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Lomba Huguet et al.

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(54) **ORGANIC AEROGELS BASED ON ISOCYANATE AND CYCLIC ETHER POLYMER NETWORKS**

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(71) Applicants: **Henkel AG & Co. KGaA**, Duesseldorf (DE); **Henkel IP Holding GmbH**, Duesseldorf (DE)

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(72) Inventors: **Miquel Lomba Huguet**, Zaragoza (ES); **Joan Garduno Perez**, Barcelona (ES); **Elisabet Torres Cano**, Barcelona (ES); **Fouad Salhi**, Farmington, CT (US); **Sergi Bassaganas Turon**, Olot (ES); **Asta Sakalyte**, Tarragona (ES)

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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The present invention relates to an organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent. An organic aerogel according to the present invention provides good thermal insulation and good mechanical properties.

Related U.S. Application Data

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**ORGANIC AEROGELS BASED ON
ISOCYANATE AND CYCLIC ETHER
POLYMER NETWORKS**

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to an organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent. An organic aerogel according to the present invention provides good thermal insulation and good mechanical properties.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Aerogels are three-dimensional, low-density assemblies of nanoparticles derived from drying wet-gels by exchanging the pore-filling solvent to a gas, usually with a supercritical fluid. By these means, the capillary forces exerted by the solvent due to evaporation are minimized, and structures with large internal void space are achieved. The high porosity of these materials is reason for their very low thermal conductivity, which makes aerogels extremely attractive materials for thermal insulating applications.

[0003] Compared to common thermal insulators in the market, aerogels are lightweight materials with a very low thermal conductivity. Therefore, aerogels are known for being good insulating materials due to their nanostructure and the elimination of any contribution from the gas phase. Thus, thickness of the insulating layer can be reduced while obtaining similar insulating properties. Aerogels are environmentally friendly because they are air filled, and furthermore, they are not subject to ageing.

[0004] Thermal insulation is important in many different applications in order to save energy and reduce costs. Examples of such applications are construction, transport and industry. For some applications, it is possible to use a thick insulating panel to reduce the heat transfer. However, other applications may require thinner insulating panels/layers because of size limitations. For the thin insulating panels/layers the thermal conductivity of the material has to be extremely low in order to get the same insulating properties than with thicker insulating panels/layers. Additionally, in some cases and depending on the application, high mechanical properties may also be required.

[0005] Most of known aerogels are inorganic aerogels, mainly based on silica. Despite of their high thermal insulating properties, a slow commercialization is observed due to their fragility and poor mechanical properties. Their low mechanical properties are generally attributed to the well-defined narrow antiparticle necks. This fragility may be overcome by different methods. For example, by cross-linking aerogels with organic polymers or by post-gelation casting of a thin conformal polymer coating over the entire internal porous surface of the preformed wet-gel nanostructure.

[0006] On the other hand, different organic aerogels have also been described in the literature. These materials are generally based on polymeric networks of different nature, formed by cross-linking of monomers in a solution to yield a gel that is subsequently dried to obtain a porous material.

[0007] First organic aerogels described in the literature were based on phenol-formaldehyde resins, which can also be used to prepare carbon aerogels by pyrolysis. Other

significant organic aerogels are based on materials prepared using multifunctional isocyanates. These monomers can be used to prepare polyimide aerogels (by reaction with anhydrides), polyamide aerogels (by reaction with carboxylic acids), polyurethane aerogels (by reaction with hydroxylated compounds), polycarbodiimide aerogels or polyurea aerogels (by reaction with aminated compounds or with water as catalyst).

[0008] Inorganic aerogels, such as silica based aerogels, represent the most traditional type and offer the best thermal insulating performance. However, these materials are brittle, dusty and easy air-borne, and therefore cannot withstand mechanical stress. Because of that, sometimes they are classified as hazardous materials. In addition, due to their brittleness, they are not suitable for some applications where mechanical properties are required.

[0009] On the other hand, organic aerogels are robust and mechanically stable, which is an advantage for many applications. However, some of these materials can also have drawbacks.

[0010] Different polymeric networks have been described for the preparation of organic aerogels. Aerogel based on resorcinol-formaldehyde networks are brittle and their curing process takes a long time (up to 5 days), which results a drawback for an industrial scale production. On the other hand, organic aerogels based on isocyanate groups have faster curing process and their mechanical properties can be modified depending on the reacting functional group with the isocyanate moiety, as well as the monomer and/or oligomer chemical structure (i.e. number of functionalities, aromatic or aliphatic nature, steric hindrance, etc.).

[0011] Prior art discloses a wide variety of aerogels based on isocyanate chemistry. Isocyanate moieties have been reacted with hydroxylated compounds to obtain polyurethane aerogels; with amines or water to obtain polyurea aerogels; with anhydrides to obtain polyimide aerogels; and with carboxylic acids to obtain polyamide aerogels. In most of the cases, multifunctional monomers must be used to increase the cross-linking degree, which usually results in higher mechanical properties. The trimerization of isocyanate groups to form polymeric isocyanurate networks has also been described.

[0012] Polyisocyanate based rigid foams, such as polyurethane and polyisocyanurate foams are known in the art and are used as a thermal insulation medium for example in the construction of refrigerated storage devices. These foams are in general prepared in the presence of a blowing agent. The thermal insulating properties of rigid foams depend on a number of factors including, the cell size and the thermal conductivity of the cell content (i.e. of the blowing agents used in the preparation of the foams). The most common blowing agents are hydrochlorofluorocarbons, hydrofluorocarbons and cycloalkenes. Even though these blowing agents are more acceptable than chlorofluorocarbons, they provide inferior thermal insulation.

[0013] Polyurea aerogels based on isocyanates and amines are not satisfactory for all applications because of their mechanical stability and/or their compressive strength, as well as the thermal conductivity. In addition, the gelling time is often too long. Furthermore, the prior art states the presence of mixing defects associated with this kind of materials, as a result of the high reaction rate between isocyanates and amino groups. This leads to aerogels having heterogeneous and unsatisfactory properties.

