

Description

This invention relates to suspended cables and the like, and in particular but not exclusively to suspended transmission lines.

5 For above ground routes cables, known in this context as drop cables, may be suspended from poles in a catenary. Typically drop cables comprise a strength member made of tensile steel which supports the load, and a carried member or lines, which may for example be a more delicate transmission line, which is attached either continually or at intervals to the strength member. For transmission lines the typical distance between poles is 200 feet, that is 69 meters. Between the poles the drop cable sags due to its own weight; 10 the extent of the sag on installation is determined by the tension in the drop cable and is designed to be within a range of values determined by the acceptable drop cable tension and the acceptable extent of eventual sag to avoid hazard. In addition to the suspension load of the weight of the drop cable itself, externally mounted drop cables are subject to additional variable loading due to wind force and settling of moisture or ice formation. This additional loading results in strain in the drop cable which will affect all the 15 elements of the cable including the carried lines.

Methods for protecting delicate transmission lines from tension forces are known in the art. UK patent, GB1,580,089 discloses a method in which transmission lines and strength members are separate and movable in a longitudinal direction within a surrounding common cable mantle. The Philips Telecommunications & Data Systems Review, volume 46, number 1, of March '88 further discusses overhead cable 20 systems which include sheaths which are "mechanically uncoupled" from the fibres to prevent damage to the fibres. German patent DE3,031,833 discloses a method of suspending transmission lines, which may include optical fibre transmission lines, with the possibility of retrofitting the lines to existing overhead lines such as high voltage power lines.

Optical fibre or other lightweight transmission lines may be conveniently installed in a previously 25 suspended drop cable in which the strength member supports a duct along which a lightweight package can be installed by the technique known as fibre blowing described in our European patent 108,590.

This technique involves blowing compressed fluid, usually gas, along a duct into which the transmission line is to be installed and feeding the transmission line into the duct at the same time so that it is urged along by the viscous drag of the fluid flow. A particular feature of this technique is that it enables sensitive 30 transmission lines, especially those containing optical fibres, to be installed after the laying, or suspending, of the duct and the transmission line is therefore free from any stress resulting from installation or suspension of the duct itself. Alternatively the carried line may be lashed to a previously suspended strength member but this is less convenient. However, even if a transmission line is installed after suspension of the strength member it is in present systems still subjected to the additional, variable strains 35 resulting from ice and/or wind loading on the drop cable.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a suspended cable arrangement comprising first and second supports, a continuous, elongate, tensile-load-carrying strength member extending between and secured to the supports, the strength member supporting a duct, suitable for use in a fibre blowing process, the strength member not being received within the duct, at least a portion of the 40 duct between the supports being decoupled from the strength member, whereby limited but significant elongation of the strength member can occur without significant elongation of the duct, and wherein the duct comprises plastics materials, the body of the duct comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct being provided by a second plastics material which is a polymer incorporating a solid lubricant.

45 According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a drop cable arrangement for blown installation of optical fibre therein, the arrangement comprising an elongate strength member which carries an elongate optical fibre duct in plural spans disposed between successive elevated points, the fibre duct being suitable for in situ blown fibre installation throughout the plural spans of an installed drop cable arrangement; said duct comprising plastics materials, the body of the duct comprising a first plastics 50 material, and the inner surface of the duct being provided by a second plastics material which incorporates a solid lubricant; said strength member being mechanically decoupled from the fibre duct in the elongated longitudinal dimension so that changes in length of the strength member caused by changes in temperature and loading stress produce substantially less, if any, strain in the fibre duct; and said duct being routed around the elevated points with sufficient slack to accommodate changes in strength member length while 55 remaining substantially gas-tight at any connection joint thereof between duct spans so as to remain suitable for blown fibre installation throughout the plural spans.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of installing optical fibre along a drop cable arrangement spanning plural vertical support points spaced apart over an extended path,

the method comprising the steps of installing a drop cable along the extended path between the vertical support points, the drop cable having an elongated strength member carried by the vertical support points and, in turn, carrying an elongated duct which is mechanically decoupled from the strength member in the longitudinal direction along the path so that changes in the length of the strength member caused by changes in temperature and loading stress produce substantially less, if any, strain in the fibre duct; said cable comprising plastics materials, the body of the cable comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct being provided by a second plastics material which incorporates a solid lubricant; effecting gas-tight joints, if needed, in the duct which bypass the vertical support points, and thereafter installing an optical fibre transmission line into the duct along the path using blown fibre techniques such that the fibre is propelled from one end of the duct using viscous friction between the fibre and faster moving gases along the duct.

The invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

- Figure 1 schematically illustrates a general embodiment of the invention;
- Figure 2 schematically illustrates an embodiment of the invention suitable for use in primary installations; and
- Figure 3 schematically illustrates a second embodiment of the invention which may be utilised for installation of a duct on to a previously suspended supporting line;
- Figure 4 schematically illustrates a sprung catenary according to a second aspect of the invention;
- Figure 5 schematically illustrates a cross section through a simple drop cable for use with the second aspect of the invention.

Referring to Figure 1, a catenary system comprises poles 1 which each have a connection ring 2 to which a tensile load supporting strength member 3 of a drop cable 4 is attached via a connection stopper member 5. Alternative means for attaching the strength member to the poles may be utilised, the arrangement shown being typical of presently used transmission line attachments. The strength member 3 supports a carried member 6. A tubular member 7 which may be made integrally with the carried member or attached to it by other means extends around the strength member (more clearly seen by reference to Figures 2 and 3) and is sufficiently loose to enable relative longitudinal movement between the tubular member 7 and the strength member 3. Prior to attachment of the strength member to the poles the carried member 6 separates from the strength member and is left slack as it bypasses the pole and then rejoins the strength member of the next span after its attachment to the pole.

