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DESCRIPTION

EXPANDABLE VINYL CHLORIDE RESIN COMPOSITION

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition, and more particularly to an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition which is excellent in processability and provides cellular moldings having a high expansion ratio and having excellent physical properties.

BACKGROUND ART

Polyvinyl chloride resins provide molded articles excellent in physical properties such as impact resistance and heat resistance and in chemical properties such as solvent resistance, acid resistance and alkali resistance and, therefore, have been widely used in the field of building materials and other various fields. In recent years, foaming method attracts attention as a means for lightening of vinyl chloride resins and cost reduction of molded articles. Molded articles of vinyl chloride resins having a high expansion ratio have been demanded strongly from the market.

In foaming of vinyl chloride resins, generally known is a method using a blowing agent in combination with a processing aid comprising methyl methacrylate as a main component.

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It is known that it is possible to achieve foaming in a high expansion ratio when an easily volatile organic solvent blowing agent such as an aliphatic hydrocarbon or a halogenated aliphatic

hydrocarbon is used as the blowing agent mentioned above.

For example, Japanese Patent Publications Kokoku No. 60-10540 and Kokoku No. 58-40986 disclose that foamed articles having an expansion ratio of several tens of times are obtained by impregnating a vinyl chloride resin with an organic solvent having a boiling point of not more than 90°C such as butane or dichlorofluoromethane as a blowing agent or by directly introducing the organic solvent to an extruder during extrusion processing.

However, the use of an organic solvent blowing agent is disadvantageous in cost as compared with a thermally decomposable blowing agent, since equipment for the impregnation and for explosion proof is required in carrying out the molding.

On the other hand, in case of using a thermally decomposable blowing agent such as a thermally decomposable organic blowing agent or a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent, it is difficult under existing circumstances to raise the expansion ratio to more than about 3-4 times so long as it is desired to produce foamed articles having a smooth surface and to keep the cells thereof uniform and fine.

For example, Japanese Patent Publication Kokoku No. 63-9540 discloses an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition obtained by adding a methacrylate resin (polymethyl methacrylate having a degree of polymerization of 2,000 to 30,000, that is, a weight average molecular weight of 200,000 to 3,000,000) with a thermally decomposable organic blowing agent such as azodicarbonamide and a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent such as sodium bicarbonate and further with a filler such as calcium carbonate to a vinyl chloride resin having an average degree of polymerization of 500 to 800. It is disclosed that this

expandable vinyl chloride resin composition is molded to give foamed articles having uniform and fine cells and having excellent surface property and surface hardness, but the expansion ratio is at most about 3-4 times.

5 Also, Japanese Patent Publication Kokai No. 6-9813 discloses an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition obtained by adding a methacrylate resin and a bicarbonate having a particle size of not more than 10 μm as a thermally decomposable blowing agent to a vinyl chloride resin. It is disclosed that this expandable vinyl chloride resin
10 composition is molded to give foamed articles having uniform and fine cells and having good heat stability and weatherability, but no detail of the average molecular weight of methacrylate resin and the expansion ratio is disclosed therein.

 Further, Japanese Patent Publication Kokai No. 9-151269
15 discloses an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition obtained by adding a polymethyl methacrylate resin having a weight average molecular weight of 4,500,000 to 7,000,000 and a thermally decomposable blowing agent to a vinyl chloride resin. It is disclosed that this expandable vinyl chloride resin composition is molded to give
20 injection-molded foams having uniform cells without occurrence of decomposition of the resins. However, in the working examples thereof, as the polymethyl methacrylate resin is used only P-531 made by Mitsubishi Rayon Co., Ltd. (weight average molecular weight 4,700,000) and no evaluation in the vicinity of 7,000,000 in weight average
25 molecular weight is made. Also, the obtained expansion ratios are at most about 2-3 times.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an

expandable vinyl chloride resin composition according to which the expansion ratio can be markedly increased by the use of a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent without using any organic solvent-based blowing agent in the foaming.

