

APPARATUS FOR LEAKAGE DETECTION OF CRYOGENIC MATERIALS

The invention relates to an apparatus for leakage detection of cryogenic materials from a cold-insulated structure, which is adapted to contain or to transport said cryogenic materials.

5 Presently many cryogenic materials are known and are widely used. For example, the role of liquid gases such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) becomes very important. Other examples of important cryogenic materials are liquefied oxygen, ethylene, butane, etc. Suitable
10 structures have been developed, which are adapted to contain and to transport cryogenic materials. LNG tankers may be mentioned by way of example.

 It will be clear that certain measures such as insulation should be taken to maintain the cryogenic materials at the
15 desired temperature. Several insulation systems have already been developed.

 It can be understood that if a fault such as a crack developed in the insulation system of the structure containing the cryogenic material, the cold from the said material would
20 leak through the fault. So, the area in contact with the fault would become chilled. This could lead to catastrophic failure of the structure as a whole and to dangerous spillage.

 To avoid these dangers it is very desirable to be informed about leakage as soon as a leak would occur.

25 Normal methods employed to detect such cold spots, which are present if a leak would occur, involve either the visual inspection of the cryogenic material-containing structure for ice formation or the attachment of temperature measuring means, such as thermocouples to the surface of the said structure and
30 the determination of temperature changes detected. The former

method is time-consuming and can be both difficult and unpleasant, whilst the latter is expensive to install and maintain. The demerits of the above methods are increased greatly, when extended to structures such as tanks as employed in the large bulk liquid gas marine tankers of the present day and will be even further increased when projected designs for still larger vessels are brought to completion.

So there exists a large need for a device which should be easily applied or removed from the structure containing the said cryogenic materials and which should be able to work in areas of maximum safety requirements. Further, no electrical connections should be used to avoid danger of ignition.

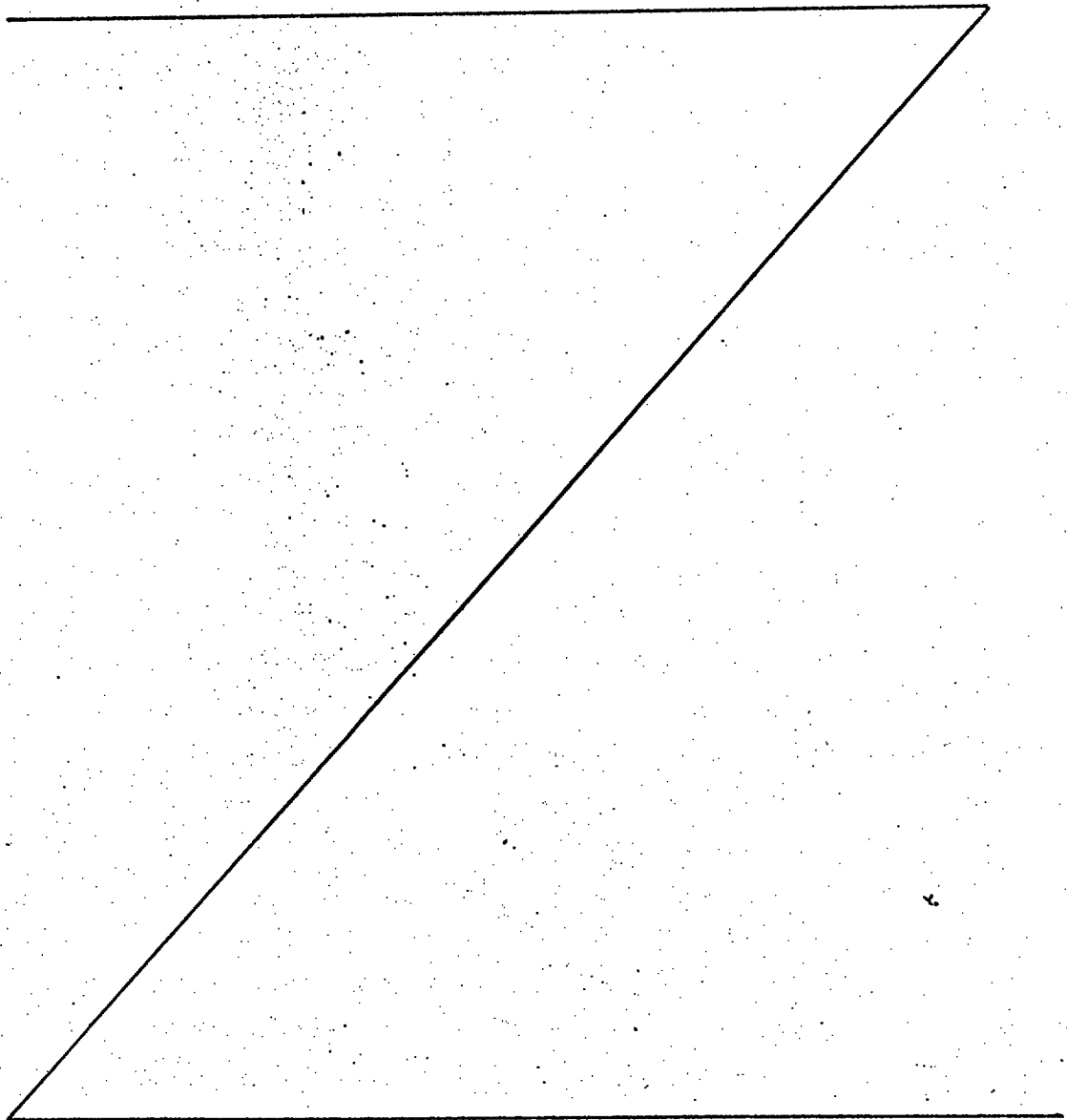
It is therefore an object of the invention to provide a simple, generally fool-proof and safe device to obtain information about cryogenic leaks. Such a device may for example be used to detect leakage in pipes (in particular under couplings), valves, tank couplings, etc.

