

**Bekmetova Madina.–ht-19-4na Chemical technology faculti
cand of chem. siences. Iztleuov G. M.,profs. Zhorabaeva N.G.**

Ashitova N., Amirkbekov E., Dosbaeva A. , Abduova A.

SKU M.Auezov, Shymkent, republic of Kazakhstan

THE PROBLEM PURIFICATION WASTE WATER FROM POLLUTANTS

Water purification is the process of removing undesirable chemicals, biological contaminants, suspended solids and gases from contaminated water. The goal is to produce water fit for a specific purpose. Most water is purified for human consumption (drinking water), but water purification may also be designed for a variety of other purposes, including meeting the requirements of medical, pharmacological, chemical and industrial applications. In general the methods used include physical processes such as filtration, sedimentation, and distillation, biological processes such as slow sand filters or biologically active carbon, chemical processes such as flocculation and chlorination and the use of electromagnetic radiation such as ultraviolet light.

The purification process of water may reduce the concentration of particulate matter including suspended particles, parasites, bacteria, algae, viruses, fungi; and a range of dissolved and particulate material derived from the surfaces that water may have made contact with after falling as rain. The standards for drinking water quality are typically set by governments or by international standards. These standards will typically set minimum and maximum concentrations of contaminants for the use that is to be made of the water. It is not possible to tell whether water is of an appropriate quality by visual examination. Simple procedures such as boiling or the use of a household activated carbon filter are not sufficient for treating all the possible contaminants that may be present in water from an unknown source. Even natural spring water – considered safe for all practical purposes in the 19th century – must now be tested before determining what kind of treatment, if any, is needed. Chemical and microbiological analysis,

while expensive, are the only way to obtain the information necessary for deciding on the appropriate method of purification. Widely varied techniques are available to remove the fine solids, micro-organisms and some dissolved inorganic and organic materials. The choice of method will depend on the quality of the water being treated, the cost of the treatment process and the quality standards expected of the processed water. One of the first steps in a conventional water purification process is the addition of chemicals to assist in the removal of particles suspended in water. Particles can be inorganic such as clay and silt or organic such as algae, bacteria, viruses, protozoa and natural organic matter. Inorganic and organic particles contribute to the turbidity and colour of water.

The addition of inorganic coagulants such as aluminum sulfate (or alum) or iron (III) salts such as iron(III) chloride cause several simultaneous chemical and physical interactions on and among the particles. Within seconds, negative charges on the particles are neutralized by inorganic coagulants. Also within seconds, metal hydroxide precipitates of the aluminum and iron (III) ions begin to form. These precipitates combine into larger particles under natural processes such as Brownian motion and through induced mixing which is sometimes referred to as flocculation. The term most often used for the amorphous metal hydroxides is “floc.” Large, amorphous aluminum and iron (III) hydroxides adsorb and enmesh particles in suspension and facilitate the removal of particles by subsequent processes of sedimentation and filtration. Aluminum hydroxides are formed within a fairly narrow range, typically: 5.5 to about 7.7. Iron (III) hydroxides can form over a larger pH range including pH levels lower than are effective for alum, typically: 5.0 to 8.5.[1-2]

In the literature, there is much debate and confusion over the usage of the terms coagulation and flocculation—where does coagulation end and flocculation begin? In water purification plants, there is usually a high energy, rapid mix unit process (detention time in seconds) where the coagulant chemicals are added followed by flocculation basins (detention times range from 15 to 45 minutes)

Sedimentation. Waters exiting the flocculation basin may enter the sedimentation basin, also called a clarifier or settling basin. It is a large tank with low water velocities, allowing floc to settle to the bottom. The sedimentation basin is best located close to the flocculation basin so the transit between the two processes does not permit settlement or floc break up. Sedimentation basins may be rectangular, where water flows from end to end, or circular where flow is from the centre outward. Sedimentation basin outflow is typically over a weir so only a thin top layer of water—that furthest from the sludge—exits.

Sludge storage and removal

As particles settle to the bottom of a sedimentation basin, a layer of sludge is formed on the floor of the tank. This layer of sludge must be removed and treated. The amount of sludge that is generated is significant, often 3 to 5 percent of the total volume of water that is treated. The cost of treating and disposing of the sludge can be a significant part of the operating cost of a water treatment plant. The sedimentation tank may be equipped with mechanical cleaning devices that continually clean the bottom of the tank or the tank can be periodically taken out of service and cleaned manually.

References

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