



Small Pilot System for the Manufacture of in Situ Precipitated Calcium Carbonate in the Presence of Pulp Fibers

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author BB wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author KD wrote the second draft of the manuscript and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Paper fillers materials are less expensive than fiber, allowing reduced production costs and improvement of paper properties.

A small pilot scale in-situ laboratory calcium carbonate filler precipitation unit was developed and designed with the objective to provide enough pulp fiber containing in-situ precipitated calcium carbonate for a small 12-inch (304 mm) wide laboratory paper machine. The in-situ precipitation system requires the reactants calcium hydroxide and carbon dioxide and was tested with a eucalyptus pulp fiber pulp suspension.

The final precipitated in-situ filler content achieved was 38.2%, 55.5% and 66.6% based on initial eucalyptus pulp fiber content. The precipitation time from an initial pH of 12.77, 12.76 and 11.98 to an final pH of 7.29, 7.55, and 7.28 for the 3 kg, 6kg, and 9 kg of calcium hydroxide reactant addition was 45 minutes for the 3 kg and 9 kg calcium hydroxide addition and 40 min. for the 6 kg calcium hydroxide addition.

Keywords: Calcium carbonate; eucalyptus; filler; in-situ precipitation; hybrid filler; paper.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the paper industry around the world is experiencing significant challenges due to stringent environmental laws; globalization, high competitiveness and substantial pressures on profit margins [1]. The global paper product market stood at roughly 420 million metric tons in 2018 [2]. Paper products require worldwide over 8 million tons of filler material [3].

Over the last decades, paper industry research has attempted to find the upper bound of calcium carbonate based (CaCO_3) filler content in a sheet of paper. Especial for printing and writing grades filler material has become a prerequisite in the global paper product market [4].

The major paper fillers used in papermaking are ground calcium carbonate (GCC) and precipitated calcium carbonate (PCC). PCC is the largest category of filler in North America, with nearly 70% of the market share. The second most common filler type, with a market share of 15%, is Kaolin, followed by ground calcium carbonate (GCC) with 13%. Titan dioxide's estimated market share is about 2%. The use of Silica / Silicates accounts for 0.3% and Talc and Aluminum Trihydrate together account for approximately 0.1% [5].

Paper fillers materials are less expensive than fiber, allowing reduced production costs, improved optical paper properties, dimensional stability, and better sheet formation and printability. The use of fillers, especially PCC, is mainly driven by production cost issues and the printing industry's need for higher quality, brightness and improved printability as well as increased machine speed on the paper machine and coating application side [6]. Applying filler material causes a decrease of the paper's strength [7]. On the negative side, adding filler material to a paper product decreases paper strength indicates a lower quality paper [7].

However, economic advantages are higher due to a savings potential to save up to \$ 4.0 for each 1% increase in filler content [6].

The use of CaCO_3 filler can be traced back to the 1920's to U.S. Patent 1,372,193 and 1,328,299 were the use of ground and precipitation CaCO_3 for industrial uses were granted as low-cost paint filler and pharmaceutical agent [8,9]. In the paper precipitated calcium carbonate (PCC) was

implemented in the 1970's in Europe and in the 1980's in North America as the industry shifted from acid to alkaline papermaking process [10].

PCC is at present time applied in slurry or powdered form to the papermaking suspension before the sheet forming process occurs. Today, the PCC filler material is manufactured in separate processing plants without pulp fibers and need to be transported to the paper manufacturing process in slurry or dried form. On-site production is realized for paper manufacturing plants that produce more than 700 metric tons of paper [11] and have a large demand of calcium carbonate filler, in general over 40,000 to t/year, because of the scale up factor [11,12].

Manufacturing of precipitated calcium carbonate filler material direct embedded in the paper manufacturing process has the potential to save production and transportation cost, because the filler material does not need to be shipped in slurry or dried and packed before transportation, lowering the environmental impact of the filler additive.

The following research project has the objective to design and test a multi-use laboratory precipitation unit that allows to produce up to 12 kg of pulp fiber material containing in-situ precipitated filler material. This would allow to operate a small 12" pilot plant paper machine running at a maximum speed of 2 m/min producing up to 4 kg of paper per hour for a detailed paper property investigation.