[0014] Polyurethane aerogels obtained by reaction of oligomeric isocyanates and high molecular weight polyols have some advantages in terms of availability and cost, however, from an aerogel perspective, they have some disadvantages. Given the importance of the relative solubility suggested in the literature, phase-separation will be delayed due to the overall increased solubility of the products over the reagents, yielding larger colloidal particles. Consequently, surface-to-volume ratios are expected to be relatively low, resulting in low surface area materials. In general, oligomeric starting materials should yield low functional group densities on the surface of the nanoparticles, thus interparticle cross-linking should also be compromised, and the resulting aerogels are expected to be mechanically weak.

[0015] Therefore, there is still a need for organic aerogels, which are providing good thermal insulation properties, while being mechanically robust.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0016] The present invention relates to an organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent.

[0017] The present invention also relates to a method for preparing an organic aerogel according to the present invention comprising the steps of: 1) dissolving a cyclic ether compound into a solvent and adding an isocyanate compound and mixing; 2) adding a catalyst, if present, and mixing; 3) letting the mixture to stand in order to form a gel; 4) washing said gel with a solvent; and 5) drying said gel by either supercritical or ambient drying.

[0018] The present invention also encompasses a thermal insulating material or an acoustic material comprising an organic aerogel according to the present invention.

[0019] In addition, the present invention encompasses, use of an organic aerogel according to the present invention as a thermal insulating material or acoustic material.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] In the following passages the present invention is described in more detail. Each aspect so described may be combined with any other aspect or aspects unless clearly indicated to the contrary. In particular, any feature indicated as being preferred or advantageous may be combined with any other feature or features indicated as being preferred or advantageous.

[0021] In the context of the present invention, the terms used are to be construed in accordance with the following definitions, unless a context dictates otherwise.

[0022] As used herein, the singular forms “a”, “an” and “the” include both singular and plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise.

[0023] The terms “comprising”, “comprises” and “comprised of” as used herein are synonymous with “including”, “includes” or “containing”, “contains”, and are inclusive or open-ended and do not exclude additional, non-recited members, elements or method steps.

[0024] The recitation of numerical end points includes all numbers and fractions subsumed within the respective ranges, as well as the recited end points.

[0025] All percentages, parts, proportions and then like mentioned herein are based on weight unless otherwise indicated.

[0026] When an amount, a concentration or other values or parameters is/are expressed in form of a range, a preferable range, or a preferable upper limit value and a preferable lower limit value, it should be understood as that any ranges obtained by combining any upper limit or preferable value with any lower limit or preferable value are specifically disclosed, without considering whether the obtained ranges are clearly mentioned in the context.

[0027] All references cited in the present specification are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0028] Unless otherwise defined, all terms used in disclosing the invention, including technical and scientific terms, have the meaning as commonly understood by one of the ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs to. By means of further guidance, term definitions are included to better appreciate the teaching of the present invention.

[0029] The present invention relates the development of novel organic aerogels based on a new polymeric network formed by reaction of monomers and/or oligomers of isocyanate and cyclic ether groups in the presence of a solvent and with or without a catalyst. These groups can react each other by different mechanisms to obtain a highly cross-linked polymeric network, which gels in presence of a solvent. After drying in supercritical or ambient conditions, lightweight aerogels are obtained with pore sizes in the range of tens to hundreds of nanometers. Very low thermal conductivity values are shown in combination with high mechanical properties, which represents the most difficult property to obtain in highly porous materials.

[0030] The present invention relates to the organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent.

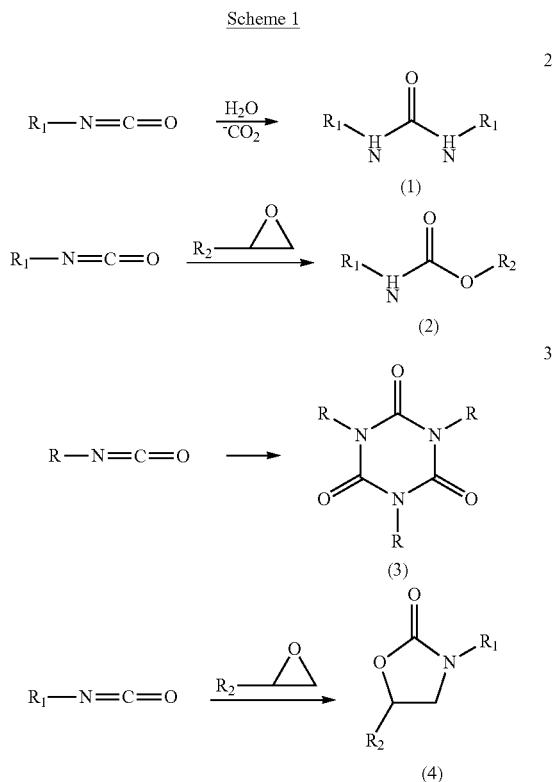
[0031] By the term ‘aerogel’ is meant herein a synthetic porous, low-density material derived from a gel, in which a gas has replaced the liquid component of the gel. Due to their porosity and density, these materials generally present low thermal conductivity.

[0032] By the term ‘gel’ is meant herein is a solid, jelly-like soft material, having a substantially dilute cross-linked system, which exhibits no flow when in the steady state.

[0033] The present invention relates to an organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound and a cyclic ether compound in a presence of a solvent. The reaction of isocyanate with cyclic ether groups, allows preparing a hybrid polymeric network with a high cross-linking degree because of the polymerization mechanism of cyclic ether resins. The high cross-linking degree results in lower pore size and better mechanical properties compared to the material having a lower cross-linking degree. Given the reactivity of these functional groups, the resulting aerogels may have different connectivity.

[0034] Main reactions between isocyanate and epoxides are illustrated in scheme 1, as representative examples. Urea (1) is formed in reaction between isocyanate and water. Urethane (2) is obtained in reaction between isocyanate and alkoxide after epoxide ring opening. Trimerization of iso-

cyanate leads to formation of isocyanurate (3). Oxazolidone (4) is obtained from the reaction between isocyanate and epoxy at high temperatures.



Therefore, the resulting nanoporous network may include polyurethane (2), polyisocyanurate (3) and polyoxazolidone (4), as well as polyurea (1) in a lesser extent. Organic aerogels according to the present invention have high cross-linking degree, lower pore size and better mechanical properties than less cross-linked aerogels.

