

HIGH VELOCITY LOW PRESSURE EMITTERCross Reference to Related Application

This application is based on and claims priority
5 to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/689,864, filed
June 13, 2005 and U.S. Provisional Application No.
60/776,407, filed February 24, 2006.

Field of the Invention

10 This invention concerns devices for emitting
atomized liquid, the device injecting the liquid into a
gas flow stream where the liquid is atomized and
projected away from the device.

15 Background of the Invention

Devices such as resonance tubes are used to
atomize liquids for various purposes. The liquids may
be fuel, for example, injected into a jet engine or
rocket motor or water, sprayed from a sprinkler head in
20 a fire suppression system. Resonance tubes use
acoustic energy, generated by an oscillatory pressure
wave interaction between a gas jet and a cavity, to

atomize liquid that is injected into the region near the resonance tube where the acoustic energy is present.

5 Resonance tubes of known design and operational mode generally do not have the fluid flow characteristics required to be effective in fire protection applications. The volume of flow from the resonance tube tends to be inadequate, and the water
10 particles generated by the atomization process have relatively low velocities. As a result, these water particles are decelerated significantly within about 8 to 16 inches of the sprinkler head and cannot overcome the plume of rising combustion gas generated by a fire.
15 Thus, the water particles cannot get to the fire source for effective fire suppression. Furthermore, the water particle size generated by the atomization is ineffective at reducing the oxygen content to suppress a fire if the ambient temperature is below 55°C.
20 Additionally, known resonance tubes require relatively large gas volumes delivered at high pressure. This produces unstable gas flow which generates significant acoustic energy and separates from deflector surfaces across which it travels, leading to inefficient
25 atomization of the water. There is clearly a need for an atomizing emitter that operates more efficiently than known resonance tubes in that the emitter uses smaller volumes of gas at lower pressures to produce sufficient volume of atomized water particles having a
30 smaller size distribution while maintaining significant momentum upon discharge so that the water particles may

overcome the fire smoke plume and be more effective at fire suppression.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a longitudinal sectional view of a high velocity low pressure emitter according to the invention;

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Figure 2 is a longitudinal sectional view showing a component of the emitter depicted in Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a longitudinal sectional view showing
10 a component of the emitter depicted in Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a longitudinal sectional view showing a component of the emitter depicted in Figure 1;

15 Figure 5 is a longitudinal sectional view showing a component of the emitter depicted in Figure 1;

Figure 6 is a diagram depicting fluid flow from the emitter based upon a Schlieren photograph of the
20 emitter shown in Figure 1 in operation; and

Figure 7 is a diagram depicting predicted fluid flow for another embodiment of the emitter.

25 Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Figure 1 shows a longitudinal sectional view of a high velocity low pressure emitter 10 according to the invention. Emitter 10 comprises a convergent nozzle 12 having an inlet 14 and an outlet 16. Outlet 16 may
30 range in diameter between about 0.125 inches to about 1 inch for many applications. Inlet 14 is in fluid

communication with a pressurized gas supply 18 that provides gas to the nozzle at a predetermined pressure and flow rate. It is advantageous that the nozzle 12 have a curved convergent inner surface 20, although
5 other shapes, such as a linear tapered surface, are also feasible.

A deflector surface 22 is positioned in spaced apart relation with the nozzle 12, a gap 24 being
10 established between the deflector surface and the nozzle outlet. The gap may range in size between about 0.1 inches to about 0.75 inches. The deflector surface 22 is held in spaced relation from the nozzle by one or more support legs 26.

15 Preferably, deflector surface 22 comprises a flat surface portion 28 substantially aligned with the nozzle outlet 16, and an angled surface portion 30 contiguous with and surrounding the flat portion. Flat
20 portion 28 is substantially perpendicular to the gas flow from nozzle 12, and has a minimum diameter approximately equal to the diameter of the outlet 16. The angled portion 30 is oriented at a sweep back angle 32 from the flat portion. The sweep back angle may
25 range between about 15° and about 45° and, along with the size of gap 24, determines the dispersion pattern of the flow from the emitter.

Deflector surface 22 may have other shapes, such
30 as the curved upper edge 34 shown in Figure 2 and the curved edge 36 shown in Figure 3. As shown in Figures

4 and 5, the deflector surface 22 may also include a closed end resonance tube 38 surrounded by a flat portion 40 and a swept back, angled portion 42 (Figure 4) or a curved portion 44 (Figure 5). The diameter and
5 depth of the resonance cavity may be approximately equal to the diameter of outlet 16.