In an external suspended drop cable system there are initial loading and tension factors which are determined by the drop cable weight and the selected installation tension, and superimposed on this there are changes in loading due to factors such as ice and wind. Typical values may be a total drop cable weight of 0.3 to 0.5 Newtons per metre run, but environmental loading caused for example by a cladding of ice to a thickness of 5mm and the ice clad cable being subjected to wind loading may increase the weight respectively by of the order of up to 2 to 3 and 5 to 6 Newtons per metre run. Thus the environmental loading may greatly exceed the cable weight loading, and the increased load imposes increased tension and consequent elongation in the suspended cable. The total loading on a cable is given by:

$$\sqrt{(\text{ice clad weight}^2 + \text{wind load}^2)}$$

and for the values mentioned above strains of the order of 0.3% or greater are experienced, the precise value depending on the cross sectional size and Youngs Modulus of the strength member. Strains of this extent can not be tolerated in delicate transmission lines such as those containing optical fibres.

With the arrangement shown in Figure 1, it can be assumed that the load of the complete drop cable 4 is taken by the strength member 3. When the load increases the strain is solely experienced by the strength member 3 because the tubular member 7 slides upon the strength member by virtue of its loose fit and the tubular member's resistance to relative movement with respect to the strength member is less than its own resistance to extension. The slackening in the carried member 6 is sufficient to take up the extension of the strength member without strain. Thus the tubular member and any line carried within it remain substantially free from environmentally induced strain thereby enabling elements that are sensitive to strain such as optical fibres or other delicate transmission lines, may be carried in a drop wire system.

Referring now in more detail to Figure 2, the drop cable 4 comprises two side by side passageways constituting the carried member 6 and tubular member 7. As shown the two passageways are of equal size, but it is possible for them to differ in size or for a greater plurality of passageways to be provided, as shown for example in Figure 2a. Conveniently the passageways may be formed by an integral plastics extrusion of side by side tubes. The strength member passes along the passageway 7: this would normally be achieved

by threading the strength member through the passageway 7, although forming the passageway around the strength member may also be possible. The passageway 6 carries a transmission line 9 which, when installed, also forms part of the carried line: the line 9 may be installed in the duct 6 prior to installation of the catenary or subsequently installed. In the case of lightweight transmission lines, and especially those containing optical fibres, it is convenient to install the lines 9 in the passageway 6 by the fibre blowing technique described in EP108590, and this technique is conveniently utilised after suspension of the drop cable in the catenary.

To enhance blowability when using a fibre blowing technique, and for long term retention of good blowing characteristics it is convenient to use a lubricant impregnated plastic for the drop cable. It may not be possible to obtain good blowability and the mechanical properties desired for the drop cable from a single plastic or blend of plastics. Optimum or more nearly optimum properties can be achieved if the passageway 6 is lined with a different plastics material from that used for the rest of the drop cable structure. The lining and the drop cable structure may be formed simultaneously or almost simultaneously using a co-extrusion or series extrusion process respectively. Alternatively, the lining of the passageway 6 may be formed in a first operation, the remainder of the drop cable body being formed subsequently (minutes, hours or days later as appropriate) by extrusion about the lining. High density polyethylene (HDPE) is a preferred lining material. Particularly preferred is HDPE incorporating a solid lubricant such as antistatic grade carbon. A concentration in the range of 5% to 10% antistatic grade carbon is preferred, most preferably 8%. Typical co-extrusion rates are of the order of 10 metres per minute. Where the lining is co-extruded it will typically be 0.2 to 0.5mm in thickness, more typically 0.25 to 0.35 mm. Where the lining is produced other than in a co-extrusion process, the lining wall thickness may preferably be somewhat greater, for example up to 1 mm.

Typical internal diameters for the passageway 6 are in the range 3 to 7mm, preferably 5 to 6mm. These dimensions are particularly suitable for use of fibre blowing processes for installation of transmission lines such as suitably packaged multimode or monomode optical fibres. In Figure 3 a modified tubular member 7 is illustrated which has an openable side to enable the tubular member 7 to be engaged around a strength member where threading is not convenient. This has applicability to retro-fitting around a previously suspended line (which may be a strength member only or a drop cable including a strength member) where access to the ends is not available. In the embodiment shown the side of the tubular member 7 is openable by virtue of a parting line at the base of the right hand side (as viewed) and the natural resilience of the material of the tube effectively forming a hinge at the top of the tubular member. The confronting sides of the parting line are provided with a cooperating ball and cup catch 10.

As previously mentioned it is necessary for the resistance of the tubular member 7 to extension to be less than the sliding resistance which enables the strength member to expand without stretching the tubular member.

To this end it is desirable to incorporate means to reduce the possibility of the strength member becoming caught or otherwise stuck in the tubular member. In general the strength member will be made of a corrosion resistant material such as stainless steel which may be further coated or oiled (for example silicone oiled) to ease friction between the strength member and tubular member and/or further aid corrosion resistance. Low friction coatings such as silicone or PTFE may also be utilised for the inside surface of the tubular member 7, which in general will comprise a plastics material. A potential source of sticking is for the strength member to become iced within the tubular member, and for this purpose vents 11 (Figure 1) to enable egress of water from the tubular member may be provided at the low point of each catenary span. In the vicinity of the vents drip beads may be provided to aid channelling of drips away from contact with the strength member and tubular member. Anti wetting agents and/or low friction coating inside the tubular member aids the egress of water. Drip beads or other formations may also be used to discourage entry of water, either directly or by running along the strength member, into the tubular member at its open ends.