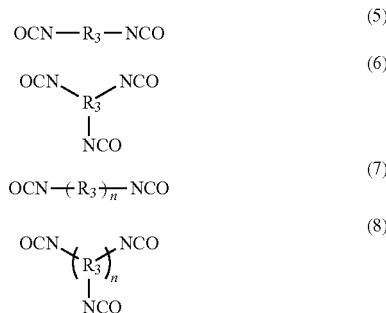
[0035] In one embodiment, an organic aerogel according to the present invention is obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent.

[0036] In another embodiment, an organic aerogel according to the present invention is obtained reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent and a catalyst.

[0037] Suitable isocyanate compound for use in the present invention has a functionality equal or greater than 2. Preferably, said isocyanate compound has a functionality from 2 to 6, and more preferably functionality from 2 to 3. By the term 'functionality' is meant herein number of isocyanate groups in the compound.

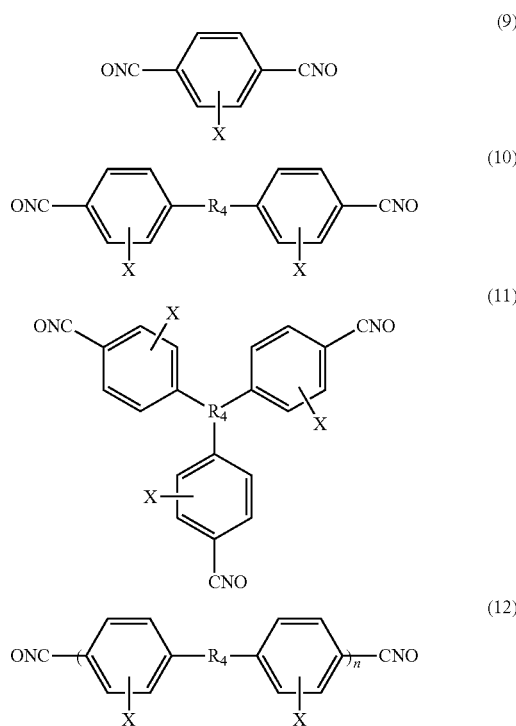
[0038] Suitable isocyanate compound for use in the present invention is an aromatic isocyanate compound or an aliphatic isocyanate compound.

[0039] Examples of suitable aliphatic isocyanate compounds (5)-(8) are:



wherein R_3 is selected from the group consisting of a single bonded O, S, CO, SO_2 , $\text{O}_3\text{P}=\text{S}$, a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 cycloalkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C7-C30 alkylaryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 heterocycloalkyl group and a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 heteroalkyl group and a combination of thereof; and integer n is 1 to 30.

[0040] Examples of suitable aromatic isocyanate compounds (9)-(12) for use in the present invention are:



wherein X represents a substituent, or different substituents and are selected independently from the group consisting of hydrogen, halogen and linear or branched C1-C6 alkyl groups, attached on their respective phenyl ring at the 2-position, 3-position or 4-position, and their respective

isomers, and R_4 is selected from the group consisting of a single bonded O, S, CO, SO_2 , $O_3P=S$, a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 cycloalkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C7-C30 alkylaryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3 to C30 heterocycloalkyl group and a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 heteroalkyl group from and a combination of thereof; and integer n is 1 to 30.

[0041] Preferably, the isocyanate compound is selected from the group consisting of 1,3,5-tris(6-isocyanatohexyl)-1,3,5-triazinane-2,4,6-trione, methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI), 1-[bis(4-isocyanatophenyl)methyl]-4-isocyanatobenzene, 2,4-diisocyanato-1-methyl-benzene (TDI), 5-isocyanato-1-(isocyanatomethyl)-1,3,3-trimethyl-cyclohexane (IPDI), 1,6-diisocyanatohexane (HDI), isomers thereof, oligomers thereof and mixtures thereof.

[0042] Suitable commercially available isocyanates for use in the present invention are for example but not limited to Desmodur RE, Desmodur L75, Desmodur N3300, Desmodur N3200, Desmodur HL, Desmodur IL and Desmodur RFE all available from Bayer; Polurene KC and Polurene HR from Sapiaci.

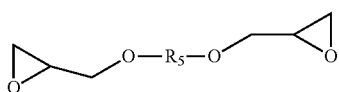
[0043] Preferably, the isocyanate compound is present in the reaction mixture from 0.5 to 25% by weight of the total weight of the reaction mixture (including solvent), more preferably from 2 to 20%.

[0044] Suitable cyclic ether compound for use in the present invention has a functionality equal or greater than 2. Preferably said cyclic ether compound has a functionality from 2 to 6, and more preferably from 2 to 4. By the term 'functionality' is meant herein number of cyclic ether groups in the compound.

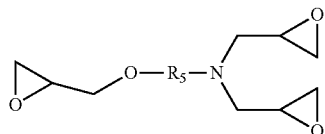
[0045] Preferably, the cyclic ether compound is present in the reaction mixture from 0.5 to 25% by weight of the total weight of the reaction mixture (including solvent), more preferably from 2 to 20%.

[0046] Preferably, a cyclic ether compound for use in the present invention is an epoxy compound or an oxetane compound.

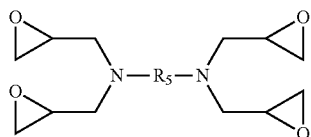
[0047] Examples of suitable epoxy compounds (13)-(19) for use in the present invention are:



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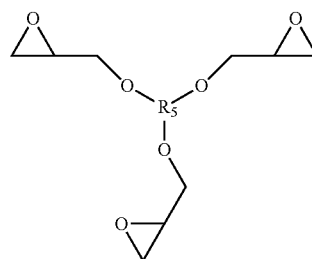


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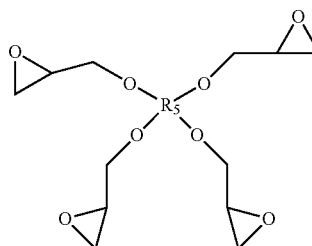


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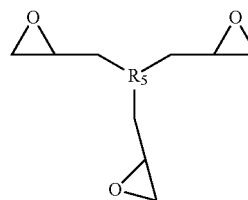
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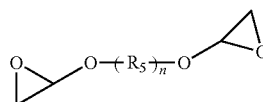
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wherein R_5 is selected from the group consisting of a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 cycloalkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C7-C30 alkylaryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 heterocycloalkyl group and a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 heteroalkyl group; and n is integer 1 to 30.

