the prior art, the development of IR technology for the detection of counterfeit drugs has been entirely limited to the field of spectroscopy, particularly near IR. Near IR spectroscopy is restricted in its detection capabilities since it is limited to surface (e.g. drug coating, outer packaging, etc.) reflection. In spectroscopy, the molecular structure of a pharmaceutical product is measured in the frequency domain, and the distinctive curvature is analyzed with corresponding signatures to determine the authenticity of the drug.

Thermography is a type of infrared imaging in which radiation emitted from objects is detected based on the temperature at different locations across the body, and images are produced of that radiation. In passive thermography an image of the emitted radiation is acquired of an object at a steady state temperature. In active thermography, a thermal pulse is applied to the object to change its temperature, and multiple images are acquired during the entire temperature cycle from the moment that the temperature heat pulse is applied until the sample pharmaceutical

product reaches the ambient temperature, and over a predetermined time period.

Thermography measures the distribution of the emission from an object, and it operates only in the mid-wavelength IR (MWIR between 3-5.4 micrometers), and the long- wavelength IR (LWIR between 8-14 micrometers). This is in contrast to spectroscopy which relates to the spectral distribution of the reflection from the object mostly in the NIR (near IR) and SWIR (Short Wave IR). It has been found by the inventors that the use of thermography allows inspection deep into the object, i.e., well beyond the surrounding container and the external surface of the object.

While thermal based systems, particularly in the field of thermography, are well exploited in areas such as military/security systems, non destructive testing, and medical imaging, such systems have never been suggested for detecting counterfeit of products, particularly in the pharmaceutical industry.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product that overcome the drawbacks associated with the prior art.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product by means of thermography, i.e., by means of an IR imaging system which operates in the MWIR or LWIR spectrum.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product by means of passive or active thermography.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that can inspect deep into a pharmaceutical product and determine counterfeit.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that can inspect and determine counterfeit of a pharmaceutical product, even from outside of the product package, and which does not require opening of the package.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that can inspect and determine counterfeit of plurality of pharmaceutical products that are packaged together, without need for opening the package.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that can inspect and determine counterfeit of pharmaceutical products from the outside of a multi-layer package.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that can inspect and determine counterfeit of a liquid pharmaceutical product from the outside of its container.

Embodiments of the present invention provide method and system that enable a manufacturer of pharmaceutical product to design a hard to counterfeit unique signature for the product, and which can be easily verified.

Additional embodiments and advantages of the present invention will become apparent as the description proceeds.

Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product comprising:

(a) acquiring, in a wavelength or wavelength spectrum selected from the mid wave IR (MWIR) to very long wave IR (VLWIR) spectrum, one or more thermographic IR images of said product, the product being cooled to a temperature below ambient temperature;

(b) comparing said acquired one or more images of said product or a quantified value deduced therefrom with a signature of a reference drug; and

(c) displaying said comparison thereby enabling determinatin the authenticity of said product.

In an embodiment, the product may be actively cooled before imaging.

In an embodiment, the method may comprise placing said product on a cooling source or within a cooling chamber and cooling said product while on or within said cooling sourse.

In an embodiment, the method may comprise cooling of the product for a time period sufficient to obtain cooling below ambient temperature.

In an embodiment, the cooling of the product may comprise applying a cooling pulse onto said product.

In an embodiment, the cooling pulse may be in a form selected from a delta function, a step function, a rectangular function, a saw tooth function and a periodic function or combination thereof.

In an embodiment, the cooling may comprise subjecting the product to a cooling source selected from the group consisting of thermal electric cooler, black body, cooling chamber, gas expansion source and refrigerator.

In an embodiment, the one or more IR images may be acquired at times during or following said cooling.

In an embodiment, the MWIR to VLWIR may be between 3μm to 20μm.

In an embodiment, the wavelength or wavelength spectrum may be selected from 3μm-5.4μm and 8μm-14μm.

In an embodiment, the method may comprise processing said one or more IR images of said product into a visual image or a quantified value.

In an embodiment, the processing may utilize a spatial or time domain mathematical operation on the IR image of said product to obtain said visual image or quantified value.

In an embodiment, the comparison may comprise correlating between the visual image or quantified value of the acquired one or more IR images of the product with said predetermined signature of a reference drug.

In an embodiment, the predetermined signature of a reference drug may comprise a visual image or quantified value from a database of visual images or quantified values of a plurality of reference drugs.

In an embodiment, the method may comprise displaying said comparison.

In an embodiment, the displaying may comprise displaying one or more visual images of said product alongside with one or more images of said reference drug.

In an embodiment, the displaying may comprise color display of the one or more images of the product and the one or more images of the reference drug.

In an embodiment, the database may comprise a plurality of signatures of reference drugs comprising at least one intentionally introduced distinguishing sign capable of being imaged by said thermography apparatus.

In an embodiment, the distinguishing sign may comprise one or more coating or edible materials in said reference drug or air bubbles entrapped in said product.

According to a second aspect, there is provided a system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product comprising:

- a thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus for acquiring, in a wavelength or a wavelength spectrum selected from the mid wave IR (MWIR) to very long wave IR (VLWIR) spectrum one or more thermographic IR images of said product;
- a cooling source for cooling the product to a temperature below ambient temperature; and
- a display unit for displaying at least said one or more IR images and a signature of a reference drug, or for display of a result of comparison between said one or more IR images and said signature of reference drug.

In an embodiment, the MWIR to VLWIR may be between 3μm to 20μm.

In an embodiment, the wavelength or wavelength spectrum may be selected from 3μm-5.4μm and 8μm-14μ.

In an embodiment, the thermography IR apparatus may be configured to acquire one or more IR images at times during or following said cooling.

In an embodiment, the system may comprise a comparison unit for comparing between said acquired one or more IR images of said product and a predetermined signature of a reference drug.

