US 20250257915A1

(19) United States

(12) Patent Application Publication

(10) Pub. No.: US 2025/0257915 A1

(43) Pub. Date: Aug. 14, 2025

Denison et al.

(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR STAGED STARTUP OF AIR-COOLED LOW CHARGED PACKAGED AMMONIA REFRIGERATION SYSTEM**

(71) Applicant: **Evapco, Inc.**, Taneytown, MD (US)

(72) Inventors: **Jake William Denison**, Germantown, MD (US); **Donald Lee Hamilton**, Westminster, MD (US); **Samuel K. Vineyard, II**, Casey, IL (US)

(21) Appl. No.: **18/894,987**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 24, 2024**

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Continuation of application No. 18/209,002, filed on Jun. 13, 2023, now Pat. No. 12,098,872, which is a continuation of application No. 17/510,622, filed on Oct. 26, 2021, now Pat. No. 11,674,723, which is a division of application No. 16/697,917, filed on Nov. 27, 2019, now Pat. No. 11,156,392.

(60) Provisional application No. 62/772,334, filed on Nov. 28, 2018.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**

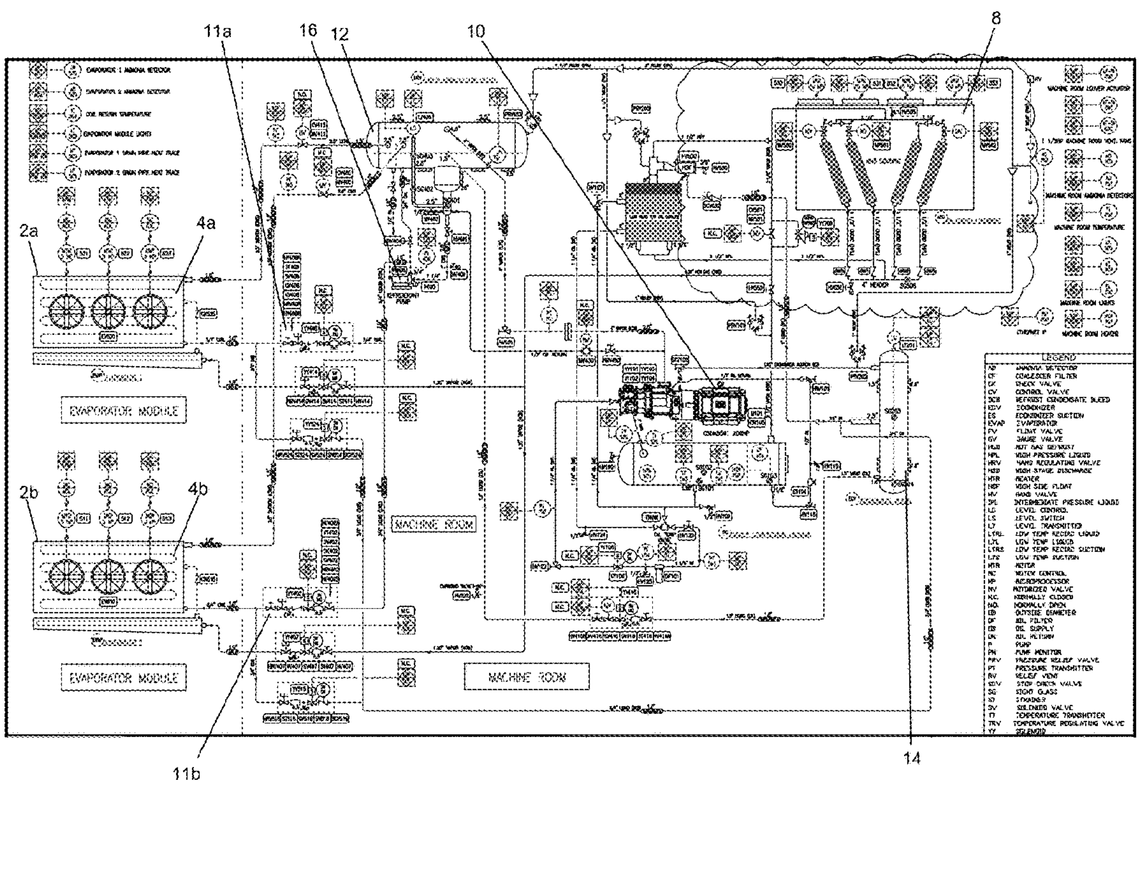
F25B 43/02	(2006.01)
F25B 39/02	(2006.01)
F25B 39/04	(2006.01)
F25B 41/20	(2021.01)
F25B 41/31	(2021.01)
F25B 41/40	(2021.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***F25B 43/02*** (2013.01); ***F25B 39/02*** (2013.01); ***F25B 39/04*** (2013.01); ***F25B 41/20*** (2021.01); ***F25B 41/31*** (2021.01); ***F25B 41/40*** (2021.01); *F25B 2339/02* (2013.01); *F25B 2339/04* (2013.01); *F25B 2400/0401* (2013.01); *F25B 2400/13* (2013.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Apparatus for staged startup of air-cooled low charged packaged ammonia refrigeration system includes motorized valves on condenser coil inlets, a main compressor discharge motorized valve, a bypass pressure regulator valve in the main compressor piping, check valves on the condenser outlets and speed control of the condenser fans. The condenser inlet motorized valves provide precise control of gas feed to the condensers, so pressure can build without collapsing the oil pressure. The condenser coil outlet contains inline check valves to prevent liquid backflow when a coil is isolated. The compressor discharge line contains a single motorized valve for regulating discharge pressure at startup. The motorized valve in the compressor discharge piping also includes a bypass with a mechanical pressure regulator to allow precise regulation at the minimum discharge pressure. Once discharge pressure rises above the minimum setpoint, the condenser inlet solenoid coils will open one at a time. The discharge pressure regulating motorized valve will simultaneously regulate the discharge pressure until the condenser coil has warmed up enough to maintain discharge pressure.