[0048] Preferably, the epoxy compound is selected from the group consisting of N,N-diglycidyl-4-glycidyoxyaniline, phenol novolac epoxy resins, tetraglycidyl ether of 1,1,2,2-tetrakis(hydroxyphenyl)ethane, N,N,N',N'-Tetraglycidyl-4,4'-methylenbisbenzenamine and mixtures thereof.

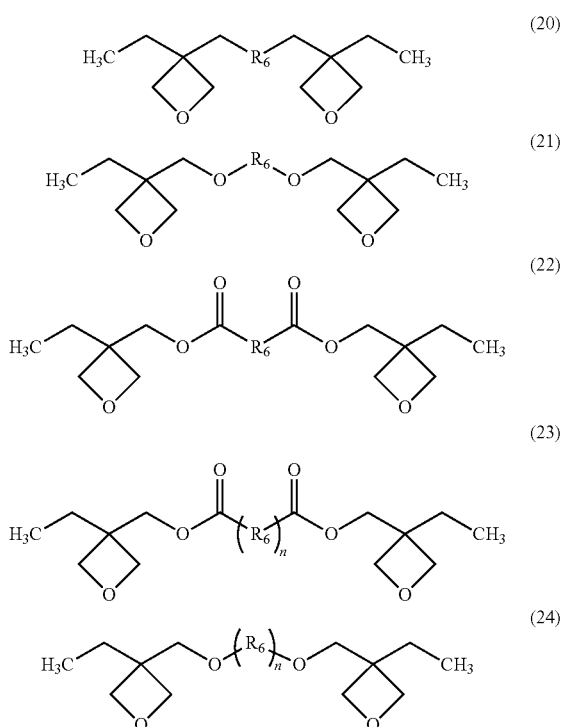
[0049] These epoxy compounds are preferred because they provide a good compromise between thermal conductivity and mechanical properties.

[0050] Suitable commercially available epoxy compounds for use in the present invention include, but not limited to 1,4 butanediol diglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE21), cyclohexandimethanol diglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE22), ethylene glycol diglycidyl ether (Erisys™ EDGE), dipropylene glycol diglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE23), 1,6 hexanediol diglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE25), trimethylolpropane triglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE30), polyglycerol-3-polyglycidyl ether (Erisys™ GE38), sorbitol glycidyl ether-aliphatic polyfunctional epoxy resin (Erisys™ GE60), phenol novolac epoxy resins (Epalloy™ 8220, 8230, 8240, 8250, 8280, 8330, 8350, 8370), from CVC Thermoset resins; tetraglycidyl ether of 1,1,2,2-tetrakis(hydroxyphenyl)ethane (Araldite®)

XB-4399-3), N,N,N',N'-Tetraglycidyl-4,4'-methylenebisbenzenamine (Araldite® MY720), tris-(hydroxyl phenyl) methane-based epoxy resin (Tactix® 742), triglycidyl ether of meta-aminophenol (Araldite® MY0610, MY0600), triglycidyl ether of para-aminophenol (Araldite® MY0510, MY0500), bisphenol-A based epoxy resins (Araldite® GY6004, GY6005, GY9513, GY9580, GY9613, GY9615, GT6243, GT4248, GT6097, GT7072, Tactix® 123) and phenol novolac epoxy resins (Araldite EPN 1179, 1180) from Huntsman; bisphenol-A based epoxy resins (D.E.R.™ 317, 330, 331, 332, 337, 362, 383) and polypropylene glycol epoxy (D.E.R.™ 732, 736), phenol novolac epoxy resins (D.E.N.™ 425, 431, 438, 439, 440) from Dow Chemical.

[0051] Preferably, the epoxy compound is present in the reaction mixture from 0.5 to 25% by weight of the total weight of the reaction mixture (including solvent), more preferably from 2 to 20%.

[0052] Examples of suitable oxetane compounds (20)-(24) for use in the present invention are:



wherein R_6 is selected from the group consisting of a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 cycloalkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C7-C30 alkylaryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted C3-C30 heterocycloalkyl group and a substituted or unsubstituted C1-C30 heteroalkyl group; and n is integer 1 to 30.

[0053] Preferably, oxetane compound is selected from the group consisting of 1,4-bis[(3-ethyl-3-oxetanylmethoxy)methyl]benzene and bis[1-ethyl(3-oxetanyl)methyl] ether.

[0054] These oxetane compounds are preferred because they provide a good compromise between thermal conductivity and mechanical properties.

[0055] Suitable commercially available oxetane compound for use in the present invention include, but not limited to 1,4-bis[(3-ethyl-3-oxetanylmethoxy)methyl]benzene (Eternacoll OXBP), bis[(3-ethyl-3-oxetanyl)methyl] terephthalate (Eternacoll OXTP), bis[1-ethyl(3-oxetanyl)methyl] ether (Aron OXT 221), and 1,4-bis[(3-ethyl-3-oxetanylmethoxy)methyl]benzene (Aron OXT 121) from Toagosei America INC.

[0056] Preferably, the oxetane compound is present in the reaction mixture from 0.5 to 25% by weight of the total weight of the reaction mixture (including solvent), more preferably from 2 to 20%.

[0057] An organic aerogel according to the present invention is obtained in a presence of a solvent.

[0058] Suitable solvent for use in the present invention is a polar solvent, preferably polar aprotic solvent.

[0059] Polar aprotic solvents are preferred because they do not have hydrogen atoms that can be donated into an H-bond. Therefore, anions participating in the nucleophilic addition reaction are not solvate, and they are not inhibited to react.

[0060] Examples of suitable solvents for use in the present invention are dimethylacetamide (DMAc), dimethylformamide (DMF), tetrahydrofuran (THF), 1-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP), dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), acetonitrile, ethyl acetate, acetone, methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), methyl isobutyl ketone (MIBK) and mixtures thereof.

[0061] In one highly preferred embodiment, an organic aerogel according to the present invention is obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent and a catalyst.

[0062] Suitable catalyst for use in the present invention is selected from the group consisting of alkyl amines, aromatic amines, imidazole derivatives, aza compounds, guanidine derivatives and amidines.