Additional strain resistance may be provided by including at least one auxiliary strength member in the wall of the tubular member 7. Such an auxiliary strength member is shown referenced 12 in Figure 3. Preferably the auxiliary strength member is made of Kevlar and extruded in to a plastics tubular member, and also provides resistance to temperature induced strain by virtue of its negative coefficient of thermal expansion. An auxiliary strength member may also be provided in the embodiment shown in Figure 2. The auxiliary strength member may continue across the slackening of the carried member.

It will be realised that the degree of slackness in the carried line between its attachment points to adjacent spans of the strength member needs to be sufficient to take up any elongation in the strength member due to environmental loading and/or any sliding of the tubular member to an asymmetric position on the span. For convenience in installation the carried member 6 may be provided in lengths and the

lengths connected by coupling with tube connectors 13 (Figure 1). Where a "blown fibre" installation technique is used to install the transmission line in the carried member 6, it is important for the tube connectors to form a well sealed joint to the members, such that leakage of the gas used for blowing is avoided. Of course for short lengths some leakage can generally be tolerated.

If the tubular member 7 and carried member 6 passageways are formed integrally, such as by a plastics extrusion, separation, termination and relative shortening of the lengths of tubular member may be performed at the point of installation.

The tubular member 7 may be fixed relative to the strength member at one end, or some intermediate location in order to control the direction or prevent unrestricted relative longitudinal sliding.

The sprung catenary of the second aspect of the present invention will now be described.

Figure 4 shows a preferred embodiment of the second aspect of the invention in which the strength members are attached to poles supporting the drop cable system via an elastic linkage, provided in this example by a helical spring 33. Conveniently the elastic linkage is attached to the pole via a ring mounting 34 to which an elastic linkage of the next span or catenary length is also attached. Preferably each catenary length of strength member is provided with an elastic linkage at each end.

With this arrangement when the drop cable is subjected to additional loading the elastic member extends and, as will be shown later, thereby enables reduction in the strain experienced in the cable. The duct 6 for the transmission line must be continuous, and so where the elastic linkage is attached to the strength member at point 53 the duct separated from the strength member (now constituted by the elastic linkage) and continues separately from the elastic linkage for a short distance until it rejoins the strength member after the elastic section. In the embodiment shown the elastic linkage at the end of the next adjacent catenary length is also bypassed in a continuous loop before the duct rejoins the strength member. An auxiliary strength member may be provided on the duct to aid in its support between the two attachment points 53 of the elastic link to the strength member. The loop of unsupported duct is provided with a degree of slackness that is at least equal to the maximum extension that the elastic member, or members, that it bridges will undergo. The invention has been illustrated by the provision of elastic linkages between the strength members and the poles: this enables provision of two elastic linkages for each catenary length with minimum inconvenience since the strength members in any event have to be interrupted for secure connection to the poles.

However, a more general principal of the invention is to provide an elastic linkage in the strength member, and for the carried line or lines to be separated from the strength member for at least the length of the elastic linkage and provided with a slackening over that length sufficient to accommodate the maximum expansion of the elastic linkage. Such an elastic linkage or linkages could be provided at any location in each catenary length.

In any external suspended drop cable system there are initial loading and tension factors which are determined by the drop cable weight and the selected installation tension, and superimposed on this there are changes in loading due to factors such as ice and wind. It is established that the relationship in a catenary between the catenary drop (the maximum sag) D, the distance L between poles, the distributed load W per metre run on the drop cable and the tension T in the drop cable can be expressed as

$$D = L^2 W/8T \quad (1)$$

from which it can be seen that the drop increases with pole separation and load and decreases with tension. The principal of the present invention is to eliminate or reduce changes in the tension T by allowing an increase in the catenary drop D in order to compensate for the additional loading which would affect W in the above equation.

While it is preferred to use the previously described drop cable together with the sprung catenary system, it is possible to use the sprung catenary system with a 'solid' drop cable of the type shown in Figure 5. In such a drop cable there is no freedom for relative movement between the strength member 3 and the surrounding plastics material. As before, the duct 6 is intended for the installation of transmission lines by means of a 'blown fibre' technique subsequent to installation of the drop cable. Consequently the details given above with reference to the duct 6 of the drop cables of Figures 1, 2 and 3, apply equally to the drop cable of Figure 5.

The effectiveness of a resilient link in the strength member is now demonstrated numerically using the simple drop cable as shown in Figure 5 in an arrangement as shown in Figure 4. In the event that the drop cable is changed to a different design or the installation tension or span length is changed, then the numerical values will change and it may be necessary to make the corresponding changes in the available extension in the elastic linkages.

For the purposes of calculating the maximum load on the cable it is assumed that there is a 5 mm coating of ice over the surface of the cable and that this ice-clad cable is subjected to wind loading of 80km/hr. It is further assumed that the entire load is borne by the strength member and that the relationship of Young's Modulus = stress/strain holds for the tensile steel strength member.

- 5 In the drop cable of Figure 5 the steel strength member has a cross sectional area of 1.7671 mm². The total weight of the cable including an installed fibre package is 0.364 Newtons per metre run and 5 mm of radial ice adds a weight of 1.98 Newtons per meter run to give a total ice clad weight of 2.344 Newtons per metre run. Using the factors and formulae for wind loading from Constrado, Publication 1/75 (1975), 'Wind forces on unclad tubular structures' the ice clad cable presents an effective size of 0.015m and an 80km/hr
10 wind load provides a load of 5.438 Newtons per metre run. Thus the total maximum load on the drop cable is given by

$$\begin{aligned} & \sqrt{(\text{ice clad weight} + \text{wind}^2 \text{ load})} = \\ & \sqrt{(2.344^2 + 5.438^2)} \\ & = 5.92 \text{ Newtons per metre run} \end{aligned}$$

- 20 For the purpose of the example a maximum distributed load of this value, 5.92 Newtons per metre run, is now assumed.

