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BP's PX Crystallization Process Offered by CB&I Lummus

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Abstract

Para xylene (PX) is a high-volume petrochemical monomer used primarily to produce purified terephthalic acid (PTA), which, in turn, is used to produce polyethylene terephthalate (PET), a polyester engineering resin. PET is used in chip form to produce blow-molded fabricated products such as water, juice, and cold beverage bottles, and in fiber form to produce textiles and industrial yarns. IHS estimated annual global production of high-purity PX in 2015 to be approximately 37 million metric tons [1].

PX is produced in dilute form industrially by the refinery catalytic reforming process, using liquid feedstocks such as wide-range naphtha, and by the chemical steam cracking process, using feedstocks including a combination of ethane, propane, n-butane, light virgin naphtha, and atmospheric gas oil. Newer technology has been commercialized for steam cracking using whole crude oil.

PX is produced in dilute form, then extracted and distilled into a mixed stream of aromatic C₈ xylene isomers—para xylene, ortho xylene (OX), and meta xylene (MX), plus C₈ ethylbenzene (EB)—which must be separated and purified to satisfy production and sales specifications for PX. PX is commercially offered in purities exceeding 99%. The mixed and dilute aromatic-rich streams from catalytic reforming and steam cracking are separated from nonxylenes and other principal aromatic components by a combination of fractional distillation (to remove benzene, toluene, and C₉+), and liquid-liquid extraction (to separate aromatics from nonaromatic alkanes and naphthenics). Due to the close boiling points of the three xylene monomers, fractional distillation is not an economically viable means to produce high-purity PX. Ortho xylene can be distilled from a mixture of meta xylene and para xylene. However, para xylene is purified from meta xylene, ortho xylene, and ethylbenzene via either molecular sieve adsorption or low-temperature suspension crystallization.

The PX molecular sieve adsorption method offered by UOP (Des Plaines, IL, USA), and its licensed Parex™ technology, is the dominant commercial process for purifying PX. Other adsorption-based processes are offered by Axens and Toray. Crystallization-based PX purification technologies are offered under license by BP (formerly British Petroleum), GTC Corporation, and Chevron-Phillips. This report presents our understanding of the current generation (as of 2015) of BP crystallization technology, which claims significant economic improvements via reduced energy consumption and lower capital cost. The BP PX crystallization technology is offered by CB&I (formerly Chicago Bridge and Iron) Lummus, which signed an exclusive contract with BP in 2010.

The BP single-stage crystallization technology provided by the new BP process reduces refrigeration energy consumption by avoiding the remelting and recrystallization required by former processes, and presents a total process flow sheet with lower equipment count, and therefore lower capital cost.

Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	PX environmental health and safety	6
3	Chemistry	7
	Molecular structure of PX and other C ₈ isomers	7
	Physical properties of xylene isomers	8
	Integrated product chain for producing para xylene from mixed xylenes	9
	Xylene isomerization	10
	Integrated product chain for producing PET from PX	13
4	PX process technology review	15
	Commercially available para xylene crystallization process technology	15
	Toluene hydro-dealkylation technology	16
	Chevron-Phillips PX crystallization process	17
	GTC Corp. PX crystallization process	18
	BP (formerly Amoco) conventional PX crystallization process	19
	Sulzer ChemTech crystallization process	21
	BEFS Prokem melt static PX crystallization process	24
	Other commercial PX crystallization processes	24
5	Para xylene industry status	25
	Para xylene global consumption and production	25
	Historic PX bulk pricing	26
6	BP patent position on PX crystallization	27
7	Characteristics of BP's latest PX crystallization technology	44
	Process components	44
	Aromatics distillation section	44
	Xylene isomerization section	46
	PX crystallization section	46
8	Project design basis	51
	Scope of project	51
	Service life of PX manufacturing plant	52
	Plant location factor	52
	PEP Cost factor	52
	Construction methodology	54
	Offsite battery limits (OSBL) facilities	54
	Materials of construction	54
	Engineering and design standards	55
	Site-specific design conditions	55
	Capital and operating cost bases	56
	Capital investment	56
	Plant construction timing	57
	Available utilities	58
	Production cost factors	58
	PX product specification	59
	Mixed-xylene feed specification	59
	Feedstock and product pricing	59
9	Proposed PX crystallization process design	60
	PX crystallization process input/output diagram	60
	Segmentation of process	60
	Process description	60
	Section 100—PX crystallization section	60
	Section 200—Xylenes isomerization and distillation section	62
	Section 300—Ethylene and propylene refrigeration	65

Stream-by-stream material balance	67
Equipment list with duty specifications	73
Itemized capital cost estimate	78
Total fixed capital cost estimate	83
Para xylene production cost estimate	85
Process discussion	86
Appendix A—Patent summary tables	87
Appendix B—Synopsis of prior PEP reports on para xylene	94
Appendix C—Chevron Phillips material safety data sheet for para xylene	97
Appendix D—Process flow diagrams	117
Appendix E—Cited references	121