[0063] Suitable catalyst may be selected from the group consisting of triethylamine, trimethylamine, benzyldimethylamine (DMBA), N,N-dimethyl-1-phenylmethanamine, 1,4-diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane, 2-ethyl-4-methylimidazole, 2-phenylimidazole, 2-methylimidazole, 1-methylimidazole, 4,4'-methylene-bis(2-ethyl-5-methylimidazole), 3,4,6,7,8,9-hexahydro-2H-pyrimido[1,2-a]pyrimidine, 2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10-octahydropyrimido [1,2-a]azepine, 1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene (DBU), 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (TBD), 1,4-diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane, 1,5-diazabicyclo[4.3.0]non-5-ene, quinuclidine and mixtures thereof.

[0064] Preferably said catalyst is selected from the group consisting of benzyldimethylamine (DMBA), 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (TBD), 1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene (DBU), 1,4-diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane, triethylamine.

[0065] Above-mentioned preferred catalysts are preferred because they provide faster gelation, and require lower temperature for it.

[0066] The catalyst is added from 0 to 10 parts per hundred parts of the reaction mixture (phr), including solvent, preferably from 2.5 to 10 phr.

[0067] A range from 2.5 to 10 phr is preferred, because aerogel performances reach a plateau around 7 phr of a catalyst and higher catalyst content would not improve any properties above this point.

[0068] An organic aerogel according to the present invention may further comprise organic, inorganic or combination of organic and inorganic fillers and fibres.

[0069] High epoxy content provides a low thermal conductivity; on the other hand, high isocyanate content provides better mechanical properties. The Applicant has surprisingly found out that low thermal conductivity and good mechanical properties can be provided when a ratio of epoxy/oxetane groups to isocyanate groups is 18:1-1:15. Preferably, an organic aerogel according to the present invention has a ratio of epoxy/oxetane groups to isocyanate groups is 18:1-1:15, more preferably 5:1-1:5.

[0070] An organic aerogel according to the present invention has a solid content from 3 to 30%, based on initial solid content of the solution, preferably from 5 to 20%.

[0071] Solid content in the range from 5 to 20% is preferred, because it provides a good compromise between thermal insulating properties and mechanical properties. High solid content provides high mechanical properties; however, high solid content provides poor thermal insulating properties. On the other hand, low solid content provides lower thermal conductivities, but mechanical properties are not ideal.

[0072] An organic aerogel according to the present invention has a thermal conductivity less than 75 mW/m·K, preferably less than 55 mW/m·K, more preferably less than 50 mW/m·K, and even more preferably less than 45 mW/m·K. Wherein the thermal conductivity is measured according to the test methods described below.

[0073] Diffusivity Sensor Method

[0074] In this method, the thermal conductivity is measured by using a diffusivity sensor. In this method, the heat source and the measuring sensor are on the same side of the device. The sensors measure the heat that diffuses from the sensor throughout the materials. This method is appropriate for lab scale tests.

[0075] Steady-State Condition System Method

[0076] In this method the thermal conductivity is measured by using a steady-state condition system. In this method, the sample is sandwiched between a heat source and a heat sink. The temperature is risen on one side, the heat flows through the material and once the temperature on the other side is constant, both heat flux and difference of temperatures are known, and thermal conductivity can be measured.

[0077] For the preparation of organic aerogels according to the present invention, several aspects have to be taken into consideration. The stoichiometric ratio of functionalities, the initial solid content, the amount and type of catalyst (if present), type of solvent, gelation time and temperature are important factors that affect to the final properties of the material. The difficulty in controlling the synthesis of this kind of polymers to obtain materials with the best combination of properties lies in the competition among the diversity of possible reactions (scheme 1) that may take place in an isocyanate-cyclic ether based blend.

[0078] In one embodiment, an organic aerogel according to the present invention is prepared according to a method comprising the steps of:

[0079] 1) dissolving a cyclic ether compound into a solvent and adding an isocyanate compound and mixing,

[0080] 2) adding a catalyst, if present, and mixing;

[0081] 3) letting the mixture to stand in order to form a gel;

[0082] 4) washing said gel with a solvent; and

[0083] 5) drying said gel by supercritical drying or ambient drying.

[0084] The reaction mixture is prepared in a closed container.

[0085] Gelation step (3) is carried out in the oven for the pre-set time and temperature. Preferably, temperature is applied on step 3, more preferably, temperature from room temperature to 180° C. is applied while gel is forming, and most preferably, temperature from room temperature to 150° C. is applied.

[0086] Temperatures from room temperature to 180° C. are preferred because of higher temperatures than 180° C. require the use of solvents with extremely high boiling points.

[0087] Gelation time is preferably from 1 to 24 hours, preferably from 1 to 15 hours and more preferably from 1 to 5 hours.

[0088] Washing time is preferably from 18 hours to 72 hours, preferably from 24 hours to 48 hours.

[0089] The solvent of wet gels of step 3) is changed one or more times after the gelation. The washing steps are done gradually, and if required, to the preferred solvent for the drying process. Once the wet gel remains in the proper solvent, it is dried in supercritical (CO₂) or ambient conditions obtaining the final aerogel material.

[0090] In one embodiment, the washing steps are done gradually as follows 1) DMAc/acetone 3:1; 2) DMAc/acetone 1:1; 3) DMAc/acetone 1:3; and 4) acetone. In another embodiment, all four washing steps are done with acetone. Once the solvent has been completely replaced by acetone, gel is dried in supercritical (CO₂) or ambient conditions obtaining the final aerogel material.

[0091] The supercritical state of a substance is reached once its liquid and gaseous phases become indistinguishable. The pressure and temperature at which the substance enters this phase is called critical point. In this phase, the fluid presents the low viscosity of a gas, maintaining the higher density of a liquid. It can effuse through solids like a gas and dissolve materials like a liquid. Considering an aerogel, once the liquid inside the wet gel pores reaches the supercritical phase, its molecules do not possess enough intermolecular forces to create the necessary surface tension that creates capillarity stress. Hence, the solvent can be dried, minimizing shrinkage and possible collapse of the gel network.

[0092] The drying process at supercritical conditions is performed by exchanging the solvent in the gel with CO₂ or other suitable solvents in their supercritical state. Due to this, capillary forces exerted by the solvent during evaporation in the nanometric pores are minimized and shrinkage of the gel body can be reduced.

