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United States Patent	12392222
Kind Code	B1
Date of Patent	August 19, 2025
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Well rehabilitation method

Abstract

A method for remediating a well. A remediation chemical is introduced into the well. An arc discharge tool is inserted into the well and lowered to a predetermined depth within the well, the arc discharge tool configured to generate electrical discharges between a pair of electrodes, the electrical discharges causing shock waves within the fluids within the well. At least one shock wave is generated with the arc discharge tool, and the arc discharge tool is withdrawn from the well.

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Family ID:	1000008112770
Appl. No.:	18/815558
Filed:	August 26, 2024

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: **E21B37/06** (20060101); **C02F1/46** (20230101); **C02F1/50** (20230101); **C02F103/06** (20060101); **E21B37/08** (20060101); **E21B41/02** (20060101)

U.S. Cl.:

CPC **E21B37/06** (20130101); **C02F1/4608** (20130101); **C02F1/50** (20130101); C02F2103/06 (20130101); C02F2201/46135 (20130101); C02F2209/02 (20130101); C02F2209/05 (20130101); C02F2303/04 (20130101); E21B37/08 (20130101); E21B41/02 (20130101)

Field of Classification Search

CPC: E21B (37/00); E21B (7/15); E21B (28/00); E21B (41/02); E21B (43/003); E21B (43/128); E21B (37/08); E21B (49/00)

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Background/Summary

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BACKGROUND

Field

(2) This disclosure relates to wells for oil gas, water or geothermal energy, and, in particular, to methods for rehabilitation wells where production output has declined.

Related Art

(3) Petroleum products such as oil and natural gas are commonly produced by drilling a borehole or wellbore into the earth into or through an oil or gas producing subsurface formation. Similarly, water or steam for geothermal energy may be extracted by drilling a wellbore into an appropriate subsurface formation. The fluid (i.e. oil, gas, water, steam, or a mixture thereof) produced by a well will be referred to herein as the “product”.

(4) FIG. 1 is a simplified schematic diagram of a well 100 including a pipe 120 extending into a borehole 110 drilled into the earth. The pipe 120 is typically composed of multiple, possibly hundreds, of pipe segments. Each pipe segment has a male thread on one end and a female thread

on the other end such that adjacent drill pipe segments can be threaded together to form a continuous pipe. The outer diameter of the pipe **120** may be from 2.5 inches to 8 inches or greater. The pipe **120** is hollow and has a smaller diameter than the borehole **110**.

(5) The approximately annular space **115** between the outside of the pipe **120** and the inside of the borehole **110** may be filled by the product. The annular space **115** may be filled with cement. The annular space **115** may be filled with a “gravel pack” that acts as a filter to prevent or inhibit sand from the subsurface layer from entering the pipe **120**. The gravel pack may comprise gravel, coarse sand, or a synthetic material such as glass beads.

(6) A portion **125** of the pipe **120** is perforated to allow the product to enter the pipe **120**. The perforated portion **125** is typically near or at the lower end of the pipe **120**. In some cases, multiple sections of the pipe **120** may be perforated to allow products to be extracted from multiple subsurface formations at different depths. When the annular space **115** is filled with cement, perforations in the pipe **120** may be formed by a perforating tool that uses shaped explosive charges to form holes through the pipe **120** and the surrounding cement. Perforations formed in this manner may extend into the subsurface layer. When the annular space **115** is filled with fluid or a gravel pack, the perforations in the pipe **120** may be formed before the pipe is placed in the borehole **110**. In this case, the perforated portion of the pipe is commonly referred to as a “screen”.

(7) The pipe **120** terminates at surface equipment **130**. In some cases, the hydraulic pressure in the subsurface formation will force the product through the pipe **120** to the surface. In such cases, the surface equipment **130** may include a well head apparatus to control the pressure in the pipe **120**. In cases where the product does not rise to the surface due to subsurface pressure, the surface equipment **130** may include all or portions of a pump to pull the product from the well. In either case, surface equipment **130** will include means to capture the product extracted from the well.