The invention therefore comprises a device for detecting leakage of cryogenic materials from a cold-insulated structure, which is adapted to contain or to transport said cryogenic materials, said device comprising a heat-conductive element, which can be brought into contact with the cryogenic material-containing or transporting structure, and comprising a "shape memory effect" (SME) element which, in case of leakage, is cooled down through its transition temperature, thus giving a displacement according to the cryogenic temperature to which the said element is subject in case of leakage, said device further comprising a housing, which is provided with an opening, which opening can be closed by said heat-conductive element, said heat-conductive element being acted on by the said SME element in case of leakage in such a way that the said opening is no longer closed.

The device may further comprise an alarm device or indicator.

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- 5 By a "shape memory effect" (SME) element is meant an element of a material, having an elastic modulus which varies significantly with temperature in a reversible manner over a transition temperature range dependent on the material employed. Usually alloys are used. Such SME alloys are known as such to those skilled in the art and will not be described here in detail.



The invention is based upon the fact that memory alloys having the shape memory effect change its shape quickly and massively if subject to a change in temperature. The said change in shape will occur if leakage of cryogenic material exists and the said change will activate a suitable alarm or indicator, so that it will be clear that the cryogenic material is leaking.

The invention will now be described by way of example in more detail in the accompanying drawing, in which:

figure 1 shows by way of background information schematically an example of a device for leakage detection of cryogenic materials;

figure 2 represents schematically an example of an embodiment of the device according to the invention.

Referring now to figure 1 a heat-conductive element 2 is brought into contact with the structure 5 containing cryogenic material. In this example the structure 5 is a pipeline. The said element 2 is connected through any means suitable for the purpose to a SME element 3. Said SME element 3 is connected to a remote alarm 6 through any suitable means, for example a cable 7, which activates the alarm mechanically.

