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(54) **COPOLYMERS FOR NEAR-INFRARED RADIATION-SENSITIVE COATING COMPOSITIONS FOR POSITIVE-WORKING THERMAL LITHOGRAPHIC PRINTING PLATES**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

There is provided a copolymer having the general structure below, wherein a, b, and d are molar ratios varying between about 0.01 and about 0.90 and c is a molar ratio varying between about 0.01 and about 0.90; A1 represents monomer units comprising a cyano-containing pendant group in which the cyano is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer; A2 represents monomer units comprising two or more hydrogen bonding sites; A3 represents monomer units that increase solubility in organic solvents; and A4 represents monomer units that increase solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions. There is also provided a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating composition comprising this copolymer as well as a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating comprising this copolymer, a method of producing such a printing plate, and finally a method of printing using such a printing plate. Formula (I).

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**COPOLYMERS FOR NEAR-INFRARED
RADIATION-SENSITIVE COATING
COMPOSITIONS FOR POSITIVE-WORKING
THERMAL LITHOGRAPHIC PRINTING
PLATES**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to thermal lithographic printing plates and their coatings. More specifically, the invention relates to copolymers for use in near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating compositions for positive-working thermal lithographic printing plates.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] In lithographic printing, a printing plate is mounted on the cylinder of a printing press. The printing plate carries a lithographic image on its surface and a printed copy is obtained by applying ink to the image and then transferring the ink from the printing plate onto a receiver material, which typically is a sheet of paper. Generally, the ink is first transferred to an intermediate blanket, which in turn transfers the ink to the surface of the receiver material (offset printing).

[0003] In conventional, so-called “wet” lithographic printing, ink as well as an aqueous fountain solution (also called dampening liquid) are supplied to the lithographic image which consists of oleophilic (or hydrophobic, i.e. ink-accepting, water-repelling) areas as well as hydrophilic (or oleophobic, i.e. water-accepting, ink-repelling) areas. When the surface of the printing plate is moistened with water and ink is applied, the hydrophilic regions retain water and repel ink, and the ink-receptive regions accept ink and repel water. During printing, the ink is transferred to the surface of the receiver material upon which the image is to be reproduced.

[0004] Lithographic printing plates typically comprise an imageable layer (also called imaging layer or coating) applied over the hydrophilic surface of a substrate, typically aluminium. The imageable layer includes one or more radiation-sensitive components, often dispersed in a suitable binder.

[0005] To produce the lithographic image on the printing plate, the printing plate is imaged by targeted radiation. This can be carried out in different ways. In direct digital imaging (computer-to-plate), printing plates can be imaged with infrared or UV lasers or light sources. Such a laser beam can be digitally controlled via a computer; i.e. the laser can be turned on or off so that imagewise exposure of the precursor can be affected via stored digitized information in the computer. Therefore, the imageable layers of printing plates, which are to be imagewise exposed by means of such image-setters, need to be sensitive to radiation in the near-infrared (NIR) or ultraviolet (UV) regions of the spectrum. Thermal lithographic plates are plates sensitive to near-infrared radiation.

[0006] The imaging device will etch the image on the printing plate by eliciting a localized transformation of the imageable layer. Indeed, in such imaged systems, the imageable layer typically contains a dye or pigment that absorbs the incident radiation and the absorbed energy initiates the reaction producing the image. Exposure to radiation triggers a physical or chemical process in the imageable layer so that the imaged areas become different from the non-imaged areas and development will produce an image on the printing plate. The change in the imageable layer can be a change of hydrophilicity/oleophilicity, solubility, hardness, etc.

[0007] Following exposure, either the exposed regions or the unexposed regions of the imageable layer are removed by a suitable developer, revealing the underlying hydrophilic surface of the substrate. Developers are typically aqueous alkaline solutions, which can contain inorganic salts, such as sodium metasilicate, sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide and surfactants.

[0008] Alternatively, “on-press developable” lithographic printing plate can be directly mounted on a press after imaging, and are developed through contact with ink and/or fountain solution during initial press operation. In other words, either the exposed regions or the unexposed regions of the imageable layer are removed by the ink and/or fountain solution, not by a developer. More specifically, a so-called on-press development system is one in which an exposed printing plate is fixed on the plate cylinder of a printing press, and a fountain solution and ink are fed thereto while revolving the cylinder to remove non-image areas. This technique allows an imaged, but un-developed printing plate (also called a printing plate precursor) to be mounted as is on a press and be made into a printing plate on an ordinary printing line.

[0009] If the exposed regions are removed, the precursor is positive working. Conversely, if the unexposed regions are removed, the precursor is negative working. In each instance, the regions of the imageable layer (i.e., the image areas) that remain are ink-receptive, and the regions of the hydrophilic surface revealed by the developing process accept water and aqueous solutions, typically a fountain solution, and do not accept ink.

[0010] The use of copolymers comprising a cyano (—CN) group directly attached to the polymeric backbone for manufacturing single- and multiple-layer positive-working thermal lithographic offset printing plates is known in the art. These copolymers with cyano (—CN) groups directly attached to the polymeric backbone typically provide good film-forming properties, mechanical strength and chemical resistance on press.

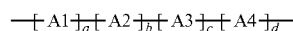
[0011] Acrylonitrile and methacrylonitrile are liquids with low boiling point (<100° C.). They have recently been classified as hazardous and very toxic materials. They thus require special handling and permission for transportation. Acrylonitrile and methacrylonitrile residues cannot be released from a product in excess of 1 ppm (airborne concentration) as an eight (8)-hour time-weighted average, under the expected conditions of processing, use, and handling. Such requirement is very difficult to achieve when using acrylonitrile and methacrylonitrile containing copolymers for the production of lithographic offset printing plates.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] In accordance with the present invention, there is provided:

[0013] 1. A copolymer having the general structure:

[0014] wherein



[0015] a, b, and d are molar ratios varying between about 0.01 and about 0.90 and c is a molar ratio varying between 0 and about 0.90,

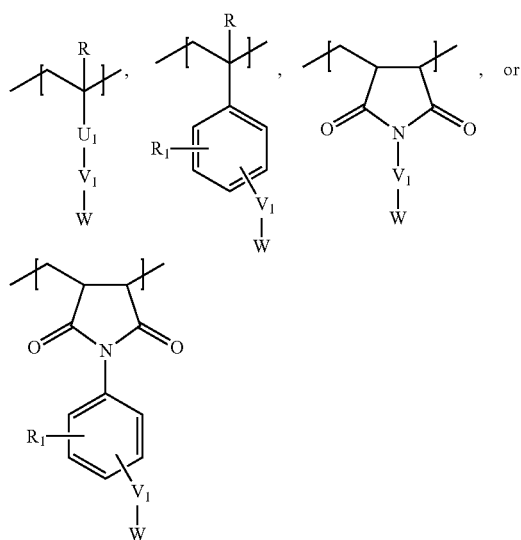
[0016] A1 represents monomer units comprising a cyano-containing pendant group in which the cyano is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer;

[0017] A2 represents monomer units comprising two or more hydrogen bonding sites;

[0018] A3 represents monomer units that increase solubility in organic solvents; and

[0019] A4 represents monomer units that increase solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions.

[0020] 2. The copolymer of item 1, wherein A1 is of formula:



[0021] wherein:

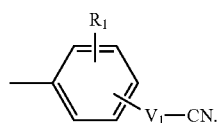
[0022] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0023] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups, the alkyl substituents optionally being substituted with one or more cyano,

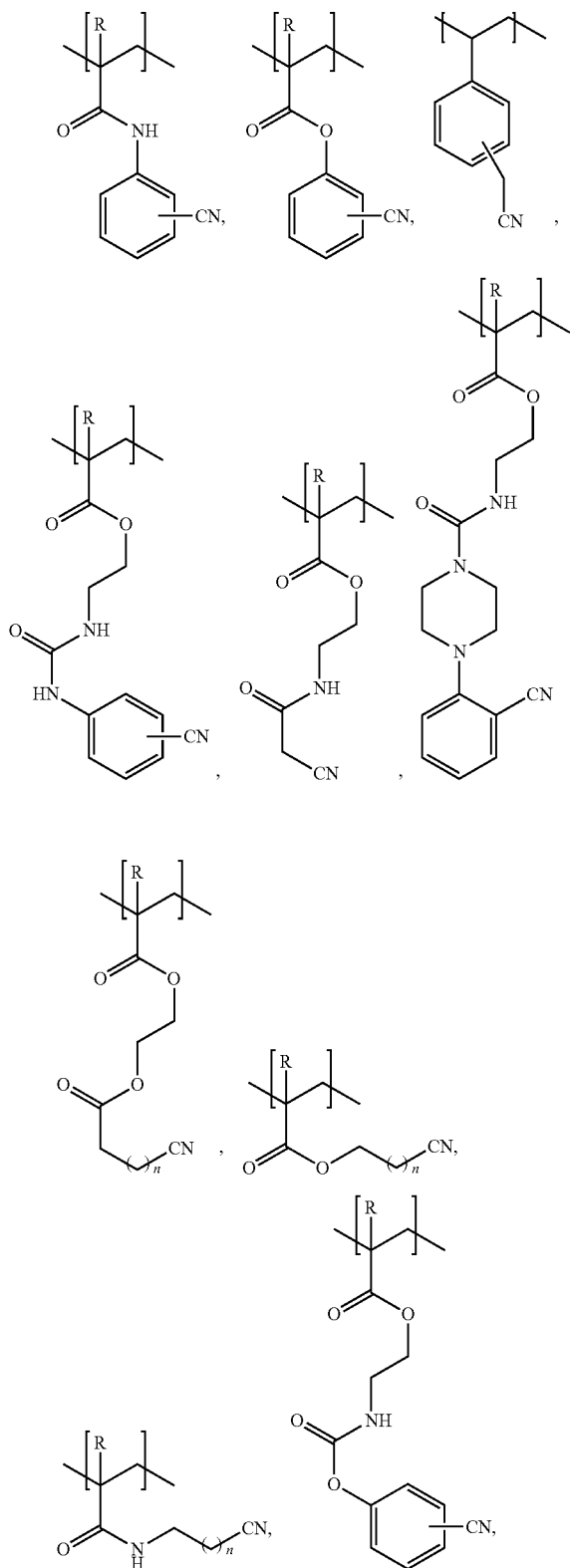
[0024] U₁ is an amide or ester linker,

[0025] V₁ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, the alkyl optionally being substituted with one or more cyano, and

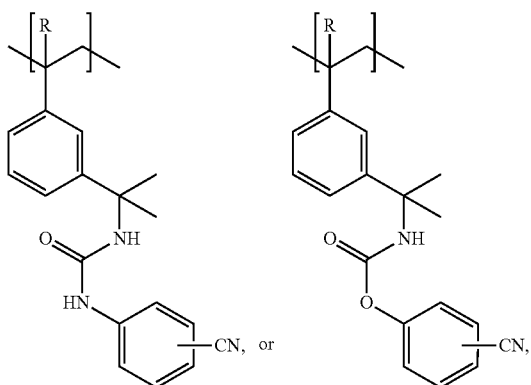
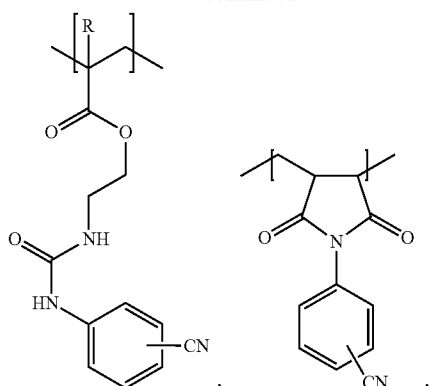
[0026] W is —CN or



[0027] 3. The copolymer of item 1 or 2, wherein A1 is



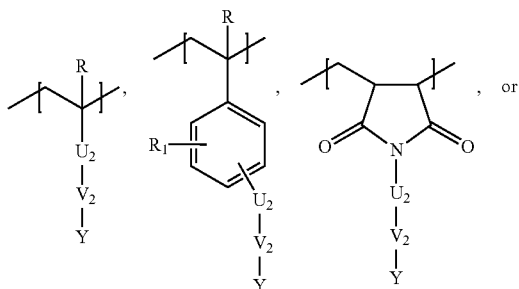
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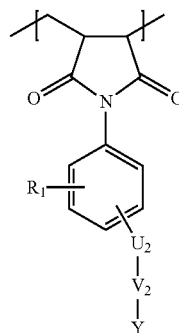
[0028] wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl and n varies between 1 and 10.