2. MATERIALS

For this research project producing In-Situ Precipitate Calcium Carbonate (SIPCC) hardwood pulp in the form of Bleached Eucalyptus Kraft Pulp (BEKP) from CMPC Celulosa was used. Calcium hydroxide ($\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$) powder was obtained from Lhoist North America. Industrial grade carbon dioxide (CO_2) gas was used with a 99% purity, supplied in a pressurized container containing 50 lbs. (22.68 kg) of gas.

2.1 Precipitation System Set Up

Based on preliminary experiments at the 10 liter scale a Large Scale Laboratory Precipitation (LSLP) system was designed as shown in Fig. 1. The LSLP system consist of a 1000 l (264.17 gal) open stainless steel tank (1) that can hold up to 920 l pulp fiber suspension (2). A 0.55kW (0.75

hp) industrial tank mounted mixer (3) with a 3 blade propeller having 250 mm (10 inch) in diameter is installed for mixing the pulp suspension. A 0.75 kW (1 hp) transfer pump (4) is used for recirculating the pulp suspension through the Static Mixer (SM) (6) with an approximate volumetric flow between 56 l to 112 l/min (15 and 30 gal/min). From Carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage tank (7), CO₂ is transferred into a CO₂-heater (12) to maintain a CO₂ temperature between 20°C and 30°C. CO₂-heater (12) contains a 9.5 mm (.38 in) inside diameter copper coil emerged in a heated H₂O bath maintained at 60°C. The temperature and pressure of the CO₂ is measured with temperature probe (13) and pressure probe (14). Operation pressure is adjusted above the pressure indicated on pressure gauge (15) using the regulator of the CO₂ storage tank. From the CO₂-heater the CO₂ gas is added into the static mixer assembly (6) using a 0.5" clear PVC hose. Six Sulzer SMF mixing elements with 25 mm in diameter are used in the static mixer assembly (6) to mix the pulp suspension and CO₂ without causing plugging. All piping for the LSLP system was manufactured using Schedule 40 Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) piping (5) with 1.5 in (38.1 mm) inside diameter. Recirculation flow is adjusted with 1.5 in PVC ball valves (6). Container (8) with

agitator is used to prepare the 20% The Ca(OH)₂ suspension. The suspension is metered into tank (1) with a 20% solids content using a 0.5 in PVC Schedule 40 PVC pipe and 0.5 in PVC ball valve (9). A temperature probe (10) and pH probe (11) allow monitoring the in-situ precipitation of calcium carbonate in tank (1). Transfer pipe (16) allows to transfer the pulp fiber suspension to the next process step.

2.2 Operation of Large Scale Precipitation System

To produce ISPC, first pulp fibers, in our case EC fibers, are pulped at a consistency of 4.5% using a laboratory pulper. The pulp fibers are then transferred into the LSLP system tank (1) and diluted to a consistency of 1.70% by adding H₂O to into the tank (1). Second, a Ca(OH)₂ suspension with 20% solids content is added from the lime tank (8) based on the final targeted ISPC solids content level. Third, variable speed propeller mixer (3) is used to mix the resulting suspension of pulp fibers and Ca(OH)₂. Pulp suspension flow in tank (1) was adjusted in that way that good recirculation of the pulp suspension is ensured by an mixing vortex indentation in the center of 100 mm (4 in) on the tank surface. The mixing propeller (3) is kept in