In order to ascertain the required properties of the elastic linkage it is necessary to find the required extension to increase the catenary drop sufficiently to keep the tension and hence the strain within acceptable limits.

- 25 Upon installation i.e. under cable load only (no wind or ice) a catenary drop of 0.7 metres is an acceptable standard. Using this value in the above equation (1) with the cable weight of 0.364 Newtons per metro run for a span length of 68 metres provides:

$$0.7 = 68^2 \times 0.364/8T$$

- 30 which gives an installation tension T = 300.56 Newtons. Using an iterative computer program it can be demonstrated that in order to support a distributed load of 5.92 Newtons per metro run, which is the maximum ice and wind load assumed above, a tension of 1350 Newtons is required. Thus the ice and wind load provides an increase in load of 1050 Newtons.

- 35 In the absence of any springs, using the relationship Young's Modulus = stress/strain for the increase in tension in the strength member, using a value of 160×10^3 Newtons per square mm for Young's Modulus for the tensile steel, and a cross sectional area of 1.7671 square mm for the strength member gives:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{strain} &= \text{load}/(\text{area} \times \text{Young's Modulus}). \\ \text{strain} &= 1050/(1.7671 \times 160 \times 10^3) = 3.7137 \times 10^{-3}. \end{aligned}$$

- 40 Thus the additional strain is 0.37% which is far in excess of that permissible for an optical fibre. Only the additional strain due to the ice and wind loading has been considered as it has been assumed that the optical fibre has been installed after suspension of the drop cable and is therefore not subject to the drop cable installation tension of 300 Newtons.

- 45 If we take a maximum acceptable strain limit of 0.25% (which is in fact too high for optical fibres but serves to illustrate the point) then the maximum catenary length that is acceptable can be calculated.

The catenary length of the unloaded, installed cable is calculated first since again it is only changes from that length that effect a subsequently installed fibre.

- 50 Catenary length = $L + (W^2 L^3)/24 T^2$
installed catenary length =
 $68 + (0.344^2 \times 68^3)/(24 \times 300^2) = 68.0172 \text{ metres}$

A 0.25% elongation gives

- 55 $68.0172 \times 1.0025 = 68.1873 \text{ metres}$

Thus to support a 5.92 Newton per metro run distributed load with only 0.25% strain increase the following

is known:

5

initial installation tension	= 300 Newtons
distance between poles	= 68 metres
distributed weight (under maximum ice/wind loading)	= 5.92 Newtons per metre run
permissible catenary length (calculated above)	= 68.1873 metres

10 The additional tension in a cable extended to its maximum permissible strain (0.25%) can be found using again the relationship Youngs Modulus = stress/strain for the increase in strain and substituting Tension = stress x area gives the relationship.

Tension = Youngs Modulus x strain x area

and using the values given earlier this gives

Tension = $160 \times 10^3 \times .0025 \times 1.7671 = 706.84$ Newtons

15 In other words a 0.25% strain limit only enables a maximum tension in the cable of 1006.84 Newtons (i.e. the installation tension of 300 Newtons plus the increase of 706.84 Newtons calculated above).

In order to reduce the tension from the previously calculated maximum tension of 1350 Newtons to the permissible tension of 1006.84 Newtons (so as not to exceed the 0.25% strain) the catenary length has to increase. This increase in length can not be provided by the cable itself (as this would increase the strain) but is provided by the springs.

20 The catenary length required to sufficiently reduce the tension can be obtained from the relationship:

25

$$\text{catenary length} = L + \frac{W^2 L^3}{24 T^2}$$

where

30 L = distance between poles

W = weight per metre run

T = tension

and using the established values this gives

35

$$\text{catenary length} = 68 + \frac{5.922 \times 68^3}{24 \times 1006.84^2} = 68.4529$$

40

Thus the required catenary length in order to yield a maximum tension of 1006.84 Newtons for a 5.92 Newtons per metre run load is 68.4529 metres.

The maximum length of the cable for 0.25% strain (which will support 1006.84 Newtons) is 68.1873 metres.

45 Therefore the springs (or other flexible portion) must provide an extension of the additional catenary length required, $68.4529 - 68.1873 = .2656$ metres over a tension change of 706.84 Newtons. If springs are provided at each end of each span this yields a required rate of 5.31 N/mm for each spring.

It is of course possible to provide springs that would take up the installation strain in the event that the fibre was not subsequently installed, or for a different maximum strain. If the maximum strain is about half that allowed above, i.e. 0.125% for example, then the spring extension rate would need to be approximately doubled.

50 The embodiment described utilises a mechanical spring, but the elasticity may be provided by other means such as an elastic polymeric material i.e. in the form of an entropy spring rather than an energy spring.

55 In Figure 4 it will be observed that the spring 33 is connected to the attachment points via a stopper member 36. The stopper 36 comprises a small diameter (for example 1 or 2 cm) helix with a comparatively long pitch length so that the turns are extended and open. The end of the drop cable strength member 1 from the drop cable is wound around the open turns of the helical stopper so that, under tension, the

strength member 1 pulls tightly against the turns of the stopper and is secured therein. This type of securement of a strength member in a helical stopper is well known in existing catenary systems. In order to aid gripping the stopper surface may be coated with a high friction material such as carborundum powder or a PVC moulding. A progressive or distributed gripping action may be provided by having a varying diameter helix with the turns tapering from a larger diameter at the end where the strength member 1 is introduced to a lesser diameter. The helical stopper, in order to function to grip the drop cable strength member 1, must be comparatively rigid with respect to the strength member.