With reference again to Figure 1, an annular chamber 46 surrounds nozzle 12. Chamber 46 is in fluid
10 communication with a pressurized liquid supply 48 that provides a liquid to the chamber at a predetermined pressure and flow rate. A plurality of ducts 50 extend from the chamber 46. Each duct has an exit orifice 52 positioned adjacent to nozzle outlet 16. The exit
15 orifices have a diameter of about 0.0625 inches. Preferred distances between the nozzle outlet 16 and the exit orifices 52 range between about 0.015 inches to about 0.125 inches as measured along a radius line from the edge of the nozzle outlet to the closest edge
20 of the exit orifice. Liquid, for example, water for fire suppression, flows from the pressurized supply 48 into the chamber 46 and through the ducts 50, exiting from each orifice 52 where it is atomized by the gas flow from the pressurized gas supply that flows through
25 the nozzle 12 and exits through the nozzle outlet 16 as described in detail below.

Emitter 10, when configured for use in a fire suppression system, is designed to operate with a
30 preferred gas pressure between about 29 psia to about 60 psia at the nozzle inlet 14 and a preferred water

pressure between about 1 psig and about 50 psig in chamber 46. Feasible gases include nitrogen, other inert gases, mixtures of inert gases as well as mixtures of inert and chemically active gases such as
5 air.

Operation of the emitter 10 is described with reference to Figure 6 which is a drawing based upon Schlieren photographic analysis of an operating
10 emitter.

Gas 45 exits the nozzle outlet 16 at about Mach 1.5 and impinges on the deflector surface 22. Simultaneously, water 47 is discharged from exit
15 orifices 52.

Interaction between the gas 45 and the deflector surface 22 establishes a first shock front 54 between the nozzle outlet 16 and the deflector surface 22. A
20 shock front is a region of flow transition from supersonic to subsonic velocity. Water 47 exiting the orifices 52 does not enter the region of the first shock front 54.

25 A second shock front 56 forms proximate to the deflector surface at the border between the flat surface portion 28 and the angled surface portion 30. Water 47 discharged from the orifices 52 is entrained with the gas jet 45 proximate to the second shock front
30 56 forming a liquid-gas stream 60. One method of entrainment is to use the pressure differential between

the pressure in the gas flow jet and the ambient. Shock diamonds 58 form in a region along the angled portion 30, the shock diamonds being confined within the liquid-gas stream 60, which projects outwardly and downwardly from the emitter. The shock diamonds are also transition regions between super and subsonic flow velocity and are the result of the gas flow being overexpanded as it exits the nozzle. Overexpanded flow describes a flow regime wherein the external pressure (i.e., the ambient atmospheric pressure in this case) is higher than the gas exit pressure at the nozzle. This produces oblique shock waves which reflect from the free jet boundary 49 marking the limit between the liquid-gas stream 60 and the ambient atmosphere. The oblique shock waves are reflected toward one another to create the shock diamonds.

Significant shear forces are produced in the liquid-gas stream 60, which ideally does not separate from the deflector surface, although the emitter is still effective if separation occurs as shown at 60a. The water entrained proximate to the second shock front 56 is subjected to these shear forces which are the primary mechanism for atomization. The water also encounters the shock diamonds 58, which are a secondary source of water atomization.

Thus, the emitter 10 operates with multiple mechanisms of atomization which produce water particles 62 less than 20 μm in diameter, the majority of the particles being measured at less than 5 μm . The

smaller droplets are buoyant in air. This characteristic allows them to maintain proximity to the fire source for greater fire suppression effect. Furthermore, the particles maintain significant downward momentum, allowing the liquid-gas stream 60 to overcome the rising plume of combustion gases resulting from a fire. Measurements show the liquid-gas stream having a velocity of 1,200 ft/min 18 inches from the emitter, and a velocity of 700 ft/min 8 feet from the emitter. The flow from the emitter is observed to impinge on the floor of the room in which it is operated. The sweep back angle 32 of the angled portion 30 of the deflector surface 22 provides significant control over the included angle 64 of the liquid-gas stream 60. Included angles of about 120° are achievable. Additional control over the dispersion pattern of the flow is accomplished by adjusting the gap 24 between the nozzle outlet 16 and the deflector surface.

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During emitter operation it is further observed that the smoke layer that accumulates at the ceiling of a room during a fire is drawn into the gas stream 45 exiting the nozzle and is entrained in the flow 60. This adds to the multiple modes of extinguishment characteristic of the emitter as described below.