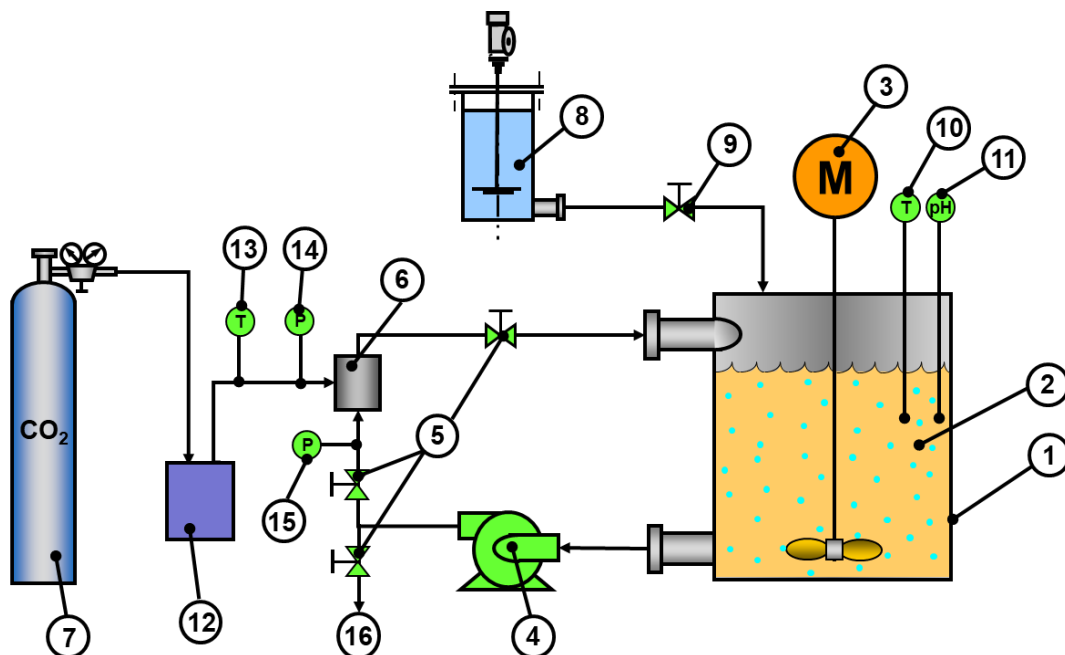


Fig. 1. Large Scale Laboratory Precipitation (LSLP) system: 1) 1000 l tank, 2) Pulp fiber suspension, 3) 0.375 kW propeller mixer 4) 0.75 kW impeller pump, 5) Ball valve, 6) Static mixer, 7) CO₂ Tank with pressure transducer and flow adjustment, 8) lime tank, 9) Dosing valve, 10) Temperature Probe, 11) pH Probe, 12) Gas heater, 13) Gas temperature probe, 14) CO₂ pressure Gauge, 15) Pressure gauge, 16) Transfer pipe [13]

operation for the whole precipitation process to ensure good mixing of the pulp suspension and the precipitated ISPC. After approximately 5 minutes of mixing recirculation pump (4) is started and the pulp suspension is recirculated with about 70 l/min (18.5 gal/min). Fourth, the pressure regulator of the Carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage tank (7) is opened and the CO₂ gas flow adjusted to 60.0 cfm (1.7 l/min) and a pressure of 68948.0 Pa (10.0 psi) above the pressure reading on pressure gauge (15) using pressure gauge (14). The CO₂ gas exiting the CO₂ storage tank (7) transfers into a CO₂-heater (12) to maintain a CO₂ temperature between 20°C and 30°C. The temperature of the CO₂ is measured with temperature probe (13). CO₂ gas exiting the CO₂-heater is then transferred into the static mixer assembly (6) using a 0.5" clear PVC hose. Six Sulzer-SMF mixing elements with 25 mm in diameter are used in the static mixer assembly (6) to mix the pulp suspension and CO₂ without causing plugging. The LSLP system is operated this way and temperature and pH values are monitored with probes (10) and (11) respectively. The LSLP system operation is stopped when pH of the recirculated pulp fiber suspension reaches a value of 7.0. The pulp fiber suspension with the ISPC is then transferred into a receiving tank using transfer line (16) for further processing.

2.3 Testing Methods

Ash content was analyzed by TAPPI T211 om-02, "Ash in wood, pulp, paper and paperboard: Combustion at 525°C" [14]. Handsheets for physical testing were prepared in accordance with T 205 sp-06, "Forming handsheets for physical tests of pulp" [15]. Moisture contents were analyzed according to TAPPI T412 om-06, "Moisture in pulp, paper and paperboard" [16]. Measuring temperature and pH of the pulp suspension an Accumet AP85 instrument was used.