[0029] 4. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 3, wherein A2 comprises a pendant group comprising a 5,5-dialkylhydantoin group such as a 5,5-dimethylhydantoin group, an aminosulfonamide group, or hydroxy group.

[0030] 5. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 3, wherein A2 is of formula:



-continued



[0031] wherein:

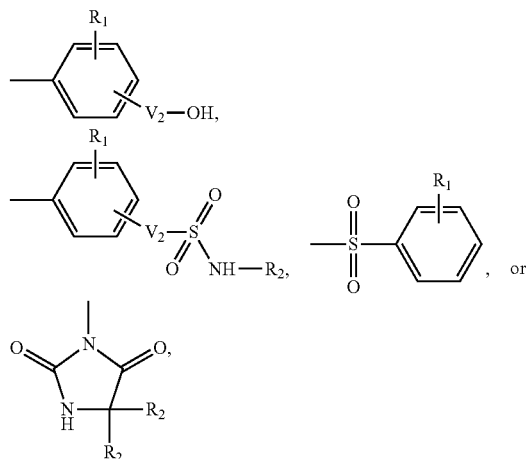
[0032] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0033] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents, the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups,

[0034] U₂ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

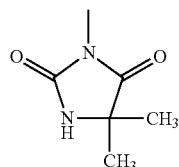
[0035] V₂ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and

[0036] Y is —OH, —SO₂—NH—R₂,

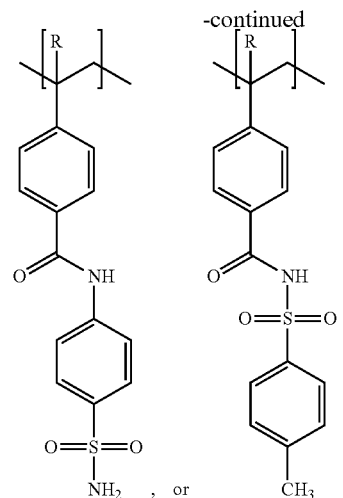
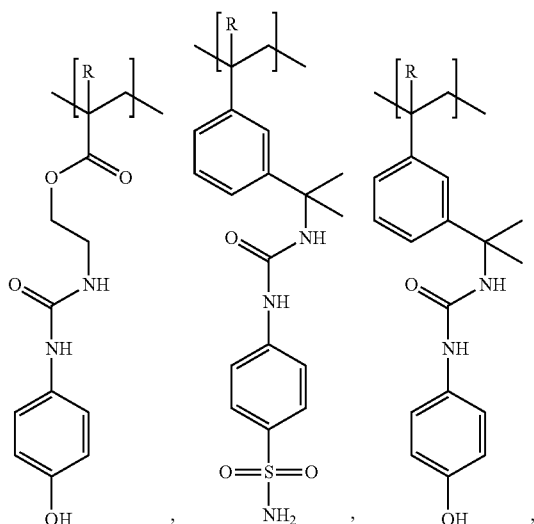
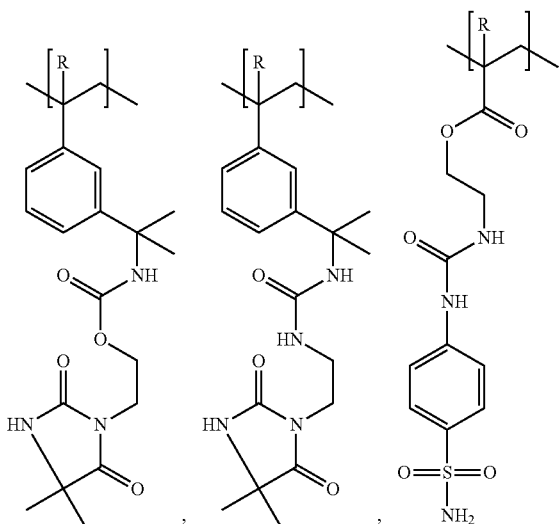
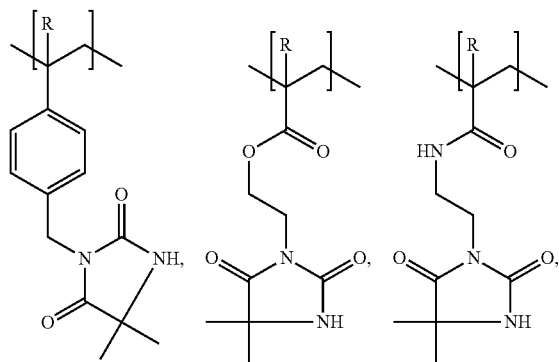


[0037] wherein R₂ each time it appears is independently hydrogen or alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional group.

[0038] 6. The copolymer of item 5, wherein Y is



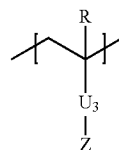
[0039] 7. The copolymer of item 5, wherein A2 is:



[0040] 8. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 7, wherein c varies between about 0.01 and about 0.90.

[0041] 9. The copolymer of item 8, wherein A3 comprises an alkyl or aryl pendant group, the aryl being eventually substituted with alkyl.

[0042] 10. The copolymer of item 8, wherein A3 is of formula:



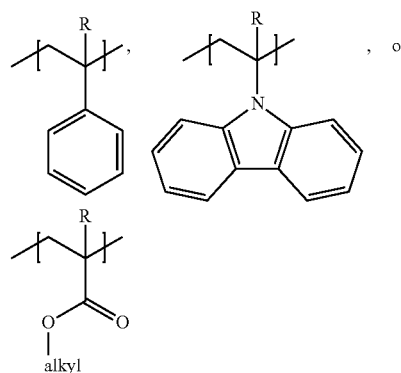
[0043] wherein

[0044] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0045] U₃ is absent and is an amide or ester linker, and

[0046] Z is alkyl or aryl, the alkyl being optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide and the aryl being optionally substituted with one or more alkyls that are optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide.

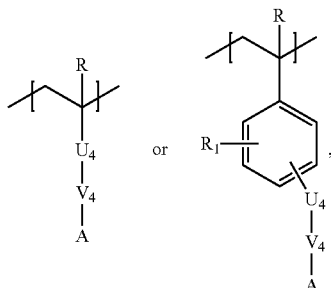
[0047] 11. The copolymer of item 9, wherein A3 is:



[0048] wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl.

[0049] 12. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 10, wherein A4 comprises a pendant group comprising a carboxylic acid group or a phosphoric acid group.

[0050] 13. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 11, wherein A4 is of formula:



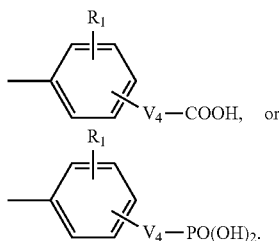
[0051] wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0052] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups,

[0053] U₄ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

[0054] V₄ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and

[0055] A is —COOH, —PO(OH)₂,



[0056] 14. The copolymer of any one of items 1 to 12, wherein A4 is a monomer unit obtained by polymerizing acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, 4-carboxyphenylmethacrylamide, 4-carboxyphenylacrylamide, vinyl benzoic acid, vinyl phosphoric acid, methacrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid, or acrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid monomers.

[0057] 15. A near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating comprising:

[0058] a copolymer as defined in any one of items 1 to 13;

[0059] a binder resin;

[0060] a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound; and

[0061] optional additives.

[0062] 16. A positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating being a coating prepared from the coating composition of item 14.

[0063] 17. A positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating comprising:

[0064] a copolymer as defined in any one of items 1 to 13;

[0065] a binder resin;

[0066] a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound; and

[0067] optional additives.

[0068] 18. A method of producing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate, the method comprising the steps of:

[0069] a) providing a substrate, and

[0070] b) coating the coating composition of item 14 on the substrate.

[0071] 19. A method of printing, the method comprising the steps of:

[0072] a) providing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate according to item 15 or 16,

[0073] b) imaging the printing plate with near-infrared radiation,

[0074] c) developing the printing plate, and

[0075] d) using the printing plate on a printing press to print.

[0076] e) using the printing plate on a printing press to print.

[0077] 20. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A1 as defined in any one of items 1 to 3.

[0078] 21. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A2 as defined in any one of items 1 and 4 to 7.

[0079] 22. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A3 as defined in any one of items 1 and 9 to 11.

[0080] 23. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A4 as defined in any one of items 1, 12, and 13.

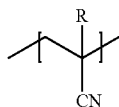
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0081] Copolymers for Positive-Working Thermal Lithographic Printing Plates

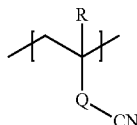
[0082] Turning now to the invention in more details, there is provided a copolymer comprising monomer units A1, which are monomer units comprising a cyano-containing pendant group in which the cyano is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer and at least one other type of monomer units.

[0083] As used herein, a “copolymer” is a polymer made of at least two different types of monomer units. Such monomer units are relatively small molecules linked with relatively large numbers of other monomer units to form a chain, i.e. a polymer or copolymer. As used herein, the “backbone” of a polymer or copolymer means the series of covalently bonded atoms from the monomer units that together create the continuous chain of the polymer or copolymer. A “pendant group” is a group of atoms attached to, but not part of, the backbone of the copolymer.

[0084] As such then, a “cyano-containing pendant group” is a pendant group that comprises a cyano (—C≡N) group. Thus, in the above, the cyano group, which is comprised in a pendant group, is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer; it is rather attached to the pendant group, which is in turns attached to the backbone as in the more specific embodiments shown below. More specifically, the monomer unit having a cyano group containing pendant group cannot be

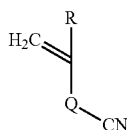


wherein R is any pendant group. Rather, this monomer unit may be of formula

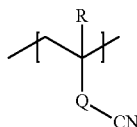


wherein R and Q are any pendant groups.

[0085] Herein, a "monomer" is a compound that becomes a monomeric unit upon polymerization. For example,



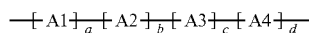
is the monomer producing monomeric unit



in a polymer or copolymer.

[0086] The copolymer is for use in near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating compositions for positive-working thermal lithographic printing plates. In embodiments, the copolymer may be a high-molecular weight copolymer, i.e. a copolymer with a molecular weight of 10,000 g/mol and more.

[0087] In embodiments, the copolymer has the general structure:



[0088] wherein a, b, and d are molar ratios varying between about 0.01 and about 0.90 and c is a molar ratio varying between about 0 and about 0.90,

[0089] A1 represents monomer units comprising a cyano-containing pendant group in which the cyano is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer;

[0090] A2 represents monomer units comprising two or more hydrogen bonding sites;

[0091] A3 represents monomer units that increase solubility in organic solvents; and

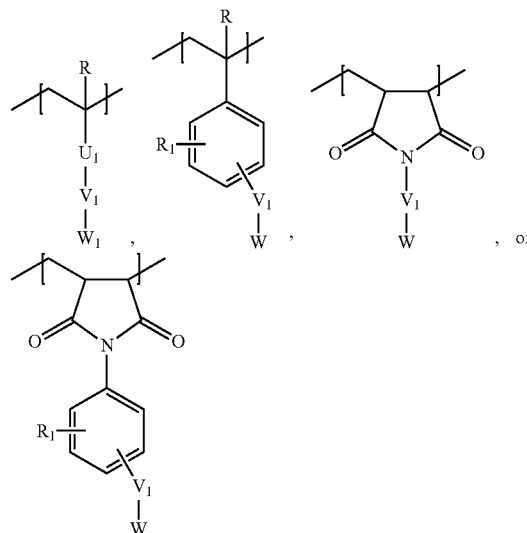
[0092] A4 represents monomer units that increase solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions.

[0093] It is to be understood from the above general structure that the copolymer can simultaneously comprise two or

more different A1 monomer units, two or more different A2 monomer units, two or more different A3 monomer units and/or two or more different A4 monomer units.