In an embodiment, the comparison unit may comprise a processing unit adapted to receive the one or more acquired IR images from the thermography IR apparatus and process said one or more image into a visual image or a quantified value comparable with said signature of a reference drug.

In an embodiment, the display unit may be adapted to display one or more visual images or a quantified value of said product and of said reference drug.

In an embodiment, the system may comprise displaying said one or more IR images of said reference drug.

In an embodiment, the comparison unit may be adapted to process said one or more acquired IR images in comparison with a signature of a reference drug.

In an embodiment, the comparison may be between said one or more acquired IR images and one or more visual images or quantified value images of said reference drug obtained under same conditions as those utilized for said product.

In an embodiment, the reference drug may be an authentic drug.

In an embodiment, the system may comprise a database of predetermined signatures of reference drugs.

In an embodiment, the database may comprise a plurality of signatures of reference drugs comprising at least one intentionally introduced distinguishing sign capable of being imaged by said thermography apparatus.

In an embodiment, the distinguishing sign may comprise one or more coating or edible materials in said reference drug or air bubbles entrapped in said product.

In an embodiment, the database may remote with respect to said thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus.

In an embodiment, the comparison unit may be remote with respect to said thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus.

In an embodiment, the system may be configured to hold said product between said cooling source and said thermography IR apparatus.

In an embodiment, the cooling source may be selected from the group consisting of thermal electric cooler, black body, cooling chamber, gas expansion source and refrigerator.

In an embodiment, the cooling source may be adapted to apply a cooling pulse onto said product for a time period sufficient to allow cooling of said product below ambient temperature.

In an embodiment, the cooling pulse may be applied in a form selected from a delta function, a step function, a rectangular function a saw tooth function and a periodic function or combination thereof.

In an embodiment, the system may comprise a memory carrying said database.

Brief Description of the Figures

In the drawings:

- Fig. 1 illustrates a block diagram schematically showing the components of a first embodiment of the system of the present invention;
- Fig. 2 illustrates a schematic diagram of the cooled detector utilized in the first embodiment of the present invention;
- Fig. 3 shows an image of five pharmaceutical tablets, four authentic and one counterfeit, as acquired by a standard CCD camera;
- Fig. 4 shows a two dimensional thermography image of the tablets of Fig. 3 as obtained by the apparatus of the invention at t=1 second, following the application of the cooling pulse;
- Fig. 5 shows a two dimensional thermography image of the tablets of Fig. 3 as obtained by the apparatus of the invention at t=10 seconds, following the application of the cooling pulse;
- Fig. 6 shows a two dimensional thermography image of the tablets of Fig. 3 as obtained by the apparatus of the invention at t=15

seconds, following the application of the cooling pulse;

- Fig. 7a shows an InSb cooled prototype apparatus by which the invention was tested;
- Fig. 7b shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus of Fig. 7a, between two empty aluminum packages of authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills;
- Fig. 7c shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus of Fig. 7a, between two empty paper carton packages of authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills respectively;
- Fig. 7d shows a comparison between the two authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera;
- Fig. 7e shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between the two authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills of Fig. 7d;
- Fig. 7f shows a comparison between the two authentic and counterfeit aluminum packages which include respectively authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera;
- Fig. 7g shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between the two authentic and counterfeit aluminum packages which include the Cialis pills of Fig. 7f;
- Fig. 7h shows a comparison between two authentic and counterfeit paper cartons which include aluminum packages which in turn each includes respectively authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera;
- Fig. 7i shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus of the invention between the two authentic and counterfeit paper carton packages of Fig. 7f, which includes each an aluminum package which in turn includes each authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills respectively;

- Fig. 8a shows a comparison as obtained by the uncooled apparatus between the two authentic and two counterfeit Cialis pills respectively;
- Fig. 8b shows the two authentic images and two counterfeit images of the Cialis pills of Fig. 8a, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera.;
- Fig. 8c shows a comparison as obtained by an uncooled apparatus between two fully packed (paper carton and aluminum) authentic Cialis pills and two fully packed counterfeit Cialis pills respectively;
- Fig. 9a shows an image of authentic and counterfeit filled liquid Optalgin containers respectively, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera;
- Fig. 9b shows the same containers of Fig. 9a respectively, as seen by a cooled InSb apparatus of the invention;

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

There are currently no complete solutions to the problems associated with counterfeit drugs. The present invention provides a novel method and system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product, using a thermography based system. The system can determine counterfeit even without removing the product from its cover, package, or container.

The term, "pharmaceutical product" as used herein refers to any form of drug, for example, a tablet, capsule or solution, and is used herein interchangeably with the term, "drug".

According an embodiment of the present invention, a thermography signature of a sample of each of a plurality of authentic pharmaceutical drug products is initially collected and stored in a database. Said initially

collected signature will be referred to hereinafter also as the "authentic signature" of the drug. The thermography signature is a thermography (i.e., in the LWIR or MWIR range) two dimensional view of the drug product, which is collected at a controlled, specific condition of the product. Such a specific condition may be, for example, the 2D response of the drug product over time to a heating (or cooling) signal, the response after a specific predetermined time after the initiation of the signal, etc. The form of said heating or cooling signal is predefined, but may vary (just for example, it may be a square pulse, a saw tooth signal, etc.). Furthermore, and as will be elaborated, the response may be limited to a specific wavelength within the LWIR or MWIR ranges, it may use polarization, etc. In any case, it has been found by the inventors that such a response is very unique to the composition and structure of the drug product, and is very hard to imitate.

As mentioned, the MWIR and LWIR ranges are conventionally referred to in the art to the ranges between 3-5.4 micrometers and between 8-14 micrometers respectively. Said definitions are originated from the fact that the atmosphere generally absorbs IR between said ranges (i.e., between 5.4 to 8 micrometers). However, the present invention may utilize also said latter rage of 5.4 to 8 micrometers, and even the range of VLWIR of 14-20 micrometers and there are various detectors that are sensitive also in said latter ranges. Therefore, the use of MWIR and LWIR throughout this application should not be viewed as limiting its scope not to include the range of 5.4 to 8 micrometers and/or 14-20 micrometer.