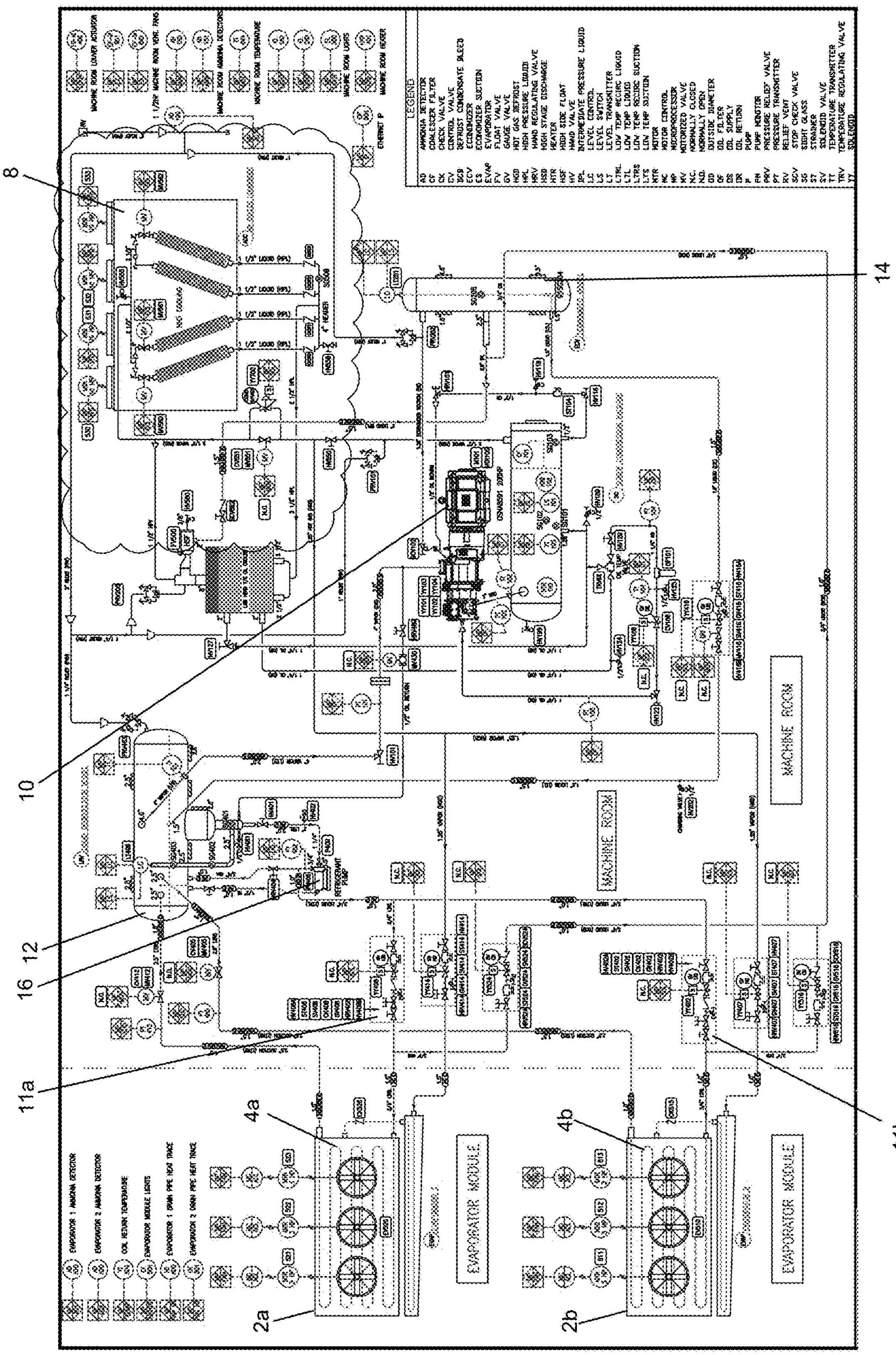


Figure 1

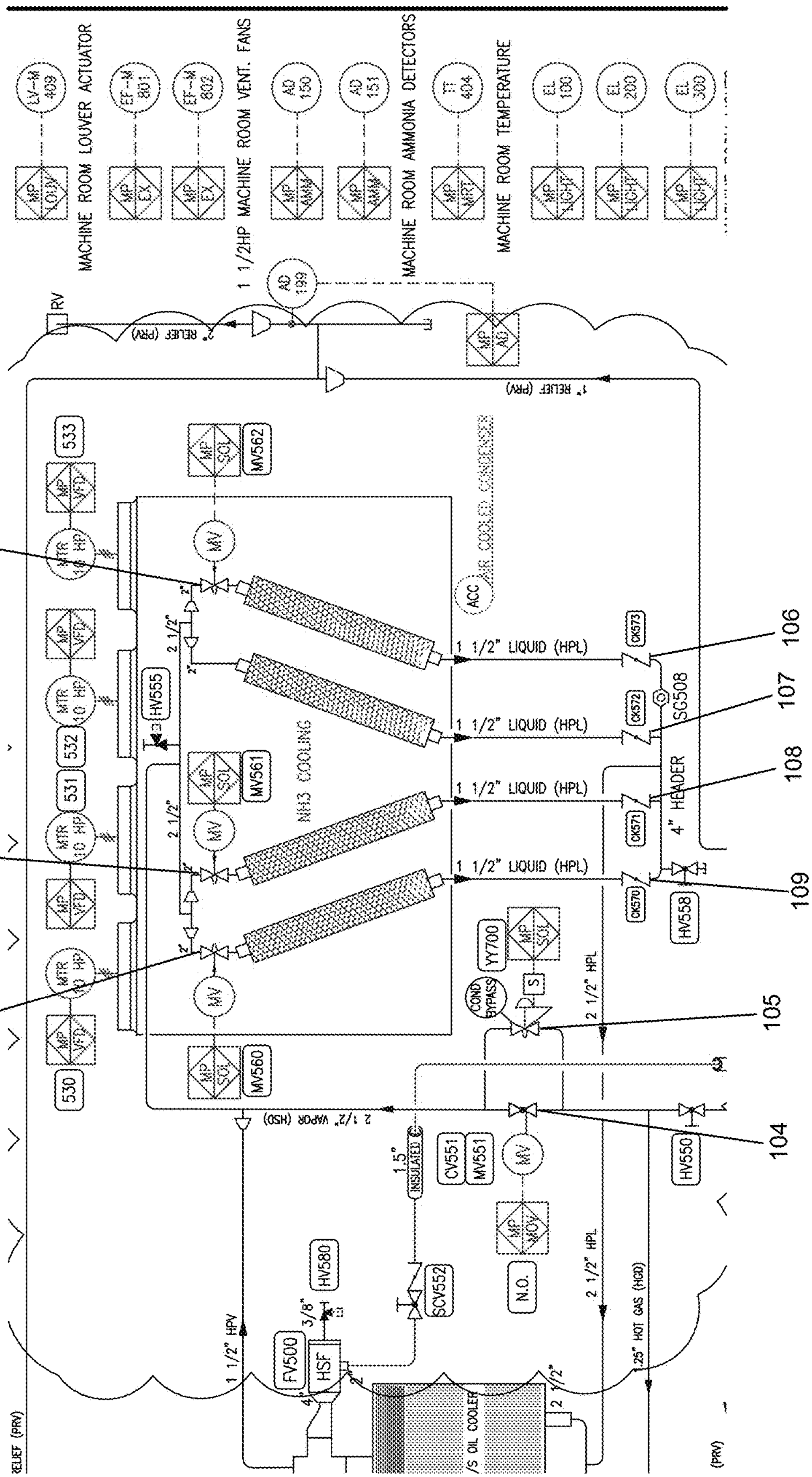

MACHINE ROOM LOUVER ACTUATOR
1 1/2HP MACHINE ROOM VENT. FANS
MACHINE ROOM AMMONIA DETECTORS
MACHINE ROOM TEMPERATURE
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
NH3 COOLING
ACC
1 1/2" LIQUID (HPL)
4" HEADER
SG508
HV555
HV558
HV550
HV580
MV560
MV561
MV562
CV551
MV551
YY700
SCV552
FV500
HSF
N.O.
530
531
532
533
2 1/2" VAPOR (HSD)
2 1/2" HPL
1 1/2" HPV
1.25" HOT GAS (HGD)
2" RELIEF (PRV)
1" RELIEF (PRV)
RV