[0093] Alternatively, wet gels can be dried at ambient conditions, in which the solvent is evaporated at room temperature. However, as the liquid evaporates from the pores, it can create a meniscus that recedes back into the gel due to the difference between interfacial energies. This may create a capillary stress on the gel, which responds by shrinking. If these forces are higher enough, they can even lead to the collapse or cracking of the whole structure. However, there are different possibilities to minimize this phenomenon. One practical solution involves the use of

solvents with low surface tension to minimize the interfacial energy between the liquid and the pore. Unfortunately, not all the solvents lead to gelation, which means that some cases would require the exchange of solvent between an initial one required for the gel formation and a second one most appropriate for the drying process. Hexane is usually used as a convenient solvent for ambient drying, as its surface tension is one of the lowest among the conventional solvents.

[0094] The organic aerogels according to the present invention can be reinforced by suitable fibre or filler compositions (either natural or synthetic), which may be based on organic, inorganic or both compounds.

[0095] One embodiment encompasses a thermal insulating material or an acoustic material comprising an organic aerogel according to the present invention.

[0096] The present invention also encompasses a use of an organic aerogel according to the present invention as a thermal insulating material or acoustic material.

[0097] Organic aerogels according to the present invention can be used for thermal insulation in different applications such as aircrafts, space crafts, pipelines, tankers and maritime ships replacing currently used foam panels and other foam products, in car battery housings and under hood liners, lamps, in cold packaging technology including tanks and boxes, jackets and footwear and tents.

[0098] Organic aerogels according to the present invention can also be used in construction materials due to their lightweight, strength, ability to be formed into desired shapes and superior thermal insulation properties.

[0099] Organic aerogels according to the present invention can be also used for storage of cryogenes.

[0100] Organic aerogels according to the present invention can be also used as an adsorption agent for oil spill clean-up, due to their high oil absorption rate.

[0101] Organic aerogels according to the present invention can be also used in safety and protective equipment as a shock-absorbing medium.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

[0102] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers methylidyne-tri-p-phenylene triisocyanate (Desmodur RE) from Bayer, and N,N-Diglycidyl-4-glycidyl-oxylaniline (Araldite MY0510) from Huntsman.

[0103] 1.02 g (3.68 mmol) of Araldite MY0510 were placed to a container with 15.06 ml of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in an equivalent ratio 1:1 respect to the epoxy. To do that, 4.94 ml (3.68 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while continuing stirring at 300 rpm. Subsequently, 0.62 ml (4.16 mmol) of N,N-Dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) were added while stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at 80° C. for 180 min in an oven. A brown gel was obtained.

[0104] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of Acetone 1:3 DMAc, Acetone 1:1 DMAc, Acetone 3:1 DMAc and Acetone, duration of each step was 24 h, and using solvent three times the volume of the gel for each step.

[0105] Subsequently, obtained material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0106] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the test method described in the description.

[0107] Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621).

[0108] Benchmarking polyurethane aerogel used in the examples was produced in house, according to description in US20140147607 A1 page 20, paragraph [0162].

[0109] The results are summarised in table 1.

TABLE 1

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Initial solid content (wt %)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)	Compression Young Modulus (MPa)
Benchmarking aerogel - prepared according to US20140147607 A1 page 20, [0162]	0.159	10	41	0.57
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.204	10	41	6.48

[0110] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel according to the present invention has better mechanical properties in comparison to some aerogels described in the literature.

Example 2

[0111] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers methylidyne-tri-p-phenylene triisocyanate (Desmodur RE) from Bayer and poly(ethylene glycol) diglycidyl ether (PEG-DGE) from Sigma-Aldrich.

[0112] 4.77 g (9.54 mmol) of PEG-DGE were placed to a container with 51.46 ml of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in a equivalent ratio 1:1. To do that, 8.53 ml (6.27 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while continuing stirring at 300 rpm. Subsequently, 1.06 ml (7.14 mmol) of N,N-Dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) were added, while stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at 80° C. for 180 min in an oven. A brown gel was obtained.

[0113] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of Acetone 1:3 DMAc, Acetone 1:1 DMAc, Acetone 3:1 DMAc and Acetone, duration of each step was 24 h, and using solvent three times the volume of the gel for each step.

[0114] The material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0115] Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621).

[0116] The results are combined in table 2.

TABLE 2

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Initial solid content (wt %)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)	Compression Young Modulus (MPa)
Benchmarking aerogel - prepared according to US20140147607 A1 page 20, [0162] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.159	10	41	0.57
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.180	10	38	2.66

[0117] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel according to the present invention has better thermal conductivity in comparison to aerogels described in the literature.

Example 3

[0118] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers methylidyne-tri-p-phenylene triisocyanate (Desmodur RE), from Bayer, and Erisys GE 60 from CVC Thermoset resins.

[0119] 4.83 g (4.83 mmol) of Erisys GE60 were placed to a container with 52 ml of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in a 1:1.5 isocyanate/epoxy equivalent ratio. To do that, 8.33 ml (6.21 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Subsequently, 1.03 ml (6.94 mmol) of N,N-Dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) were added stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at 80° C. for 180 min in an oven. A brown gel was obtained.

[0120] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of Acetone 1:3 DMAc, Acetone 1:1 DMAc, Acetone 3:1 DMAc and Acetone, duration of each step was 24 h, and using solvent three times the volume of the gel for each step.

[0121] The obtained material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0122] The results are combined in table 3.

TABLE 3

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Initial solid content (wt %)	Isocyanate/epoxy ratio	Thermal conductivity* (mW/m · K)	Compression Young Modulus** (MPa)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.435	10	1/3	49	10.50

Example 4

[0123] Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers methylidyne-tri-p-phenylene triisocyanate (Desmodur RE), from Bayer Corporation, and polyethylene glycol diglycidyl ether (PEG-DGE) from Sigma-Aldrich.

[0124] 2.88 g (5.76 mmol) of PEG-DGE were placed to a container with 44 ml of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in a 3:1 isocyanate/epoxy

equivalent ratio. To do that, 15.45 ml (11.52 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Subsequently, 1.38 ml (9.9 mmol) of triethylamine (Et₃N) were added while stirring were continued at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at 120° C. for 60 min in an oven. A brown gel was obtained.

[0125] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone, duration of each step was 24 h, and using solvent three times the volume of the gel for each step.

Example 5

[0126] 4.93 g (17.8 mmol) of Araldite MY0510 was placed to a container with 52 ml of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) while stirred at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in a 1:3 isocyanate/epoxy equivalent ratio. 7.95 ml (5.91 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while stirring was continued at 300 rpm. Subsequently, 0.99 ml (6.67 mmol) of N,N-dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) was added while stirring was continued at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at 150° C. in an oven for 60 min. A brown gel was obtained.