[0094] In the above, c can be 0, which means that A3 is optional. Thus, in embodiments, A3 is absent from the above chemical structure. In other embodiments, c varies between about 0.01 and about 0.90. In embodiments, a, b, c, and/or d are 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, or 0.8 or more and/or are 0.8, 0.7, 0.6, 0.5, 0.4, 0.3, 0.2, 0.1 or less.

[0095] In embodiments, A1 is of formula:



[0096] wherein:

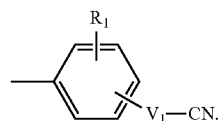
[0097] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0098] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl or alkoxy substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups, the alkyl substituents optionally being substituted with one or more cyano,

[0099] U₁ is an amide or ester linker,

[0100] V₁ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, the alkyl optionally being substituted with one or more cyano, and

[0101] W is —CN or

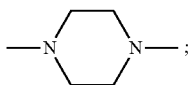


[0102] Herein, when it is said that an alkyl comprises (or optionally comprises) a functional group, it means that the functional group may be either at end of the alkyl or in between any two carbon atoms of the alkyl. For more certainty, when more than one functional group is comprised in an alkyl, the functional groups do not need to be separated by carbon atoms of the alkyl; i.e. they may be directly attached to one another. It is understood that when such a functional

group (having two available bonds as shown below) is located at an end of the alkyl, one of its two available bonds will be attached to the terminal carbon atom of the alkyl and the other will be attached to a hydrogen atom.

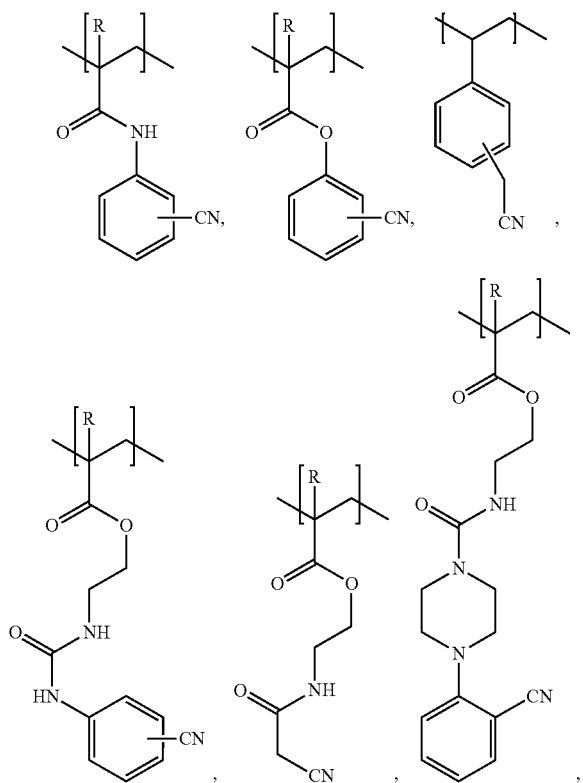
[0103] Herein, when it is said that an alkyl is substituted (or optionally substituted) with a group, this expression has its regular meaning in the art, i.e. one of the hydrogen atoms of the alkyl is replaced by the group.

[0104] For more certainty, herein an ether functional group is $-\text{O}-$; an ester functional group (or linker) is $-(\text{C}=\text{O})-\text{O}-$ or $-\text{O}-(\text{C}=\text{O})-$; an amine functional group is $-\text{NR}_3-$, an amide functional group (or linker) is $-(\text{C}=\text{O})-\text{NR}_3-$ or $-\text{NR}_3-(\text{C}=\text{O})-$; an urea functional group is $-\text{NR}_3-(\text{C}=\text{O})-\text{NR}_3-$; a piperazinyl functional group is

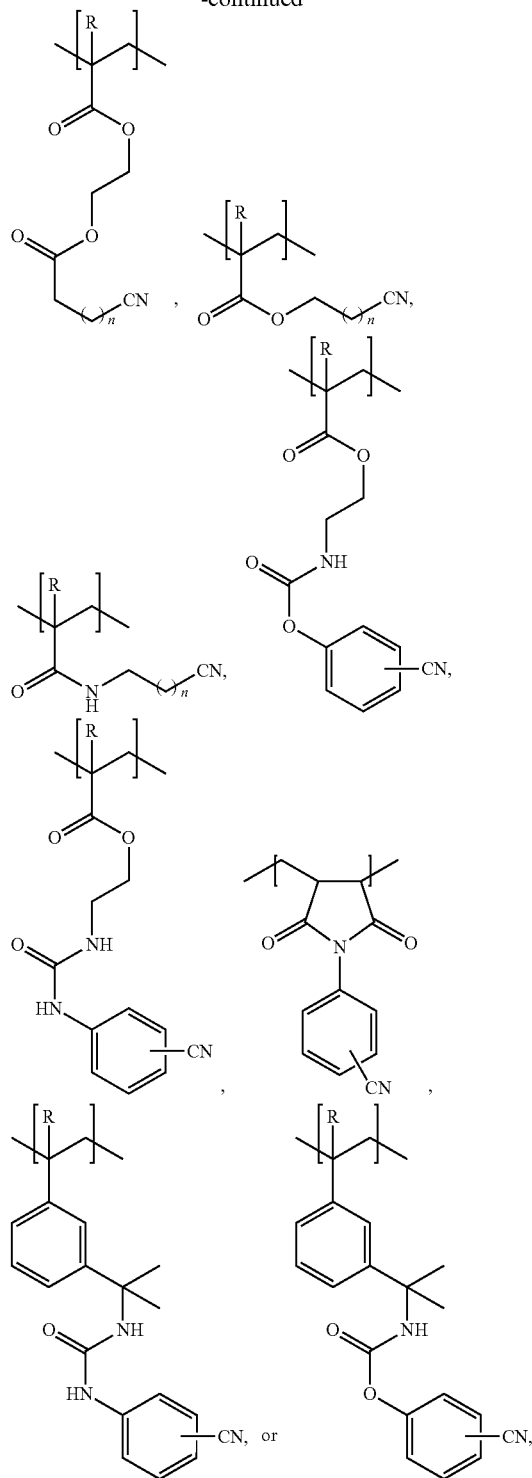


a sulfonamide functional group is $-\text{SO}_2-\text{NR}_3-$ or $-\text{NR}_3-\text{SO}_2-$; and a carbamate functional group is $-\text{NR}_3-(\text{C}=\text{O})-\text{O}-$ or $-\text{O}-(\text{C}=\text{O})-\text{NR}_3-$. In these functional groups, R_3 is hydrogen or alkyl, the alkyl being optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide.

[0105] In embodiments, A1 is



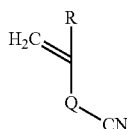
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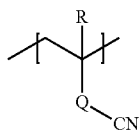
[0106] wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl and n varies between 1 and 10.

[0107] In a related aspect, the present invention also relates to monomers. More specifically, the present invention relates to monomers corresponding to any and all of the above-described A1 monomer units, individually or together as a group, as well as to any and all subsets thereof.

[0108] For the sake of concision, the formulas of these monomers are not repeated here. The skilled person will easily infer these formulas from the formulas of the A1 monomer units given above. Indeed, as used herein, a “monomer” is a compound that becomes a monomeric unit upon polymerization. For example,



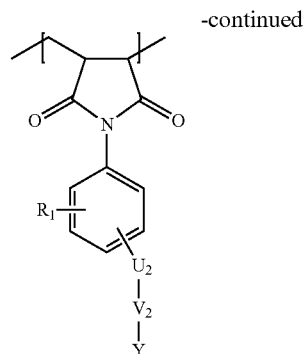
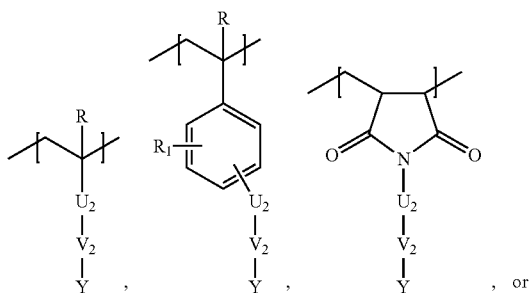
is the monomer producing monomeric unit



in a polymer or copolymer. The skilled person will easily appreciate that the monomer corresponding to any given monomeric unit will be identical to that monomeric unit except that the two bonds linking the monomeric unit to two other monomer units (to the left and to the right in the above formula) are replaced by a double bond.

[0109] As stated above, A2 is a monomer unit comprising two or more hydrogen bonding sites. In embodiments, A2 comprises three, four or five hydrogen bonding sites. A2 comprises functional groups capable of forming hydrogen bonds. Such functional groups are well-known to persons of skill in the art and include groups containing a hydrogen atom in a polar covalent bond and groups containing an electronegative atom with a pair of free electrons. Non-limiting examples of such groups include hydroxy, carboxy, esters, amines, amides and groups obtained by combining any of them.

[0110] In specific embodiments, A2 is of formula:



[0111] wherein:

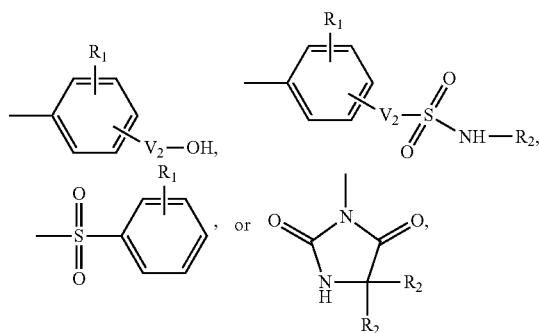
[0112] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0113] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents, the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups,

[0114] U₂ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

[0115] V₂ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and

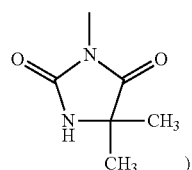
[0116] Y is —OH, —SO₂—NH—R₂,



[0117] wherein R₂ each time it appears is independently hydrogen or alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional group.

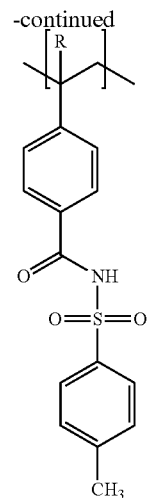
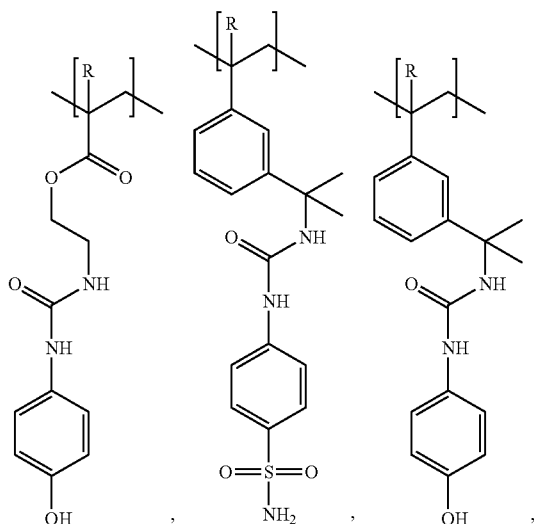
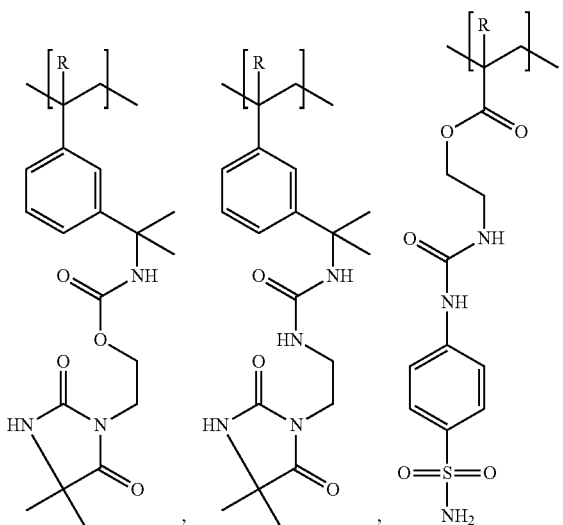
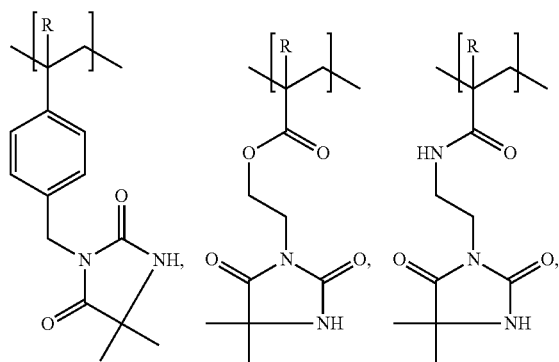
[0118] In embodiments, A2 comprises a pendant group comprising a 5,5-dialkylhydantoin such as

[0119] 5,5-dimethylhydantoin group (i.e.



an aminosulfonamide group (such as —NH—C₆H₄—SO₂—NH₂), or hydroxy group.

