An oxygen pump can produce high-purity high-pressure oxygen. Oxygen ions (\( \text{O}^{2-} \)) are electrochemically pumped through a multi-stage electrolysis stack of cells. Each cell includes an oxygen-ion conducting solid-state electrolyte between cathode and anode sides. Oxygen dissociates into the ions at the cathode side. The ions migrate across the electrolyte and recombine at the anode side. An insulator is between adjacent cells to electrically isolate each individual cell. Each cell receives a similar volt potential. Recombined oxygen from a previous stage can diffuse through the insulator to reach the cathode side of the next stage. Each successive stage similarly incrementally pressurizes the oxygen to produce a final elevated pressure.
FIG. 1
FIG. 3

122
148
146
140
-DC
134

O2 Anode
O2 Cathode
O2 Anode
O2 Cathode
O2 Anode
O2 Cathode
Air Cathode

124
136
138
144
142

FIG. 4

138
142
146
GENERATION OF HIGH PRESSURE OXYGEN VIA ELECTROCHEMICAL PUMPING IN A MULTI-STAGE ELECTROLYSIS STACK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims benefit pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §119 (e) of U.S. provisional application 61/834,927 filed Jun. 14, 2013, which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

ORIGIN OF THE INVENTION

The invention described herein was jointly made by employees of the United States Government and may be manufactured and used by or for the Government for Government purposes without the payment of any royalties thereon or therefore. The invention described herein was also jointly made in the performance of work under a NASA contract and is subject to the provisions of National Aeronautics and Space Act, Public Law 111-314, §3 (124 Stat. 3330, 51 U.S.C. Chapter 201).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

High-pressure oxygen is used in many applications, including space applications, medical applications, and industrial applications. A wide range of such applications may benefit from improvements in producing high-pressure oxygen.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An exemplary embodiment of the invention is directed to an apparatus and a method that can produce high-pressure oxygen.

An exemplary embodiment is directed to an oxygen pump apparatus that can extract oxygen from ambient air, carbon dioxide, and/or water, and then provide the oxygen at high pressure.

An exemplary embodiment is directed to an apparatus that can produce substantially pure dry high-pressure oxygen.

An exemplary embodiment is directed to an apparatus that can produce high-purity dry high-pressure oxygen via an electrochemical pumping process.

An exemplary embodiment includes a high-pressure oxygen generator that comprises a multi-stage stack of cells, where each cell includes an oxygen ion-conducting solid-state electrolyte membrane sandwiched between cathode and anode layers, where each stage can incrementally pressurize oxygen.

An exemplary embodiment includes a method of using the apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary arrangement comprising a solid oxide electrolysis cell, which is usable in providing oxygen from CO₂.

FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary high-purity high-pressure oxygen generator that comprises a multi-stage electrochemical oxygen pump including a stack of the electrolysis cells.

FIG. 3 illustrates an enlarged section of the oxygen generator shown in FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 illustrates identifiers for certain materials shown in FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 illustrates another embodiment, which includes an exemplary electrolysis cell that can provide oxygen from ambient air.

FIG. 6 illustrates a further embodiment, which includes an exemplary electrolysis cell that can provide oxygen from H₂O.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

It will be readily understood that the features of exemplary embodiments may be arranged and designed in a wide variety of different configurations. Thus, the following detailed description of the exemplary embodiments of apparatus and method is not intended to limit the scope of the invention as claimed, but is merely representative of selected exemplary embodiments that implement the principles described herein.

The features, structures, and/or characteristics described herein may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments or arrangements. That is, a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with one embodiment may be included in at least one other embodiment or arrangement.

An exemplary embodiment is directed to an apparatus and method for generating high-purity high-pressure oxygen. The high-pressure oxygen is achieved by using electrochemical pumping in a multi-stage electrolysis stack of cells.

An oxygen pressurizer includes a cylindrical pressure containment chamber (or shell) that houses the multi-stage electrolysis stack of cells. In an exemplary embodiment the stack has a cylindrical configuration. Each cell also comprises a cylindrical (disk) configuration. In other embodiments other configurations may be used. The chamber is arranged to receive oxygen-containing fluid (gas or gases) through one or more inlets located at a first (inlet or entrance) chamber end. The chamber also includes one or more outlets at the other (outlet or discharge) chamber end. The inlet and outlet structure can comprise a suitable passageway (or aperture or channel) through the chamber housing that allows oxygen content to flow therein. The inlet structure allows for a continuous stream of oxygen-containing intake gas to flow to a stack entry area while also allowing the residual intake gas to be removed or exhausted. The exemplary outlet structure allows for separated and highly pressurized oxygen to be removed or exhausted from the chamber housing. Different embodiments can include different numbers of inlets and outlets. Also, a chamber housing arrangement may include only one inlet and one outlet. Furthermore, as discussed in more detail later, in some embodiments the chamber housing may not include a designated inlet. Rather, the stack entry area can be in continuous open fluid communication with (and exposed to) ambient surroundings, such as air.

Oxygen is extracted from the (oxygen source) fluid at the first end. The oxygen repeatedly undergoes an increase (step-up) in pressure as it passes through the stack. The generated dry oxygen at a higher pressure is output through one or more outlets at the other (outlet or discharge) chamber end. Except for the inlets and outlets, an exemplary chamber is hermetically sealed during the oxygen pressurization process. The exemplary chamber and stack arrangement allows for production of high-purity high-pressure oxygen.