[0127] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone, duration of each step was 24 h, and solvent was used in three times the volume of the gel in each step.

[0128] The material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0129] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the method described in the description above.

[0130] Linear shrinkage can be defined as a decrease in a single dimension, calculated by the following equation:

$$\text{Linear Shrinkage (\%)} = \frac{\text{Initial length} - \text{final length}}{\text{initial length}} * 100$$

The results are combined in table 4.

TABLE 4

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity* (mW/m · K)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.157	3	37

[0131] The FTIR spectra of the aerogel prepared with Desmodur RE and Araldite MY0510 showed a band at 1750

cm^{-1} , due to the formation of oxazolidone rings. Neither urethane (1700 cm^{-1}) nor isocyanurate rings (1680 cm^{-1}) were formed at that temperature. FTIR spectra was obtained using FTIR Tensor 27 spectrophotometer from Bruker with an ATR Golden Gate accessory.

Example 6

[0132] 4.77 g (9.54 mmol) of PEG-DGE were placed to a container with 51.46 ml of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature ($20^\circ\text{ C}.$). Subsequently, Desmodur RE was added in a equivalent ratio 1:1. To do that, 8.53 ml (6.27 mmol) of Desmodur RE solution were added while continuing stirring at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at $80^\circ\text{ C}.$ for 180 min in an oven. A brown gel was obtained.

[0133] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone, duration of each step was 24 hours, and solvent was used three times the volume of the gel for each step.

[0134] The material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0135] The results are combined in table 5.

TABLE 5

Aerogel	Density (g/cm^3)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity* ($\text{mW}/\text{m} \cdot \text{K}$)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.102	45	78

Example 7

[0136] 1.20 g (3.3 mmol) of Aron oxetane OXTP were dissolved in 15.36 ml of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) at room temperature ($20^\circ\text{ C}.$) and 1 g (2.2 mmol) of Desmodur RE was added in a 3:2 isocyanate/oxetane equivalent ratio. Subsequently, 0.12 ml (0.79 mmol) of N,N-dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) were added while stirring at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was poured into sealed molds and heated up at $80^\circ\text{ C}.$ in an oven for 300 min. A white gel was obtained.

[0137] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone, duration of each step was 24 hours, and solvent was used three times the volume of the gel for each step.

[0138] The material was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

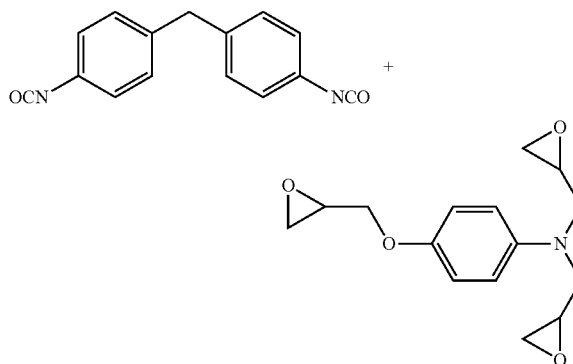
[0139] The results are combined in table 6.

TABLE 6

Aerogel	Density (g/cm^3)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity* ($\text{mW}/\text{m} \cdot \text{K}$)
Isocyanate/Oxetane aerogel	0.120	18	39

Example 8

[0140] Isocyanate/epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers 4,4'-methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI) (from Sigma-Aldrich), and N,N-Diglycidyl-4-glycidylloxylaniline, Araldite MY0510 (from Huntsman).



[0141] 1.29 g (4.65 mmol) of Araldite MY0510 was added into to a container with 25 mL of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature ($20^\circ\text{ C}.$). Subsequently, MDI was added in a 1:1 isocyanate/epoxy ratio—1.59 g (6.36 mmol) of MDI was added while stirring at 300 rpm was continued. Subsequently, 0.58 mL (3.91 mmol) of N,N-dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) was added while stirring at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solutions was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was subsequently poured into sealed molds and heated up inside an oven at 80° C for 180 min. A brown gel was obtained.

[0142] The resulting gel was stepwise washed with a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0143] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

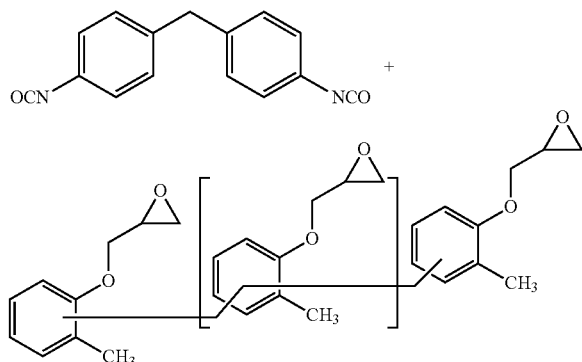
[0144] The results are combined in table 7.

TABLE 7

Aerogel	Density (g/cm^3)	Linear shrinkage (%)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.517	37

Example 8

[0145] Isocyanate/epoxy aerogels were prepared from 4,4'-methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI) and poly[(o-cresyl glycidyl ether)-co-formaldehyde] Mn~1050, both from Sigma-Aldrich.



[0146] 1.84 g (1.75 mmol) of poly[(o-cresyl glycidyl ether)-co-formaldehyde] was added into a container with 25 mL of N,N-Dimethylacetamide (DMAc) stirring at 300 rpm. The resulting slurry was stirred at 300 rpm for 5 minutes at room temperature (20° C.). Subsequently, MDI was added in a 1:1 isocyanate/epoxy ratio—1.03 g (4.12 mmol) of MDI was added while stirring at 300 rpm was continued. Subsequently, 0.57 mL (3.84 mmol) of N,N-dimethylbenzylamine (DMBA) was added while stirring at 300 rpm. Final solid content of the solutions was approximately 10 wt %. The reaction mixture was subsequently poured into sealed molds and heated inside an oven up for 180 min at 80° C. A brown gel was obtained.

[0147] The resulting gel was stepwise washed in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0148] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0149] The results are combined in table 8.

TABLE 8

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.914	40

Example 9

[0150] Isocyanate/epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers polurene KC from Sapici and bisphenol A diglycidyl ether from Sigma-Aldrich.