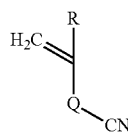
[0120] In embodiments, A2 is



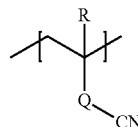
wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl.

[0121] In a related aspect, the present invention also relates to monomers. More specifically, the present invention relates to monomers corresponding to any and all of the above-described A2 monomer units, individually or together as a group, as well as to any and all subsets thereof.

[0122] For the sake of concision, the formulas of these monomers are not repeated here. The skilled person will easily infer these formulas from the formulas of the A2 monomer units given above. Indeed, as used herein, a “monomer” is a compound that becomes a monomeric unit upon polymerization. For example,



is the monomer producing monomeric unit



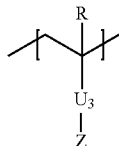
in a polymer or copolymer. The skilled person will easily appreciate that the monomer corresponding to any given monomeric unit will be identical to that monomeric unit except that the two bonds linking the monomeric unit to two other monomer units (to the left and to the right in the above formula) are replaced by a double bond.

[0123] As stated above, A3 is a monomer unit that increases in organic solvents. The organic solvents include those typically used in the manufacture of thermal lithographic printing plates; for example: alcohol, ketone, N,N,-dimethylformamide, N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone, 1,3-dioxolane and other common polar solvents.

[0124] In embodiments, A3 comprises an alkyl or aryl pendant group. The alkyl and aryl groups increase solubility in

organic solvents. The solubility of the copolymer can thus be modulated by varying molar ratio c.

[0125] In embodiments, A3 is of formula:



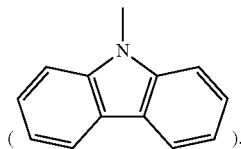
[0126] wherein

[0127] R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

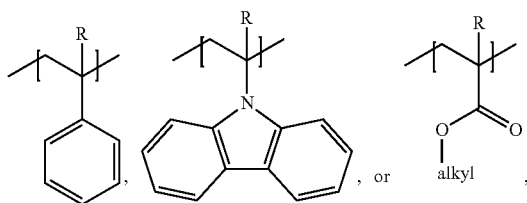
[0128] U₃ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker, and

[0129] Z is alkyl or aryl, the alkyl being optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide and the aryl being optionally substituted with one or more alkyls that are optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide.

[0130] In embodiments, Z is carbazole



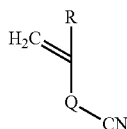
[0131] In embodiments, A3 is:



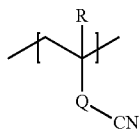
wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl.

[0132] In a related aspect, the present invention also relates to monomers. More specifically, the present invention relates to monomers corresponding to any and all of the above-described A3 monomer units, individually or together as a group, as well as to any and all subsets thereof.

[0133] For the sake of concision, the formulas of these monomers are not repeated here. The skilled person will easily infer these formulas from the formulas of the A3 monomer units given above. Indeed, as used herein, a "monomer" is a compound that becomes a monomeric unit upon polymerization. For example,



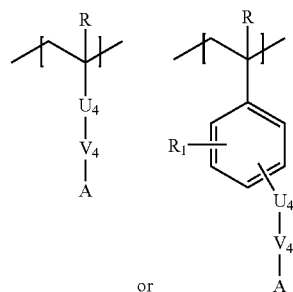
is the monomer producing monomeric unit



in a polymer or copolymer. The skilled person will easily appreciate that the monomer corresponding to any given monomeric unit will be identical to that monomeric unit except that the two bonds linking the monomeric unit to two other monomer units (to the left and to the right in the above formula) are replaced by a double bond.

[0134] As stated above, A4 increases solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions. Thus, A4 typically comprises a pendant group comprising an acidic functional group, such as a carboxylic acid (—COOH) or a phosphoric acid (—PO(OH)₂). These acidic functional groups increase solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions. The solubility of the copolymer can thus be modulated by varying molar ratio d.

[0135] In specific embodiments, A4 is of formula:



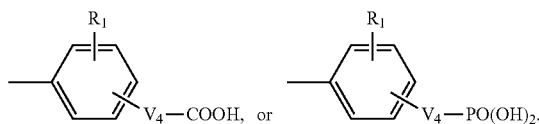
[0136] wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

[0137] R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperaziny, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups,

[0138] U₄ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

[0139] V₄ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperaziny, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and

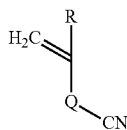
[0140] A is —COOH, —PO(OH)₂,



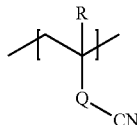
[0141] In embodiments, A4 is a monomer unit obtained by polymerizing acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, 4-carboxyphenylmethacrylamide, 4-carboxyphenylacrylamide, vinyl benzoic acid, vinyl phosphoric acid, methacrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid, or acrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid monomers.

[0142] In a related aspect, the present invention also relates to monomers. More specifically, the present invention relates to monomers corresponding to any and all of the above-described A4 monomer units, individually or together as a group, as well as to any and all subsets thereof.

[0143] For the sake of concision, the formulas of these monomers are not repeated here. The skilled person will easily infer these formulas from the formulas of the A4 monomer units given above. Indeed, as used herein, a "monomer" is a compound that becomes a monomeric unit upon polymerization. For example,



is the monomer producing monomeric unit



in a polymer or copolymer. The skilled person will easily appreciate that the monomer corresponding to any given monomeric unit will be identical to that monomeric unit except that the two bonds linking the monomeric unit to two other monomer units (to the left and to the right in the above formula) are replaced by a double bond.

[0144] Methods of Making Copolymers

[0145] The copolymers of the invention typically have reduced toxicity and are easy and inexpensive to manufacture. They can be obtained by copolymerizing the corresponding monomers in organic solvents using free radical initiators. Examples of such initiators include 2,2'-azobis(2-methylbutyronitrile), benzoyl peroxide, and ammonium persulfate. The resulting copolymers are then isolated by precipitation in water or mixtures of water and alcohol, filtered and dried until constant weight.

[0146] Near-Infrared Radiation-Sensitive Coating Compositions for Positive-Working Thermal Lithographic Printing Plates

[0147] In another aspect, the present invention relates to the use of the above-described copolymers in near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating compositions for single- or multiple-layer positive-working thermal lithographic printing plates. Such plates can be directly imaged with near-infrared laser imaging devices in computer-to-plate and digital offset printing technologies.

[0148] Thus, the present invention relates to a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating composition for a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate, the composition comprising:

[0149] a copolymer as defined above, preferably in an amount between about 15 and about 85% by weight;

[0150] a binder resin, preferably in an amount between about 15 and about 85% by weight;

[0151] a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound, preferably in an amount between about 1.0 and about 15% by weight; and

[0152] optional additives, preferably in an amount between amount 0.50 and about 2.0% by weight.

[0153] It is to be understood from the above that the coating composition may comprise a mixture of copolymers, a mixture of binder resins, a mixture of near-infrared radiation-absorbing compounds, and/or a mixture of optional additives, such as visible colorants, film-forming additives and stabilizers.

[0154] Such coating compositions can be used to prepare a coating for a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate. The coating composition is radiation-sensitive in that, upon exposure to radiation, there will be a physical or chemical process in the coating (produced using the coating composition) so that 1) the imaged areas will be different from the non-imaged areas after exposure to radiation and 2) development will produce an image on the printing plate.

[0155] Binder Resins

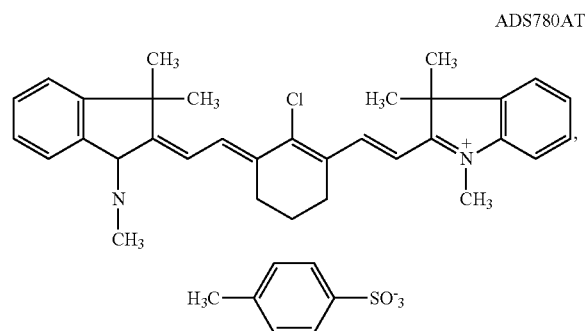
[0156] According to the present invention, the coating composition comprises binder resins, preferably in an amount between about 15-20% and about 80-85% by weight. Suitable binder resins for use in positive-working thermal lithographic printing plates are well known to the skilled person.

[0157] Examples of binder resins include polymers and copolymers comprising hydroxy groups that can form a hydrogen bonding network with the copolymers of the invention. Such binder resins are, for example, phenolic resins, acetal copolymers and cellulosic polymers. In embodiments, the binder resin is Thermolak® 7525 (a phenolic resin, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada), Thermolak® 0802 (an acetal copolymer, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada) and cellulose acetate hydrogen phthalate (available from Kodak, Kingsport, Tenn., USA).

[0158] Near-Infrared Radiation-Absorbing Compound

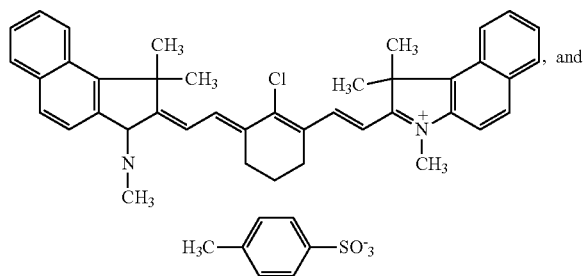
[0159] According to the present invention, the coating composition further comprises a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound, preferably in an amount between about 1.0 and about 15% by weight. Suitable near-infrared radiation-absorbing compounds for use in positive-working thermal lithographic printing plates are well known to the skilled person. Such near-infrared radiation-absorbing compounds have one or more absorption bands between about 780 and about 1,100 nm. These materials convert incoming near-infrared radiation into heat.