5 A further object of the present invention is to provide an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition which provides foamed articles having a high expansion ratio and having uniform and fine cells.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

10 The present inventors have found, as a result of intensive study, that a composition capable of largely increasing the expansion ratio as compared with conventional compositions is obtained by adding a specific (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer and a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent to a vinyl chloride resin.

15 In accordance with the present invention, there is provided an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition comprising (a) 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin, (b) 5 to 30 parts by weight of, as a processing aid, a (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer having a specific viscosity of not less than 0.73 measured at 30°C with respect to a
20 solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform, and (c) 2 to 25 parts by weight of a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent.

 Sodium bicarbonate is particularly preferred as the thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent.

25 The feature of the present invention resides in that a polymer which is obtained by emulsion polymerization of a monomer mixture containing a predominant amount of a methacrylic acid ester and/or an

acrylic acid ester and which has a high molecular weight is used as a processing aid for vinyl chloride resins. By using the above-mentioned processing aid and the thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent, the effect that the expansion ratio in the foaming can be increased without impairing excellent physical and chemical properties that the vinyl chloride resins originally possess can be remarkably exhibited with the addition of small amounts thereof.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The vinyl chloride resins used in the present invention are not particularly limited, and any of conventionally used vinyl chloride resins can be used in the present invention. Homopolymer and copolymers composed of 80 to 100 % by weight of units of vinyl chloride and 0 to 20 % by weight of units of other monomers copolymerizable with vinyl chloride are preferable.

Examples of the other monomer copolymerizable with vinyl chloride are, for instance, vinyl acetate, propylene, styrene, an acrylic acid ester (e.g., alkyl acrylates having a C_1 to C_8 alkyl group such as methyl acrylate, ethyl acrylate, butyl acrylate and octyl acrylate), and other vinyl monomers. These may be used alone or in admixture thereof.

The average degree of polymerization of the vinyl chloride resin is not particularly limited, but vinyl chloride resins having an average degree of polymerization of about 400 to about 800 are usually employed.

Such vinyl chloride resins include, for instance, polyvinyl chloride, copolymers of not less than 80 % by weight of units of vinyl

chloride and not more than 20 % by weight of units of vinyl acetate, propylene, styrene or an acrylic acid ester, a post-chlorinated polyvinyl chloride, and the like. These may be used alone or in admixture thereof.

5 The processing aid is a component used for the purpose of improving the expandability of the vinyl chloride resin.

 In the present invention, as the processing aid are used a homopolymer or copolymers obtained by emulsion polymerization of a monomer mixture (hereinafter also referred to as "monomer mixture
10 (M)") containing a predominant amount of a methacrylic acid ester and/or an acrylic acid ester. These polymers are important to have a high molecular weight, and the specific viscosity thereof measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform is at least 0.73, preferably from 0.73 to 3, more preferably
15 from 0.73 to 1.7, further preferably from 0.8 to 1.6, still further preferably from 0.9 to 1.5. If the specific viscosity is less than 0.73, sufficient expandability is not obtained. Also, if the specific viscosity exceeds 1.7, the expandability tends to lower. The specific viscosity 0.73 corresponds to about 7,300,000 in terms of weight average
20 molecular weight of the (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer.

 The specific viscosity can be adjusted by means of the ratio of polymerization initiator to monomer or the amount of chain transfer agent such as mercaptan.

 The above-mentioned monomer mixture (M) is a mixture of 50
25 to 100 % by weight of methyl methacrylate and 0 to 50 % by weight of a monomer selected from an acrylic acid ester and a methacrylic acid ester excepting methyl methacrylate, and it may further contain other vinyl

monomers copolymerizable therewith.

Examples of the methacrylic acid ester excepting methyl methacrylate are, for instance, ethyl methacrylate, propyl methacrylate, butyl methacrylate, 2-ethylhexyl methacrylate and other alkyl
5 methacrylates. Examples of the acrylic acid ester are, for instance, methyl acrylate, ethyl acrylate, propyl acrylate, butyl acrylate, 2-ethylhexyl acrylate and other alkyl acrylates. These acrylates and methacrylates excepting methyl methacrylate may be used alone or in admixture thereof.