According to the present invention, the signature of any given drug product in the market, whose authenticity is suspected, is compared to said authentic signature, for verification as to whether it is authentic or

not. The comparison is made essentially in the same condition as was used upon collection of said authentic signature.

For example, the signature may be displayed as one or a series of visual images of the drug, and may be quantified by a value for comparison with a corresponding sample drug, as described herein below. Since it is assumed that a counterfeit drug comprises a different molecular composition (and sometimes structure) than that of an authentic drug, the MWIR or LWIR emission, e.g. as a function of time (i.e. the signature) of the authentic drug is different than that of a counterfeit drug.

The inventors of the present invention have found that the use of a thermography system for detection of counterfeit products in the MWIR and LWIR spectra, particularly, but not limitatively, after the providing into it a heating or cooling signal (hereinafter, for the sake of brevity both terms will be briefly referred to as a "heating signal"), has considerable advantages over prior art detection systems of counterfeit drugs, which utilize spectroscopic devices and methods. For instance, as noted herein above, prior art technologies use detection systems in the near-wavelength infrared (NIR) spectrum, which are based on reflections from the product, and therefore enable inspection of only the external surface of the drug. Said spectroscopic based prior art systems generally have difficulties in passing through the drug container, coverage, or package (hereinafter, all said terms will be referred to as "packages"), and in any case it requires opening of the package. On the other hand, the thermography MWIR or LWIR detection system of the present invention allows detection of the internal molecular changes of the drug, which bypasses the coating layer of the package that may be present on the surface of a capsule (or on any other form of the drug). In other words, the MWIR and LWIR detection system of the invention passes through the package of the drug and

therefore does not require opening of it. This allows the operator of the system to determine the authenticity of the drug even when it is contained within an entire container, or even within an entire crate or carton, in a single procedure, thereby significantly improving the efficiency of the detection process on the commercial scale. In addition, by allowing the pharmaceutical product to remain within the container, the process for detecting the authenticity of a drug in the liquid state is much more practical than that afforded by a procedure performed utilizing the spectroscopic based system of the prior art.

The use of a thermography system allows the detected signature to be displayed in a form of an image, in which the variation in temperature and radiated emission are clearly shown. This allows a greater ability to distinguish between drugs on a visual scale.

Fig. 1 shows in block diagram form the general structure of a first embodiment of the thermography IR system 100 of the present invention. System 100 comprises a heat source 110 for heating (or cooling) a sample pharmaceutical product 102 to a modified temperature, thereby to change its IR emission in the MWIR or LWIR ranges. System 100 further comprises a thermography apparatus 120 for detecting the emitted radiation from pharmaceutical product 102. Said detection may be continuous, or it may be carried out some predefined period from the moment that the temperature heat pulse has been applied. Said detection conditions should conform as much as possible the conditions in which the authentic signatures that are saved in data base 130 have been collected. Thermography apparatus 120 comprises one or more IR array detectors 122 (commonly referred to in the art also as "focal plane arrays") for sensing IR radiant energy in the MWIR and LWIR ranges, and converting them into an image. Such arrays are well known in the art, and are used,

for example, in night vision thermal systems. Optical arrangement 124 focuses the radiation onto the two dimensional array 122. Said optical arrangement may include one or more lenses, filters and/or polarizers. Controller 126 operates the array 122. The Controller also receives an analog signal from the detector array 122 which describes the thermography emission from drug product 102. Controller 126 also converts the signal from the array to a digital high resolution 2D present product image 140. The 2D image 140 of the radiant emission from the pharmaceutical product 102 is displayed on display unit 132. As said, database 130 stores plurality of authentic signatures of many authentic drug products. Said stored signatures can generally be shown as images. In one embodiment of the invention, controller 126 extracts 129 the authentic signature 140' of drug 102 from database 130, as previously collected from an authentic drug, and displays the same side by side with present image 140, for visual inspection. It should be noted that on display unit 132 the signature levels of the IR emission are displayed in various colors, to emphasize said varying spatial emission from the product. As noted above, it has been found that there is a very clear visual distinction between the image 140 of an authentic drug, and of a counterfeit drug in all common drugs that have been tested by the inventors. It should be mentioned again, that the present signature is obtained in a same controlled condition as of the authentic signature. In any case, the authentic signatures within data base 130, and the conditions in which they are collected, can be easily defined to reflect and emphasize such distinction. Some of the options for varying such conditions will be elaborated hereinafter. Optionally, instead of the visual inspection and comparison of the images on screen 132, the comparison may be made automatically by image processing unit 128. Image processing unit 128 determines the correlation factor between the present signature and the stored authentic signature from database 130 and evaluates whether the

correlation factor is above a predefined threshold. Following this evaluation, image processing unit 128 establishes a conclusion regarding as to whether the sample 102 is authentic or counterfeit, and said conclusion 104 may be displayed on display unit 132, or notified to the user in any other conventional form.

In another alternative, the tested (suspected) drug product may be compared to a reference drug product which is known to be authentic instead of a pre stored signature within the data base. This comparison, in a similar manner to the process as described before, can be performed either by visual inspection or automatically by applying image processing algorithm.

The database 130 may be located at various locations. In one embodiment database 130 is located within the testing apparatus. In another embodiment, data base 130 is maintained in a secured manner within a secured site, and relevant authentic signatures are extracted from there by the testing apparatus via the Internet (or any other communication, such as cellular technology). In still another embodiment, data base 130 is maintained in a secured manner within a secured site, the image 140 is conveyed via the Internet to said secured site, and the comparison is performed within said secured site, which in turn conveys into the testing apparatus a yes/no result regarding the authenticity of the product. As said, in still another alternative, the comparison may be made to an image which is locally extracted from a physical ("master") product which is known for sure to be authentic.