Tables

Table 1	Typical aromatic content of pygas and reformat	5
Table 2	Para xylene fire and explosion safety summary	6
Table 3	Para xylene personnel exposure summary	6
Table 4	Physical properties comparison of aromatic components	8
Table 5	Physical properties of para xylene	9
Table 6	Major para xylene technology licensors	15
Table 7	Top 10 global producers of high-purity PX	25
Table 8	BP patent portfolio relative to para xylene crystallization	27
Table 9	Application list for Ferrum pusher centrifuges	47
Table 10	Location factors, mid-2015	52
Table 11	PEP cost factors, third quarter 2015	53
Table 12	IHS offsite battery limits (OSBL) capital cost components	54
Table 13	Relevant project standards setting organizations	55
Table 14	Chevron-Phillips para xylene commercial specification	59
Table 15	Mixed-xylene feedstock composition specification	59
Table 16	Unit pricing used in project economics	59
Table 17	Section 100—PX crystallization design basis table	61
Table 18	Section 200—PX isomerization design basis tab	63
Table 19	Section 300—Ethylene/propylene cascade refrigeration design basis table	66
Table 20	Stream-by-stream material balance	67
Table 21	ISBL equipment list with duty specifications	74
Table 22	ISBL itemized capital cost by type of equipment	78
Table 23	ISBL itemized capital cost by section of process plant	78
Table 24	ISBL itemized capital cost	79
Table 25	Total fixed capital cost estimate	84
Table 26	Variable costs of PX production	85
Table 27	Total estimated costs of PX production	86

Figures

Figure 1	Molecular structure of para xylene	7
Figure 2	Molecular structure of benzene, toluene, and the three xylene isomers	7
Figure 3	Integrated product chain for producing para xylene	9
Figure 4	Distribution of xylene isomers under vapor phase equilibrium conditions	11
Figure 5	Equilibrium concentration of xylenes in a vapor stream as a function of temperature	11
Figure 6	Xylene formation via toluene disproportionation	12
Figure 7	Xylene formation via trans-alkylation	12
Figure 8	Xylene isomerization via ExxonMobil MHA1 process	13
Figure 9	Integrated product chain diagram for producing PET from PX	14

Figure 10	Process configuration for producing high-purity PX from reformat	16
Figure 11	Block flow diagram for UOP Tatoray™ toluene disproportionation process	17
Figure 12	Block flow diagram for Chevron-Phillips PX crystallization process	18
Figure 13	Block flow diagram for GTC toluene methylation process	19
Figure 14	Schematic diagram for conventional BP/Amoco two-stage PX crystallization process	21
Figure 15	Block flow diagram for Sulzer thin film PX crystallization process	22
Figure 16	Sulzer step one—Freezing of PX on inside walls of crystallizer	22
Figure 17	Sulzer step two—Sweating PX impurities off inside walls of crystallizer	23
Figure 18	Sulzer step three—Melting PX crystals off inside walls of crystallizer	23
Figure 19	Distribution of global PX demand by geographical region	25
Figure 20	Historic bulk para xylene pricing in the United States	26
Figure 21	BP WO 2014/152762 configuration	27
Figure 22	BP WO 2014/152762 double-stage process configuration	28
Figure 23	Solubility of PX in a mixed xylene feed stream	29
Figure 24	Eutectic composition of mixed xylene streams	30
Figure 25	PX recovery as a function of crystallizer temperature	30
Figure 26	BP WO 2014/152762 PX crystallization equipment configuration	31
Figure 27	BP USP 6194609 plate heat exchanger configuration	31
Figure 28	BP USP 6565653 process for para xylene crystallization	32
Figure 29	BP USP 6600083 hybrid process for para xylene purification	33
Figure 30	BP USP 6600083 schematic for raffinate recovery and recycle	34
Figure 31	BP USP 7405340 distillation train to concentrate xylene feedstock	35
Figure 32	BP USP 7405340 process for para xylene production	36
Figure 33	BP USP 7405340 presentation of conventional PX crystallization process	37
Figure 34	BP USP 7405340 ethylene refrigeration loop for first-stage PX crystallizers	38
Figure 35	BP USP 7405340 ammonia absorption refrigeration loop	39
Figure 36	BP USP 7812206 PX slurry filtering and re-slurry device	40
Figure 37	BP USP 8211319 PX slurry filtering and re-slurry device	41
Figure 38	BP USPA 20100041936 use of filter column to replace centrifuge in PX purification	42
Figure 39	BP USPA 2010/0041936 enhanced filter column to replace centrifuge in PX purification	42
Figure 40	Configuration of BP crystallization process components	44
Figure 41	Configuration of BP distillation section	45
Figure 42	Schematic of xylenes recovery distillation column	45
Figure 43	BP isomerization section schematic drawing	46
Figure 44	Pusher centrifuge internals	48
Figure 45	Pusher centrifuge process fluid flow path	49
Figure 46	Integration of three BP process components	50
Figure 47	Historical values of US PEP Cost index	53
Figure 48	BP PX crystallization process input/output diagram	60
Figure 49	Section 100—PX crystallization block flow diagram	61
Figure 50	Section 200—Xylenes isomerization block flow diagram	63
Figure 51	UOP Polybed™ PSA H ₂ purification unit	64
Figure 52	PX vapor pressure curve	65
Figure 53	Section 300—Ethylene/propylene refrigeration block flow diagram	66
Figure 54	Overall material balance	67

Process flow diagrams

BP PX Crystallization Process—Section 100 PX Crystallization	118
BP PX Crystallization Process—Section 200 PX Isomerization and Distillation	119
BP PX Crystallization Process—Section 300 PX Ethylene and Propylene Refrigeration	120

1 Introduction

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