10 Examples of the other vinyl monomer are, for instance, an aromatic vinyl compound such as styrene or α -methylstyrene, an unsaturated nitrile compound such as acrylonitrile, and the like. These may be used alone or in admixture thereof.

The proportions of the respective components in the monomer
15 mixture (M) are from 50 to 100 % by weight, preferably 50 to 90 % by weight, more preferably 60 to 85 % by weight, of methyl methacrylate, and from 0 to 50 % by weight, preferably 10 to 50 % by weight, more preferably 15 to 40 % by weight, of a monomer selected from the methacrylic acid ester excepting methyl methacrylate and the acrylic
20 acid ester, and from 0 to 20 % by weight, preferably 0 to 10 % by weight, more preferably 0 to 5 % by weight, of the other copolymerizable vinyl monomer.

If the proportion of methyl methacrylate in the monomer mixture (M) is less than 50 % by weight, the processability and
25 expandability are lowered. If the proportion of the monomer selected from an acrylic acid ester and a methacrylic acid ester excepting methyl methacrylate exceeds 50 % by weight, the processability and

expandability tend to be lowered. Further, if the proportion of the other vinyl monomer exceeds 20 % by weight, the gelling property and expandability tend to be lowered.

The above-mentioned processing aid is obtained, for example,
5 by emulsion-polymerizing the monomer mixture (M), using suitable dispersion medium, emulsifier, polymerization initiator and chain transfer agent, in a known manner. The emulsion polymerization may be carried out in two stages or more, or may be carried out in a single stage.

10 The dispersion medium used in the emulsion polymerization is usually water.

Known emulsifiers are used. Examples of the emulsifier are, for instance, an anionic surfactant such as a fatty acid salt, an alkyl sulfate, an alkylbenzene sulfonate, an alkyl phosphate or a sulfosuccinic
15 acid diester, and a non-ionic surfactant such as a polyoxyethylene alkyl ether or a polyoxyethylene fatty acid ester.

As the polymerization initiator are used water-soluble and oil-soluble polymerization initiators. For example, usual inorganic polymerization initiators such as a persulfate, organic peroxides or azo
20 compounds may be used alone, or may be used as a redox system in combination with a sulfite, a thiosulfate, a primary metal salt, formaldehyde sodium sulfoxylate or the like. Preferable persulfates include, for instance, sodium persulfate, potassium persulfate, ammonium persulfate, and the like. Preferable peroxides include, for
25 instance, t-butyl hydroperoxide, cumene hydroperoxide, benzoyl peroxide, lauroyl peroxide, and the like.

The chain transfer agent is not particularly limited. For

instance, t-dodecylmercaptan, t-decylmercaptan, n-dodecylmercaptan, n-decylmercaptan and the like can be used.

The temperature and time of the emulsion polymerization reaction are not particularly limited and are suitably adjusted so as to
5 obtain the desired specific viscosity and particle size in accordance with the purpose of use.

In case of carrying out the emulsion polymerization in two or more stages, the monomer of the next stage is added after confirming that the prior stage polymerization is completed, whereby the
10 polymerization in each stage can be carried out without mixing of the next stage monomer with the prior stage monomer.

The particles in the thus obtained polymer latex have usually an average particle size of about 100 to about 3,000 Å (0.01 to 0.3 μm). The particles are taken out of the latex by salting out or coagulation by
15 means of addition of a usual electrolyte, or spray drying in hot air. Also, as occasion demands, washing, dehydration, drying and the like are carried out in a usual manner.

In general, the processing aid obtained by the above-mentioned procedures is preferably a white powder having an average
20 particle size of 30 to 300 μm from the viewpoint of incorporating it as a processing aid into a vinyl chloride resin or an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition.