In some embodiments an outlet port of the pump chamber can be in fluid communication (via a valve) with a suitable high-pressure gas storage receptacle (e.g., a gas holding tank). Pump operation causes a continuous flow of high-purity oxygen into the tank. The pump operation also causes the pressure inside the tank to increase with the delivery of
compressed oxygen. The operation can be conducted continuously until the tank has reached a desired high-pressure level of the oxygen.

In some embodiments the arrangement may be operated in a batch mode. Pressurized oxygen may be collected and stored in the chamber itself. The oxygen can be stored near an outlet port until it is later transferred therefrom. That is, generated pressurized oxygen can be held in an oxygen-containing storage area at the discharge end of the chamber until the desired batch of oxygen (e.g., of a final pressure and volume) is achieved. An outlet valve that is in fluid communication with the oxygen storage area can then be opened to remove the batch of pressurized oxygen from the chamber. Another batch of high-purity high-pressure oxygen can then be generated in the chamber. The ability of exemplary arrangements to be operated in a continuous or a batch mode may be useful in some applications.

Each cell of the exemplary arrangement includes an oxygen-ion conducting solid-state electrolyte membrane sandwiched between cathode and anode sides. Each cell is used to carry out a single stage of the multi-stage process. At each respective stage, oxygen ions are electrically pumped through the respective cell of that respective stage. At the cathode side, oxygen is dissociated into oxygen ions. These oxygen ions can then migrate across the membrane. The migrated oxygen ions can then recombine at the anode side to form oxygen.

In an exemplary embodiment each stage of the process can incrementally pressurize oxygen. The extent of pressurization can vary depending on the application from as low as about 0.1 atmospheres (atm) but will more commonly be on the order of approximately 0.2 to 2.0 atmospheres (atm) and may be on the order of 10 atmospheres. Oxygen pressure is increased in each process stage by application of voltage during the stage. The stage steps include dissociating oxygen (at a relatively lower pressure) into oxygen ions on one (first) side of a cell, conducting the ions through the electrolyte, and then recombining the ions to reform oxygen (at a relatively higher pressure) on the other (second) side of the cell.

The outer edges of each of the cells are sealed. For example, in some arrangements a hermetic glass-ceramic seal can be used. In other arrangements other seal types may be used, including but not limited to, ceramic cements, metallic seals, brazed connections or other suitable sealed connections. Thus, recombined oxygen cannot escape from the circumferential outer (disk) edge of a cell. Being blocked by the cell edge sealing and the membrane, the recombined oxygen (gas) can only proceed in the direction (e.g., upward) toward a relatively lower pressure into oxygen ions on one (first) side of a cell, conducting the ions through the electrolyte, and then recombining the ions to reform oxygen (at a relatively higher pressure) on the other (second) side of the cell.

For ease of understanding an exemplary multi-stage electrochemical pump device for the oxygen generator will be described at both the cell level (e.g., FIG. 1) and the stack level (e.g., FIG. 2). Each stack (or core) comprises a plurality of solid oxide electrolysis (SOE) cells. In an exemplary embodiment each cell (and stack) has a diameter of approximately 2 inches. Of course in other embodiments other dimensional sizes and cell numbers may be used.

Each cell includes an oxygen-ion conducting ceramic membrane located (sandwiched) between two electrode layers (anode and cathode). In the exemplary embodiment the membrane electrolyte comprises yttria stabilized zirconia (YSZ). The electrode layers comprise a tapered porous YSZ structure or other porous electrode structure, with an electro catalyst deposited on the microstructure surfaces. Alternative arrangements may include other types of membrane electrolytes such as doped ceria. This may include for example, gadolinium or samarium doped ceria. As discussed in more detail later, exemplary oxygen generators/pumps allow for different catalysts to be used with (or tailored to) different electrochemical reactions. In some exemplary embodiments, the stacks can include oxide solid oxide cells that comprise cell materials, structures, sizes and/or features of the types described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,534,519 and/or U.S. Pat. No. 4,877,506, which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety. Alternatively, instead of the cell electrodes having the tapered porosity of the incorporated disclosures example arrangements may use other types of porous electrode structures.

As used herein, high-purity oxygen, substantially pure oxygen, and essentially pure oxygen each refer to an oxygen content level that is greater than approximately 90%, with a preferred level being 99.5%, and more preferably in the range of 97-99%. As used herein, high-pressure oxygen refers to pressure in the approximate range of 1000-3000 psia. However, it should be understood that some arrangements may produce oxygen at elevated pressures below 1000 psia.

An exemplary electrolysis process involving the electrochemical pump will now be described. A potential is applied across each individual cell in the stack of cells. The electrical potential optimally applied is a function of the electrolyte thickness and conductivity as well as temperatures. The electrical potential may range in some embodiments from 0.1 to 2.2 volts and most commonly in the range of 1.5 to 2.0 volts. Operational temperature in embodiments using YSZ membrane electrolyte is greater than 450° C. to ensure adequate oxygen-ion conductivity in the ceramic membrane, and in some arrangements 600-1000° C. Alternatively, arrangements using other types of membrane electrolyte may operate at other temperatures, for example arrangements using doped ceria electrolyte, may operate preferably at temperatures in the approximately 450-600° C. range. An oxygen-containing fluid is supplied to the cathode side of the first (lowest, entrance) cell of the stack. The fluid can be received into the chamber through at least one fluid inlet port. The particular fluid supplied at the cathode side allows for a reaction to be carried out in which (negative) oxygen ions (O⁻²) are produced.