Heat source 110 is preferably controlled by a signal generator 105. Heat source 110, together with signal generator 105, imitate the same condition in which the authentic signature of drug 102 has been collected. Heat

source 110 may be, for instance, an oven, a microwave, an IR lamp, a laser beam, etc., for heating (or cooling, for example by means of gas expansion), an individual drug (e.g. a capsule), or an entire container thereof. The heat signal 107 from generator 105 may be a delta function, a step function, a rectangular function, a periodic function, a saw tooth function, or any other designated function. It is important to note that the response of the drug to the heat differs depending on the type heat applied to the drug (e.g., oven, microwave, etc.), as well as on the type of heat signal as provided from generator 105. Thus, whenever necessary, in order to obtain a more comprehensive characterization of the sample drug 102, more than one combination of heat source and heat signal 107 may be used. Moreover, plurality of signatures that reflect the change of emission from the drug over time, or responsive to polarization or filtering may also be used. Of course, in this case, the database requires the storing of the plurality of authentic signatures for comparison, as a function the signal form, of time, wavelength, polarization, heat source type, etc.

In one embodiment, IR thermography apparatus 120 may comprise both a cooled detector and an uncooled detector. A cooled detector is capable of detecting Infra Red radiant energy in the range of MWIR (3 μm-5.4 μm). The detector array comprises, for example, 320x256 individual elements in the size of about 30 μm each pixel, or alternatively, 640x512 individual elements in the size of about 15 μm pitch. In that case, the array may be made of InSb (Indium Antimonide) or MCT (Mercury Cadmium Telluride), and operated at cryogenic temperature. Furthermore, the detector array may be connected to the focal plane processor (FPP) array (not shown in the figure) by means of Indium bumps, and may be illuminated from the back side. An uncooled detector is an electro optical assembly which converts Infra Red radiant energy in the range of LWIR (8 μm-14 μm). The uncooled detector is built of a detector array which is housed in an

evacuated Dewar. The uncooled detector array comprises, for example, 320x256 individual elements in the size of 20- 30 μm each pixel, or alternatively, 640x512 individual elements in the size of 20-30 μm pitch. The array may be fabricated from VOx (Vanadium Oxide) or Amorphous Silicon, and is operated at around room temperature.

It is understood that alternative cooled and uncooled IR detectors having different capabilities and structures may be used for the purpose of the present invention. For instance, an LWIR (8 μm-12 μm) array detector may alternatively be cooled from MCT or a QWIP (Quantum Well Infrared Photodetector) sensor.

Although not necessarily required, in one embodiment, Filter/optics arrangement may comprise a set of filters, for example, in a form of a filter wheel (See Fig. 2), well known in the art. The wheel may include a set of narrow band filters, preferably from the MWIR to the LWIR, and/or IR polarizers. Alternatively, any optical device that can change the spectral transmission properties at high frequency may be utilized.

Fig. 2 shows the assembly of a cooled thermography array detector 122 in a schematic form. Array detector 122 comprises a focal plane array 150 and an electronic interface board 156. A vacuum chamber 152 is shown joined with a cooler 154. In the alternative case when an uncooled detector is used, the assembly does not comprise a cooler 154. However, in order to maintain the focal plane array at a steady temperature a thermo-electric cooler (TEC) may be provided instead. When an object emits IR radiation as indicated by arrow 158 it is filtered by filter 160 and impinged on focal plane array 150 in the desired wavelength.

Thus, in the above embodiment for performing the authenticity detection procedure of the present invention, active thermography is performed. In this case, a sample drug is obtained and heated by a heat source 110, which is in turn controlled by a signal generator 105 (which issues, for example, a step function, delta, rectangle, periodic etc.). During at least a portion of the heating and/or the relaxation period (i.e., the cooling of the product), the emitted IR radiation is sampled at least once by the thermography IR system, in a manner which conforms the condition as maintained when the authentic signature was collected. For example, a drug product is heated by a heat pulse for a predetermined period of time until the original temperature of the product drug is raised a predetermined amount to a modified temperature. The pharmaceutical product is then allowed to cool back to its original temperature. During at least a portion of the heating period and/or cooling period, the thermography apparatus of the present invention samples the emitted radiation to determine the signature of the sample drug. The signature of the drug, as presently obtained, is compared, either visually on the display, or automatically by means of a signal processing unit, with the corresponding authentic signature of the drug as previously obtained and stored within database 130.

As said, the emitted radiation response as a function of time (i.e, either a continuous varying response or the radiation after a specific period from the moment of initiating the heating) of the sample drug and is compared to the signature of the corresponding authentic version of the sample drug. If the signature of the authentic version of the drug is identical, or at least highly correlated above the predetermined threshold to the sample drug, then the sample is considered to be authentic. If, however, the signature of the authentic drug is not identical or highly correlated above said predetermined threshold to the sample drug, then the sample is

considered to be counterfeit. If the sample drug is counterfeit, necessary actions may be taken, depending on the various circumstances in which the counterfeit drug was discovered.

As previously said, in an alternative aspect the sample drug is cooled by a thermal pulse generator (e.g. a quick cooling method such as gas expansion) for a predetermined amount of time, until it reaches a predetermined modified temperature. The response is acquired during the entire pulse, during a specific time after the initiation of the pulse, even at some time after the end of the pulse. In a similar manner to as described above, also in the case of cooling, the authentic signature, as well as the signature from the presently tested product are obtained in exact same controlled conditions (i.e., same pulse, same cooling or heating temperature, same period, etc.).

In one alternative, in order to ensure accurate controlled conditions, the drug product may be put on an extended black body (such an extended black body is known in the art, and is manufactured, for example, by CI Inc.).

In another alternative, the entire testing process is performed within a temperature stabilized and controlled chamber which ensures uniform ambient temperature conditions.