The processing aid is used in an amount of 5 to 30 parts by weight, preferably 5 to 25 parts by weight, more preferably 8 to 25 parts
25 by weight, per 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin. If the amount of the processing aid is less than 5 parts by weight, the effect to be produced by the addition of the processing aid is not sufficiently

obtained. If the amount is more than 30 parts by weight, excellent mechanical properties of the vinyl chloride resin are impaired.

Examples of the thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent used in the present invention are, for instance, sodium bicarbonate, potassium bicarbonate, ammonium bicarbonate, sodium carbonate, ammonium carbonate, and the like. These may be used alone or in admixture thereof. Of these, sodium bicarbonate is preferred from the viewpoints of expansion efficiency and cost.

The amount of the thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent is selected in accordance with the purpose without particular restriction. The amount is usually from 2 to 25 parts by weight, especially from 3 to 18 parts by weight, per 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin. If the amount of the blowing agent is less than 2 parts by weight, foamed articles having a sufficient expansion ratio are not obtained. If the amount is more than 25 parts by weight, foamed articles having a uniform cell are hard to be obtained.

Also, the above-mentioned amount of the thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent may be changed in conformity with the amount of the processing aid. For example, it is preferable to use the blowing agent in an amount of, per 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin, 3 to 8 parts by weight when the processing aid is used in an amount of 10 parts by weight, and in an amount of 4 to 18 parts by weight when the processing aid is used in an amount of 20 parts by weight.

The expandable vinyl chloride resin composition of the present invention may contain one or more of other additives such as stabilizer, lubricant, impact modifier, plasticizer, colorant, filler and the

like, as occasion demands.

The process for preparing the expandable vinyl chloride resin composition of the present invention is not particularly limited. For example, the composition can be prepared in such a manner as mixing a
5 vinyl chloride resin, the processing aid, a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent and other additives, and melt-kneading the mixture at an appropriate temperature by a melt kneader such as a twin screw extruder.

The method of the molding processing of the expandable vinyl
10 chloride resin composition of the present invention is not particularly limited, and generally used molding methods such as extrusion are applicable.

The present invention is more specifically explained by means of examples and comparative examples, in which all parts and % are by
15 weight unless otherwise noted. It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to these examples.

Methods of evaluation used in the examples and comparative examples are shown below.

(Measurement of specific viscosity of polymer sample (processing aid))

20 In 100 ml of chloroform was dissolved 0.1 g of a polymer sample, and the measurement was carried out using a Ubbelohde's viscometer kept at a constant temperature in a water bath of 30°C.

(Measurement of expansion ratio)

After measuring the specific gravity of a obtained powder
25 compound (non-foamed molding of vinyl chloride resin composition), the compound was molded by a small-size single screw extruder attached to a Laboplasto mill made by Toyo Seiki Kabushiki Kaisha to give a rod-like

foamed article (foamed molding of vinyl chloride resin composition), and the specific gravity of the rod-like foamed article was measured. The expansion ratio was calculated from the measured values according to the following equation.

$$5 \quad \text{Expansion ratio} = (\text{specific gravity of non-foamed molding}) / (\text{specific gravity of foamed molding})$$

The specifications of extruder and the molding conditions are shown below.

Specifications of extruder

10 Screw: L/D = 20, compression ratio = 2.7, number of rotation = 30 r.p.m.

Die: diameter = 5 mm, land = 20 mm

Molding conditions

Molding temperature: C1 = 170°C, C2 = 175°C, C3 = 180°C

Die = 185°C

15 (Measurement of polymerization conversion)

The polymerization conversion was calculated according to the following equation.

$$\text{Polymerization conversion (\%)} = (\text{amount of produced polymer} / \text{amount of monomers charged}) \times 100$$

20 (Measurement of average particle size of latex)

With respect to a latex obtained, the average particle size was measured using light scattering in a wavelength of 546 nm by a Spectrophotometer U-2000 made by Hitachi, Ltd.

(Evaluation of cell state)

25 With respect to the cell state of a foamed article obtained, the appearance was visually observed and evaluated according to the following criteria.

○: The cell structure is uniform and the appearance is excellent.

△: Broken cells are scattered.