A plurality of different (oxygen source) fluid compositions (e.g., most commonly air, water and/or carbon dioxide) can be used to supply the oxygen to the stack. Of course oxygen containing gas mixtures other than air may be used as well. Each of the usable fluids can be dissociated to enable the production of O²⁻. For example, carbon dioxide (CO₂) can be dissociated into carbon monoxide (CO) and O²⁻ according to Equation I. Also, (ambient) air can be dissociated into O²⁻ according to the Equation II. Water vapor can be dissociated into hydrogen gas (H₂) and O²⁻ according to Equation III.

\[
\text{CO}_2 + 2\text{e}^- \rightarrow \text{CO} + \text{O}^{2-} \quad \text{Equation I}
\]
\[
\frac{1}{2}\text{O}_2 + 2\text{e}^- \rightarrow \text{O}^{2-} \quad \text{Equation II}
\]
\[
\text{H}_2\text{O} + 2\text{e}^- \rightarrow \text{H}_2 + \text{O}^{2-} \quad \text{Equation III}
\]
FIG. 5 shows an exemplary cell level arrangement in which a (entry) cell 140 is used to obtain oxygen from ambient air, in accordance with Equation II. The solid oxide electrolysis cell 140 includes a (air) cathode 142, an (O₂) anode 144, and a (YSZ) membrane electrolyte 146. Electric wiring 148 (for use in establishing the voltage potential) and a current collector 149 are also shown. O²⁻ that is dissociated from the ambient air on the cathode side of the cell 140 can migrate through the electrolyte 146 to the anode side of the cell, as shown by the flow direction arrow. The cell thickness in this exemplary arrangement is approximately 1020-1050 microns, but could be thinner or thicker in other arrangements. It should be understood that the structures and dimensions presented herein are exemplary, and that in other embodiments other arrangements (dimensions and various sizes) can be used.

As discussed in more detail later, the cell 140 may be used as the first (initial or entry) cell of a stack. The first cell is exposed to the oxygen-containing fluid (i.e., air) in accordance with FIG. 5. FIG. 2 shows an exemplary pump arrangement. The arrangement includes a pump 120 that pressurizes oxygen. The pump 120 comprises a stack 122 formed of a plurality of cells 140, like the cell shown in FIG. 5. In an exemplary embodiment each of the stack cells 140 is substantially identical.

The entire stack of this exemplary arrangement is housed in a cylindrical shell (or chamber housing) 124. The shell 124 is encased in at least one outer layer of insulation 126. Heating elements 128 are also shown. The stack of this example is operable at temperatures greater than 600°C. The diameter D in this example is approximately 2 inches.

In an exemplary embodiment the shell 124 comprises a multi-layer Ceramic-Matrix-Composite (CMC) fiber reinforced shell. The outer circular edge of each cell is hermetically sealed by a seal arrangement 136, such as a glass-ceramic seal. The hermetic sealing of this arrangement extends across the plurality of cells and throughout the length of the stack.

As shown in FIG. 2, a source of oxygen-containing fluid (i.e., air) at a low entry pressure (e.g., ambient pressure) can enter the shell 124 through an inlet 130. High-purity O₂ provided at a high pressure (relative to the entry pressure) can exit the shell through an outlet 132. For example, air at P₁low can be received by the stack, the separated O₂ can be pumped up in pressure as it passes through the stack, and then high-purity O₂ at a final P₁high can be released from the stack.

FIG. 3 shows an enlarged view of the circular area indicated by the “A” in FIG. 2. As can be seen from FIG. 3, the cathode side of the first cell 134 is the entry point (or area) of the stack 122. That is, in the example of FIG. 3 the bottom cell 134 in the stack functions as the entry cell, which gets exposed to the oxygen-containing fluid. As shown in FIG. 1, this first cell 134 (like the cell 140) includes an entry side cathode (which can function as a air exposed cathode), an electrolyte (e.g., a YSZ electrolyte membrane), and an anode (which can function as an O₂ anode). Each of the remaining cells 140 in the stack 122 include a cathode (or first) side cathode (which can function as an O₂ cathode), an electrolyte, and an anode side anode (which can function as an O₂ anode).

As indicated by FIG. 5 and FIG. 3, each cell 140 can be connected by wired connections 148 in parallel. As discussed later in further detail, in an exemplary embodiment the adjacent cells 140 in the stack 122 are electrically separated from each other by an insulating layer 138. In an example arrangement the insulating layer may be comprised of zirconia cloth. In other arrangements cells may be insulated by other electrical insulators including but not limited to ceramic insulators such as porous structures comprised of alumina, which has both electrical and ionic insulating properties. Of course in other arrangements, other structures and materials may be used.

FIG. 4 indicates representative drawing symbols for some of the pump components presented in FIG. 3, such as insulating layer 138, electrodes 142, 144, and electrolyte 146. Although the pump arrangement has been shown in a vertical orientation in FIG. 2, it should be understood that the pump operation can be carried in other orientations in other embodiments. Also, although the stack (and shell/housing) is shown as having a cylindrical configuration, it should be understood that other configurations (including non cylindrical) can be used in other embodiments.

The exemplary pump arrangements allow for use of deposited electrode catalysts that are specifically tailored to the particular electrochemical reactions being used. For example, for the CO₂ electrolysis (Equation I) or the H₂O electrolysis (Equation III), the applied electrode catalyst can be a composite or cermet, such as Ni-YSZ or Ni-ceria. However, for reducing the oxygen from an air source (Equation II), the applied electrode catalyst can be an oxygen reduction catalyst, such as Lanthanum Strontium Cobalt Ferrite (LSCF) or Lanthanum Strontium Manganite (LSM). Of course as previously discussed, in other arrangements other materials may be used.