In the case wherein the signature of the authentic version of the sample drug has not been previously recorded and stored in the database, the signature of the sample drug is acquired as described herein above, and stored in a secondary database of the system of the present invention until the authentic version of the sample drug is acquired, at which time the signature of the sample drug is compared thereto.

According to an alternative aspect of the present invention, passive thermography is performed, wherein the sample remains at ambient temperature, and is not heated or cooled. According to this embodiment, the IR detector system detects only the steady state radiant emission in the MWIR or LWIR spectral wavelength, and not as a function of time. Thus, the database in that case contains suitable temperature signatures of authentic drugs in the MWIR and/or LWIR spectra for a specific ambient temperature.

In another alternative, the entire testing process may be done inside a temperature stabilized and controlled chamber which ensures uniform ambient temperature conditions within the chamber.

In still another embodiment, the product package itself (for example, the aluminum package of the pills) may include one or more internal heating elements. The one or more heating elements in that case are activated by providing to them a corresponding external electric signal, that in turn causes the pharmaceutical product to heat.

According to the present invention, additional secret identifying information may be added by the manufacturer to the authentic drug during the manufacturing process in order to further distinguish it from a counterfeit drug. For instance, an internal barcode in the form of air bubbles may be included by the manufacturer within the drug. There are many other possible ways by which additives may be included within the drug, which affect response in the MWIR or LWIR, but not the medical effectiveness of the drug. While such an addition to the drug has no significant effect, if any, on the medical effectiveness of the drug (and therefore, will not require additional regulatory approval by the FDA), it

may significantly affect the authentic signature of the drug to a rate which is hard to imitate, or which form a distinguishable signature from a signature of a drug which is known to be counterfeit. It should be noted that the drug manufacturer may also include such additive on the drug package. For example, the drug manufacturer may include a portion on the drug or package that has a very high emmisivity, heat capacity, etc.

In still another aspect of the invention, the present invention enables the determining as to whether the drug has been exposed during its life to improper heat conditions. In that case, the drug is coated by an edible thin layer that changes its physical properties when exposed to a temperature above some predefined allowed limits. Just for example, the drug may be coated by a thin chocolate layer, and the authentic signature of the drug includes such layer. Later on, if the drug has been exposed to some temperature above a room temperature, this coating melts, and it affects also the signature of the drug (MWIR or LWIR, active or passive radiation, as is the case) as obtained by the apparatus of the present invention. In such a manner the apparatus of the present invention can detect not only counterfeit, but also it can ensure quality of the drug that may suffer improper storage conditions throughout its life. Moreover, in a similar manner the apparatus of the invention can also ensure the quality of a drug, and detect a drug has been mistakenly manufactured while lacking some of its ingredients. Such a lack of ingredient generally involves deviation from the authentic signature in terms of MWIR or LWIR 2D emission. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, the quality assurance as described herein will not be distinguished throughout this application from a conventional counterfeit. In other words, the term "counterfeit" of drug relates to any deviation of the authentic drug ingredients, no matter what is the reason that has caused this deviation.

In still another embodiment of the invention, although the present invention has been described herein with reference to detecting counterfeit drugs, the application of the method and system described herein may be equally be useful for the identification of other counterfeit products such as currency, diamonds, food products, or other products in which a deviation from their authentic "ingredient" materials result in a change in time of their 2D (thermography) LWIR or MWIR emission, for example, after being subjected to some predetermined controlled temperature change. Therefore, in one specific embodiment of the invention, the term "drug" in this application may be expanded to include said other types of products (although they are actually not drugs).

The thermography apparatus of the present invention can detect a counterfeit drug by applying one or more of the following techniques:

1. Predetermining a rate of temperature variation (i.e., minimum to maximum temperature or vice versa) that will be applied to the sample (i.e., to the "master" authentic drug, and to the drug in question);
2. The type of heat source that will be used to effect said temperature change, for example, a typical oven, a microwave based oven, a laser based heating source, a refrigerator, a thermo electric cooler, etc.;
3. The profile of the temperature variation signal, i.e., a spike, a saw tooth signal, a step signal, a cyclic signal, etc.;
4. The distance from the heat (cooling) source;
5. The type of detector, i.e., a cooled (MWIR) detector, or a non-cooled (LWIR detector);
6. The option of applying averaging of the response from the sample at two times, e.g., at predetermined times T_1 and T_2. It should be noted that use of other types of mathematical operations is also possible, either in the time domain or in the spatial domain. Analysis in the

time domain means analysis on several frames that are obtained during some times, for example, averaging of 10 sequential images. Analysis in the spatial domain means the application of some image processing algorithm on a single image, for example, in order to emphasis the edges of the authentic and/or tested images. Specific examples for operations in the time domain are averaging over time of frame images, STD (Standard Deviation) of frame images over time, Fourier transform over time, low pass filter in the time domain, or high pass filter in the time domain. Specific examples for operations in the spatial domain are FFT (Fast Fourier Transform), Wavelet Transform, Discrete Fourier Transform (DFT), Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT), low pass, or high pass. These are only examples, and other mathematical operation in the spatial or time domain may be applied.

7. The option of using one or more filters in order to limit the response to a specific optical range.
8. The option of comparing between the signatures of the authentic and the suspected external packages (aluminum or paper carton or plastic packages) of the pills, or the internal aluminum packages of the pills;
9. As mentioned, the authenticity verification by the system of the invention includes predefined conditions that are applied to the product when obtaining the authenticity and test signatures. These conditions, although predefined, are very flexible. Therefore, if for some reason it is found that the apparatus of the invention cannot clearly distinguish between a specific authentic and counterfeit drug when one specific condition is applied, the predefined condition can be easily modified in order to find a more suitable condition. The fact that the various parameters that form the possible conditions can vary within very large ranges, there is almost no

doubt that a suitable condition can be found for each and every pharmaceutical product in the market, that will result in a distinguishable authenticity signature for that product.