(8) Wells may be substantially more complex than the simple example shown in FIG. 1. In particular, a well may include multiple, roughly concentric, pipes descending into a borehole. For example, a well may include an outer pipe or casing cemented to the borehole and an inner pipe or production tube for extracting fluids from the well. In such cases, both the casing and the production tube will be perforated at roughly the same depth to allow fluids to flow from the subsurface formation into the production tube and thence to the surface.

(9) Over time, mineral deposits and/or growth of bacteria and other organic material may degrade the productivity of a well. Minerals and organic material may be deposited with the perforations in the pipes, between grains of a gravel pack, if present, and within perforations and channels in the subsurface formation. Such deposits may obstruct the flow of the product from the subsurface formation to the surface equipment and thus cause a reduction in the flow rate of the product from the well. When the flow rate is reduced to an unacceptable level, a remediation process may be undertaken to restore, to at least some degree, the flow rate of the well.

(10) Well remediation typically uses chemicals to break up or dissolve materials obstructing the fluid flow within a well. Chemicals used in well remediation include strong acids to attack mineral deposits and/or bactericides to attack organic deposits. These and other chemicals used in well remediation will be referred to herein as “remediation chemicals”. The use of remediation chemicals may be combined with agitation of the fluids in the well and/or mechanical scrubbing using, for example, a brush or water jet. Debris from the removed deposits may be pumped from the well along with any residual chemicals.

(11) This patent describes an improved well remediation method that uses an arc discharge tool in combination with appropriate remediation chemicals to remove obstructing deposits from a well. An arc discharge tool generates a strong shock wave using an electric discharge between a pair of electrodes. The shock wave may shatter mineral deposits and shred organic deposits which can increase the surface area of the deposits subject to attack by the remediation chemicals. Further, the strong shock wave generated by the arc discharge tool can drive the remediation chemicals through

pipe perforations and/or a gravel pack into the perforations and channels in the subsurface formation.

Description

THE DRAWINGS

- (1) FIG. 1 is a simplified schematic diagram of a well.
- (2) FIG. 2 is a perspective view of an exemplary arc discharge tool.
- (3) FIG. 3 is a block diagram of the arc discharge tool.
- (4) FIG. 4 is a flow chart of a well rehabilitation method.
- (5) FIG. 5A is a simplified schematic diagram of a well during a first stage of rehabilitation.
- (6) FIG. 5B is a simplified schematic diagram of a well with an electric discharge tool during a second stage of rehabilitation.
- (7) Throughout this description, elements appearing in figures are assigned three-digit reference designators, where the most significant digit is the figure number where the element is first introduced, and the two least significant digits are specific to the element. An element that is not described in conjunction with a figure may be presumed to have the same characteristics and function as a previously-described element having the same reference designator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (8) Apparatus
- (9) Referring now to FIG. 2, an exemplary arc discharge tool **230**, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 8,950,495, may be suitable for use in the well remediation method described herein. Other configurations of arc discharge tools are possible and may be used in the method described herein.
- (10) The arc discharge tool **230** has an elongate cylindrical body **232** configured to be lowered into a well to the depth of a perforated portion of the well pipe. A first end **234** of the body is adapted to connect to a cable that provides electrical power to the arc discharge tool **230** and provides a mechanism to lower the arc discharge tool **230** into, and extract the arc discharge tool **230** from, the pipe. A discharge head **240** is located at the opposite end of the body **232**. A conventional centralizer **236** may be attached adjacent the discharge head **240** to ensure that the discharge head is centrally located within the well pipe.
- (11) As shown in the detail view, the discharge head **240** has a first electrode **242** and a second electrode **246** separated by a gap **250**. When a high voltage is placed between the first electrode **242** and the second electrode **246**, an electrical discharge can occur across the gap **250**. The high voltage may be applied such that either the first electrode **242** or the second electrode **246** is positive and the other electrode is negative. The electrical discharge will produce a substantial shock wave in the fluid present in the gap. The shock wave typically propagates symmetrically and outwardly from the gap to impact the interior wall of the pipe. When the discharge head **240** is positioned in the perforated portion of a well pipe, the shock wave may pass through the perforations in the pipe to impact the subsurface formation. The effect of the impact of the shock wave, in combination with the action of chemicals introduced into the well, may remove mineral deposits and organic materials from the inside of the pipe, the perforations, a gravel pack if present, and the surrounding subsurface formation.
- (12) The second electrode **246** is held by a holder **248** having three or four legs coupled to the body **232**. The holder **248** holds the second electrode **246** in position to set a desired width of the gap **250** between the first and second electrodes. The holder **248** also provides an electrical connection between the body **232** and the second electrode **246**.
- (13) The first electrode **242** is separated from the holder **248** by an insulator **244**. Insulator **244** provides electrical isolation for the first electrode **242** and inhibits electrical discharge directly between the first electrode **242** and the legs of the holder **248**.