FIG. 6 shows another cell level arrangement. This exemplary solid oxide electrolysis cell 150 is used to obtain oxygen from H₂O, in accordance with Equation III. The cell 150 includes a (H₂O) cathode 152, an (O₂) anode 154, and a (YSZ) electrolyte 156. Electric wiring 158 and a current collector 159 are also shown. The H₂O may be in the form of a water vapor. O²⁻ dissociated from the H₂O can migrate through the electrolyte 156 to the anode side, as represented by the flow direction arrow. A plurality of substantially identical cells 150 can be arranged in fluid connected engagement to form a multi-stage electrolysis stack in an electrochemical pump that pressurizes oxygen.

FIG. 1 shows an example of a cell level arrangement in which a solid oxide electrolysis cell 100 is used to obtain oxygen from carbon dioxide, in accordance with Equation I. The cell 100 includes a (CO₂) cathode 102, an (O₂) anode 104, and a (YSZ) electrolyte 106. Electric wiring 108 and a current collector 110 are also shown. Dissociated O²⁻ can migrate through the cell 100 in the flow direction of the arrow, from the cathode side toward the anode side. The cell thickness X is in this exemplary embodiment is in the range of approximately 1020-1050 microns. The cells can be arranged in the manner shown in FIG. 2 to produce an electrochemical pump arrangement that produced oxygen at elevated pressure.

Returning to a discussion of the exemplary operational process, in these exemplary arrangements the O²⁻ ions produced at the cathode side of the first cell can diffuse across the electrolyte material to the anode side. The remaining residual byproducts (e.g., unwanted gas) from the dissociated fluid introduced on the cathode side of the first cell in the stack, are expelled or removed from (and replaced at) the cathode side, such as by additional (inflowing) fluid. The unwanted residual byproducts can be exhausted from the chamber through one or more ports. For example, removal of unwanted byproducts can be carried out to rid generated CO (resulting from Equation I) and generated H₂ (resulting from Equation III).

In some example embodiments the cathode side of the first (lowest, entry) cell of the stack can be in open fluid communication with the ambient surroundings (e.g., air). For example, such an open-ended chamber may be absent any designated fluid inlet opening. Other embodiments can also be used for supplying sufficient quantities of source oxygen to
the stack. For example, oxygen at elevated pressures may be produced by providing oxygen alone to the first cell in the stack. The pressure of the oxygen will then be elevated from the starting pressure as it is moved successively through the cells of the stack.

Regardless of the particular structural configuration of the chamber, the produced \( \text{O}_2^- \) ions are provided within a sufficiently close distance of the cathode so that they are electrically prone to begin crossing the electrolyte to the anode side. The \( \text{O}_2^- \) ions that migrate across the membrane recombine at the anode side to form oxygen gas. At the anode (oxygen) electrode the oxide ions coming from the electrolyte give up electrons in forming oxygen gas. That is, ionized oxygen that traveled through the electrolyte is converted to oxygen gas at the oxygen anode electrode. The anode involved in the oxygen recombination reaction can often be considered a pressure reduction catalyst. The oxygen gas can be formed according to Equation IV.

\[
2\text{O}_2^- \rightarrow \text{O}_2 + 4e^-
\]

As previously discussed, the YSZ membrane electrolyte of the example arrangement is configured to only conduct oxygen ions. Furthermore, because of the applied voltage arrangement the oxygen ions are only conducted one-way. Thus, the very first stage of the electrochemical pumping process of the example arrangement essentially pure dry oxygen is produced on the anode side of the first cell.

The oxygen pressure can be increased on the anode side of each cell by increasing the voltage across the cell. The pressure increase can be achieved in accordance with principles of the well-known Nernst equation:

\[
V = \frac{RT}{4F \ln P_{\text{O}_2}^{\text{anode}}} + P_{\text{O}_2}^{\text{cathode}}
\]

where
- \( V \) is the voltage across the cell
- \( R \) is the ideal gas constant
- \( T \) is the temperature
- \( F \) is Faraday's constant
- \( P_{\text{O}_2} \) is the partial pressure of oxygen

As previously discussed, in the exemplary process each cell receives a potential in the range of 0.1 to 2.2 volts and most commonly 1.5 to 2 volts. The voltage used optimally is generally dictated by electrolyte thickness and conductivity as well as temperature. Accordingly, this enables each individual stack stage to provide (or contribute to) an incremental pressurization (higher pressure) of oxygen as a function of the voltage applied. Most commonly in exemplary arrangements the pressure increase is in the range of 0.2 to 2.0 atm per cell stage in the stack but may be 10 atm. That is, in terms of pounds per square inch, each stage can as controlled, may produce an additional (further) increase in the oxygen pressure in the approximate range of 2.7 to 27 psia and may be 150 psia. In the exemplary process the stack is configured so that each separate stage causes the substantially same increase in pressure. Of course in other arrangements cells may produce different increases in pressure as desired. This may be done, for example, by varying the voltages that are applied to the cells.

Using 10 atm as an example increase in pressure per cell stage, the oxygen pressure following completion of the next stage will be greater by approximately 10 atm. That is, performing this next stage will result in a new pressure that is substantially equal to the current stage pressure plus another 10 atm. For example, if the oxygen pressure is 50 atm as a result of the prior stage completion, then completion of the immediately next stage will result in the oxygen pressure being 60 atm. Each sequential next stage in the example adds another 10 atm to the oxygen pressure. Each added 10 atm is cumulative over the entire stack, resulting in a generated final pressure. Thus, the exemplary pump can be operated as a pressure compounding (or intensifying) device.