[0160] Suitable near-infrared absorbing compounds are, for example, cyanine molecular and merocyanine dyes, such as that described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,397,690 and 6,326,122, which are incorporated herein by reference. Other examples of near-infrared absorbing molecular dyes include the following, which available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada:

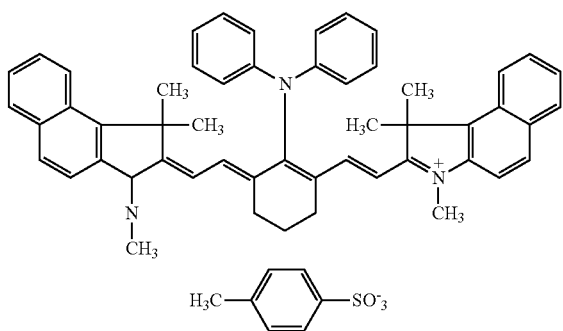


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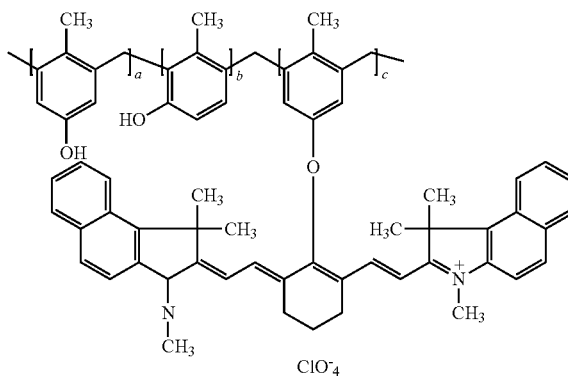


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wherein a, b, c, d, and e are the molar ratios, which are 0.10, 0.30, 0.50, 0.08 and 0.02, respectively; and

Thermolak®1010



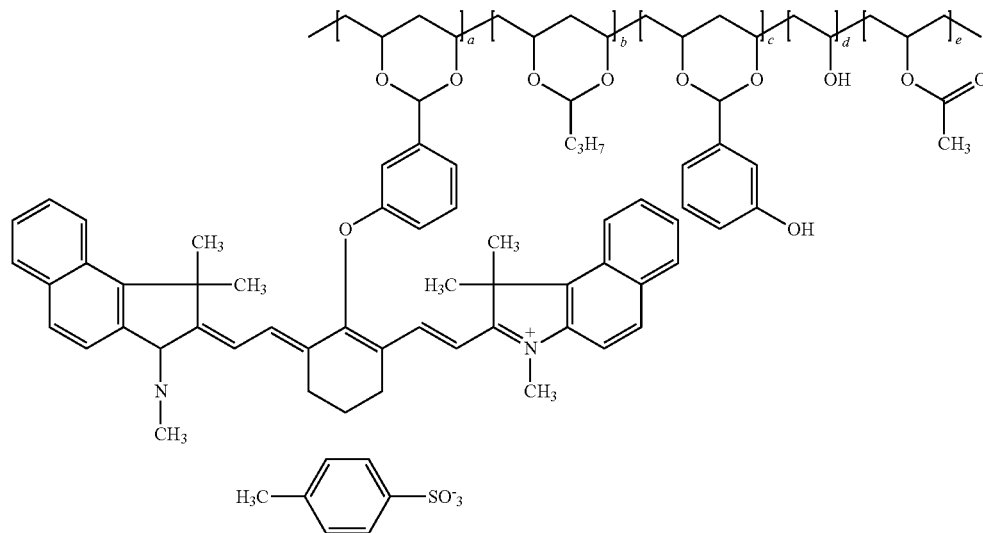
wherein a, b, and c are the molar ratios, which are 0.73, 0.25, and 0.02 respectively.

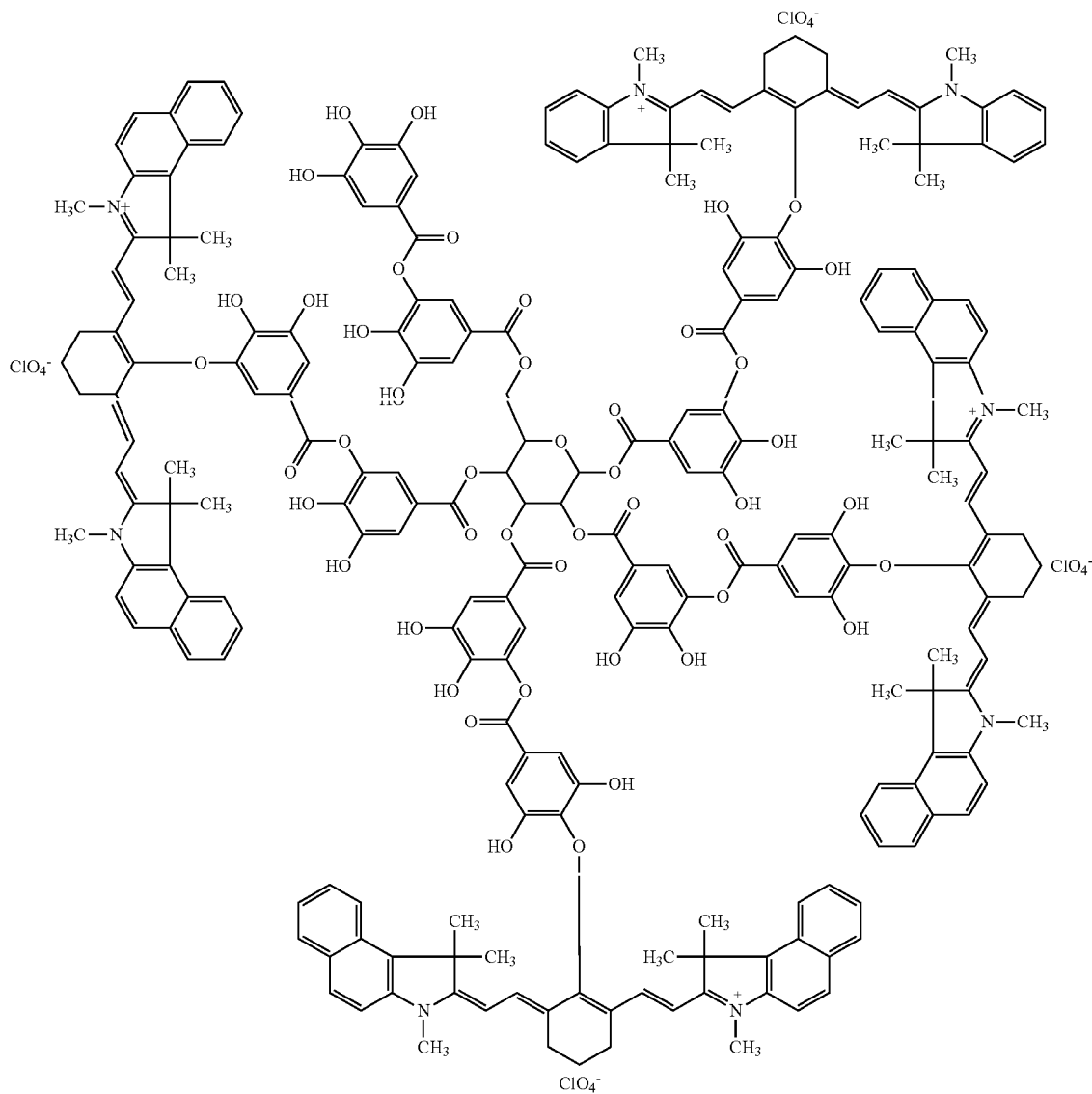
[0162] The amount of such near-infrared radiation-absorbing polymers in the coating composition is preferably between about 7 and about 15 weight percent.

[0163] Another near-infrared radiation-absorbing materials that can be used in the coating composition of the present invention may be the near-infrared radiation-absorbing galotannic compounds described in U.S. Provisional Patent Application 61/255,918, which is incorporated herein by reference. These compounds are available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada. One example of such galotannic compound is:

[0161] Other suitable near-infrared absorbing compounds are the polymers described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,124,425; 6,177,182; and 7,473,515, which are incorporated herein by reference. Yet other suitable near-infrared absorbing polymers are available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada, and have the following structures:

Thermolak®8010





Thermolak® 9031.

[0164] The amount of such near-infrared radiation-absorbing gallotannic compounds is preferably between about 2 and about 5 weight percent.

[0165] Optional Additives

[0166] The optional additives that can be used in the above-described coating composition include, for example, visible colorants, film-forming agents and shelf-life stabilizers. Such additives and their use are well known to the persons of skill in the art.

[0167] In embodiments, visible colorants having absorption bands between 450 and 780 nm are used, preferably in an amount between about 1 and about 5 weight percent. Examples of such visible colorants include cationic dyes, such as basic blue 3, basic blue 7, basic blue 11, basic blue 17, basic blue 26, basic blue 66, basic red 9, basic red 29, basic violet 2, basic violet 3, basic violet 4, basic violet 6, basic violet 14, basic green 4 and basic green 5.

[0168] The coating composition may further comprise film-forming agents to provide more uniformly coated films and to provide a more slippery top surface so as to reduce the formation of scratches during handling and packaging. Examples of film-forming agents include siloxane copolymers having polyether, polyester and alkyl pendant groups, such as that commercially available from BYK USA (Wallingford, Conn., USA) under trade names BYK 306, BYK 307, BYK 310, BYK 333, and BYK 337. Another suitable film-forming agent is a siloxane copolymer comprising polyether and alkyl pendant groups available from American Dye Source, Inc. under trade name Thermolak® P1000S. The amount of film-forming agents in the coating compositions is preferably between about 1 and about 6 weight percent.

[0169] The coating composition may further comprise shelf-life stabilizers such as that described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,884,568, including 3-mercapto-1,2,4-triazole; 3-mercapto-

4-methyl-4H-1,2,4-triazole; 3-mercapto-5-(4-pyridyl)-1H-1,2,4-triazole; 2-mercaptobenzimidazole; 2-mercaptobenzoxazole; 2-mercaptobenzothiazole; 6-ethoxy-2-mercaptobenzothiazole; 2-mercapto-5-methyl-1,3,4-thiadiazole; 2-mercapto-5-phenyl-1,3,4-oxadiazole; 2-mercapto-5-(4-pyridyl)-1,3,4-oxadiazole; 5-mercapto-3-methylthio-1,2,4-thiadiazole; 2-mercapto-5-methylthio-1,3,4-thiadiazole; 2-mercaptoimidazole; 2-mercapto-1-methylimidazole; 5-mercapto-1-methyl-1H-tetrazole; and 5-mercapto-1-phenyl-1H-tetrazole. The amount of thermal stabilizers in the coating compositions is preferably between about 1 and about 4 weight percent.

[0170] The coating composition may also comprise one or more suitable solvents. The solvent allows for the formation of a coating on a substrate. Any solvent known to the person of skill in the art to be appropriate for this purpose can be used. Non-limiting examples of such solvent include n-propanol, isopropanol, 2-methoxy propanol, ethyl glycol, water or a mixture thereof.

[0171] Positive-Working Thermal Lithographic Printing Plates and Methods of Producing and Using

[0172] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating being a coating prepared from the above-described coating composition.

[0173] In another related aspect, the present invention relates to a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating comprising:

[0174] a copolymer as defined above;

[0175] a binder resin as defined above;

[0176] a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound as defined above; and

[0177] optional additives as defined above.

[0178] In the printing plate, the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating is deposited on a substrate. In embodiments, the substrate is anodized aluminum, plastic films or paper. Aluminum substrates may be brushed-grained or electro-grained, then anodized with acidic solutions. The near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating may have a coating weight between about 1.0 and about 3.0 g/m².

[0179] In embodiments, there may be one or more layers between the substrate and the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating and/or on top of the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating as known to the person of skill in the art. For example, a polymeric adhesion-promoting and/or heat-insulating layer may be present between the substrate and the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating. This layer may be obtained from aqueous solutions containing poly(acrylic acid), poly(acrylic acid-co-vinylphosphoric acid) or polyvinyl phosphoric acid, which are then dried using hot air at about 110° C. The coating weight of the adhesion-promoting and/or heat-insulating layer may be between about 0.1 and about 1.0 g/m². Overcoat layers can also be provided on top of the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating. Such layers typically protect the near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating from deleterious ambient radiation, humidity, scratching, sticking, etc.

[0180] In another related aspect, the present invention relates to a method of producing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate, the method comprising the steps

of: a) providing a substrate, and b) coating a coating composition as defined above on the substrate. In embodiments, the method further comprises the step of coating the substrate with a polymeric adhesion-promoting and/or heat insulating layer before step b).

[0181] In another related aspect, the present invention relates to a method of printing, the method comprising the steps of: a) providing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate as defined above, b) imaging the printing plate with near-infrared radiation, c) developing the printing plate and d) using the printing plate on a printing press to print. The printing plates may be directly imaged with laser imaging devices in computer-to-plate and digital offset printing technologies. In embodiments, the imaged plate is developed off press with water or a developer.

[0182] In use, the copolymer and the binder in the coating will produce a cohesive network by forming hydrogen bonds. Upon exposure to near-infrared radiation, the near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound will absorb the incoming near-infrared radiation and produce heat. The heat will disrupt the hydrogen bond network in the imaged areas. This will make the exposed areas more soluble in water or developer (off-press development) or fountain solution and inks (on-press development) than the unexposed areas, which will remain less soluble. This will allow the development (on- or off-press) of the printing plates.

[0183] Some of the compounds described herein may exist as isomers of different types (optical, geometric and/or positional isomers for example). The present invention embraces all such isomers.

[0184] Unless otherwise noted, as used herein “alkyl” means a linear or branched alkyl group having 1 to 24 carbon atoms and “aryl” means an aryl group having 1 to 3 cycles and optionally comprising one or two heteroatoms, such as N, O and S. Similarly, “alkyloxy” means a linear or branched alkyloxy (R—O—) group comprising 1 to 24 carbon atoms.