×: Most of cells are broken and the appearance is poor.

5

EXAMPLE 1

An 8 liter reactor equipped with a stirrer was charged with 0.7 part of sodium dioctylsuccinate dissolved in water as an emulsifier, and thereto was added water so that the total amount of water including water included in sub-raw materials added later became 200 parts.

10 After passing a nitrogen gas through the gaseous phase and liquid phase of the reactor to expel oxygen from the space and water, the temperature of the content was elevated to 70°C with stirring. To the reactor was then added at a time a first stage monomer mixture composed of 68 parts of methyl methacrylate (hereinafter also referred to as "MMA") and 12

15 parts of butyl acrylate (hereinafter also referred to as "BA"). Subsequently 0.01 part of potassium persulfate was added as an initiator, and stirring was continued for 1 hour to substantially complete the polymerization. A second stage monomer mixture composed of 6 parts of MMA and 14 parts of BA was added dropwise at a rate of about

20 30 parts per hour. After the completion of the dropwise addition, the content in the reactor was kept at 70°C for 90 minutes and was then cooled to give a latex. The average particle size of the latex was measured. The result is shown in Table 1.

The polymerization conversion was 99.5 %. The latex was

25 coagulated by salting out with an aqueous solution of calcium chloride, heat-treated by elevating the temperature to 90°C and dehydrated by a cetrifugal dehydrator. The obtained cake of a resin was washed with an

approximately same amount of water as the weight of the resin and was dried at 50°C for 15 hours by a parallel flow dryer to give a white powder of polymer sample (1). The specific viscosity of the obtained polymer sample (1) was measured. The result is shown in Table 1.

5 In a Henschel mixer, 100 parts of a polyvinyl chloride (KANEVINYL S-1007 made by Kaneka Corporation, average degree of polymerization 680) was mixed with 10.0 parts of the above polymer sample (1), 6.0 parts of calcium carbonate, 2.0 parts of titanium oxide, 2.0 parts of an octyl tin mercapto-type stabilizer [di-n-octyl tin bis(iso-
10 octyl mercaptoacetate)] (TVS #8831 made by Nitto Kasei Kabushiki Kaisha), 0.6 part of calcium stearate, 0.1 part of hydroxystearic acid (LOXIOLE G-21 made by Henkel GmbH), 0.9 part of a dibasic fatty acid alcohol ester (LOXIOLE G-60 made by Henkel GmbH) and 0.6 part of a polyethylene wax (ACPE-617A made by Allied Chemical Corporation),
15 and the inner temperature was elevated to 110°C. After cooling, 6.0 parts of sodium bicarbonate was incorporated into the mixture to give a powder compound. The compound was molded by a small-size extruder attached to a Laboplasto mill made by Toyo Seiki Kabushiki Kaisha to give a round rod-like foamed article. The cell state of the foamed article
20 was evaluated, and the expansion ratio was measured. The results are shown in Table 1.

EXAMPLES 2 to 4 and COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES 1 and 2

25 Polymer samples (2) to (6) were prepared according to the recipe shown in Table 1 in the same manner as in Example 1, and the characteristics thereof were measured. Also, round rod-like foamed articles were obtained by incorporating each of the obtained polymer

samples (2) to (6) into polyvinyl chloride in the same manner as in Example 1, and were evaluated. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

		Ex. 1	Ex. 2	Ex. 3	Ex. 4	Com.Ex.1	Com.Ex.2
Polymer sample No.		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Composition (part)							
Polymer sample							
1st stage mixture	MMA	68	68	68	68	68	68
	BA	12	12	12	12	12	12
2nd stage mixture	MMA	6	6	6	6	6	6
	BA	14	14	14	14	14	14
Initiator		0.01	0.007	0.003	0.001	0.03	0.1
Emulsifier		0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5
Results of evaluation							
Polymerization conversion (%)		99.5	99.7	99.5	99.4	99.2	99.4
Specific viscosity of polymer sample		0.73	0.82	0.92	1.06	0.60	0.33
Average particle size of latex (μm)		0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
Expandability	Expansion ratio (times)	7.8	8.2	10.1	11.8	3.9	2.8
	Cell state	○	○	○	○	△	△

From the results shown in Table 1, it is understood that compositions having a good expandability are obtained when polymer samples (1) to (4) having a specific viscosity of not less than 0.73, but no sufficient expandability is obtained when polymer samples (5) and (6) having a specific viscosity of less than 0.73, and accordingly the specific viscosity of the polymer is required to be not less than 0.73 for obtaining the effects of the present invention.