As can be seen, the exemplary oxygen pressurizing pump embodiments allow for the final oxygen pressure generated to be directly based (or dependent) on the number of stages that are included in the device as well as the voltages applied to each cell in the stack. There is a correlation between the total number of stages in a stack and the maximum oxygen pressure that can be generated by that stack. Completing a greater number of stages will result in a greater (higher) level of pressurized oxygen. Likewise there is a correlation between the voltage that is applied to each cell and the increase in pressure achieved by each cell.

As can be appreciated, the exemplary embodiments enable production of pure oxygen at a particular high-pressure level by using a particular sized stack (of a predetermined number of cells). For example, an exemplary high-pressure oxygen generator can be used to provide pressurized oxygen at pressure approaching 2500-3000 psia by employing a stack of approximately 35 cells, where each cell stage can increase the oxygen pressure by up to approximately 85 psia. It should be understood that other exemplary generator/stack arrangements can provide other values of pressurized oxygen.

As previously discussed, an exemplary electrochemical pump utilizes a multi-stage arrangement that includes cells that are stacked in a series configuration. In an exemplary arrangement a potential of 1.5 to 2 volts is applied across each cell. The membrane electrolyte in each cell comprises a YSZ layer. The chamber configuration allows each of the stacked cells to be kept electrically insulated from each other by having a respective insulating layer located between all adjacent cells in the stack. For example, a non-electronically conducting ceramic woven cloth-like layer may extend between adjacent cells in the stack being maintained separated from each other.

Each cell in the stack is individually wired in a manner that limits the voltage difference across each individual cell. For example, each of the cells can be wired in parallel. With the cells being wired in parallel, the voltage difference across each cell can be easily controlled to avoid electrochemical reduction of the electrolyte. The sealed cell edges allow for feedthroughs for the current-carrying wire leads (e.g., platinum) to each individual cell. As can be appreciated, the exemplary pump embodiment provides a stack configuration that avoids a large total voltage differential across any individual cell stage.

Furthermore, because the exemplary pump does not use high voltage potentials across any cell, the cell’s electrolyte will have a much longer life. That is, the configuration and operation of the exemplary pump prevent its electrolyte material from being quickly chemically reduced and decomposed. As can be appreciated, the example pump configuration does not allow the material properties of cell electrolyte to undergo a rapid detrimental change, especially with regard to ionic conducting ability.

The exemplary multi-stage pump also allows each stage to provide a substantially same incremental pressurization of oxygen, such as the 0.2 to 10 atm described in the example. Thus, the multi-stage stack arrangement allows each cell to have a low differential pressure across the cell membrane. As can be appreciated in the example arrangement, a large differ-
The exhaust of a practical solid-state device that can separate oxygen from air and other materials, and then electrochemically pump the oxygen in a multi-stage process to produce high-purity high-pressure oxygen. The exemplary device utilizes an oxygen-ion conducting solid-state membrane. Unlike a rotary or reciprocal compressor, the exemplary solid-state device requires no moving parts to compress the oxygen. With no moving parts the solid-state device provides increased reliability and minimum maintenance. Furthermore, because the exemplary device generates high-purity oxygen, there is no need for the produced oxygen to undergo any extra separation processes to purify the oxygen. Also, the high operating temperatures of the device (≈600°C in the example arrangement) assures sterility of the generated oxygen. Thus, high-purity high-pressure oxygen that can be created by the exemplary device can be used in life support and medical applications. Furthermore, the exemplary pump device can generate dry high-purity oxygen from ambient sources, including air or water which contains impurities or other debris. The pump arrangement is configured to resist fouling from such impurities. In contrast, other water electrolysis technologies are limited by requiring a high-purity water source. The exemplary pump embodiment further enjoys a stack configuration that is based on a bi-supported cell arrangement. With the exemplary arrangement support is improved because the cell membrane (solid-state electrolyte) is structurally supported by both (cathode and anode) electrolyte layers. Additionally, improved hermetic sealing is provided at the outer edges of the stacked (cylindrical) cells. Thus, the exemplary arrangement also avoids need for a compression sealing mechanism or other (mechanical) spring-loaded hardware. In the exemplary pump embodiment the chamber, which houses the multi-stage stack, structurally serves as a pressure containment vessel. The exemplary chamber comprises one or more outer sealing layers of ceramic matrix composite (CMC). The chamber configuration causes the entire stack to be wrapped in a multi-layer CMC reinforced fiber shell, which provides the pressure containment. The exemplary chamber is structurally capable of securely containing the high-pressure oxygen gas that gets generated therein. The exemplary pump embodiment further includes the shell being encased in an outer insulator layer. For example, the layer can be high temperature insulation wool (e.g., aluminosilicate fibers) or a high temperature aerogel material. The aerogel may be used for application of the pump in space. In other examples other types of insulating layers may be used. The exemplary pump can also include heating elements. For example, the heating elements can be electrical heating elements embedded near the inner wall of the insulation layer. The heating elements can assist in initial start-up of the exemplary pump embodiment. The heating elements can also be utilized to provide supplemental heat as needed to maintain a constant operating temperature (e.g., 450-1000°C). The exemplary apparatus and method overcomes these problems by providing a novel ability to generate dry high-purity high-pressure oxygen on-site during space missions. An exemplary embodiment includes a pump controller. The controller includes at least one processor. The controller is programmed to automatically control generating batches of high-pressure oxygen. The controller is operatively connected to receive data sensed by pressure sensors. These pressure sensors (sensors) are associated with a pressure holding area, such as a high-pressure gas storage tank. The pump feeds pressurized oxygen to the tank through an outlet port associated with a valve that is operated (open/close) by the controller. Thus, the pressure sensors can be located inside the pump housing adjacent the outlet port. All aspects of pump operation, including the level of output pressure applied across the individual cells of the stack, is handled by the controller. In some embodiments an inlet port of the chamber housing may include a valve which controls the amount and flow of oxygen-containing fluid that reaches the stack. Such an inlet valve would also be controlled by the pump controller. Based on data sensed by the pressure sensors, the controller determines whether a pressurized oxygen batch is completed. Upon such determination the controller can close the outlet valve and cease supply of voltage to the stack. The controller is programmable to allow setting the desired high-pressure level. That is, the controller can be set to generate pressurized oxygen at a predetermined pressure level. In another pump control embodiment, a pump controller is in operative connection with oxygen level sensors. The sensors can wirelessly communicate sensed data, which is obtainable by the controller. The sensors may be located on an exterior of the chamber and/or in a room at a location that is spaced from the chamber. The controller is operable to automatically control the pump to maintain a proper level (percentage) of oxygen in the air in the room. For example, following a controller decision (based on data from the sensors) that the oxygen content in the room area has dropped
below a predetermined (low) level, the controller can start the
pump to generate high-purity oxygen on a continuing basis,
with the release, which is released to the room. The controller
can cease pump operation upon determining (based on sensor
data) that the room contains a proper oxygen percentage. The
proper percentage may be a set (much higher) level above the
predetermined (low) level. The controller can make the deter-
minations (and control the pump) in real time.