Figure 2

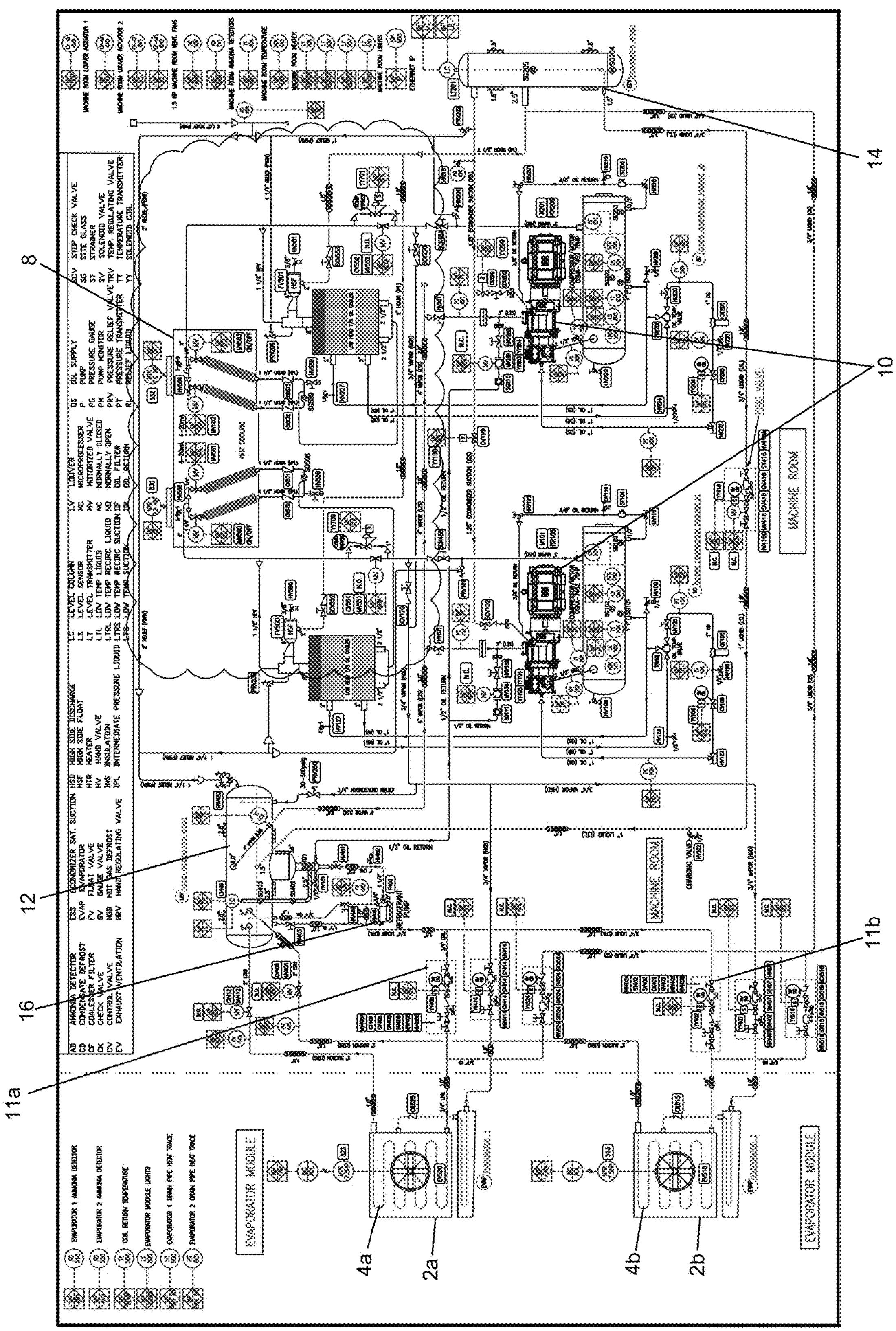


Figure 3

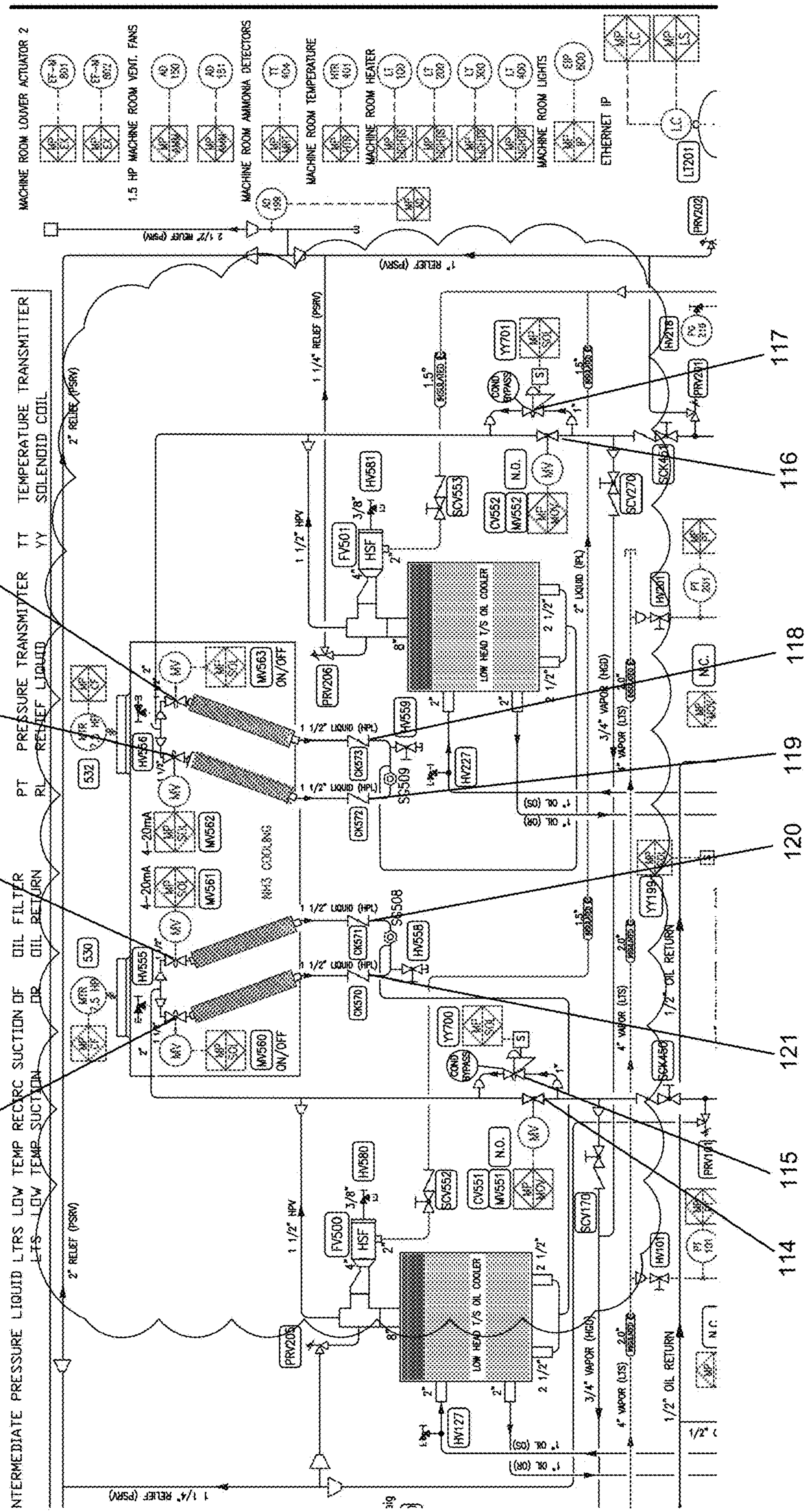


Figure 4

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR STAGED STARTUP OF AIR-COOLED LOW CHARGED PACKAGED AMMONIA REFRIGERATION SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to ammonia refrigeration systems.

Description of the Background

[0002] Air-cooled (non-evaporative), ammonia refrigeration systems struggle to start during low-ambient conditions. As the compressor discharges superheated vapor into the condenser, the cold condenser coils immediately condense any vapor, preventing the discharge pressure to increase. Screw compressors require a minimum pressure delta across the housing to maintain proper oil flow to the compressor's components. The air-cooled condenser surface area is too large, due the very low ambient conditions (very high temperature differences) to allow the delta pressure to build at start-up. Chlorofluorocarbon refrigerant (CFC, HFC, HCFC) systems have utilized isolating valves on the outlet of condenser coils, which force liquid to back up in the condenser, reducing the surface area of the coil that is capable of condensing vapor. However, this requires significant charge that must be stored elsewhere in the system during normal operation. This is not acceptable to achieving low-charge and critically charged ammonia refrigeration systems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention overcomes the problems of the prior art by allowing the condenser coils to isolate individually during the startup period, allowing individual sequencing of the coils until the condenser is warm enough to maintain discharge and oil pressure. This invention also eliminates the need for a stand-alone oil pump to maintain oil pressure during start-up.

[0004] Several components provide the control required to stably and reliably operate the system during start-up: Motorized valves can be installed on all or one of the condenser coil inlets, a main compressor discharge motorized valve is installed, a bypass pressure regulator valve in the main compressor piping is installed, check valves on the condenser outlets are installed and speed control of the condenser fans. The condenser inlet motorized valves provide precise control of gas feed or act as an on/off valve for the condensers allowing pressure to build without collapsing the oil pressure. The