The emitter causes a temperature drop due to the atomization of the water into the extremely small particle sizes described above. This robs the fire of heat and helps mitigate spread of combustion. The

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nitrogen gas flow and the water entrained in the flow replace the oxygen in the room with gases that cannot support combustion. Further oxygen depleted gases in the form of the smoke layer that is entrained in the
5 flow also contributes to the oxygen starvation of the fire. It is observed, however, that the oxygen level in the room where the emitter is deployed does not drop below about 16%. The water particles and the entrained smoke create a fog that blocks radiative heat transfer
10 from the fire, thus mitigating spread of combustion by this mode of heat transfer. Because of the extraordinary large surface area resulting from the extremely small water particle size, the water readily absorbs energy and forms steam which further displaces
15 oxygen, absorbs heat from the fire and helps maintain a stable temperature typically associated with a phase transition. The mixing and the turbulence created by the emitter also helps lower the temperature in the region around the fire.

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The emitter is unlike resonance tubes in that it does not produce significant acoustic energy. Jet noise (the sound generated by air moving over an object) is the only acoustic output from the emitter.
25 The emitter's jet noise has no significant frequency components higher than about 6 kHz (half the operating frequency of well known types of resonance tubes) and does not contribute significantly to water atomization.

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Furthermore, the flow from the emitter is stable and does not separate from the deflector surface (or

experiences delayed separation as shown at 60a) unlike the flow from resonance tubes, which is unstable and separates from the deflector surface, thus leading to inefficient atomization or even loss of atomization.

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Another emitter embodiment 11 is shown in Figure 7. Emitter 11 has ducts 50 that are angularly oriented toward the nozzle 12. The ducts are angularly oriented to direct the water or other liquid 47 toward the gas 45 so as to entrain the liquid in the gas proximate to the first shock front 54. It is believed that this arrangement will add yet another region of atomization in the creation of the liquid-gas stream 60 projected from the emitter 11.

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Emitters according to the invention operated so as to produce an overexpanded gas jet with multiple shock fronts and shock diamonds achieve multiple stages of atomization and result in multiple extinguishment modes being applied to control the spread of fire when used in a fire suppression system.

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What is claimed is:

1. An emitter for atomizing and discharging a liquid entrained in a gas stream, said emitter being connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized source of said liquid and a pressurized source of said gas, said emitter comprising:

a nozzle having an inlet and an outlet and an unobstructed bore therebetween, said outlet having a diameter, said inlet being connectable in fluid communication with said pressurized gas source;

a duct, separate from said nozzle and connectable in fluid communication with said pressurized liquid source, said duct having an exit orifice separate from and positioned adjacent to said nozzle outlet; and

a deflector surface positioned facing said nozzle outlet, said deflector surface being positioned in spaced relation to said nozzle outlet and having a first surface portion comprising a flat surface oriented substantially perpendicularly to said nozzle and a second surface portion comprising an angled surface surrounding said flat surface, said flat surface having a wetted area defined by minimum diameter approximately equal to said outlet diameter, said liquid being dischargeable from said orifice, and said gas being dischargeable from said nozzle outlet, said liquid being entrained with said gas and atomized forming a liquid-gas stream that is deflected by said deflector surface and flows away therefrom.

2. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said nozzle is a convergent nozzle.

3. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said outlet diameter is between about 1/8 and about 1 inch.

4. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said orifice has a diameter between about $1/32$ and about $1/8$ inch.

5. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said deflector surface is spaced from said outlet by a distance between about $1/10$ and about $3/4$ of an inch.

6. An emitter according to claim 1, further comprising a closed end cavity positioned within said deflector surface and surrounded by said flat surface.

7. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said exit orifice is spaced from said nozzle outlet by a distance between about $1/64$ and $1/8$ of an inch.

8. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said nozzle is adapted to operate over a gas pressure range between about 29 psia and about 60 psia.

9. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said duct is adapted to operate over a liquid pressure range between about 1 psig and about 50 psig.

10. An emitter for atomizing and discharging a liquid entrained in a gas stream, said emitter being connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized source of said liquid and a pressurized source of said gas, said emitter comprising:

a nozzle having an inlet and an outlet and an unobstructed bore therebetween, said outlet having a diameter, said inlet being connectable in fluid communication with said pressurized gas source;

a duct separate from said nozzle and connectable in fluid communication with said pressurized liquid source, said duct having an exit orifice separate from and positioned adjacent to said nozzle outlet; and

a deflector surface positioned facing said nozzle outlet, said deflector surface being positioned in spaced relation to said nozzle outlet and having a first surface portion comprising a flat surface oriented substantially perpendicularly to said nozzle and a second surface portion comprising a curved surface surrounding said flat surface, said flat surface having a wetted area defined by a minimum diameter approximately equal to said outlet diameter.

11. An emitter according to claim 16, wherein said duct is angularly oriented toward said nozzle.

12. An emitter according to claim 10, further comprising a closed end cavity positioned within said deflector surface and surrounded by said flat surface.