The pump arrangement can be configured such that the
stack is open at both ends to the room air. Thus, as high-purity
oxygen is generated it is automatically released into the room.
In other arrangements the chamber housing may have an
outlet valve, which can be operated (opened/closed) by the
controller to simultaneously release a generated batch of
high-purity oxygen. The exemplary controller is program-
able, which allows the set points for pump on and pump off
oxygen percent levels to be received as user input. That is, the
controller can be set much like a room thermostat.

Although the exemplary arrangements have been
described based upon certain embodiments, a wide array of
modifications, variations, and alternative constructions are
also within the spirit and scope of the principles described
herein. Example arrangements for generating high-pressure
oxygen via electrochemical pumping in a multi-stage elec-
trolysis stack have been described herein with reference to
particular components, features, properties, attributes, rela-
tionships, and methods. However, it should be understood
that in other embodiments other arrangements may include
other components, features, properties, attributes, relation-
ships, and/or methods which provide similar capabilities and
functionality.

It will be readily understood that the features of exemplary
embodiments, as generally described and illustrated in the
Figures herein, can be arranged and designed in a wide variety
different configurations. That is, the features, structures,
and/or characteristics of embodiments or arrangements
described herein may be combined in any suitable manner in
one or more other embodiments or arrangements. Thus, the
detailed description of the exemplary embodiments of appa-
ratus and method, as represented in the attached Figures, is
not intended to limit the scope of the invention as claimed, but
is merely representative of selected exemplary embodiments
that implement the principles described herein.

In the foregoing description, certain terms may have been
used to describe example arrangements for purposes of brev-
ity, clarity, and understanding. For example, certain terms like
"upward", "downward", "higher", "lower" "left", "right",
"outer", "inner", "front", "rear", "top", and "bottom" may
have been used. However no unnecessary limitations are to be
implied therefrom because such terms have been used for
descriptive purposes and are intended to be broadly con-
strued. The terms are not to present limitations on the scope of
the exemplary embodiments, as defined by the claims hereof.
Moreover, the descriptions and illustrations herein are by way
of examples and the inventive teachings are not limited to the
specific details shown and described.

The novel structure, along with the methods of preparing
and using the novel structure, achieves at least one of the
above stated objectives, eliminates difficulties encountered in
the use of prior devices and systems, solves problems, and
attains the desirable results described herein.

In the following claims, any feature described as a means
for performing a function shall be construed as encompassing
any means capable of performing the recited function, and
shall not be limited to the particular means used for perform-
ing the function in the foregoing description, or mere equiva-
lents.

Having described the features, discoveries and principles
of the invention, the manner in which it is constructed and
operated and the advantages and useful results attained, the
new and useful structures, devices, elements, arrangements,
parts, combinations, systems, equipment, operations, meth-
ods, processes, and relationships are set forth in the appended
claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:
an electrochemical pump comprising a multi-stage elec-
trolysis stack,
wherein the stack is operable in carrying out multi-stage
pressurization of oxygen,
wherein the stack comprises a hermetically sealed outer
device perimeter,
wherein the stack includes a plurality of solid oxide elec-
trolysis cells,
wherein each cell includes a solid electrolyte sandwiched
between a cathode layer and an anode layer,
wherein the electrolyte comprises yttria stabilized zirconia
(YSZ) or other selective oxygen conducting material,
wherein each cell is individually wired in parallel,
wherein each cell comprises at least one anode,
wherein each cell comprises at least one cathode,
wherein each cell comprises a solid electrolyte,
wherein a potential in the range of 0.1-2.2 volts applied
across each cell is operable to cause:
(i) dissociation of oxygen into oxygen ions (O²⁻) on
a cathode side of the respective cell,
wherein the cathode side is at a first pressure,
(ii) migration of oxygen ions dissociated in (i) through the
electrolyte of the respective cell, and
(iii) recombination of oxygen ions that migrated in (ii) into
oxygen gas on an anode side of the respective cell,
wherein the anode side is at a second pressure,
wherein the second pressure is in the range of 0.2-10 atmos-
pheres greater than the first pressure.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the multi-
stage pressurization of oxygen includes a plurality of indi-
vidual sequential pumping stages, including a first pumping
stage and a last pumping stage,
wherein each sequential pumping stage is operable to pro-
duce an incremental increase in cumulative oxygen pres-
sure, which allows the last pumping stage to provide
pressurized oxygen at a final pressure level,
wherein the final pressure level is greater than any pressure
level provided by a preceding pumping stage of the
multi-stage pressurization of oxy-
gen.