motorized valves provide precise control of the gas flow at a very low pressure drop or provide on/off control as needed. The air-cooled condensers may be any style: tube and fin or microchannel, etc. in horizontal or vertical tube arrangements. The condenser coil outlet contains vertically oriented inline check valves to prevent liquid backflow when a coil is isolated. This allows each condenser coil to be isolated without trapping significant liquid refrigerant charge in a low-charge ammonia refrigeration system. Trapping an appreciable amount of liquid in the condenser coils upsets startup of a packaged ammonia refrigeration system. The compressor discharge line contains a single motorized valve for regulating discharge pressure. The motorized valve is used for coarse gas control at start-up. The motorized valve in the compressor discharge piping also includes a bypass with a mechanical pressure regulator to allow precise regulation at the minimum discharge pressure. Once discharge pressure rises above the minimum setpoint, the condenser inlet solenoid coils will open one at a time. The discharge pressure regulating motorized valve will simultaneously regulate the discharge pressure until the condenser coil has warmed up enough to maintain discharge pressure. Fan speed control is also utilized to maintain stable operation at start-up.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. **1** is a schematic of a refrigeration system according to a single compressor embodiment of the invention.

[0006] FIG. **2** is a blow-up of the upper right-hand portion of FIG. **1**.

[0007] FIG. **3** is a schematic of a refrigeration system according to a dual compressor embodiment of the invention.

[0008] FIG. **4** is a blow-up of the upper right-hand portion of FIG. **3**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0009] FIG. **1** is a process and instrumentation diagram for a single compressor, air-cooled (non-evaporative) condenser, low charge packaged penthouse refrigeration system according to an embodiment of the invention. A blow-up of the upper right quadrant of FIG. **1** is presented in FIG. **2**. FIG. **3** is a process and instrumentation diagram for a dual compressor, air-cooled condenser, low charge packaged penthouse refrigeration system according to an embodiment of the invention. A blow-up of the upper right quadrant of FIG. **3** is presented in FIG. **4**.