2.4 Scanning Electron Microscopy

JEOL JSM-5800 LV low vacuum scanning electron microscope was used for surface evaluation of a paper handsheet containing ISPC prepared according to TAPPI testing standard T205 sp-06 [15].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The production of ISPC together with EC pulp fibers was carried out based on pre-testing of the LSLP system. For each ISPC production run,

two batches of 3 kg of OD EC fibers at a consistency of 4.5% were prepared using a 100 liter laboratory pulper. The resulting 133.3 l of pulp suspension containing 4.5% OD EC fibers. The resulting pulp fiber suspension is transferred into the LSLP system tank (1) and diluted to a consistency of 1.70% by adding to tank (1) 219 liter of H₂O to a final liquid suspension of 353 l. The Ca(OH)₂ suspension with 20% dry solids content containing 3kg (15 l), 6 kg (30 l), and 9 kg (45 l) based on the final targeted ISPC level in the EC pulp suspension of 39%, 56%, and 67% respectively is prepared in the lime tank (8) prior to each ISPC production run. After the Ca(OH)₂ suspension is added, mixing with a variable speed propeller mixer (3) is started by adjusting the mixer speed that a vortex indentation of approximately 100 mm (4 in) in tank (1) resulted. After mixing adjustment the recirculation pump (4) is started and the pulp suspension is recirculated at a flow rate of 64 l/min. the CO₂ addition is initiated by opening the pressure regulator of the Carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage tank (7) to a CO₂ gas flow of 60.0 cfm (1.7 l/min), this resulted into a pressure of 68948.0 Pa (10.0 psi) on pressure gauge (14), above the pressure reading on pressure gauge (15) located prior to the static mixer (6). The CO₂ gas exiting the CO₂ storage tank (7) transfers into a CO₂-heater (12) to maintain a CO₂ temperature between 20°C and 30°C to minimize ice buildup on the supply lines. The temperature of the CO₂ injected into the static mixer (6) is measured with temperature probe (13). The LSLP system is operated this way and temperature and pH values are monitored with probes (10) and (11) respectively. The LSLP system operation is stopped when pH of the recirculated pulp fiber suspension reaches a value of 7.0. The pulp fiber suspension with the ISPC is then transferred into a receiving tank using transfer line (16) for further processing.

Fig. 2 shows the ISPC production run with 3 kg, 6kg, and 9 kg of Ca(OH)₂ added to the EC pulp suspension. After the 20% Ca(OH)₂ suspension was added the pH increased 12.77, 12.76 and 11.98 for the 3 kg, 6kg, and 9 kg respectively. For the following 30 min for the 3 kg and 9 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition and 25 min for the 6kg addition the pH stayed above 12.0. A steep pH drop occurred in the following 10 minutes to a final pH of 7.29 and 7.28 for the 3 kg and 9 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition respectively and a pH of 7.55 for the 6 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition with final conversion of ISPC achieved after 45 min. for the 3 kg and 9 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition respectively and 40 min. for

the 6 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition. The pulp suspension temperature increased during in situ precipitation of ISPC from 18.6°C to 20.8°C for the 3kg Ca(OH)₂ addition, from 20.2°C to 21.8°C for the 6kg Ca(OH)₂ addition, and from 21.1°C to 24.2°C for the 9kg Ca(OH)₂ addition.

The ISPC filler content based on OD pulp fiber suspension for the addition of 3 kg, 6 kg, and 9 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition was 38.2%, 55.5% and 66.6% respectively by analyzing the pulp ash content according to the TAPPI T221 method [14]. The solids content analyzed with TAPPI T 412 of the pulp suspension after in-situ precipitation including EC fibers and ISPC

material was 1.80%, 3.52%, 4.38% for the 3 kg, 6 kg, and 9 kg Ca(OH)₂ addition respectively.

Fig. 3 shows a SEM microscopic picture at a magnification of 1800 of the in-situ precipitated PCC filler material covering the eucalyptus pulp fiber surface.

The ISPC system proved its ability to produce up to 12 kg of in-situ PCC containing pulp fiber material in a two batch operation. This allows to operate a small 12" (304 mm) pilot plant paper machine to produce up to 4 kg of paper per hour for a detailed paper property investigation.