3. The apparatus according to claim 2 wherein the last
pumping stage is operable to provide dry high-purity pressur-
ized oxygen.

4. The apparatus according to claim 2 wherein the pump is
operable to pump oxygen through the stack in a pumping
direction from a first cell of the stack through a last cell of the
stack,
wherein the first pumping stage is operable to cause:
(I) oxygen-containing fluid to dissociate into oxygen ions and residual byproducts adjacent the cathode layer of the first cell;
(II) oxygen ions dissociated in (i) to migrate through the electrolyte of the first cell; and
(III) oxygen ions that migrated in (ii) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the first cell; wherein the last pumping stage is operable to cause:
(IV) oxygen to dissociate into oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the last cell;
(V) oxygen ions dissociated in (iv) to migrate through the electrolyte of the last cell; and
(VI) oxygen ions that migrated in (v) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the last cell, wherein the oxygen is at the final pressure level.
5. The apparatus according to claim 4 wherein the pump includes a shell structure,
wherein the shell structure surrounds the stack,
wherein the shell structure includes at least one inlet port, wherein the at least one inlet port is in fluid communication with the cathode layer of the first cell,
wherein the shell structure includes at least one outlet port, wherein the at least one outlet port is in fluid communication with the anode layer of the last cell.
6. The apparatus according to claim 4 wherein in (I) the first pumping stage is operable to cause at least one of:
CO₂ to dissociate into oxygen ions and carbon monoxide (CO);
water vapor to dissociate into oxygen ions and hydrogen gas (H₂); or
ambient air to dissociate into oxygen ions and residual byproducts.
7. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein each respective insulator layer includes at least one of zirconia cloth, alumina and other electrically insulating ceramic materials.
8. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein each cathode layer and each anode layer include a respective electrode, wherein each electrode in the stack comprises a tapered porosity YSZ microstructure,
wherein each electrode includes an electro-catalyst deposited on surfaces of the microstructure, wherein the electro-catalyst comprises at least one of:
Lanthanum Strontium Cobalt Ferrite (LSCF),
Lanthanum Strontium Manganite (LSM),
Ni-YSZ, or Ni-ceria;
9. The apparatus according to claim 8 wherein the anode layer of at least one cell includes an electro-catalyst that comprises at least one of LSCF or LSM.
10. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein each cell comprises a cylindrical disk, wherein each disk comprises a thickness that extends from a first side to a second side, wherein the thickness is greater than 1000 microns, wherein each disk comprises an outer perimeter, wherein respective outer perimeters of the respective disks form the outer edge perimeter of the stack, wherein the pump includes a seal arrangement, wherein the seal arrangement hermetically seals each outer perimeter.
11. The apparatus according to claim 10 wherein the seal arrangement comprises a glass-ceramic seal arrangement.
12. The apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the pump includes a pressure containment structure, wherein the pressure containment structure comprises a multi-layer Ceramic-Matrix-Composite (CMC) reinforced fiber shell,
wherein the shell surrounds the stack.
13. The apparatus according to claim 12 wherein the pump is operable at temperatures greater than 450° C., wherein the pump includes an outer insulation layer, wherein the outer insulation layer encases the shell, wherein the outer insulation layer includes at least one of alumiosilicate fibers or aerogel material.
14. An apparatus comprising:
an electrochemical pump,
wherein the pump comprises a stack of solid oxide electrolysis cells,
wherein each cell includes a solid electrolyte sandwiched between electrode layers,
wherein the solid electrolyte includes at least one of yttria stabilized zirconia (YSZ) and doped ceria, wherein the electrode layers include a cathode layer and an anode layer,
wherein each electrode layer comprises a tapered porosity or other porous microstructure,
wherein each electrode layer includes an electro-catalyst deposited on surfaces of the microstructure, wherein the electro-catalyst comprises at least one of:
Lanthanum Strontium Cobalt Ferrite (LSCF),
Lanthanum Strontium Manganite (LSM),
Ni-YSZ, or Ni-ceria;
wherein each cell comprises a cylindrical disk, wherein each disk comprises an outer edge perimeter, wherein each cell is individually wired,
wherein the pump includes a respective an insulating layer comprised of at least one of zirconia cloth, alumina and other insulating ceramic material located between adjacent cells,
wherein each insulating layer is configured to electrically isolate respective cells,
wherein each insulating layer allows gas diffusion of oxygen therethrough,
wherein the pump is configured to apply a potential of 0.1 to 2.2 volts across each respective cell,
wherein the pump includes a seal arrangement, wherein the seal arrangement hermetically seals each outer edge perimeter,
wherein the pump includes a pressure containment structure,
wherein the pressure containment structure comprises a multi-layer reinforced fiber shell, wherein the stack is wrapped in the shell, wherein the shell is located radially outside of the seal arrangement,
wherein the pump includes an outer insulation layer, wherein the outer insulation layer encases the shell, wherein the outer insulation layer includes at least one of aluminum silicate fibers, or aerogel material;
wherein the pump includes heating elements located radially outside of the shell, wherein the pump is operable at temperatures greater than 450° C., wherein the pump is configured to carry out a multi-stage pressurization process in which the cells sequentially electrochemically pump oxygen to a higher pressure level,
wherein each respective stage of the multi-stage pressurization process involves a respective cell, wherein each respective stage causes: oxygen to dissociate into oxygen ions \((O^{2-})\) adjacent the cathode layer of the respective cell, the oxygen ions to migrate through the solid electrolyte of the respective cell, and the oxygen ions to recombine adjacent the anode layer of the respective cell, to form oxygen which is able to diffuse through a respective adjacent insulating layer toward a cathode layer of an adjacent cell; wherein each respective stage is operable to provide an incremental increase in oxygen pressurization on the order of 0.1 to 10 atmospheres, wherein a final stage of the multi-stage pressurization process is operable to produce high-purity dry pressurized oxygen.