If a leakage in the said structure 5 occurs, cryogenic material will fall onto the heat-conducting element 2. So, cold will pass to the SME element 3 which will change its shape quickly and massively. This change in shape will act on the remote alarm 6 through the mechanical flexible means 7, such as a Bowden cable.

In figure 2 a housing 1' is provided with an opening 1'a which is directed towards the structure 5' containing cryogenic material. In this example the structure 5' is a tank. The opening 1'a can be closed by a heat-conductive element 2', by means of a biasing element 3', made from a SME alloy. The housing 1' may be pressurized through an opening 4' by any suitable fluid medium, for example air or inert gas.

The opening 1'a of the housing 1' is brought into contact

through any means suitable for the purpose with the cryogenic material-containing structure.

If a leakage in the said structure 5' occurs, cryogenic material will fall onto the heat-conducting element 2'. So, cold will pass to the SME element 3'. Said element 3' will change its shape quickly and massively, and in this way the element 2' will no longer close the opening 1'a. Subsequently, the pressure medium will escape round the element 2' and thus a suitable pressure signal can be obtained to activate an alarm 6'. Any alarm suitable for the purpose may be used, for example a sound alarm or an indicating element.

It will be appreciated that the housing 1' and opening 1'a may have any suitable shape. The opening 1'a may, for example, have a round shape, so that the element 2' may be a disc. Further, an advantageous shape of the SME element is a bias element such as a spring and in particular a coiled spring. An advantageous material used for the heat-conductive element may, for example, be copper. Another suitable material is SME material.

It will be appreciated that any signal suitable for the purpose may be used to activate the alarm. For example, a pressure signal may be converted into an electric signal to activate an electronic alarm. Further any pressure medium suitable for the purpose may be used. If a device according to the invention is used on board tankers, the air to be used for the said alarm may be supplied from the ship's own air system.

It will also be appreciated that in advantageous embodiments of the invention (not shown) the alarm or indicator may be activated, for example, by a lever system or a hydraulic or pneumatic coupling between the SME element and the alarm. Further, it will be appreciated that it is not absolutely necessary to provide a remote alarm device or indicator. In advantageous embodiments of the invention (not shown) the alarm device or indicator may be provided at the detecting device itself.

C L A I M S

1. A device for detecting leakage of cryogenic materials from a cold-insulated structure, which is adapted to contain or to transport said cryogenic materials, said device comprising a heat-conductive element, which can be brought into contact with the cryogenic material-containing or transporting structure, and comprising a "shape memory effect" (SME) element which, in case of leakage, is cooled down through its transition temperature, thus giving a displacement according to the cryogenic temperature to which the said element is subject in case of leakage, said device further comprising a housing, which is provided with an opening, which opening can be closed by said heat-conductive element, said heat-conductive element being acted on by the said SME element in case of leakage in such a way that the said opening is no longer closed.
2. The device as claimed in claim 1, further comprising an alarm device or indicator.
3. The device as claimed in claim 1 or 2, in which the heat-conductive element is acted on by a SME bias element.
4. The device as claimed in claim 3, wherein the said SME bias element is a spring.
5. The device as claimed in any one of claims 1-4, in which the heat-conductive element is made of SME material.
6. The device as claimed in any one of claims 1-5, wherein the heat-conductive element is a disc.
7. The device as claimed in claim 6, wherein the disc is a copper disc.
8. The device as claimed in claim 4, wherein the SME element is a coiled spring.
9. The device as claimed in any one of claims 2-8, wherein the alarm is activated mechanically.



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10. The device as claimed in any one of claims 2-8, wherein the alarm is activated pneumatically.
11. The device as claimed in any one of claims 2-8, wherein the alarm is activated hydraulically.
- 5 12. A device substantially as described in the specification by reference to fig. 2 of the accompanying drawing.

The text of the specification has been reproduced by photocopying the applicants original typescript. It may contain a few amendments which are difficult to read. The original typescript containing these amendments may be inspected on the premises of the Patent Office

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