[0185] Herein, “halide” means F—, Cl—, Br— or I—.

[0186] Herein, unless otherwise indicated, weight percent values are based on the total dry weight of the coating composition.

[0187] As used herein, “near-infrared radiation” means electromagnetic radiation, such as that emitted by a laser, with a wavelength between about 700 and about 1100 nm. Non-limiting examples of such near-infrared radiation is the light emitted by diode lasers, which are equipped with plate-setters available from Creo-Kodak, Dinippon Screen, Heidelberg and Presstek International.

[0188] As used herein, “about” means plus or minus 5% of the numerical value thus qualified.

[0189] Other objects, advantages and features of the present invention will become more apparent upon reading of the following non-restrictive description of specific embodiments thereof, given by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings.

DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

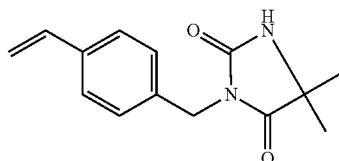
[0190] The present invention is illustrated in further details by the following non-limiting examples. These examples use the compounds listed in the following glossary.

GLOSSARY

[0191]

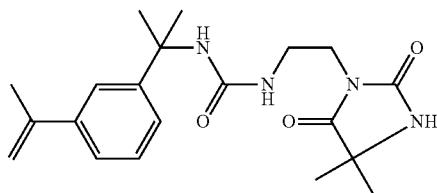
Basic violet 3	Visible colorant, available from Spectra Colors, Kearny, New Jersey, USA.
DMF	N,N-dimethylformamide
Dowanol PM	2-Methoxy propanol, available from Dow Chemicals, USA and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
EMA	Ethyl methacrylate, available from Sigma Aldrich, Canada.
GSP90	Aqueous alkaline developer for positive-working thermal lithographic offset printing plates having a conductivity of 80 mS/cm at 25° C., available from Mylan Group, Travinh City, Travinh Province, Vietnam.

HDB-01



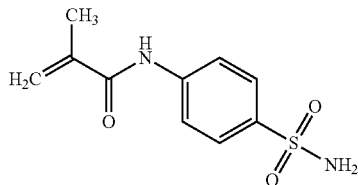
3-[4-Vinylbenzyl]-5,5-dimethylhydantoin, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

HDB-02



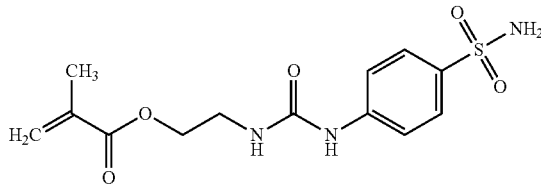
3-{2-Methyl-2[N-[(3-ethyl-5,5-dimethylhydantoinyl)ureido]ethyl]-2-methylvinyl benzene, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

HDB-03



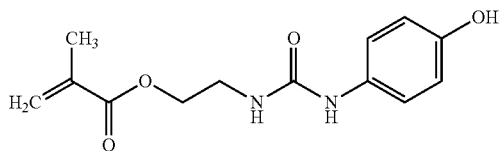
N-(4-aminosulfonylphenyl)methacrylamide, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

HDB-04



2-[N'-(4-aminosulfonylphenyl)ureido]-ethylmethacrylate, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

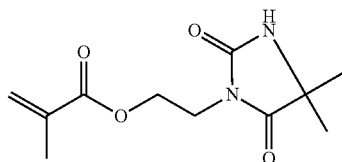
HDB-05



2-[N'-(4-hydroxyphenyl)ureido]ethylmethacrylate, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

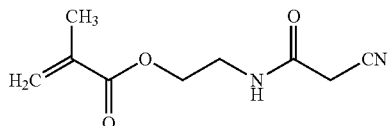
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HDB-06



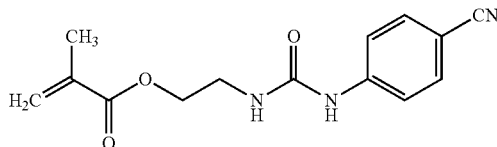
2-(5,5-Dimethylhydantoinyl)ethyl methacrylate, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

MCN-01



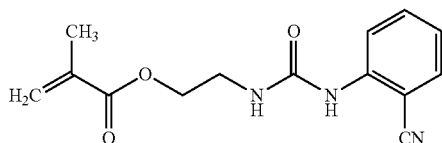
2-(Cyanomethylamido)ethylmethacrylate available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

MCN-02



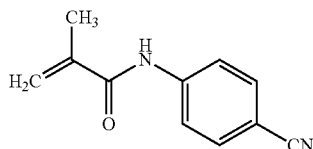
2-[N'-(4-Cyanophenyl)ureido]ethylmethacrylate available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

MCN-03



2-[N'-(2-Cyanophenyl)ureido]ethylmethacrylate available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

MCN-04



4-Cyanophenyl methacrylamide, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

MEK

Methyl ethyl ketone, available from Sigma Aldrich, Canada or from Sapa Chemicals, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

MMA

Methylmethacrylate, available from Sigma Aldrich, Canada.

NMP

N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone, available from Sapa Chemicals, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

PG Aqueous Solution

Aqueous solution containing 60% by weight of propylene glycol in water, available from Mylan Group, LongDuc Industrial Park, Travinh City, Travinh Province, Vietnam.

PM Aqueous Solution

Aqueous solution containing 60% by weight of propylene glycol methyl ether in water, available from Mylan Group, LongDuc Industrial Park, Travinh City, Travinh Province, Vietnam.

Stabilat-20

An aqueous solution containing 20% by weight of Stabilat D2010, which is a concentrated fountain solution for sheet fed press available from FUJIFILM Hunt Chemicals Singapore Pte. Ltd., Singapore

Thermolak ® P1000S

Siloxane copolymer comprising polyether and alkyl pendant groups, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

Thermolak ® 1010

Near-infrared absorbing polymer having a maximum absorption peak at 800 nm in methanol solution, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

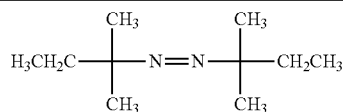
Thermolak ® 7525

Novolak resin, available from American Dye Source, Inc., Baie d'Urfe, Quebec, Canada.

V59

2,2'-azobis(2-methylbutyronitrile), available from Wako (USA).

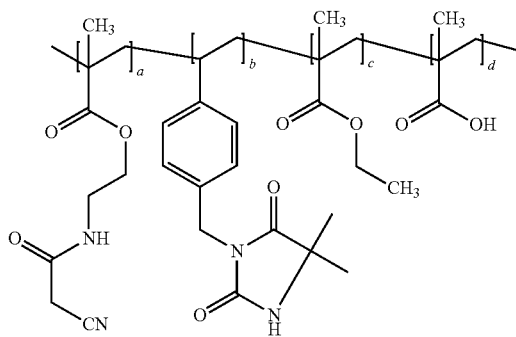
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**[0192]** Synthesis of the Copolymers

[0193] The syntheses of the copolymers were performed in a 4 necks glass reactor equipped with a water condenser, a mechanical stirrer, a dropping funnel and a nitrogen gas inlet. The molecular structures of the obtained copolymers were determined by proton NMR and FTIR spectroscopy. The average molecular weight of the copolymers obtained was determined by size exclusion chromatography (SEC), using a N,N-dimethylformamide solution and calibrated with polystyrene standards. The acid number was determined by titration with a solution of potassium hydroxide in ethanol.

Example 1

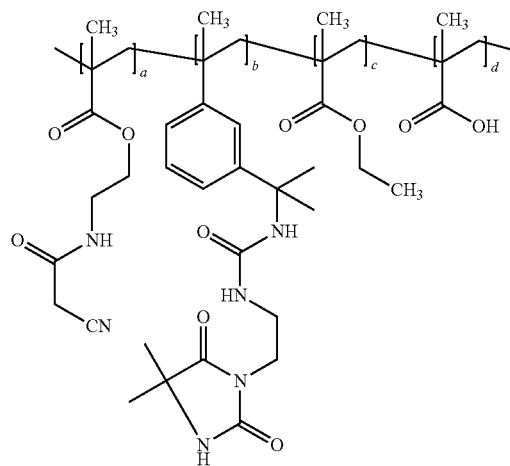
[0194] Copolymer PCN-01A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein a=0.20, b=0.37, c=0.35 and d=0.08 was synthesized by adding 0.30 grams of V59 into 120 ml of a DMF solution (in which 0.20 moles of MCN-01, 0.37 moles of HDB-01, 0.35 moles of ethyl methacrylate and 0.08 moles of methacrylic acid were dissolved) at 75° C. under constant stirring and nitrogen atmosphere. After 10 hours of polymerization, 0.20 grams of V59 was added into the reaction mixture and the polymerization was continued for another 14 hours. Air was introduced and the reaction mixture was stirred at 105° C. for an additional 2 hours to terminate the polymerization. The copolymer was precipitated in 2 L. of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The average molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 43,400 g/mole and 26.2 mg KOH/g, respectively.

Example 2

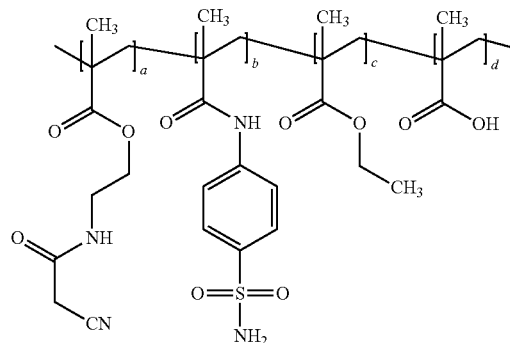
[0195] Copolymer PCN-02A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein a=0.20, b=0.37, c=0.35 and d=0.08 was synthesized by adding 0.30 grams of V59 into 120 ml of a DMF solution (in which 0.20 moles of MCN-01, 0.37 moles of HDB-02, 0.35 moles of ethyl methacrylate and 0.08 moles of methacrylic acid were dissolved) at 75° C. under constant stirring and nitrogen atmosphere. After 10 hours of polymerization, 0.20 grams of V59 was added into the reaction mixture and the polymerization was continued for another 14 hours. Air was introduced and the reaction mixture was stirred at 105° C. for an additional 2 hours to terminate the polymerization. The copolymer was precipitated in 2 L. of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The average molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 74,000 g/mole and 26.4 mg KOH/g, respectively.

Example 3

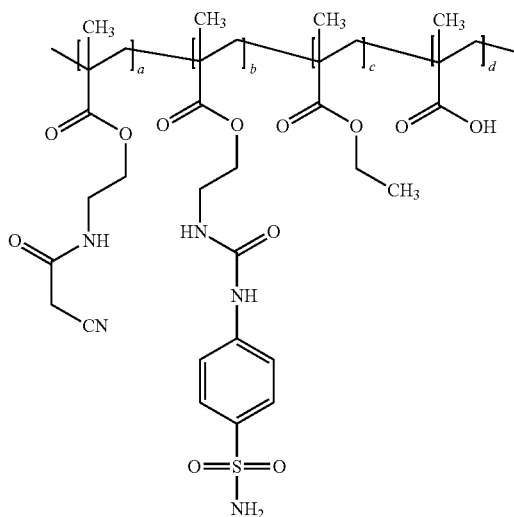
[0196] Copolymer PCN-03A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 1 with the exception that 0.37 moles of HDB-03 replaced the HDB-01. After the polymerization, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 85,000 mole/g and 24.4 g/mole, respectively.

Example 4

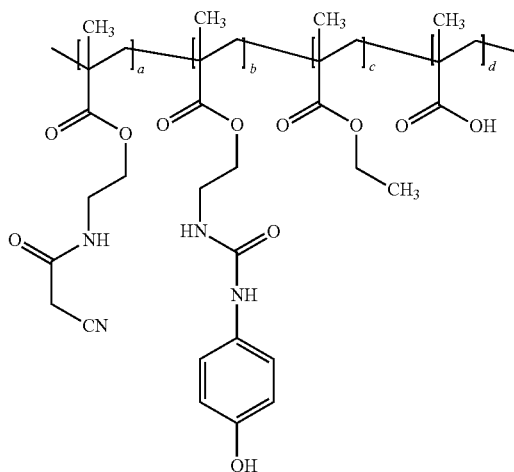
[0197] Copolymer PCN-04A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 1 with the exception that 0.37 moles of HDB-04 replaced the HDB-01. After the polymerization, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 97,000 mole/g and 24.0 g/mole, respectively.