EXAMPLES 5 to 7 and COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES 3 and 4

Foamed articles were prepared in the same manner as in Example 3 except that the amount of polymer sample (3) was changed as shown in Table 2 instead of 10.0 parts per 100 parts of polyvinyl chloride in order to evaluate a change in expandability when the amount of polymer sample (3) incorporated into polyvinyl chloride was changed. The expandability of the foamed articles was evaluated. The results are shown in Table 2, provided that in Comparative Example 4 a foamed article suitable to evaluate the expandability could not be obtained due to non-uniformity of a composition obtained.

20

Table 2

	Ex. 3	Ex. 5	Ex. 6	Ex. 7	Com. Ex. 3	Com. Ex. 4
Polymer sample No.	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Amount (part)	10	8	15	20	3	40
Expandability						
Expansion ratio (times)	10.1	7.1	11.1	13.4	3.8	-
Cell state	○	○	○	○	○	-

25

From the results shown in Table 2, it is understood that the

compositions incorporated with the processing aid according to the present invention exhibit a good expandability, but sufficient expandability is not obtained if the amount of the processing aid is small as shown in Comparative Example 3.

5

EXAMPLES 8 to 15 and COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES 5 to 9

Foamed articles were prepared in the same manner as in Example 3 except that the amount of polymer sample (3) and the kind and amount of the blowing agent were changed as shown in Table 3 in
10 order to evaluate a change in expandability based on the amount of processing aid incorporated into polyvinyl chloride and the kind and amount of thermally decomposable blowing agent. The expandability of the foamed articles was evaluated. The results are shown in Table 3.

In the table, SBC denotes sodium bicarbonate, and ADCA
15 denotes azodicarbonamide.

Table 3

Example No.	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Com. Ex. 5	Com. Ex. 6	Com. Ex. 7	Com. Ex. 8	Com. Ex. 9
Polymer sample													
Number	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Amount (part)	10	10	10	10	20	20	20	20	10	20	10	10	10
Blowing agent													
Kind	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	SBC	ADCA	ADCA	ADCA
Amount (part)	3	5	7	8	4	10	15	20	1.5	27	1	2	3
Expandability													
Expansion ratio (times)	5.2	7.8	10.0	8.2	9.1	13.8	14.0	10.5	3.8	3.9	3.0	3.6	2.3
Cell state	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	×	○	○	×

From the results shown in Table 3, it is understood that as shown in Comparative Examples 5 and 6, a high expansion ratio is not obtained if the amount of a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent is small, and foamed articles having uniform cells are not obtained
5 if the amount is too large. It is also understood that a sufficient expandability is not obtained also in the case that thermally decomposable blowing agents other than a thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent are used, as shown in Comparative Examples 7 to 9.

10

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The expandable vinyl chloride resin composition of the present invention provides foamed articles having an expansion ratio as high as 5-10 or more in spite of the use of thermally decomposable
15 inorganic blowing agents and, moreover, having a good state of cells. Therefore, cost reduction is possible since an existing extruder can be used, and also the range of uses is expanded.