All the above options may be used, while defining the conditions for obtaining the drug signature. It should be noted that the conditions may change from one drug to another, in order to find a condition which provides a distinguishable result. Such conditions may be decided specifically for each drug upon having known counterfeit drugs, in order to find a condition that best distinguishes the authentic drug from said given drug product which is known to be counterfeit. Therefore, various conditions may be applied for various drugs or type of drugs. Furthermore, the apparatus may operate in one of the following modes:

1. An automatic mode in which the evaluation is performed by means of image processing which compares (correlates) between the images of the authentic and the suspected drug;
2. Image processing as in item 1, while a specific operation is applied to the image, such as high pass, low pass, FFT, DFT, DCT, etc.;
3. Manual mode in which the operator of the apparatus visually compares between the two images. As will be demonstrated by the following example, operation in such manual mode provides very good results in many real typical counterfeit cases;
4. In one option, the apparatus may only collect a signature from the suspected drug, and conveys it to a secured site (who maintains a bank of signature) for comparison. In that case, the comparison is performed in the secured site. Following said comparison, the secured site returns the yes/no result to the apparatus;

5. In still another option, the apparatus comprises within it a local database of signatures for various drug types.
6. In another option, the comparison is made locally between a signature as obtained from a suspected drug and a signature as obtained at same time from a drug which is physically available to the operator and is known to the operator to be absolutely authentic (a "reference drug"). At the time when verification is necessary, the apparatus first extracts in site the authentic signature from the reference drug, then it extracts a signature from the tested drug, and then it performs comparison between said two signatures and provides a final conclusion.

In still another embodiment of the invention, the MWIR or LWIR array detector 122 is a single pixel "array" (although the term "array" generally refers to plurality of sensors and not to a case when only one sensor is used, for the sake of brevity the present invention uses the term "array" also when said array includes only one sensor, i.e., pixel). More particularly, the array includes only one IR sensor. There three alternative options for operating with said one pixel array, as follows:

a. While obtaining the authentic signature from the drug, the drug product (such as a pill) 102 is positioned at a predetermined fix position and orientation in relation to the one pixel array, and the signature (i.e., radiation from the drug) is obtained by said one pixel array with respect to a predefined one point over the external surface of drug product 102. In that case, the optics 124 directs the one pixel array toward said predefined point. While obtaining the test signature from the drug product, the drug in question is positioned exactly in the same position and orientation as defined for the authentic drug, such that the

comparison is made with respect to a same point respectively in said two, authentic and tested drugs.

b. While obtaining the authentic signature from the drug, the drug product (such as a pill) is positioned at a predetermined fix position and orientation in relation to the one pixel array, and the signature (i.e., radiation from the drug) is obtained by said one pixel array with respect to the whole drug. In that case, the optics 124 images the whole drug on the one pixel array such that radiation from the whole drug product is measured. While obtaining the test signature from the tested drug product, the drug in question is positioned exactly at the same position and orientation as defined for the authentic drug, such that the comparison is made with respect to a same orientation in said two, authentic and tested drugs.

c. The third alternative option is the same as the first option described above. However, the optics is movable such that it "scans" the drug product in such a manner that each time another point on the external surface of the drug product 102 is measured.

It should be noted that said one pixel array embodiment (particularly its first two alternatives) is generally more simple and of lower cost, so it more suitable for use by the end user of the drug, for example in its home.

It should also be noted that the system of the invention may operate in principle in two modes of operations, which are referred to herein as "active" and "passive". In the passive mode, the authenticity and test signatures are obtained in the ambient temperature, without the application of a heating or cooling signal. Generally, in the passive mode the IR radiation is a function of (a) the emissivity of the object, (b) the

selected wave length band (MWIR, or LWIR etc), (c) the object temperature (Plank equation), and (d) the ambient temperature. The operation of the thermography system in the passive mode therefore reveals mostly properties of the surface of the object, not of its full internal structure. In the active mode, the authenticity and test signatures are obtained following or during the application to the object of a heating or cooling signal. In that case, the IR radiation from the product is a function of: (a) the operating wave length band (MWIR or LWIR, etc), (b) the product temperature (Plank equation), (c) the ambient temperature, (d) the emissivity of the object, (e) the thermal conductivity of the object, (f) the object heat capacity, (g) the object thermal convection, and (g) the absorption of the thermal pulse due to object molecular structure. Therefore, the use of the invention in the active mode is preferable, as it reveals various properties of the object that are not revealed while operating in the passive mode. A full imitation of all said properties in the counterfeit product that are all affect the results of the active mode operation of the system of the invention, is essentially impossible.

Example 1

Five drug samples (tablets) were obtained for detection via active thermography using the system of the present invention. Four tablets were authentic and one tablet was counterfeit. Fig. 3 shows an image of the five samples acquired from a standard CCD camera. As can be seen, all five samples are essentially identical in appearance (color, shape, dimensions) to the human eye, as well as in weight. The middle tablet 302 is counterfeit, whereas the surrounding tablets 303 are authentic.

The tablets were placed on an open surface calibrated at 40°C. A pulse was applied to cool the tablets from 40°C to 20°C. The MWIR emission from

each tablet was detected using the system of the present invention during the cooling process.

In Figs. 5-7, the thermography image of the tablets is shown using a detector array comprising 640x512 individual elements. It should be noted that the images in the experiment, as performed, included a display in a colored scale, in which the coldest temperature was indicated as blue, while the hottest temperature was shown as red. The color in this scale was varied between these two extremes for displaying other temperatures accordingly. Therefore, in this experiment the determination of a counterfeit drug was even easier and more distinguishable than in the black and white images as provided in this application. For this reason, the present invention encourages using such a colored scale for displaying varied MWIR or LWIR temperature emissions.

Fig. 4 shows a two dimensional thermography image of the tablets 302, 303 at t=1 second, following the application of the cooling pulse. Thermography images of the tablets 302, 303 were then acquired at 10 seconds (Fig. 5) and 15 seconds (Fig. 6) as further cooling took place. Figs. 5-7 thus show the change in the thermography emission over time and temperature change from 40°C to 20°C.