Example 5

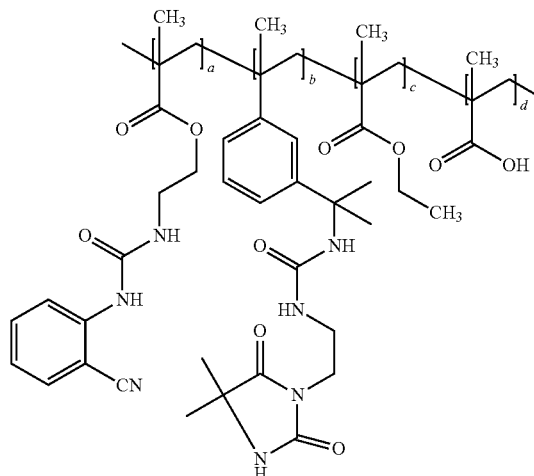
[0198] Copolymer PCN-05A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 1 with the exception that 0.37 moles of HDB-05 replaced the HDB-01. After the polymerization, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 89,000 mole/g and 23.7 g/mole, respectively.

Example 6

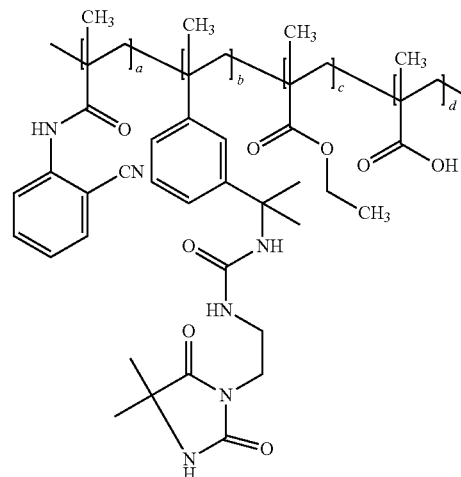
[0199] Copolymer PCN-06A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized by adding 0.30 grams of V59 into 120 ml of a DMF solution (in which 0.20 moles of MCN-02, 0.37 moles of HDB-02, 0.35 moles of ethyl methacrylate and 0.08 moles of methacrylic acid were dissolved) at 75° C. under constant stirring and nitrogen atmosphere. After 10 hours polymerization, 0.20 grams of V59 was added into the reaction mixture and the polymerization was continued for another 14 hours. Air was introduced and the reaction mixture was stirred at 105° C. for an additional 2 hours to terminate the polymerization. The copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white copolymer powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The average molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 67,000 g/mole and 23.6 mg KOH/g, respectively.

Example 7

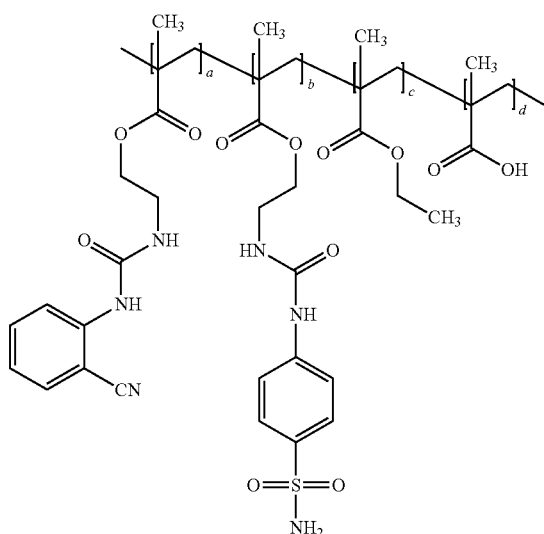
[0200] Copolymer PCN-07A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 6 with the exception that the MCN-02 was replaced by 0.20 moles of MCN-04. After the polymerization, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 77,000 mole/g and 24.2 g/mole, respectively.

Example 8

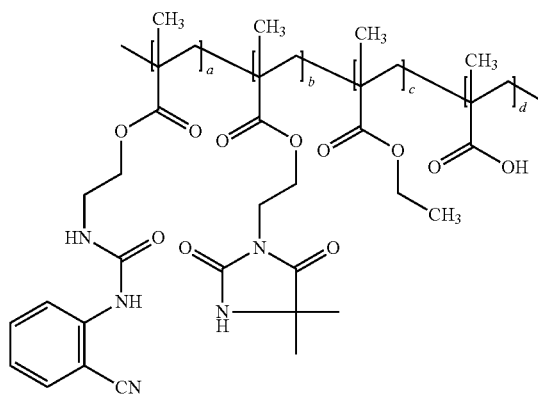
[0201] Copolymer PCN-08A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized by adding 0.30 grams of V59 into 120 ml of a DMF solution (in which 0.20 moles of MCN-02, 0.37 moles of HDB-04, 0.35 moles of ethyl methacrylate and 0.08 moles of methacrylic acid were dissolved) at 75° C. under constant stirring and nitrogen atmosphere. After 10 hours polymerization, 0.20 grams of V59 was added into the reaction mixture and the polymerization was continued for another 14 hours. Air was introduced and the reaction mixture was stirred at 105° C. for an additional 2 hours to terminate the polymerization. The copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The average molecular weight and acid number were determined to be 105,000 g/mole and 23.9 mg KOH/g, respectively.

Example 9

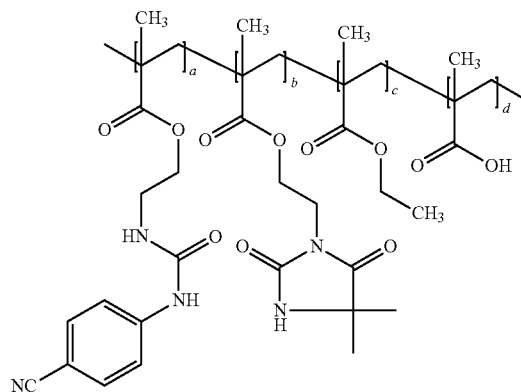
[0202] Copolymer PCN-09A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 8 with the exception that 0.37 moles of HDB-06 were used to replace the HDB-04. After the synthesis, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water, filtered and washed copiously with de-ionized water. A white powder was obtained after drying under vacuum at 40° C. The average molecular weight and acid number were determined around 92,000 g/mole and 24.0 mg KOH/g, respectively.

Example 10

[0203] Copolymer PCN-10A having a general structure as shown below:



wherein $a=0.20$, $b=0.37$, $c=0.35$ and $d=0.08$ was synthesized similarly to Example 9 with the exception that 0.20 moles of MCN-03 were used to replace the MCN-02. After the synthesis, the copolymer was precipitated in 2 L of de-ionized water,

TABLE I-continued

Laser Imaging		Energy Density (mJ/cm ²)									
Clearing Point, CP											
20 Sec. Dwell Time	72	84	76	80	86	90	84	87	78	78	122
30 Sec. Dwell Time	60	74	64	68	74	78	76	74	60	64	115
Correct Exposure, CE											
20 Sec. Dwell Time	120	132	120	126	130	132	130	132	124	124	165
30 Sec. Dwell Time	106	118	110	120	122	118	124	126	118	120	150
Development at 23° C.											
Coating Development Loss, CDL (%)											
20 Seconds	4.20	1.60	1.80	1.50	3.70	1.40	2.40	1.50	3.20	2.20	7.50
30 Seconds	6.80	3.90	3.85	3.00	5.60	2.80	4.60	2.80	5.40	4.20	11.0
Alcohol Resistance, CR (%)											
PG Aqueous Solution	82	83	85	87	82	87	84	88	80	84	72
PM Aqueous Solution	71	74	75	76	72	77	71	78	72	74	53
Stabilat-20	98	99	100	100	99	100	99	100	99	99	92

[0222] It can be seen from this table that the printing plates comprising the copolymers of the invention showed several advantages compared to the printing plate without any such copolymer (Example 21). They required less energy for laser imaging, they showed lower coating development loss. They also exhibited better chemical resistance against alcohol substituted fountain solution, such as Stabilat D2010 and water solution, containing 60% Dowanol PM and propylene glycol. In contrast, it was observed that the coating of printing plate of Example 21 was totally dissolved 8 hours after immersion in a water solution containing 50% Dowanol PM.

[0223] In addition, the printing plates comprising the copolymers of the invention produced more than 180,000 high quality copies on paper. In contrast, the plate of Example 21 produced around 110,000 high quality copies.

[0224] Finally, it was observed that the printing plates were stable during storage for at least 12 months under normal room conditions.

[0225] The above tests show that the copolymers for positive-working printing plates typically provide fast laser imaging speed, high-resolution images, wide processing latitude, stable storage life, good chemical resistance and long print run on press.

[0226] Although the present invention has been described hereinabove by way of specific embodiments thereof, it can be modified, without departing from the spirit and nature of the subject invention as defined in the appended claims.

REFERENCES

[0227] The present description refers to a number of documents, the content of which is herein incorporated by reference in their entirety.

U.S. Pat. Nos.:

5,397,690;
6,124,425;
6,132,929;
6,177,182;
6,326,122;
6,355,396;
6,410,203;
6,884,568;

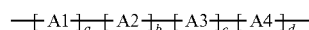
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7,060,415;
7,060,416;
7,258,961;
7,371,504; and
7,473,515.

U.S. Provisional Patent Application:

61/255,918

1. A copolymer having the general structure:



wherein

a, b, and d are molar ratios varying between about 0.01 and about 0.90 and c is a molar ratio varying between 0 and about 0.90,

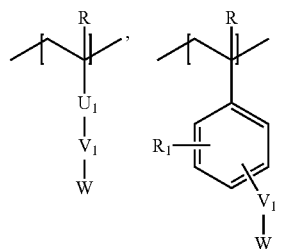
A1 represents monomer units comprising a cyano-containing pendant group in which the cyano is not directly attached to the backbone of the copolymer;

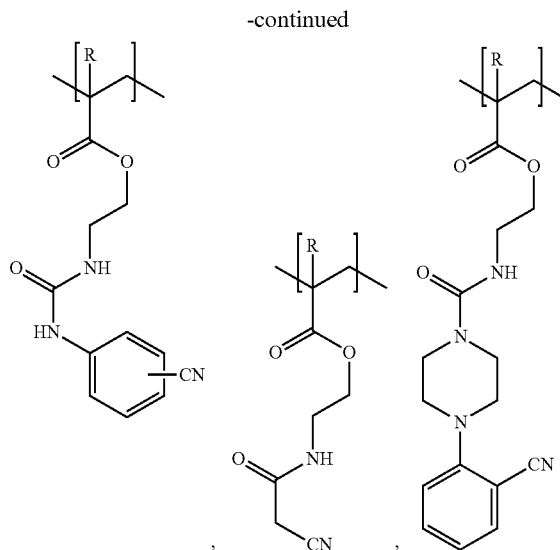
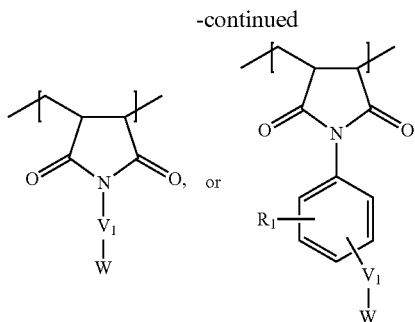
A2 represents monomer units comprising two or more hydrogen bonding sites;

A3 represents monomer units that increase solubility in organic solvents; and

A4 represents monomer units that increase solubility in aqueous alkaline solutions.