In a particularly preferred embodiment of the invention the stopper is formed integrally with an elastic member (although separate, connected stopper and elastic members are possible). It is possible for the same diameter of wire (for example standard 10 gauge) to form the rigid stopper section by virtue of the small diameter turns and then be formed into substantially larger turns to provide the elastic linkage. It will be realised that, within the general context of the expression 'strength member' the stopper and elastic linkage will comprise or constitute the strength member by virtue of their attachment to or continuation from the drop cable strength member.

A further advantage of incorporating an elastic linkage, and one of general applicability, is that upon initial installation the spring should extend to an initial length corresponding to the desired installation tension (assuming installation is carried out without significant environmental loading) and is effectively a built in tension gauge. This is particularly relevant where elastic linkages are used to reduce loading since the calculation of the required spring rate assumes a given installation tension, and if the installation tension differs then the correct degree of tension relief may not be provided. However the use of an elastic linkage purely as a tension gauge for use in installing other catenaries where tension relief is not necessary may also be useful.

Claims

1. A suspended cable arrangement comprising first and second supports (1), a continuous, elongate, tensile-load-carrying strength member (3) extending between and secured to the supports (1), the strength member (3) supporting a duct (6), suitable for use in a fibre blowing process, the strength member (3) not being received within the duct (6), at least a portion of the duct (6) between the supports (1) being decoupled from the strength member (3), whereby limited but significant elongation of the strength member (3) can occur without significant elongation of the duct (6), and wherein the duct (6) comprises plastics materials, the body of the duct (6) comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct (6) being provided by a second plastics material which is a polymer incorporating a solid lubricant.
2. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 1 wherein there are three or more supports (1), the duct (6) providing a continuous path between all the supports (1), the duct (6) diverging from the strength member (3) at the supports (1), and excess length of the duct (6) being provided at the supports (1), wherein the duct (6) comprises plural discrete parts joined together in an end-to-end relationship, the joints (13) between the parts being substantially gas tight.
3. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein a tubular member (7) loosely surrounds the strength member (3) in a first cavity, the duct (6) being formed as a second cavity distinct from the first, and the duct (6) being supported by the strength member (3) by means of the tubular member (7).
4. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 3 wherein the tubular member (7) and the duct (6) are each part of a one piece body of plastics material, the body of the duct (6) being provided by plastics material which is different from that which provides the inner surface of the duct (6).
5. A cable arrangement as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the second plastics material is high density polyethylene.
6. A cable arrangement as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the lubricant is an antistatic grade of carbon.
7. A drop cable arrangement suitable for use in the cable arrangement of claim 1 comprising a duct (6) suitable for use in a fibre blowing process, and means connected to or integral with the duct (6) for engagement with a tensile-load-carrying strength member (3), wherein the duct (6) comprises plastics



strength member 1 pulls tightly against the turns of the stopper and is secured therein. This type of securement of a strength member in a helical stopper is well known in existing catenary systems. In order to aid gripping the stopper surface may be coated with a high friction material such as carborundum powder or a PVC moulding. A progressive or distributed gripping action may be provided by having a varying diameter helix with the turns tapering from a larger diameter at the end where the strength member 1 is introduced to a lesser diameter. The helical stopper, in order to function to grip the drop cable strength member 1, must be comparatively rigid with respect to the strength member.

In a particularly preferred embodiment of the invention the stopper is formed integrally with an elastic member (although separate, connected stopper and elastic members are possible). It is possible for the same diameter of wire (for example standard 10 gauge) to form the rigid stopper section by virtue of the small diameter turns and then be formed into substantially larger turns to provide the elastic linkage. It will be realised that, within the general context of the expression 'strength member' the stopper and elastic linkage will comprise or constitute the strength member by virtue of their attachment to or continuation from the drop cable strength member.

A further advantage of incorporating an elastic linkage, and one of general applicability, is that upon initial installation the spring should extend to an initial length corresponding to the desired installation tension (assuming installation is carried out without significant environmental loading) and is effectively a built in tension gauge. This is particularly relevant where elastic linkages are used to reduce loading since the calculation of the required spring rate assumes a given installation tension, and if the installation tension differs then the correct degree of tension relief may not be provided. However the use of an elastic linkage purely as a tension gauge for use in installing other catenaries where tension relief is not necessary may also be useful.

Claims

1. A suspended cable arrangement comprising first and second supports (1), a continuous, elongate, tensile-load-carrying strength member (3) extending between and secured to the supports (1), the strength member (3) supporting a duct (6), suitable for use in a fibre blowing process, the strength member (3) not being received within the duct (6), at least a portion of the duct (6) between the supports (1) being decoupled from the strength member (3), whereby limited but significant elongation of the strength member (3) can occur without significant elongation of the duct (6), and wherein the duct (6) comprises plastics materials, the body of the duct (6) comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct (6) being provided by a second plastics material which is a polymer incorporating a solid lubricant.
2. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 1 wherein there are three or more supports (1), the duct (6) providing a continuous path between all the supports (1), the duct (6) diverging from the strength member (3) at the supports (1), and excess length of the duct (6) being provided at the supports (1), wherein the duct (6) comprises plural discrete parts joined together in an end-to-end relationship, the joints (13) between the parts being substantially gas tight.
3. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein a tubular member (7) loosely surrounds the strength member (3) in a first cavity, the duct (6) being formed as a second cavity distinct from the first, and the duct (6) being supported by the strength member (3) by means of the tubular member (7).
4. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 3 wherein the tubular member (7) and the duct (6) are each part of a one piece body of plastics material, the body of the duct (6) being provided by plastics material which is different from that which provides the inner surface of the duct (6).
5. A cable arrangement as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the second plastics material is high density polyethylene.
6. A cable arrangement as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the lubricant is an antistatic grade of carbon.
7. A drop cable arrangement suitable for use in the cable arrangement of claim 1 comprising a duct (6) suitable for use in a fibre blowing process, and means connected to or integral with the duct (6) for engagement with a tensile-load-carrying strength member (3), wherein the duct (6) comprises plastics



materials, the body of the duct (6) comprises a first plastics material and the inner surface of the duct (6) is provided by a second plastics material, the second plastics material being a polymer incorporating a solid lubricant.