The thermography image of counterfeit drug 302 is clearly different from that of authentic drugs 303. The thermography images of the figures show authentic drugs 303 progressively becoming lighter in appearance until they are nearly undetectable by the human eye (Fig. 6) in front of the background as shown. Counterfeit drug 302, in comparison to Fig. 4 which has been taken after the first second, became darker in Fig. 5, and then became slightly lighter by the fifteenth second image of Fig. 6.

Example 2

A feasibility test was performed using an InSb cooled detector. The feasibility test compared between an authentic Cialis and a counterfeit Cialis, as provided by the Pharmaceutical Crime Unit, the Ministry of Health, the State of Israel.

The lab prototype consisted of:

1. A cooled detector in the MWIR region (3μm-5.4μm);
2. Optics;
3. Electronic circuitry for acquiring a 2D digital spatial image from the detector outputs; and
4. An extended black body for applying a heating signal.

The prototype apparatus is shown in Fig. 7a. The apparatus comprises electronics 801, focal plane array 802 in the MWIR range, Optics 803, and a black body 804 manufactured by CI Inc. A Cialis package 805 is shown placed on said black body 804.

Several tests were performed. During the tests, various samples were placed on black body 804. In each of said tests, the black body was initially set to 30°C. After stabilizing the temperature of the black body at 30°C, its temperature was reduced to 15°C, while recording every 1 second the emission of the drug during the entire temperature change. The sequence of 10 images that were obtained was averaged to provide a single image for each test. The two authentic and counterfeit images were compared.

Fig. 7b shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between two empty aluminum packages of authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills. It can be seen that the images are very easily visually distinguishable.

Fig. 7c shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between two empty paper carton packages of authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills respectively. Again, it can be seen that the two images are very easily visually distinguishable.

Fig. 7d shows a comparison between the two authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera. It can be seen that the pills look essentially exactly the same.

Fig. 7e shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between the two authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills of Fig. 7d. It can be seen that the two images are very easily visually distinguishable.

Fig. 7f shows a comparison between the two authentic and counterfeit aluminum packages which include respectively authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera. It can be seen that the packages which include the pills look exactly the same.

Fig. 7g shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus, between the two authentic and counterfeit aluminum packages which include the Cialis pills of Fig. 7f. It can be seen that the two images are very easily visually distinguishable.

Fig. 7h shows a comparison between the two authentic and counterfeit paper cartons which include aluminum packages which in turn each includes respectively authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera. It can be seen that the packages which include the aluminum packages with pills look exactly the same.

Fig. 7i shows a comparison as obtained by the apparatus of the invention between the two authentic and counterfeit paper carton packages of Fig. 7f, which includes each an aluminum package which in turn includes each authentic and counterfeit Cialis pills respectively. It can be seen that the two images are very easily visually distinguishable.

As said, the example above, as well as several others examples were performed using averaging of several images in order to obtain the signature. It should be noted that other mathematical operations may be used as an alternative to averaging, such as multiplication, integral, differential, division, addition, difference, etc.

Example 3

The results of Example 3 were obtained by an apparatus which uses an uncooled detector (in the range of 8μm to 14μm). The results were obtained for the same samples as used in Example 2.

Several tests were performed. During the tests, various samples were placed on black body 804. In each of said tests, the black body was initially set to 30°C. After stabilizing the temperature of the black body at 30°C, its temperature was reduced to 15°C, while recording (imaging) every 1 second the emission of the drug during the entire temperature change. The sequence of 10 images that were obtained was averaged to provide a single image as the result of each test. The two authentic and counterfeit images were compared.

Fig. 8a shows a comparison as obtained by the uncooled apparatus between the two authentic and two counterfeit Cialis pills respectively. It can be seen that the authentic and counterfeit images are very easily visually distinguishable.

Fig. 8b shows the two authentic images and two counterfeit images of the Cialis pills of Fig. 8a, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera. It can be seen that all said pills images look exactly the same.

Fig. 8c shows a comparison as obtained by the uncooled apparatus, between two fully packed (paper carton and aluminum) authentic Cialis pills and two fully packed counterfeit Cialis pills respectively. It can be seen that the respective authentic and counterfeit images are very easily visually distinguishable.

It is known in the art that an uncooled detector is much cheaper than a cooled detector. It has been found by the inventors that the results by the two types of detectors are essentially the same. In other words, both provide very distinguishable results.

In still another embodiment, both cooled MWIR detector and uncooled LWIR detector are used together in the same system. Such multi spectral detector use can give a higher range of sensitivity. Although such a system is more expensive and complicated than of a single detector system, a multi spectrum system is advantageous in some hard to distinguish cases.

Example 4

In Example 4, an apparatus which having an InSb (in the range of 3μm to 5.4μm) cooled detector (640X512 pixels at 15μm pitch) was used.

A test was performed with an authentic container of Optalgin drops and another with a counterfeit container of a liquid Optalgin. During the tests, the samples were placed on a black body. In each of said tests, the black body was initially set to 30°C. After stabilizing the temperature of the

black body at 30°C, its temperature was reduced to 15°C, while recording every 1 second the emission of the drug during the entire temperature change. The sequence of 10 images that were obtained was averaged to provide a single image for each test. The two authentic and counterfeit images were compared.

Fig. 9a shows an image of authentic and counterfeit liquid Optalgin containers, as obtained by a CCD (VIS) camera. The upper container in the image is authentic, and the lower is counterfeit. Fig. 9b shows the same containers respectively, as obtained by said apparatus, as a result of the experiment as described. As can be seen, these two images of the authentic and counterfeit containers are very easily visually distinguishable.