- (14) FIG. 3 shows a block diagram of an arc discharge system **300** which includes an arc discharge tool **330** which may be the arc discharge tool **230** shown in FIG. 2. The arc discharge system **300** includes a surface installation **320** and the arc discharge tool **330** linked by a cable **322**.
- (15) The cable **322** may include a wire rope or other structural member for raising and lowering the arc discharge tool **330** into the drill pipe. The cable **322** may also include at least a pair of electrical conductors for conveying electrical power from the surface installation **320** to the arc discharge tool **330**. The cable **322** may include one or more additional electrical conductors or optical fibers for conveying data and control information between the surface installation **320** and the arc discharge tool **330**.
- (16) The surface installation **320** may commonly be housed in a truck, but is not limited to that implementation. The surface installation may include a primary power supply **324**, which may be, for example, a generator or batteries. The primary power supply **324** may provide primary power to the arc discharge tool **330** via the cable **322**. The primary power may be AC or DC power.
- (17) The surface installation **320** may also include an instrumentation and control subsystem **326** to control and document the operation of the cleaning tool. At a minimum, the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** may provide the ability to selectively enable operation of the arc discharge tool **330** when the tool is proximate a perforated portion of the well pipe and to selectively disable operation of the tool in other positions. This may be achieved via commands sent over cable **322**. For example, the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** may be configured to control one or more of the rate at which the arc discharge tool **230** descends and ascends in the well pipe, the rate or frequency of electrical discharges produced by the tool **230**, the electrical voltage or energy of each discharge, and other operational parameters. The instrumentation and control subsystem **326** may also document the operation of the arc discharge tool. For example, the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** may store or otherwise document the depth and time when the arc discharge tool **330** was activated, the time when the arc discharge tool **330** was deactivated, a count of the number of electric discharges that occurred between activation and deactivation, the time and depth of some or all of the electrical discharges, the time duration and/or peak current of some or all of the electrical discharges, and other information.
- (18) The arc discharge tool **330** may include a power converter **362**, an energy storage **364**, a switch **366**, and a controller **368** housed with the body **332** of the arc discharge tool. The power converter **362** may receive primary power from a primary power supply via the cable **322** and may convert the primary power into DC power of sufficiently high voltage to create a discharge between electrodes **342** and **346**.
- (19) The energy store **364** may be, for example, a high voltage capacitor or a plurality of capacitors connected in series and/or parallel to collectively function as a high voltage capacitor. The power converter **362** may be configured with a limited output current capacity, such that the energy store **364** may be gradually charged from a discharged state to the full voltage output from the power converter. Once the energy store **364** is charged to a desired voltage level, a switch **366** may connect the energy store to the electrodes **342** and **346**, causing an electrical discharge that depletes the energy stored in the energy store **364**. The power converter **362** may then begin recharging the energy store **364** in preparation for the next electrical discharge.
- (20) The switch **366** may be, for example, a triggered spark gap, a solid-state switch using a cascade of semiconductor devices, or a gas-filled or vacuum tube device such as a thyratron or krytron. The switch **366** may be another device or combination of devices capable of both blocking the high voltage level produced by the power converter and passing very high instantaneous current each time the stored energy is discharged through the electrodes **342**, **346**.
- (21) The controller **368** may be configured to control the operation of the cleaning tool and to periodically trigger the switch **366** to initiate a series of electrical discharges between the electrodes **342**, **346**. The discharge voltage level may be determined by the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** and communicated to the controller **368** in the well via the cable **322**. The controller

368 may be configured to selectively enable and disable the operation of the arc discharge tool **330** in response to commands received from the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** via the cable **322**. Alternatively, the operation of the arc discharge tool **330** may be enabled and disabled from the surface by selectively providing or not providing the primary power from the primary power supply **324**. The controller **368** may also be configured to transmit feedback information to the instrumentation and control subsystem **326** via the cable **322**.