15. The apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the stack includes a first cell and a last cell, wherein the shell includes at least one inlet port, wherein the at least one inlet port is in fluid communication with the cathode layer of the first cell, wherein the shell includes at least one outlet port, wherein the at least one outlet port is in fluid communication with the anode layer of the last cell.

16. The apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the anode layer of each cell includes an electro-catalyst that comprises at least one of LSM or LSCF.

17. The apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the stack includes a first cell and a last cell, wherein the first cell is operable to cause adjacent the cathode layer thereof, at least one of: CO\(_2\) to dissociate into oxygen ions and carbon monoxide (CO); water vapor to dissociate into oxygen ions and hydrogen gas \((H_2)\); or ambient air or other oxygen containing gas mixture to dissociate into oxygen ions and residual byproducts.

18. A method of producing pressurized oxygen, comprising:
   (a) operating an electrochemical pump,
   wherein the pump includes a stack of solid oxide electrolysis cells, wherein each cell includes a solid electrolyte sandwiched between a cathode layer and an anode layer, wherein the electrolyte comprises at least one of yttria stabilized zirconia (YSZ) and doped ceria, wherein each cell is individually wired, wherein the stack includes a respective electrical insulator layer located between respective adjacent cells, wherein each insulator layer allows diffusion of oxygen gas therethrough, wherein the pump is operable to cause multi-stage pressurization of oxygen to a final pressure level, in which oxygen is sequentially pumped through the stack in a pumping direction from a first cell of the stack through a last cell of the stack, wherein the multi-stage pressurization includes a plurality of individual respective pumping stages, including a first pumping stage and a last pumping stage, wherein each sequential pumping stage is operable to produce an incremental increase in cumulative oxygen pressure, which allows the last pumping stage to provide pressurized oxygen at the final pressure level, wherein each respective pumping stage involves a respective cell of the stack,
   wherein during the respective pumping stage a potential in the range of 0.1-2.2 volts is provided across the respective cell, wherein the first pumping stage involves the first cell, wherein the last pumping stage involves the last cell, wherein each respective pumping stage includes: (i) dissociation of oxygen into oxygen ions \((O^{2-})\) in a first area, wherein the first area is adjacent the cathode layer of the respective cell, wherein the first area is at a first pressure level, (ii) migration of oxygen ions dissociated in (i) through the electrolyte of the respective cell, and (iii) recombination of oxygen ions that migrated in (ii) into oxygen in a second area, wherein the second area is adjacent the anode layer of the respective cell, wherein the second area is at a second pressure level, wherein the second pressure level is in the range of 0.1 to 10 atmospheres greater than the first pressure level; and (b) operating the electrochemical pump to provide pressurized oxygen at the final pressure level.

19. The method according to claim 18 and comprising either I, II, or III, wherein I includes operating the pump to cause:
   (I-1) ambient air to dissociate into oxygen ions and residual byproducts adjacent the cathode layer of the first cell, wherein the ambient air is at an ambient pressure level; (I-2) oxygen ions dissociated in (I-1) to migrate through the electrolyte of the first cell; (I-3) oxygen ions that migrated in (I-2) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the first cell; (I-4) subsequent to (I-3), oxygen to dissociate into oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the last cell; (I-5) oxygen ions dissociated in (I-4) to migrate through the electrolyte of the last cell; and (I-6) oxygen ions that migrated in (I-5) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the last cell, wherein the oxygen is at the final pressure level; and wherein II includes operating the pump to cause:
   (II-1) water vapor to dissociate into hydrogen gas \((H_2)\) and oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the first cell, wherein the water vapor is at an ambient pressure level; (II-2) oxygen ions dissociated in (II-1) to migrate through the electrolyte of the first cell; (II-3) oxygen ions that migrated in (II-2) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the first cell; (II-4) subsequent to (II-3), oxygen to dissociate into oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the last cell; (II-5) oxygen ions dissociated in (II-4) to migrate through the electrolyte of the last cell; and (II-6) oxygen ions that migrated in (II-5) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the last cell, wherein the oxygen is at the final pressure level; and wherein III includes operating the pump to cause:
   (III-1) CO\(_2\) to dissociate into carbon monoxide \((CO)\) and oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the first cell, wherein the CO\(_2\) is at an ambient pressure level; (III-2) oxygen ions dissociated in (III-1) to migrate through the electrolyte of the first cell; (III-3) oxygen ions that migrated in (III-2) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the first cell; (III-4) subsequent to (III-3), oxygen to dissociate into oxygen ions adjacent the cathode layer of the last cell; (III-5) oxygen ions dissociated in (III-4) to migrate through the electrolyte of the last cell; and
(III-6) oxygen ions that migrated in (III-5) to recombine into oxygen adjacent the anode layer of the last cell, wherein the oxygen is at the final pressure level.

20. The method according to claim 18 wherein each electrode layer comprises a tapered porosity YSZ microstructure with an electro-catalyst deposited thereon, wherein the anode layer of each cell includes a deposited electro-catalyst that comprises at least one of: Lanthanum Strontium Cobalt Ferrite (LSCF), or Lanthanum Strontium Manganite (LSM).