- 5 8. A drop cable arrangement as claimed in claim 7 wherein the second plastics material is high density polyethylene.
9. A cable arrangement as claimed in claims 7 or claim 8 wherein the solid lubricant is an anti-static grade of carbon.
- 10 10. A cable arrangement as claimed in claim 9, wherein the concentration of carbon in the second plastics material is in the range 5 to 10 per cent.
11. A cable arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 7 to 11 wherein the inner surface is provided by a lining having a thickness in the range 0.2 to 1mm.
12. A drop cable arrangement for blown installation of optical fibre thereinto, the arrangement comprising:
 - an elongate strength member (3) which carries an elongate optical fibre duct (6) in plural spans disposed between successive elevated points (1), the fibre duct being suitable for in situ blown fibre installation throughout the plural spans of an installed drop cable arrangement (4);
 - said duct (6) comprising plastics materials, the body of the duct (6) comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct (6) being provided by a second plastics material which incorporates a solid lubricant;
 - said strength member (3) being mechanically decoupled from the fibre duct (6) in the elongated longitudinal dimension so that changes in length of the strength member (3) caused by changes in temperature and loading stress produce substantially less, if any, strain in the fibre duct (6); and
 - said duct (6) being routed around the elevated points (1) with sufficient slack to accommodate changes in strength member (3) length while remaining substantially gas-tight at any connection joint (13) thereof between duct (6) spans so as to remain suitable for blown fibre installation throughout the plural spans.
13. A method of installing optical fibre along a drop cable arrangement spanning plural vertical support points spaced apart over an extended path, the method comprising the steps of:
 - installing a drop cable (4) along the extended path between the vertical support points (1), the drop cable (4) having an elongated strength member (3) carried by the vertical support points (1) and, in turn, carrying an elongated duct (6) which is mechanically decoupled from the strength member (3) in the longitudinal direction along the path so that changes in the length of the strength member (3) caused by changes in temperature and loading stress produce substantially less, if any, strain in the fibre duct (6); said duct (6) comprising plastics materials, the body of the duct (6) comprising a first plastics material, and the inner surface of the duct (6) being provided by a second plastics material which incorporates a solid lubricant;
 - effecting gas-tight joints (13), if needed, in the duct (6) which bypass the vertical support points (1); and
 - thereafter installing an optical fibre transmission line (9) into the duct (6) along the path using blown fibre techniques such that the fibre (9) is propelled from one end of the duct (6) using viscous friction between the fibre (9) and faster moving gases along the duct (6).

Patentansprüche

1. Hängekabelanordnung mit ersten und zweiten Trageelementen (1), einem durchgehenden, länglichen, Zugbelastung tragenden Lastteil (3), das sich zwischen den Trageelementen (1) erstreckt und daran festgelegt ist, wobei das Lastteil (3) einen Kabelgang (6) trägt, der zur Verwendung in einem Faserblasverfahren geeignet ist, das Lastteil (3) ist nicht in dem Kabelgang (6) aufgenommen, wobei zumindest ein Abschnitt des Kabelgangs (6) zwischen den Trageelementen (1) von dem Lastteil (3) entkoppelt ist, wodurch eine begrenzte aber beträchtliche Dehnung des Lastteils (3) auftreten kann, ohne eine bedeutende Dehnung des Kabelgangs (6), und wobei der Kabelgang (6) Kunststoffmaterialien enthält, der Körper des Kabelgangs (6) enthält ein erstes Kunststoffmaterial und die innere Oberfläche des Kabelgangs (6) ist durch ein zweites Kunststoffmaterial gebildet, das ein Polymer ist, mit einem



aufgenommenen festen Gleitmittel.

2. Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 1, in der drei oder mehr Trageelemente (1) vorgesehen sind, der Kabelgang (6) mit einem durchgehenden Kanal zwischen allen Trageelementen (1) versehen ist, der Kabelgang (6) von dem Lastteil (3) an den Trageelementen (1) divergiert und eine Überschußlänge des Kabelgangs (6) an den Trageelementen (1) vorgesehen ist, wobei der Kabelgang (6) mehrere diskrete Teile enthält, die in einer Ende-zu-Ende-Beziehung miteinander verbunden sind, die Verbindungen (13) zwischen den Teilen sind im wesentlichen gasdicht.
3. Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, in der ein röhrenförmiges Teil (7) das Lastteil (3) in einem ersten Hohlraum lose umgibt, der Kabelgang (6) als zweiter sich von dem ersten unterscheidenden Hohlraum ausgebildet ist und der Kabelgang (6) durch das Lastteil (3) über das röhrenförmige Teil (7) getragen ist.
4. Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 3, in der das röhrenförmige Teil (7) und der Kabelgang (6) jeweils Teil eines einstückigen Körpers von Kunststoffmaterial sind, wobei der Körper des Kabelgangs (6) aus Kunststoffmaterial gebildet ist, welches von dem der inneren Oberfläche des Kabelgangs (6) unterschiedlich ist.
5. Kabelanordnung nach einem der vorangehenden Ansprüche, in der das zweite Kunststoffmaterial ein hochdichtes Polyethylen ist.
6. Kabelanordnung nach einem der vorangehenden Ansprüche, in der das Gleitmittel eine antistatische Kohlenstoffart ist.
7. Freiluftkabelanordnung, die zur Verwendung in der Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 1 geeignet ist, mit einem Kabelgang (6), der für die Verwendung in einem Faserblasverfahren geeignet ist und Mitteln, die mit dem Kabelgang (6) verbunden und einstückig mit demselben angeordnet sind, zum Eingriff mit einem Zugbelastung tragenden Lastteil (3), wobei der Kabelgang (6) Kunststoffmaterialien enthält, der Körper des Kabelgangs (6) enthält ein erstes Kunststoffmaterial und die innere Oberfläche des Kabelgangs (6) ist aus einem zweiten Kunststoffmaterial gebildet, das zweite Kunststoffmaterial ist ein Polymer, in das ein festes Gleitmittel eingearbeitet ist.
8. Freiluftkabelanordnung nach Anspruch 7, in der das zweite Kunststoffmaterial ein hochdichtes Polyethylen ist.
9. Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 7 oder 8, in der das feste Gleitmittel eine antistatische Kohlenstoffart ist.
10. Kabelanordnung nach Anspruch 9, in der die Kohlenstoffkonzentration im zweiten Kunststoffmaterial im Bereich von 5 bis 10 % liegt.
11. Kabelanordnung nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 10, in der die innere Oberfläche eine Auskleidung mit einer Dicke im Bereich von 0,2 bis 1 mm aufweist.
12. Hängekabelanordnung zur darin vornehmbaren Blasinstallation von optischen Kabeln, mit
 - einem länglichen Lastteil (3), das einen länglichen Kabelgang (6) für optische Fasern über mehrere lichte Weiten trägt, die zwischen aufeinanderfolgenden erhobenen Punkten (1) angeordnet sind, der Faserkabelgang ist für eine in situ eingeblasene Faserinstallation durch die mehreren lichten Weiten einer installierten Freiluftkabelanordnung (4) geeignet,
 - dem Kabelgang (6), der Kunststoffmaterialien enthält, der Körper des Kabelgangs (6) enthält ein erstes Kunststoffmaterial und die innere Oberfläche des Kabelgangs (6) besteht aus einem zweiten Kunststoffmaterial, in das ein festes Gleitmittel eingearbeitet ist,
 - dem Lastteil (3), welches mechanisch von dem Faserkabelgang (6) in der länglich ausgerichteten Längsrichtung derart entkoppelt ist, daß Änderungen in der Länge des Lastteils (3) verursacht durch Änderungen der Temperatur und der Zugbelastung wesentlich weniger, wenn überhaupt, Belastung in dem Faserkabelgang (6) verursachen, und



- dem Kabelgang (6), der um die erhobenen Punkte (1) mit einem ausreichenden Spiel geführt ist, zum Ausgleichen von Änderungen der Länge des Lastteils (3), während jede Verbindung (13) zwischen den gespannten Kabelgängen im wesentlichen gasdicht verbleibt, und zwar derart, daß er für die Blasfaserinstallation über die lichten Weiten geeignet verbleibt.

5 13. Verfahren zum Installieren einer optischen Faser entlang einer Freiluftkabelanordnung, die sich über mehrere vertikale Stützpunkte spannt, die voneinander über einen sich erstreckenden Weg beabstandet sind, mit den folgenden Schritten:

- Installieren eines Freiluftkabels (4) entlang dem sich erstreckenden Weg zwischen den vertikalen Stützpunkten (1), wobei das Freiluftkabel (4) ein längliches Lastteil (3) aufweist, das von den vertikalen Stützpunkten (1) getragen ist und einen länglichen Kabelgang (6) trägt, der mechanisch von dem Lastteil (3) in Längsrichtung entlang dem Weg entkoppelt ist, so daß Änderungen der Länge des Lastteils (3) verursacht durch Änderungen der Temperatur und der Zugbelastung wesentlich weniger, wenn überhaupt, Belastung des Faserkabelgangs (6) verursachen, der Kabelgang (6) enthält Kunststoffmaterialien, der Körper des Kabelgangs (6) enthält ein erstes Kunststoffmaterial und die innere Oberfläche des Kabelgangs (6) ist aus einem zweiten Kunststoffmaterial gebildet, in das ein festes Gleitmittel eingearbeitet ist,
- Vorsehen von gasdichten Verbindungen (13), wenn benötigt, in dem Kabelgang (6), der die vertikalen Stützpunkte (1) umgeht und
- anschließendes Installieren einer optischen Faserübertragungsleitung (9) in den Kabelkanal (6) entlang dem Weg unter Verwendung von Blasfasertechniken, so daß die Faser (9) ausgehend von einem Ende des Kabelkanals (6) unter Wirkung von Fluidreibung zwischen der Faser (9) und den sich schneller bewegenden Gasen entlang dem Kabelkanal (6) vorangetrieben wird.