(22) Processes

(23) Referring now to FIG. 4, a process **400** for rehabilitating a well may start at **405** when appropriate rehabilitation chemicals and an arc discharge system, such as the arc discharge system **300**, are made available at the well. The process **400** may conclude at **495** after the rehabilitation process is completed.

(24) At **410**, parameters for the rehabilitation process may be determined. The parameters may include the type and amount of rehabilitation chemicals to be introduced into the well. The selection of the chemicals may be based, for example, on samples of mineral scale and/or organic material extracted from the perforated portion of the well pipe. The parameters may include a depth range and a number of positions within the depth range where the arc discharge tool will be activated. The depth range would typically encompass the perforated portion of the well pipe. The parameters may further include, for example, a spacing between the electrodes of the arc discharge tool, a peak voltage applied between the electrodes, an energy per discharge, and/or a discharge repetition rate. The spacing of the electrodes in the discharge head may be set based, at least in part, on the electrical conductivity or salinity of the fluids in the well. The spacing determined for the electrodes may be generally inverse to the conductivity of the fluids in the drill string at the perforated portion of the well pipe. The electrodes may be closely spaced if the drill string in the well has low conductivity and the electrodes may be spaced further apart if the fluids are highly conductive. The energy per discharge may be set, at least in part, based on the inside diameter of the perforated portion of the well pipe. The operating parameters of the arc discharge tool may be set, in part, based on other parameters such as the temperature, viscosity, dielectric constant, or other parameter indicative of the fluid content of the perforated portion of the well pipe. Where necessary, a survey of the well may be performed by lowering one or more tools into the well to measure necessary parameters of the fluid at the perforated portion of the well pipe.

(25) At **420**, the chemicals selected at **410** may be introduced into the well. The chemicals may be in liquid, granular, or pelletized form. A variety of techniques may be used to introduce the chemicals into the well. The surface equipment of the well may include a port that allows chemicals to be introduced into the well without disassembling or removing any of the surface equipment. In other cases, a portion or all of the surface equipment may have to be disassembled from the well in order to introduce the chemicals.

(26) In some cases, the chemicals may simply be poured into the top of the well pipe. In other cases, the chemicals may be introduced into the well through a tube inserted into the well pipe. For example, FIG. 5A is a simplified schematic diagram of well **500A** including a well bore **110** and a pipe **120** including a perforated portion **125**. Chemicals **520** may be introduced into the well through a tube **510** inserted into the pipe **120**. The tube **510** provides delivery of the chemicals **520** directly to the perforated portion **125** of the pipe **120**. The tube **510** also allows recirculation of the fluid in the well pipe to flush the chemicals from the well at the conclusion of the remediation process.

(27) At **430**, the arc discharge tool may be lowered into the drill pipe to a first position within the depth range defined at **410**. For example, as shown in FIG. 5B, the arc discharge tool **530** may be lowered on a cable **534** supported by a derrick **536**. A truck **532** contains the surface installation (**320** in FIG. 3) of the arc discharge system and a winch to reel the cable in and out and thus control the depth of the arc discharge tool **530** within the well. Although shown separately in FIG. 5B, the derrick **536** may be boom or arm extending from the truck **532**.

(28) At **440**, the arc discharge system may be activated to cause one or more discharges between electrodes of the arc discharge tool. The discharge energy, repetition rate, and number of discharges may be as defined at **410**. Each discharge creates a shock wave within the well pipe to disrupt mineral and organic deposits. Each discharge may drive the remediation chemicals through the perforations in the well pipe into the subsurface formation.

(29) At **450**, a determination is made if the arc discharge tool has been activated at all of the positions defined at **410**. When a determination is made at **450** that the process is not completed and the arc discharge tool should be activated at one or more additional position (“no” at **450**), the process returns to **430** and the arc discharge tool is moved to the next position.

(30) When the arc discharge tool has been activated at all of the positions selected at **410** (“yes” at **450**), the arc discharge tool is removed from the well at **460**. Residual chemicals and debris may be pumped or flushed from the well at **470** and the process **400** ends at **495**.