[0151] Bisphenol A diglycidyl ether (2.47 g, 7.3 mmol) was dissolved in 20 mL of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) and Polurene KC was added (6.65 g, containing 3.33 g of pure KC in butyl acetate, 2.1 mmol). The second solution was prepared dissolving 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (0.057 g, 0.04 mmol) in 1.58 mL of DMAc. Both solutions were mixed and poured into sealed molds and left at room temperature for 2 h. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 20 wt % and equivalent ratio 1:1.

[0152] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1

DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0153] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0154] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the test method described in the description. Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621). The results are combined in table 9.

TABLE 9

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.497	34	54

Example 10

[0155] Isocyanate/epoxy aerogels were prepared from monomers Polurene KC from Sapici and poly[(o-cresyl glycidyl ether)-co-formaldehyde] from Sigma-Aldrich (functionality 6 and 4,8).

[0156] For the first solution of poly[(o-cresyl glycidyl ether)-co-formaldehyde] (2.70 g, 2.5 mmol) was dissolved in 20 mL of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) and subsequently Polurene KC was added (6.30 g, containing 3.15 g of pure KC in butyl acetate, 2.0 mmol). The second solution was prepared by dissolving 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (0.058 g, 0.04 mmol) in 1.60 mL of DMAc. Both solutions were mixed and poured into sealed molds and left at room temperature for 2 h. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 20 wt % and equivalent ratio 1:1.

[0157] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of Acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0158] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0159] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the test method described in the description. Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621). The results are combined in table 10.

TABLE 10

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)
Isocyanate/Epoxy aerogel	0.474	29	62

Example 11

[0160] Isocyanate/Oxetane aerogels were prepared from monomers Polurene KC from Sapici and 4,4'-bis[(3-ethyl-3-oxetanyl)methoxymethyl]biphenyl (OXBP) from Toago-sei America INC.

[0161] For the first solution of OXBP (1.70 g, 4.1 mmol) was dissolved in 10 mL of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) and Polurene KC was added (4.35 g, containing 2.18 g of pure KC in butyl acetate, 1.4 mmol). The second solution was prepared dissolving 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (0.038 g, 0.03 mmol) in 4.18 mL of DMAc. Both solutions were mixed and poured into sealed molds and left at room temperature for 5 h. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 20 wt %.

[0162] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0163] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0164] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the test method described in the description. Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621). The results are combined in table 11.

TABLE 11

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)	Young Modulus (MPa)
Isocyanate/Oxetane aerogel	0.490	35	73	64

Example 12

[0165] Isocyanate/Oxetane aerogels were prepared from monomers Polurene HR from Sapici and bis[1-ethyl(3-oxetanyl)methyl ether (OXT-221) from Toagosei America INC.

[0166] For the first solution of OXT-221 (1.13 g, 5.3 mmol) was dissolved in 10 mL of N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMAc) and Polurene HR was added (5.55 g, containing 2.77 g of pure HR in butyl acetate, 2.7 mmol). The second solution was prepared by dissolving 1,5,7-triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene (0.039 g, 0.03 mmol) in 3.64 mL of DMAc. Both solutions were mixed and poured into sealed molds and left at room temperature for 24 h. Final solid content of the solution was approximately 20 wt %.

[0167] The resulting gel was washed stepwise in a mixture of acetone 1:3 DMAc, acetone 1:1 DMAc, acetone 3:1 DMAc and acetone. Each washing cycle was 24 h, and three times the volume of the gel in solvent was used in each washing cycle.

[0168] The obtained gel was dried by supercritical drying with supercritical carbon dioxide.

[0169] Thermal conductivity was measured with a heat diffusivity sensor according to the test method described in the description. Compression Young Modulus was measured with an Instron 3366 (ASTM D1621). The results are combined in table 12.

TABLE 12

Aerogel	Density (g/cm ³)	Linear shrinkage (%)	Thermal conductivity (mW/m · K)	Young Modulus (MPa)
Isocyanate/Oxetane aerogel	0.488	33	68	43

[0170] Isocyanate/epoxy aerogels according to the present invention show densities in the range of 0.1 to 0.3 g/cm³ and a compression modulus from 0.2 MPa up to 64 MPa. Thermal conductivity of the aerogels can be measured by means of a diffusivity method, showing a thermal conductivity in the range of 33 to 73 mW/m·K.

What is claimed is:

1. An organic aerogel obtained by reacting an isocyanate compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 and a cyclic ether compound having a functionality equal or greater than 2 in a presence of a solvent.

2. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said an isocyanate compound and said cyclic ether compound are reacted in the presence of a catalyst.

3. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said isocyanate compound has a functionality from 2 to 6, preferably from 2 to 3.

4. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said cyclic ether compound has a functionality from 2 to 6, preferably from 2 to 4.

5. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said isocyanate compound is an aromatic isocyanate compound or an aliphatic isocyanate compound.

6. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said cyclic ether compound is an epoxy compound or an oxetane compound.

7. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein ratio of epoxy/oxetane groups to isocyanate groups is 18:1-1:15, preferably 5:1-1:5.

8. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said solvent is a polar solvent, preferably polar aprotic solvent.

9. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said catalyst is selected from the group consisting of alkyl amines, aromatic amines, imidazole derivatives, aza compounds, guanidine derivatives and amidines.

10. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said organic aerogel has a solid content from 3 to 30%, based on initial solid content of the solution, preferably from 5 to 20%.

11. An organic aerogel according to claim 1, wherein said organic aerogel has a thermal conductivity less than 75 mW/m·K, preferably less than 55 mW/m·K, more preferably less than 50 mW/m·K, and even more preferably less than 45 mW/m·K.

12. A method for preparing an organic aerogel according to claim 1 comprising the steps of:

- 1) dissolving a cyclic ether compound into a solvent and adding an isocyanate compound and mixing,
- 2) adding a catalyst if present, and mixing;
- 3) letting the mixture to stand in order to form a gel;
- 4) washing said gel with a solvent; and
- 5) drying said gel by supercritical or ambient drying.

13. A method according to claim 12, wherein temperature from room temperature to 180° C. is applied at step 3 to form a gel, preferably temperature from room temperature to 150° C. is applied.

14. A thermal insulating material or an acoustic material comprising an organic aerogel according to claim 1.

15. Use of an organic aerogel according to claim 1 as a thermal insulating material or acoustic material.

* * * * *