Claims:

1. Apparatus for heating an elongate tubular article, comprising a frame member adapted to be disposed around said article, said frame member having a heater device adapted to heat the elongate tubular article and disposed on or proximal to an inner surface of said frame member, and a controller for operating the heater device; the said heating device having two or more heating zones.

2. Apparatus for heating a heat shrinkable sleeve applied around an elongate tubular article, comprising a frame member adapted to be disposed around said article, said frame member having a heater device adapted to heat the heat shrinkable sleeve and disposed on or proximal to an inner surface of said frame member, and a controller for operating the heater device; the said heating device having two or more heating zones.

3. Apparatus of claim 1, wherein the heater device forms a surface which envelops said elongate tubular article when the apparatus is disposed around said article.

4. Apparatus of claim 2, wherein the heater device forms a surface which envelops said heat shrinkable sleeve when the apparatus is disposed around said sleeve.

5. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-4, wherein the heater device comprises an infra red heating element.

6. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-5, wherein the heater device comprises a thin stamped sheet or foil strip.

7. Apparatus of claim 6 wherein the stamped sheet or foil strip comprises a material selected from the group consisting of: a nickel chromium alloy; a chromium aluminum alloy; a nickel chromium iron alloy; iron chromium aluminium alloy; and inconel.

8. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-5, wherein the heater device comprises an infrared element in the form of quartz tubes or ceramic tiles.

9. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-5, wherein the heater device comprises diffused gas combusting devices.

10. Apparatus of claim 9 wherein the diffused gas combusting device is powered by propane or natural gas.

11. Apparatus of claim 9 wherein the diffused gas combusting device is a catalytic panel heater.

12. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-11 wherein the heater device comprises at least two independent heating zones adapted to heat respectively at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the elongate tubular article, and said controller allows for the operating of the heating zones simultaneously or sequentially.

13. Apparatus of claim 12 wherein the at least two independent heating zones are slidable longitudinally with respect to the structure from an adjacent, central position to a spaced position.

14. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-11 wherein the heater device comprises at least two areas of different inner surface diameter when disposed around said article.

15. Apparatus of claim 14 wherein the at least two areas comprise a first area and a third area at either end of a second area, wherein the inner surface diameter of said second area is smaller than the inner surface diameter of said first area and said third area.

16. Apparatus of claim 15 having a first, a second, and a third independent heating zones each corresponding to the first, second, and third area.

17. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-16 further comprising a refractory or insulating layer.

18. Apparatus of claim 17 wherein the heater device is mounted or bonded onto said refractory or insulating layer.

19. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-18 wherein the frame member comprises a clam shell device having a hinge extending longitudinally along one side.

20. Method for heating a heat shrinkable sleeve applied around an elongate tubular article, comprising disposing adjacent to the sleeve a heater device of any one of claims 2-19, and heating said sleeve with said heater device.

21. Method of claim 20 wherein the heater device comprises at least two heater portions, and said method comprises heating at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the sleeve simultaneously or sequentially with said respective heater portions.

22. Method for preheating an elongate tubular article, comprising disposing adjacent to said elongate tubular article, a heater device of any one of claims 1, 3, or 5-19, and heating said elongate tubular article with said heater device.

23. Method of claim 22 wherein the heater device comprises at least two heater portions, and said method comprises heating at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the elongate tubular article simultaneously or sequentially with said respective heater portions.

Claims:

1. Apparatus for heating an article selected from: a section of an oil or gas pipeline; and a heat shrinkable sleeve applied around a section of an oil or gas pipeline; said apparatus comprising a frame member adapted to be disposed around said article, said frame member having a heater device adapted to heat the article and disposed on or proximal to an inner surface of said frame member, and a controller for operating the heater device; the said heater device having two or more heating zones, wherein the heater device comprises an infrared heating element in the form of a thin stamped sheet or foil strip.

2. Apparatus of claim 1, wherein the heater device forms a surface which envelops said article when the apparatus is disposed around said article.

3. Apparatus of any one of claims 1-2, wherein the stamped sheet or foil strip comprises a material selected from the group consisting of: a nickel chromium alloy; a chromium aluminum alloy; a nickel chromium iron alloy; iron chromium aluminum alloy; and inconel.

4. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the heater device comprises at least two independent heating zones adapted to heat respectively at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the article, and said controller allows for the operating of the heating zones simultaneously or sequentially.

5. Apparatus of claim 4, wherein the at least two independent heating zones are slidable longitudinally with respect to the structure from an adjacent, central position to a spaced position.

6. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the heater device comprises at least two areas of different inner surface diameter when disposed around said article.

7. Apparatus of claim 6, wherein the at least two areas comprise a first area and a third area at either end of a second area, wherein the inner surface diameter of said second area is smaller than the inner surface diameter of said first area and said third area.

8. Apparatus of claim 7 having a first, a second, and a third independent heating zones each corresponding to the first, second, and third area.

9. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 8 further comprising a refractory or insulating layer.

10. Apparatus of claim 9, wherein the heater device is mounted or bonded onto said refractory or insulating layer.

11. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the frame member comprises a clam shell device having a hinge extending longitudinally along one side.

12. Method for heating a heat shrinkable sleeve applied around an oil or gas pipeline, comprising disposing adjacent to the sleeve a heater device of any one of claims 1 to 11, and heating said sleeve with said heater device.

13. Method of claim 12 wherein the heater device comprises at least two heater portions, and said method comprises heating at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the sleeve simultaneously or sequentially with said respective heater portions.

14. Method for preheating an oil or gas pipeline, comprising disposing adjacent to said oil or gas pipeline, a heater device of any one of claims 1-11, and heating said oil or gas pipeline with said heater device.

15. Method of claim 14, wherein the heater device comprises at least two heater portions, and said method comprises heating at least two distinct longitudinally spaced zones of the oil or gas pipeline simultaneously or sequentially with said respective heater portions.

16. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the heater device is capable of heating from an ambient temperature to a temperature of 700°C in 10 seconds or less.

17. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the heater device is capable of cooling down from a heating temperature to ambient temperature in 2 seconds or less.

18. Apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the thin stamped sheet or foil strip has a chemical composition in percent by weight as follows: 0.02-0.10% C; 0-0.10% Mn; 19.5% Cr; about 56% Ni; 4.25% Mo; 0-2.0% Fe; 13.5% Co; 1.3% Al; 9.1% Cu; 0-0.15% Si; 0.003-0.01% B; and 3% Ti.