(31) Closing Comments

(32) Throughout this description, the embodiments and examples shown should be considered as exemplars, rather than limitations on the apparatus and procedures disclosed or claimed. Although many of the examples presented herein involve specific combinations of method acts or system elements, it should be understood that those acts and those elements may be combined in other ways to accomplish the same objectives. With regard to flowcharts, additional and fewer steps may be taken, and the steps as shown may be combined or further refined to achieve the methods described herein. Acts, elements and features discussed only in connection with one embodiment are not intended to be excluded from a similar role in other embodiments.

(33) As used herein, “plurality” means two or more. As used herein, a “set” of items may include one or more of such items. As used herein, whether in the written description or the claims, the terms “comprising”, “including”, “carrying”, “having”, “containing”, “involving”, and the like are to be understood to be open-ended, i.e., to mean including but not limited to. Only the transitional phrases “consisting of” and “consisting essentially of”, respectively, are closed or semi-closed transitional phrases with respect to claims. Use of ordinal terms such as “first”, “second”, “third”, etc., in the claims to modify a claim element does not by itself connote any priority, precedence, or order of one claim element over another or the temporal order in which acts of a method are performed, but are used merely as labels to distinguish one claim element having a certain name from another element having a same name (but for use of the ordinal term) to distinguish the claim elements. As used herein, “and/or” means that the listed items are alternatives, but the alternatives also include any combination of the listed items.

Claims

1. A method for remediating a well, comprising: introducing a remediation chemical into the well; inserting an arc discharge tool into the well and lowering the arc discharge tool to a predetermined depth within the well, the arc discharge tool for generating one or more electrical discharges between a pair of electrodes, each electrical discharge causing a shock wave in the fluids within the well; generating, with the arc discharge tool, at least one shock wave; and withdrawing the arc discharge tool from the well.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising: prior to inserting the arc discharge tool, defining arc discharge tool operating parameters comprising one or more of a spacing between the pair of electrodes, a peak voltage applied between the pair of electrodes, an initial energy per discharge, and a discharge repetition rate.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the arc discharge tool operating parameters are defined based, in part, on an inside diameter of the well at the predetermined depth.
4. The method of claim 2, wherein the arc discharge tool operating parameters are defined based, in part, on one or more of an electrical conductivity, a salinity, a temperature, a viscosity, and a

dielectric constant of a fluids in the well at the predetermined depth.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the remediation chemical comprises one or more of an acid and a bactericide.
 6. A method for remediating a well including a pipe with a perforated portion for extracting a fluid from a subsurface formation, the method comprising: introducing a remediation chemical into the well; inserting an arc discharge tool into the pipe and lowering the arc discharge tool to an initial position within the perforated portion of the pipe, the arc discharge tool for generating one or more electrical discharges between a pair of electrodes, each electrical discharge causing a shock wave in the fluids within the pipe; generating, with the arc discharge tool, at least one shock wave; and withdrawing the arc discharge tool from the well.
 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the at least one shock wave drives the remediation chemical through perforations in the perforated portion of the pipe into the subsurface formation.
 8. The method of claim 6, further comprising: prior to withdrawing the arc discharge tool, moving the arc discharge tool to one or more additional positions within the perforated portion of the pipe; and generating, with the arc discharge tool, at least one shock wave at each additional position.
 9. The method of claim 6, further comprising: after withdrawing the arc discharge tool, removing residual remediation chemical and debris from the well.
 10. The method of claim 6, further comprising: prior to inserting the arc discharge tool, defining arc discharge tool operating parameters comprising one or more of a spacing between the pair of electrodes, a peak voltage applied between the pair of electrodes, an initial energy per discharge, and a discharge repetition rate.
 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the arc discharge tool operating parameters are defined based, in part, on an inside diameter of the perforated portion of the pipe.
 12. The method of claim 10, wherein the arc discharge tool operating parameters are defined based, in part, on one or more of an electrical conductivity, a salinity, a temperature, a viscosity, and a dielectric constant of a fluids in the perforated portion of the pipe.
 13. The method of claim 6, wherein the remediation chemical comprises one or more of an acid and a bactericide.
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