While some embodiments of the invention have been described by way of illustration, it will be apparent that the invention can be carried into practice with many modifications, variations and adaptations, and with the use of numerous equivalents or alternative solutions that are within the scope of persons skilled in the art, without exceeding the scope of the claims.

AMENDED CLAIMS

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1. A method for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product comprising:

(a) acquiring, in a wavelength or wavelength spectrum selected from the mid wave IR (MWIR) to very long wave IR (VLWIR) spectrum, one or more thermographic IR images of said product, the product being cooled to a temperature below ambient temperature;

(b) comparing said acquired one or more images of said product or a quantified value deduced therefrom with a signature of a reference drug; and

(c) displaying said comparison thereby enabling determination the authenticity of said product.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein said product is actively cooled before imaging.

3. The method of Claim 1 or 2, comprising placing said product on a cooling source or within a cooling chamber and cooling said product while on or within said cooling source.

4. The method of Claim 3, comprising cooling of the product for a time period sufficient to obtain cooling below ambient temperature.

5. The method of Claim 3 or 4, wherein said cooling of the product comprises applying a cooling pulse onto said product.

6. The method of Claim 5, wherein said cooling pulse is in a form selected from a delta function, a step function, a rectangular function a saw tooth function and a periodic function or combination thereof.

7. The method of any one of Claims 3 to 6, wherein said cooling comprises subjecting the product to a cooling source selected from the group consisting of thermal electric cooler, black body, cooling chamber, gas expansion source and refrigerator.

8. The method of any one of Claims 1 to 7, wherein said one or more IR images are acquired at times during or following said cooling.

9. The method of any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein said MWIR to VLWIR is between 3μm to 20μm.

10. The method of any one of Claims 1 to 9, wherein said wavelength or wavelength spectrum is selected from 3μm-5.4μm and 8μm-14μm.

11. The method of any one of Claims 1 to 10, comprises processing said one or more IR images of said product into a visual image or a quantified value.

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein said processing utilizes a spatial or time domain mathematical operation on the IR image of said product to obtain said visual image or quantified value.

13. The method of Claims 1 or 12, wherein said comparison comprises correlating between the visual image or quantified value of the acquired one or more IR images of the product with said predetermined signature of a reference drug.

14. The method of Claim 13, wherein said predetermined signature of a reference drug comprises a visual image or quantified value from a database of visual images or quantified values of a plurality of reference drugs.

15. The method of any one of Claims 1 to 14 comprising displaying said comparison.

16. The method of Claim 15, wherein said displaying comprises displaying one or more visual images of said product alongside with one or more images of said reference drug.

17. The method of Claim 15 or 16, wherein the displaying comprises color display of the one or more images of the product and the one or more images of the reference drug.

18. The method of any one of Claims 14 to 17, wherein said database comprises a plurality of signatures of reference drugs comprising at least one intentionally introduced distinguishing sign capable of being imaged by said thermography apparatus.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein said distinguishing sign comprises one or more coating or edible materials in said reference drug or air bubbles entrapped in said product.

20. A system for determining the authenticity of a pharmaceutical product comprising:

- a thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus for acquiring, in a wavelength or a wavelength spectrum selected from the mid wave IR (MWIR) to very long wave IR (VLWIR) spectrum one or more thermographic IR images of said product;
- a cooling source for cooling the product to a temperature below ambient temperature; and
- a display unit for displaying at least said one or more IR images and a signature of a reference drug, or for display of a result of comparison between said one or more IR images and said signature of reference drug.

21. The system of Claim 20, wherein said MWIR to VLWIR is between 3μm to 20μm.

22. The system of Claim 20 or 21, wherein said wavelength or wavelength spectrum is selected from 3μm-5.4μm and 8μm-14μ.

23. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 22 wherein said thermography IR apparatus is configured to acquire one or more IR images at times during or following said cooling.

24. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 23, comprising a comparison unit for comparing between said acquired one or more IR images of said product and a predetermined signature of a reference drug.

25. The system of Claim 24, wherein said comparison unit comprises a processing unit adapted to receive the one or more acquired IR images from the thermography IR apparatus and process said one or more image

into a visual image or a quantified value comparable with said signature of a reference drug.

26. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 25, wherein said display unit is adapted to display one or more visual images or a quantified value of said product and of said reference drug.

27. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 26, for displaying said one or more IR images of said reference drug.

28. The system of Claim 24 or 25, wherein said comparison unit is adapted to process said one or more acquired IR images in comparison with a signature of a reference drug.

29. The system of Claim 28, wherein said comparison is between said one or more acquired IR images and one or more visual images or quantified value images of said reference drug obtained under same conditions as those utilized for said product.

30. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 29, wherein said reference drug is an authentic drug.

31. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 30, comprising a database of predetermined signatures of reference drugs.

32. The system of Claim 31, wherein said database comprises a plurality of signatures of reference drugs comprising at least one intentionally introduced distinguishing sign capable of being imaged by said thermography apparatus.

33. The system of Claim 32, wherein said distinguishing sign comprises one or more coating or edible materials in said reference drug or air bubbles entrapped in said product.

34. The system of any one of Claim 31 to 33 wherein said database is remote with respect to said thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus.

35. The system of any one of Claims 24 to 34, wherein said comparison unit is remote with respect to said thermography Infra Red (IR) apparatus.

36. The system of any one of claims 20 to 35 configured to hold said product between said cooling source and said thermography IR apparatus.

37. The system of any one of claims 20 to 36, wherein said cooling source is selected from the group consisting of thermal electric cooler, black body, cooling chamber, gas expansion source and refrigerator.

38. The system of any one of Claims 20 to 37, wherein said cooling source is adapted to apply a cooling pulse onto said product for a time period sufficient to allow cooling of said product below ambient temperature.

39. The system of Claim 38, wherein said cooling pulse is applied in a form selected from a delta function, a step function, a rectangular function a saw tooth function and a periodic function or combination thereof.

40. The system of claim 31 comprising a memory carrying said database.