CLAIMS

1. An expandable vinyl chloride resin composition capable of providing cellular molded articles without using organic solvent blowing agents, said composition comprising 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin, 5 to 30 parts by weight of, as a processing aid, a (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer having a specific viscosity of not less than 0.73 measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform, and 2 to 25 parts by weight of at least one thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent selected from the group consisting of sodium bicarbonate, potassium bicarbonate, ammonium bicarbonate, sodium carbonate and ammonium carbonate, said composition containing no organic solvent blowing agent and no wood flour having an average particle size of 50 to 500 μm , and said (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer being a polymer obtained by polymerization of a monomer mixture of 50 to 100 % by weight of methyl methacrylate, 0 to 50 % by weight of a monomer selected from the group consisting of acrylic acid esters and methacrylic acid esters excepting methyl methacrylate and 0 to 20 % by weight of other vinyl monomers copolymerizable therewith.

2. The composition of Claim 1, wherein said vinyl chloride resin is a polymer of 80 to 100 % by weight of units of vinyl chloride and 20 to 0 % by weight of units of other vinyl monomer copolymerizable with vinyl chloride.

3. The composition of Claim 1, wherein said (meth)acrylic acid

ester polymer has a specific viscosity of 0.73 to 1.7 measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform.

4. The composition of Claim 1, wherein said (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer has a specific viscosity of 0.8 to 1.6 measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform.

5. The composition of Claim 1, wherein said (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer is a copolymer of 50 to 90 % by weight of units of methyl methacrylate, 10 to 50 % by weight of units of a member selected from the group consisting of ethyl methacrylate, propyl methacrylate, butyl methacrylate, 2-ethylhexyl methacrylate, methyl acrylate, ethyl acrylate, propyl acrylate, butyl acrylate and 2-ethylhexyl acrylate, and 0 to 20 % by weight of other vinyl monomer copolymerizable therewith.

6. The composition of Claim 1, wherein the amount of said thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent is from 6 to 25 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of said vinyl chloride resin.

7. The composition of Claim 1, wherein said thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent is sodium bicarbonate.

8. A process for preparing cellular molded articles of a vinyl chloride resin without using an organic solvent blowing agent, which comprises mixing a vinyl chloride resin with additives to form an

expandable vinyl chloride resin composition comprising 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin, 5 to 30 parts by weight of, as a processing aid, a (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer having a specific viscosity of not less than 0.73 measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform, and 2 to 25 parts by weight of at least one thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent selected from the group consisting of sodium bicarbonate, potassium bicarbonate, ammonium bicarbonate, sodium carbonate and ammonium carbonate, and molding said composition to give foamed articles, wherein said composition contains no organic solvent blowing agent and no wood flour having an average particle size of 50 to 500 μm , and said (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer is a polymer obtained by polymerization of a monomer mixture of 50 to 100 % by weight of methyl methacrylate, 0 to 50 % by weight of a monomer selected from the group consisting of acrylic acid esters and methacrylic acid esters excepting methyl methacrylate and 0 to 20 % by weight of other vinyl monomers copolymerizable therewith.

9. A process for preparing cellular molded articles of a vinyl chloride resin having an expansion ratio of 5 or more without using an organic solvent blowing agent, which comprises mixing a vinyl chloride resin with additives to form an expandable vinyl chloride resin composition comprising 100 parts by weight of a vinyl chloride resin, 5 to 30 parts by weight of, as a processing aid, a (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer having a specific viscosity of not less than 0.73 measured at 30°C with respect to a solution of 0.1 g of the polymer dissolved in 100 ml of chloroform, and 2 to 25 parts by weight of at least one thermally

decomposable inorganic blowing agent selected from the group consisting of sodium bicarbonate, potassium bicarbonate, ammonium bicarbonate, sodium carbonate and ammonium carbonate, and molding said composition to give foamed articles having an expansion ratio of 5 or more, wherein said composition contains no organic solvent blowing agent, and said (meth)acrylic acid ester polymer is a polymer obtained by polymerization of a monomer mixture of 50 to 100 % by weight of methyl methacrylate, 0 to 50 % by weight of a monomer selected from the group consisting of acrylic acid esters and methacrylic acid esters excepting methyl methacrylate and 0 to 20 % by weight of other vinyl monomers copolymerizable therewith.

10. The process of Claim 9, wherein the amount of said thermally decomposable inorganic blowing agent is from 4 to 18 parts by weight.