[0010] The system includes evaporators **2***a* and **2***b*, including evaporator coils **4***a* and **4***b*, respectively, condenser **8**, compressor(s) **10**, expansion devices **11***a* and **11***b* (which may be provided in the form of valves, metering orifices or other expansion devices), pump **16**, liquid-vapor separation device **12**, and economizer **14**. According to one embodiment, liquid-vapor separation device **12** may be a recirculator vessel. According to other embodiments, liquid-vapor separation device **12** and economizer **14** may one or both provided in the form of single or dual phase cyclonic separators. The foregoing elements may be connected using standard refrigerant tubing in the manner shown in FIGS. **1-4**. As used herein, the term "connected to" or "connected via" means connected directly or indirectly, unless otherwise stated.

[0011] According to the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1-4**, low pressure liquid refrigerant ("LPL") is supplied to the evaporator by pump **16** via expansion devices **11**. The refrigerant accepts heat from the refrigerated space, leaves the evaporator as low-pressure vapor ("LPV") and liquid and is delivered to the liquid-vapor separation device **12** (which may optionally be a cyclonic separator) which separates the liquid from the vapor. Liquid refrigerant ("LPL") is returned to the pump **16**, and the vapor ("LPV") is delivered to the compressor **10** which condenses the vapor and sends high pressure vapor ("HPV") to the condenser **8** which compresses it to high pressure liquid ("HPL"). The HPL is delivered to the economizer **14** which improves system efficiency by reducing the high-pressure liquid ("HPL") to intermediate pressure liquid ("IPL") then delivers it to the liquid-vapor separation device **12**, which supplies the pump **16** with low pressure liquid refrigerant ("LPL"), completing the refrigerant cycle.

[0012] FIGS. **1-4** also include numerous control, isolation, and safety valves, as well as temperature and pressure sensors (a.k.a. indicators or gages) for monitoring and control of the system.

Single Compressor Penthouse Improved Startup Configuration and Method

[0013] Referring to the single compressor embodiment (FIGS. **1** and **2**, and particularly FIG. **2**), motorized condenser inlet **101**, **102** and **103** valves are installed on the inlet of the condenser coil bundles. The motorized valves can function as variable control valves or on/off valves.

[0014] A single condenser bundle is open to ensure proper surface is available during start-up. As the system begins increasing load, valves **101**, **102** and **103** will begin to open. Once all valves are open, variable fan control takes over pressure control. The sequencing of the use of valves and fan operation can vary, based on system operation and design.

[0015] Motorized valve **104** and ammonia pressure regulator valve **105** provide precise ammonia gas control during start-up of the system in low ambient conditions. During start-up, all motorized valves are closed, and the pressure regulator provides compressor differential pressure control to ensure proper oil flow. The ammonia pressure regulator **105** provides low volume flow control. As the compressor begins to load, more ammonia gas flow is generated. Motorized valve **104** begins to open and control the discharge pressure, compressor differential pressure and oil flow.

[0016] The next step during system start-up is to begin opening the condenser motorized valves **101**, **102** and **103** and concomitant staging the startup of the condenser fans.

[0017] Check valves **106**, **107**, **108** and **109** installed at the outlet to the condenser bundles are utilized to ensure liquid ammonia does not backflow into the condenser or other coil bundles during periods of downtime or normal operating periods.

[0018] Each of valves **101**, **102**, **103** and **105** are activated by attached microcontrollers or PLC (programmable logic control). A central microcontroller or PLC monitors the status of each valve, as well as discharge pressure, and directs the action of the valves accordingly for sequential startup of the condenser coils while maintaining gas and oil pressure.

[0019] Not all valves are required for a every ambient condition. In fact, above a certain ambient temperature, low ambient control may not be required. Therefore, valves can be installed and arranged to optimize operation at startup based on the ambient temperature.

Dual Compressor Penthouse Improved Startup Configuration and Method

(Isolated Compressor Operation)

[0020] FIGS. **3** and **4** show a process and instrumentation diagram for a dual compressor, air-cooled condenser, low charge packaged penthouse refrigeration system. The dual compressor design utilizes and isolated compressor concept. The compressors use different oil separators, oil coolers, and condenser bundles.

[0021] Motorized valves **110**, **111**, **112** and **113** are installed on the inlet of the condenser coil bundles. The motorized valves can function as variable control valves or on/off valves.

[0022] During startup, motorized valves **111** and **112** will be opened to a minimum position to allow ammonia gas flow to the condenser coil. As the system begins increasing load, valves **111** and **112** will open to 100% and valves **113** and **110** will begin opening. Once all valves are open, variable fan control takes over pressure control. The sequencing of the use of valves and fan operation can vary, based on system operation and design.