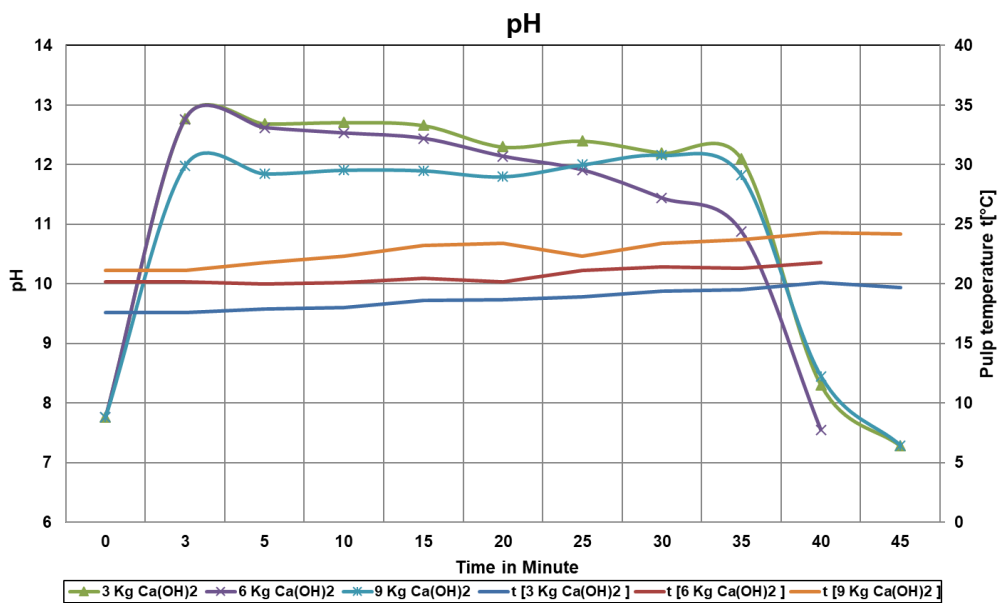


Fig. 2. *In situ* precipitation of calcium carbonate

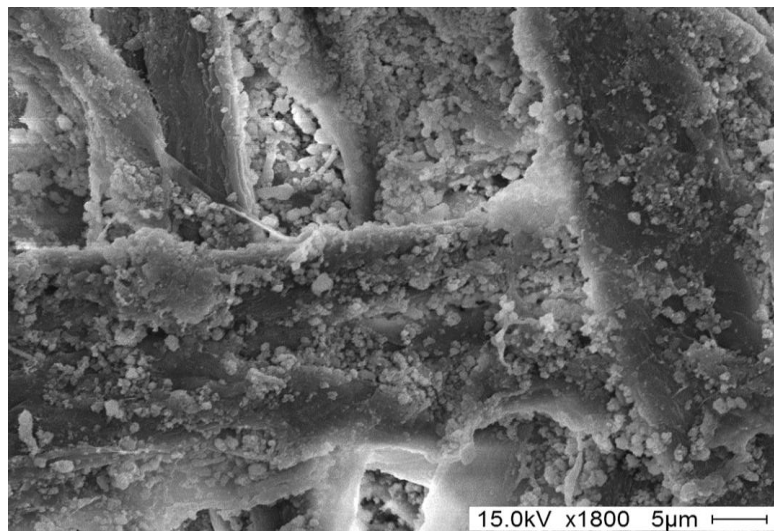


Fig. 3. *In situ* precipitated calcium carbonate [17]

4. CONCLUSION

The development and design of a small pilot scale in situ laboratory calcium carbonate filler precipitation unit resulted in a successful operation and production of a precipitated in-situ PCC filler material using $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ and CO_2 as reactants in the presence of eucalyptus pulp fibers.

Final filler content achieved was 38.2%, 55.5% and 66.6% based on 6 kg initial eucalyptus pulp fiber content. The precipitation time from an initial pH of 12.77, 12.76 and 11.98, and final pH of 7.29, 7.55, and 7.28 of for the 3 kg, 6kg, and 9 kg $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ addition respectively was 45 minutes for the 3 kg and 9 kg $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ addition and 40 min. for the 6 kg $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ addition.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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