2. The copolymer of claim 1, wherein A1 is of formula:





wherein:

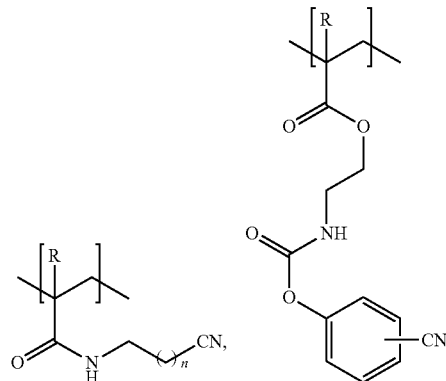
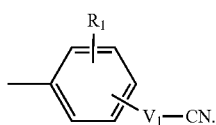
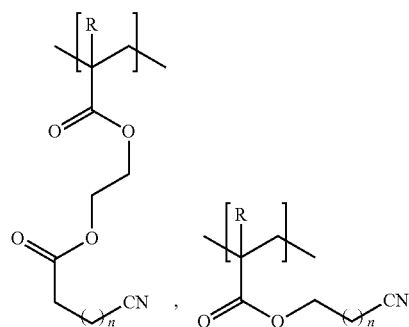
R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups, the alkyl substituents optionally being substituted with one or more cyano,

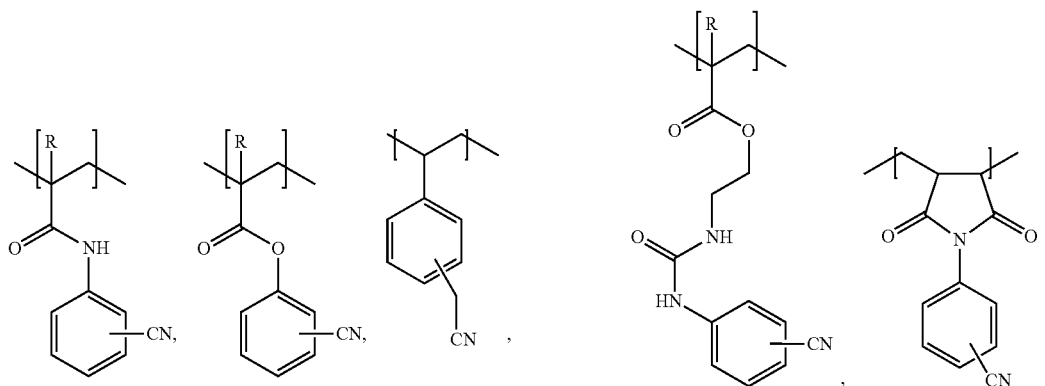
U₁ is an amide or ester linker,

V₁ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, the alkyl optionally being substituted with one or more cyano, and

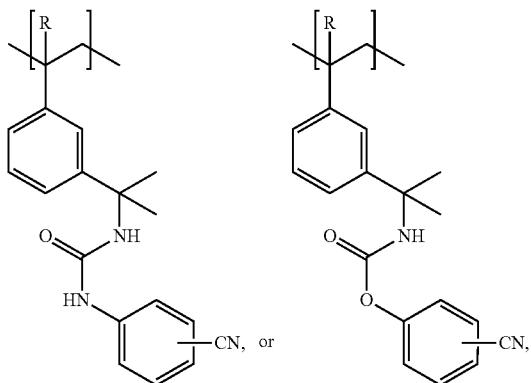
W is —CN or



3. The copolymer of claim 1 or 2, wherein A1 is



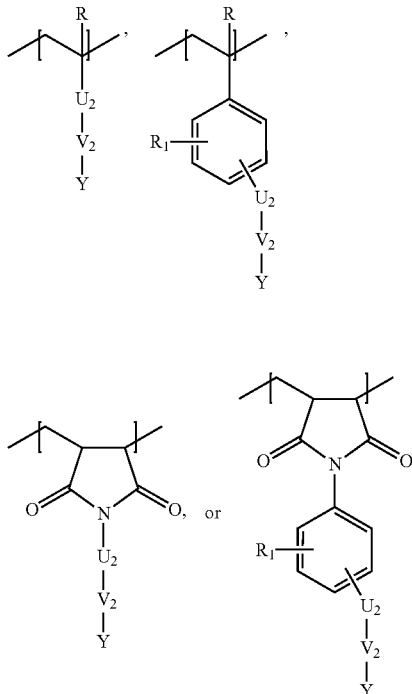
-continued



wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl and n varies between 1 and 10.

4. The copolymer of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein A2 comprises a pendant group comprising a 5,5-dialkylhydantoin group such as a 5,5-dimethylhydantoin group, an amino-sulfonamide group, or hydroxy group.

5. The copolymer of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein A2 is of formula:



wherein:

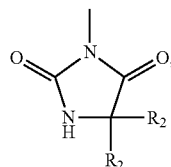
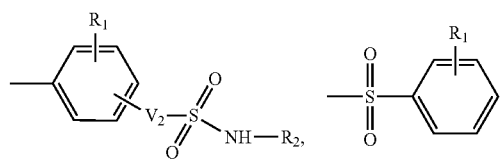
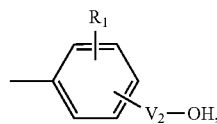
R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

R₁ is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents, the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups,

U₂ is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

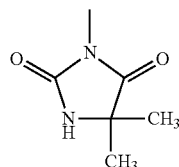
V₂ is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and

Y is —OH, —SO₂—NH—R₂,

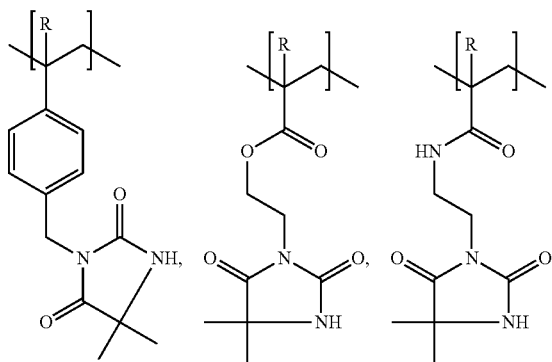


wherein R₂ each time it appears is independently hydrogen or alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional group.

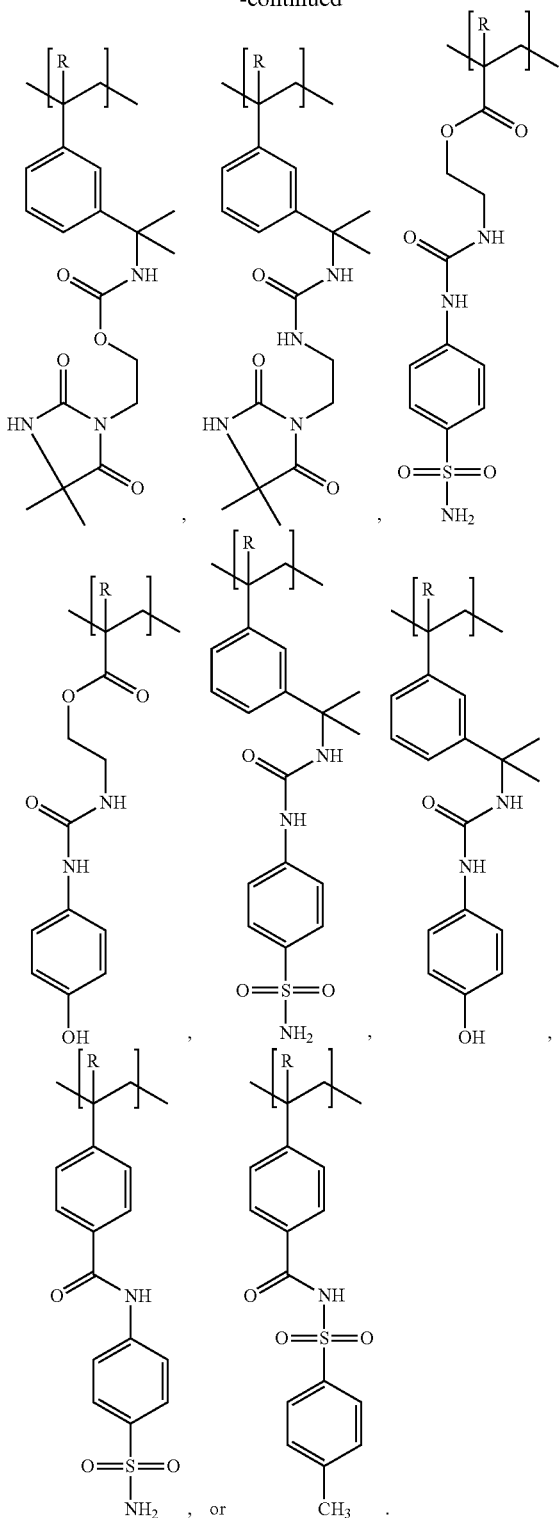
6. The copolymer of claim 5, wherein Y is



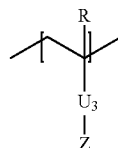
7. The copolymer of claim 5, wherein A2 is:



-continued



10. The copolymer of claim 8, wherein A3 is of formula:



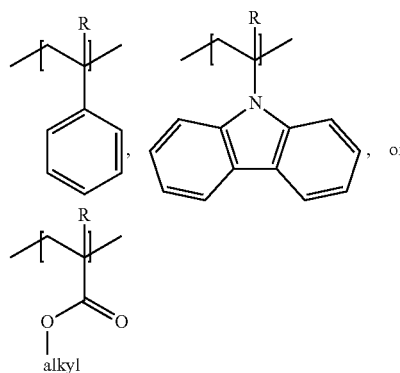
wherein

R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

 U_3 is absent and is an amide or ester linker, and

Z is alkyl or aryl, the alkyl being optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide and the aryl being optionally substituted with one or more alkyls that are optionally substituted with one or more hydroxy, alkyloxy or halide.

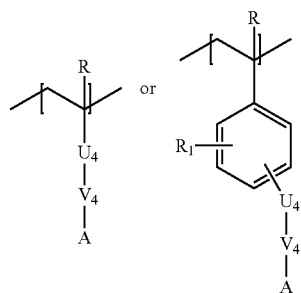
11. The copolymer of claim 9, wherein A3 is:



wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl.

12. The copolymer of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein A4 comprises a pendant group comprising a carboxylic acid group or a phosphoric acid group.

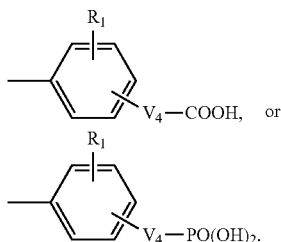
13. The copolymer of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein A4 is of formula:



wherein R is hydrogen, methyl or ethyl,

 R_1 is absent or represents one to four alkyl substituents; the alkyl substituents optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide, or carbamate functional groups, U_4 is absent or represents an amide or ester linker,

V_4 is absent or represents alkyl optionally comprising one or more ether, ester, amine, amide, urea, piperazinyl, sulfonamide or carbamate functional group, and A is $-\text{COOH}$, $-\text{PO}(\text{OH})_2$,



14. The copolymer of any one of claims **1** to **12**, wherein A4 is a monomer unit obtained by polymerizing acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, 4-carboxyphenylmethacrylamide, 4-carboxyphenylacrylamide, vinyl benzoic acid, vinyl phosphoric acid, methacrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid, or acrylyl alkyl phosphoric acid monomers.

15. A near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating composition comprising:

- a copolymer as defined in any one of claims **1** to **13**;
- a binder resin;
- a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound; and
- optional additives.

16. A positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating being a coating prepared from the coating composition of claim **14**.

17. A positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate comprising a near-infrared radiation-sensitive coating, the coating comprising:

- a copolymer as defined in any one of claims **1** to **13**;
- a binder resin;
- a near-infrared radiation-absorbing compound; and
- optional additives.

18. A method of producing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate, the method comprising the steps of:

- c) providing a substrate, and
- d) coating the coating composition of claim **14** on the substrate.

19. A method of printing, the method comprising the steps of:

- f) providing a positive-working thermal lithographic printing plate according to claim **15** or **16**,
- g) imaging the printing plate with near-infrared radiation,
- h) developing the printing plate, and
- i) using the printing plate on a printing press to print.

20. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A1 as defined in any one of claims **1** to **3**.

21. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A2 as defined in any one of claims **1** and **4** to **7**.

22. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A3 as defined in any one of claims **1** and **9** to **11**.

23. A monomer corresponding to a monomer unit A4 as defined in any one of claims **1**, **12**, and **13**.

* * * * *