[0023] Fine ammonia gas control during start-up of the system is provided by:

Compressor #1

[0024] a. Valve #**114** Motorized valve

[0025] b. Valve #**115** Pressure regulator

[0026] c. Start-up requires all motorized valves are closed and the pressure regulator provides compressor differential pressure to ensure proper oil flow. During start-up, all motorized valves are closed, and the pressure regulator provides compressor differential pressure control to ensure proper oil flow. The ammonia pressure regulator provides low volume flow control. As the compressor begins to load, more ammonia gas flow is generated. Motorized valve #**114** begins to open and control the discharge pressure, compressor differential pressure and oil flow.

Compressor #2

[0027] a. Valve #**116** Motorized valve

[0028] b. Valve #**117** Pressure regulator

[0029] c. Start-up requires all motorized valves are closed and the pressure regulator provides compressor differential pressure to ensure proper oil flow. During start-up, all motorized valves are closed, and the pressure regulator provides compressor differential pressure control to ensure proper oil flow. The ammonia pressure regulator provides low volume flow control. As the compressor begins to load, more ammonia gas flow is generated. Motorized valve #**116** begins to open and control the discharge pressure, compressor differential pressure and oil flow.

[0030] The next stage is to begin opening the condenser motorized valves (**110**, **111**, **112** and **113**) and staging the condenser fans accordingly.

[0031] Check valves (**118**, **119**, **120** and **121**) are utilized to ensure liquid ammonia does not backflow into the condenser or other coil bundles during periods of downtime or normal operating periods.

[0032] As with the single compressor embodiment, each of valves **110-117** is activated by attached microcontrollers or PLC. A central microcontroller or PLC monitors the status of each valve, as well as discharge pressure, and directs the action of the valves accordingly for sequential startup of the condenser coils while maintaining gas and oil pressure. Not all valves are required for every ambient condition. In fact, above a certain ambient temperature, low ambient control may not be required. Therefore, valves can be installed and arranged to optimize operation at startup based on the ambient temperature.

[0033] According to various embodiments, the evaporator is housed in the evaporator (penthouse) module, and the remaining components of the system shown in FIGS. **1-4** (except for the condenser coils and fans and associated structures) are housed in an enclosure such as a machine room module. The condenser coils and fans may be mounted on top of the enclosure or machine room module for a complete self-contained rooftop system. The air-cooled condenser may optionally be fitted with an adiabatic air-pre-cooling system. The entire system may be completely self-contained in two roof-top modules making it very easy for over-the-road transport to the install site, using e.g., flat bed permit load non-escort vehicles. The penthouse and machine room modules can be separated for shipping and/or for final placement, but according to most preferred embodiments, the penthouse and machine room modules are mounted adjacent to one-another to maximize the reduction in refrigerant charge. According to a most preferred embodiment, the penthouse module and the machine room module are integrated into a single module, although the evaporator space is separated and insulated from the machine room space to comply with industry codes. According to an alternative embodiment, the evaporator coil may be mounted in a refrigerated space adjacent to, below, or remote from, the machine room module.

[0034] The combination of features as described herein provides a very low charge refrigeration system compared to the prior art. Specifically, the present invention is configured to require less than six pounds of ammonia per ton of refrigeration capacity. According to a preferred embodiment, the present invention can require less than four pounds of ammonia per ton of refrigeration. And according to most preferred embodiments, the present invention can operate efficiently with less than two pounds per ton of refrigeration capacity.

[0035] While the present invention has been described primarily in the context of refrigeration systems in which ammonia is the refrigerant, it is contemplated that this invention will have equal application for refrigeration systems using other natural refrigerants, including carbon dioxide.

[0036] The description of the invention is merely exemplary in nature and, thus, variations that do not depart from the concept of a packaged (one- or two-module integrated and compact system) low refrigerant charge (i.e., less than 10 lbs of refrigerant per ton of refrigeration capacity) refrigeration system are intended to be within the scope of the invention. Any variations from the specific embodiments described herein but which otherwise constitute a packaged, pumped liquid, recirculating refrigeration system with charges of 10 lbs or less of refrigerant per ton of refrigeration capacity should not be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the invention set forth in the following claims.

1. A refrigeration system comprising:

a refrigerant evaporator coil,

vapor/liquid separation structure connected to an outlet of said evaporator coil via refrigerant line configured to separate low pressure refrigerant vapor from low pressure refrigerant liquid;

a refrigerant compressor connected to an outlet of said liquid-vapor separation device via refrigerant line and configured to compress refrigerant vapor from said vapor liquid separation structure;

a compressor discharge motorized valve connected to an outlet of said refrigerant compressor via refrigerant line and configured for coarse regulation of discharge pressure during system start-up;

a bypass pressure regulator valve connected to an outlet of said refrigerant compressor via refrigerant line and configured for precise regulation of discharge pressure during start-up;

an air-cooled refrigerant condenser comprising a plurality of condenser coils connected to said compressor discharge motorized valve and said bypass pressure regulator valve via refrigerant line and configured to condense refrigerant vapor produced in said compressor to refrigerant liquid,

a motorized valve connected to an inlet of at least one of said condenser coils configured to provide control of gas feed to the condenser coil to allow pressure to build without collapsing oil pressure;

vertically oriented inline check valve connected to an outlet of at least one of said condenser coils configured to prevent liquid backflow;

a collection vessel connected to an outlet of said condenser via refrigerant line for receiving refrigerant liquid from said condenser;

refrigerant line connecting an outlet of said collection vessel to an inlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure and configured to deliver refrigerant liquid to said separation structure;

said vapor/liquid separation structure having a liquid outlet that is connected via refrigerant line to an inlet of said evaporator coil;

and wherein said vapor/liquid separation structure, said compressor, and said collection vessel, are situated inside a pre-packaged modular enclosure.

2. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said refrigerant is ammonia.

3. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said vapor/liquid separation structure comprises a recirculator vessel.

4. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said collection vessel comprises an economizer.

5. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, further comprising an oil separator vessel configured to separate compressor oil from refrigerant vapor received from said compressor.

6. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said air-cooled condenser comprises condenser fans and is located on top of or adjacent to said pre-packaged modular enclosure.

7. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said air-cooled condenser comprises an adiabatic air-pre-cooling system.

8. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said evaporator coil is mounted in a prefabricated modular evaporator room.

9. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, wherein said evaporator coil is mounted in a refrigerated space adjacent to or below said transportable prefabricated modular enclosure.

10. A refrigeration system according to claim **1**, which requires less than ten pounds of refrigerant per ton of refrigeration capacity.

11. A refrigeration system according to claim 1, which requires less than four pounds of refrigerant per ton of refrigeration capacity.

12. A refrigeration system comprising:
an air-cooled refrigerant condenser comprising a plurality of condenser coils;
a motorized valve connected to an inlet of at least one of said condenser coils configured to provide control of gas feed to the condenser coil to allow pressure to build without collapsing oil pressure;
vertically oriented inline check valve connected to an outlet of at least one of said condenser coils configured to prevent liquid backflow; and
a transportable prefabricated modular enclosure sized to allow entry of a technician therein for servicing, said transportable prefabricated modular enclosure containing:
a vapor/liquid separation structure configured to be connected to an outlet of an evaporator via refrigerant line;
a refrigerant compressor connected to an outlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure via refrigerant line and connected to an inlet of said condenser via refrigerant line;
a compressor discharge motorized valve connected to an outlet of said refrigerant compressor via refrigerant line and configured for coarse regulation of discharge pressure during system start-up;
a bypass pressure regulator valve connected to an outlet of said refrigerant compressor via refrigerant line and configured for precise regulation of discharge pressure during start-up;
said compressor discharge motorized valve and said bypass pressure regulator valve connected to said air-cooled refrigerant condenser via refrigerant line,
a collection vessel connected to an outlet of said air-cooled refrigerant condenser via refrigerant line;
refrigerant line connecting an outlet of said collection vessel to an inlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure;
wherein said vapor/liquid separation structure has an outlet that is configured to be connected via refrigerant line to an inlet of an evaporator;
said refrigeration system further comprising refrigerant in an amount of less than ten pounds of refrigerant per ton of refrigeration capacity.

13. A refrigeration system according to claim 12, further comprising an evaporator connected to an inlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure and connected to an outlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure.

14. A refrigeration system according to claim 13, wherein said evaporator is mounted in a prefabricated modular evaporator room.

15. A refrigeration system according to claim 13, wherein said evaporator is mounted in a refrigerated space adjacent to or below said transportable prefabricated modular enclosure.

16. A refrigeration system according to claim 12, further comprising a recirculator pump situated in a refrigerant flow path between a fluid outlet of said vapor/liquid separation structure, and an inlet of an evaporator.

17. A refrigeration system according to claim 12, wherein said air-cooled condenser comprises a fan and is configured to be mounted on top of or adjacent to said transportable prefabricated modular enclosure.

18. A method for start-up of an air-cooled low charged packaged ammonia refrigeration system having an evaporator, liquid/vapor separator, a compressor, an air-cooled condenser having a plurality of condenser coils, and a collection vessel without the need for a stand-alone oil pump to maintain oil pressure during start-up, said method comprising:
starting refrigerant flow through said condenser coils one at a time until each condenser coil is warm enough to maintain discharge and oil pressure;
using a motorized valve in a discharge line from said compressor for course control of gas flow out of said compressor;
using a bypass pressure regulator valve in said discharge line from said compressor for fine control of gas flow out of said compressor;
using motorized valves at an inlet of at least one condenser coil in said air-cooled condenser to control gas feed to said condenser coil;
using check valves at an outlet of at least one condenser coil to prevent liquid backflow during coil isolation;
monitoring gas pressure in said discharge line from said compressor and controlling the opening of said motorized valves at an inlet of at least one condenser coil based on said monitored gas pressure using a microcontroller or programmable logic controller.

19. A method for modifying an air-cooled low charged packaged ammonia refrigeration system having an evaporator, liquid/vapor separator, a compressor, an air-cooled condenser, and a collection vessel, said method comprising:
installing a motorized valves in at least one condenser coil inlet, installing a motorized valve in a main compressor discharge line;
installing a bypass pressure regulator valve in said main compressor discharge line, and
installing inline check valves on at least one condenser coil outlet.

20. A method according to claim 19, comprising installing motorized valves in all but one condenser coil inlet.

* * * * *