25 Revendications

1. Un agencement de câble suspendu comprenant un premier et un deuxième supports (1), un élément continu, allongé (3) de résistance soumis à une contrainte de traction, s'étendant entre les supports (1) et fixé à ceux-ci, l'élément de résistance (3) supportant un conduit (6) apte à être utilisé dans un processus de soufflage de fibre, l'élément de résistance (3) n'étant pas reçu à l'intérieur du conduit (6), au moins une partie du conduit (6) étant découplée de l'élément de résistance (3) entre les supports (1), grâce à quoi un allongement limité mais significatif de l'élément de résistance (3) peut se produire sans allongement significatif du conduit (6), et dans lequel le conduit (6) comprend des matières plastiques, le corps du conduit (6) comprenant une première matière plastique et la surface intérieure du conduit (6) comportant une deuxième matière plastique qui est un polymère incorporant un lubrifiant solide.
2. Un agencement de câble selon la revendication 1 dans lequel il existe trois supports (1) ou davantage, le conduit (6) réalisant un trajet continu entre tous les supports (1), le conduit (6) divergeant de l'élément de résistance (3) aux supports (1), et un excès de longueur du conduit (6) étant agencé aux supports (1), dans lequel le conduit (6) comprend plusieurs parties discrètes assemblées entre elles dans une relation bout à bout, les assemblages (13) entre les parties étant sensiblement étanches aux gaz.
3. Un agencement de câble selon la revendication 1 ou la revendication 2 dans lequel un élément tubulaire (7) entoure de façon lâche l'élément de résistance (3) dans une première cavité, le conduit (6) étant réalisé sous forme d'une deuxième cavité distincte de la première, et le conduit (6) étant supporté par l'élément de résistance (3) au moyen de l'élément tubulaire (7).
4. Un agencement de câble selon la revendication 3 dans lequel l'élément tubulaire (7) et le conduit (6) font chacun partie d'un corps de matière plastique d'une seul tenant, le corps du conduit (6) comportant une matière plastique qui est différente de celle que comporte la surface intérieure du conduit (6).
5. Un agencement de câble selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes dans lequel la deuxième matière plastique est un polyéthylène à haute densité.



6. Un agencement de câble selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes dans lequel le lubrifiant est une qualité antistatique de carbone.
- 5 7. Un agencement de câble à embranchements apte à être utilisé dans l'agencement de câble selon la revendication 1 comprenant un conduit (6), apte à être utilisé dans un processus de soufflage de fibre, et un moyen relié au conduit (6) ou d'un seul tenant avec lui servant à venir en prise avec un élément de résistance (3) soumis à une contrainte de traction, dans lequel le conduit (6) comprend des matières plastiques, le corps de conduit (6) comprend une première matière plastique et la surface intérieure du conduit (6) comporte une deuxième matière plastique, la deuxième matière plastique étant un polymère incorporant un lubrifiant solide.
- 10 8. Un agencement de câble à embranchements selon la revendication 7 dans lequel la deuxième matière plastique est un polyéthylène à haute densité.
- 15 9. Un agencement de câble selon la revendication 7 ou la revendication 8 dans lequel le lubrifiant solide est une qualité de carbone antistatique.
- 20 10. Un agencement de câble selon la revendication 9 dans lequel la concentration en carbone dans la deuxième matière plastique est dans la plage de 5 à 10 pour cent.
- 25 11. Un agencement de câble selon l'une quelconque des revendications 7 à 11 dans lequel la surface intérieure est constituée d'un revêtement dont l'épaisseur est comprise dans la plage de 0,2 à 1 mm.
- 30 12. Un agencement de câble à embranchements destiné à contenir une fibre optique installée par soufflage, l'agencement comprenant:
 - un organe allongé de résistance (3) qui porte un conduit allongé (6) de fibre optique dans une série de portées disposées entre dans des points élevés successifs (1), le conduit de fibre étant apte à une installation de fibre soufflée in situ dans la totalité de la série de portées d'un agencement de câble à embranchements installé (4);
 - 30 ledit conduit (6) comprenant des matières plastiques, le corps du conduit (6) comprenant une première matière plastique et la surface intérieure du conduit (6) comportant une deuxième matière plastique qui incorpore un lubrifiant solide;
 - ledit élément de résistance (3) étant découplé mécaniquement du conduit de fibre (6) dans la dimension longitudinale allongée de façon que des variations de longueur de l'élément de résistance (3) provoquées par des variations de température et d'effort de contrainte produisent une déformation sensiblement moindre, ou nulle, du conduit de fibre (6); et
 - 35 ledit conduit (6) étant acheminé autour des points élevés (1) avec un relâchement suffisant pour permettre des variations de la longueur de l'organe de résistance (3) tout en restant sensiblement étanche aux gaz à tout assemblage (13) de connexion de ce dernier entre des portées (6) de conduit de façon à rester apte à l'installation d'une fibre soufflée dans la totalité de la série de portées.
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- 45 13. Un procédé d'installation d'une fibre optique le long d'un agencement de câble comprenant plusieurs portées entre des points de supports verticaux espaces l'un de l'autre sur un trajet étendu, le procédé comprenant les étapes consistant à:
 - 45 installer un câble à embranchements (4) le long du trajet étendu entre les points de support verticaux (1), le câble à embranchements (4) incluant un élément de résistance allongé (3) porté par les points de supports verticaux (1) et portant lui-même un conduit allongé (6) qui est découplé mécaniquement de l'élément de résistance (3) dans la direction longitudinale le long du trajet d'une manière telle que des variations de la longueur de l'élément de résistance (3), provoquées par des variations de
 - 50 température et d'effort de contrainte produisent une déformation sensiblement moindre ou nulle du conduit de fibre (6); ledit conduit comprenant des matières plastiques, le corps du conduit (6) comprenant une première matière plastique et la surface intérieure du conduit (6) comportant une deuxième matière plastique qui incorpore un lubrifiant solide:
 - effectuer si nécessaire, dans le conduit (6), des assemblages (13) étanches aux gaz qui contournent les points de support vertical (1);
 - 55 installer ensuite dans le conduit (6), le long du trajet, une ligne (9) de transmission à fibre optique en utilisant des techniques de fibre soufflée d'une manière telle que la fibre (9) est propulsée à partir d'une extrémité du conduit (6) en utilisant une friction visqueuse entre la fibre (9) et des gaz qui se



déplacent plus rapidement le long du conduit (6).

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