13. A method of operating an emitter, said emitter comprising:
a nozzle having an unobstructed bore positioned between an inlet connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized gas source and an outlet having a diameter;
a duct connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized liquid source, said duct having an exit orifice positioned adjacent to said outlet;

a deflector surface positioned facing said outlet in spaced relation thereto, said deflector surface comprising a flat surface oriented substantially perpendicularly to said nozzle, said flat surface having a wetted area defined by a minimum diameter approximately equal to said outlet diameter;

said method comprising:

discharging said liquid from said orifice;

discharging said gas from said outlet, said gas reaching supersonic speed;

establishing a first shock front between said outlet and said deflector surface wherein said gas slows to subsonic speed and then impinges on said wetted area;

establishing a second shock front proximate to said deflector surface, said gas moving across said wetted area and increasing to supersonic speed between said first shock front and said second shock front, and decreasing in speed after passing through said second shock front;

entraining said liquid in said gas at at least one of said shock fronts to form a liquid-gas stream;

projecting said liquid-gas stream from said emitter.

14. A method according to claim 13, comprising establishing a plurality of shock diamonds in said liquid-gas stream from said emitter.

15. A method according to claim 13, comprising creating an overexpanded gas flow jet after said gas is discharged from said nozzle.

16. A method according to claim 13, comprising supplying gas to said inlet at a pressure between about 29 psia and about 60 psia.

17. A method according to claim 13, comprising supplying liquid to said duct at a pressure between about 1 psig and about 50 psig.

18. A method according to claim 13, further comprising entraining said liquid with said gas proximate to said second shock front.

19. A method according to claim 13, further comprising entraining said liquid with said gas proximate to said first shock front.

20. A method according to claim 13, wherein said liquid-gas stream does not separate from said deflector surface.

21. A method according to claim 13, comprising creating no significant acoustic energy from said emitter other than jet noise.

22. A method according to claim 13, further comprising generating momentum in said gas flow jet.

23. A method according to claim 13, further comprising projecting said liquid-gas stream at a velocity of about 1,200 ft/min at a distance of about 18 inches from said emitter.

24. A method according to claim 13, further comprising projecting said liquid-gas stream at a velocity of about 700 ft/min at a distance of about 8 feet from said emitter.

25. A method according to claim 13, further comprising establishing flow pattern from said emitter having a predetermined included angle by providing an angled portion of said deflector surface.

26. A method according to claim 13, comprising drawing liquid into said gas flow jet using a pressure differential between the pressure in said gas flow jet and the ambient.

27. A method according to claim 13, comprising entraining said liquid into said gas flow jet and atomizing said liquid into drops less than 20 μm in diameter.

28. A method according to claim 13, comprising discharging an inert gas from said outlet.

29. A method according to claim 13, comprising discharging a mixture of inert and chemically active gases from said outlet.

30. A method according to claim 13, wherein said gas mixture comprises air.

31. A method of operating an emitter, said emitter comprising:
a nozzle having an unobstructed bore positioned between an inlet connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized gas source and an outlet comprising an unobstructed bore having a diameter;
a duct connectable in fluid communication with a pressurized liquid source, said duct having an exit orifice positioned adjacent to said outlet;
a deflector surface positioned facing said outlet in spaced relation thereto, said deflector surface comprising a flat surface oriented substantially perpendicularly to said nozzle, said flat surface having a wetted area defined by a minimum diameter approximately equal to said outlet diameter;
said method comprising:

discharging said liquid from said orifice;
discharging said gas from said outlet creating an
overexpanded gas flow jet from said nozzle wherein said gas achieves
supersonic speed;
impinging said gas flow jet on said wetted area;
entraining said liquid in said gas to form a liquid-gas stream;
and
projecting said liquid-gas stream from said emitter.

32. A method according to claim 31, further comprising:
establishing a first shock front between said outlet and said
deflector surface wherein said gas decreases from supersonic to subsonic
speed;
establishing a second shock front proximate to said deflector
surface, said gas increasing to supersonic speed between said first shock
front and said second shock front, and decreasing in speed after passing
through said second shock front; and
entraining said liquid in said gas proximate to one of said first
and second shock fronts.

33. A method according to claim 31, further comprising establishing
a plurality of shock diamonds in said liquid-gas stream from said emitter.

34. An emitter according to claim 1, wherein said angled surface
has a sweep back angle between about 15° and about 45° measured from
said flat surface.

35. An emitter according to Claim 1, further comprising a plurality
of said exit orifices.

36. A method according to claim 13, further comprising drawing an oxygen depleted smoke layer into said gas discharged from said outlet and entraining said smoke layer with said liquid-gas stream of said emitter.

37. A method according to claim 31, further comprising drawing an oxygen depleted smoke layer into said gas discharged from said outlet and entraining said smoke layer with said liquid-gas stream of said emitter.