



US006810718B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Wilson et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 6,810,718 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Nov. 2, 2004**

(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR FLUID ANALYSIS**

(75) Inventors: **Bary W. Wilson**, Richland, WA (US);
Timothy J. Peters, Richland, WA (US);
Chester L. Shepard, West Richland, WA (US);
James H. Reeves, Richland, WA (US)

(73) Assignee: **Battelle Memorial Institute**, Richland, WA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **10/339,811**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 10, 2003**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2003/0101801 A1 Jun. 5, 2003

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/776,109, filed on Feb. 1, 2001, now Pat. No. 6,561,010, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/447,036, filed on Nov. 19, 1999, now abandoned.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **G01N 11/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **73/54.01; 73/53.05; 73/54.02; 73/54.07; 250/343; 702/108; 702/130**

(58) **Field of Search** **73/54.01, 53.01, 73/53.05, 54.02, 54.07; 250/339.09, 343; 356/246; 702/108, 130**

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

3,748,894 A *	7/1973	White et al.	73/36
3,751,661 A *	8/1973	Packer et al.	378/47
4,118,973 A *	10/1978	Tucker et al.	73/54.07
4,125,769 A	11/1978	Marten et al.	
4,228,353 A	10/1980	Johnson	
4,277,971 A *	7/1981	Drzewiecki et al.	73/54.09

4,388,530 A	6/1983	Lubecki et al.	
4,567,012 A	1/1986	Radcliff	
4,627,272 A *	12/1986	Wright	73/54.23
4,649,711 A	3/1987	Sibley et al.	
4,683,759 A	8/1987	Skarsvaag et al.	
4,720,842 A	1/1988	Kira et al.	
4,721,874 A *	1/1988	Emmert	310/333
4,750,351 A *	6/1988	Ball	73/54.04
4,795,903 A	1/1989	Clayton	
4,959,848 A	9/1990	Parobek	
4,959,995 A *	10/1990	Deysarkar et al.	73/54.01
5,262,732 A *	11/1993	Dickert et al.	324/672
5,377,531 A	1/1995	Gomm	
5,422,495 A *	6/1995	Cohn	250/573
5,497,008 A	3/1996	Kumakhov	
5,509,297 A *	4/1996	Müller et al.	73/54.32
5,511,416 A *	4/1996	Shambayati	73/204.21
5,517,427 A *	5/1996	Joyce	702/50
5,521,698 A	5/1996	Carroll et al.	

(List continued on next page.)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Goodyear: MEMS Based Smart Tires, IDA 1999.

Wilson, Bary W, et al, "Modular System for Multi-Parameter In-Line Machine Fluid Analysis" Technology Showcase 2000, JOAP International Condition Monitoring Conference, Apr. 3-6, 2000, Mobile, AL, 78-85 (2000).

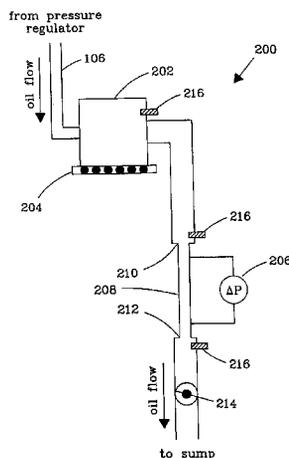
Primary Examiner—Daniel S. Larkin

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Woodard, Emhardt, Moriarty, McNett & Henry LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is an apparatus and method for analyzing a fluid used in a machine or in an industrial process line. The apparatus has at least one meter placed proximate the machine or process line and in contact with the machine or process fluid for measuring at least one parameter related to the fluid. The at least one parameter is a standard laboratory analysis parameter. The at least one meter includes but is not limited to viscometer, element meter, optical meter, particulate meter, and combinations thereof.

32 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



US 6,810,718 B2

Page 2

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

5,537,336	A	*	7/1996	Joyce	702/108	5,982,847	A	*	11/1999	Nelson	378/47
5,569,842	A		10/1996	Silvestri		6,006,154	A		12/1999	Wang	
5,576,498	A	*	11/1996	Shambayati	73/861.52	6,009,760	A		1/2000	Jakkula et al.	
5,598,451	A		1/1997	Ohno et al.		6,012,325	A		1/2000	Ma	
5,604,441	A	*	2/1997	Freese et al.	324/663	6,031,565	A		2/2000	Getty et al.	
5,657,363	A		8/1997	Hossain et al.		6,037,592	A	*	3/2000	Sunshine et al.	250/343
5,712,891	A		1/1998	Benony et al.		6,043,505	A	*	3/2000	Ames et al.	250/577
5,721,759	A		2/1998	Raatikainen		6,151,108	A	*	11/2000	Kwon et al.	356/70
5,739,916	A	*	4/1998	Englehaupt	356/414	6,196,058	B1	*	3/2001	Chen	73/54.04
5,742,660	A		4/1998	Majewski et al.		6,226,347	B1		5/2001	Golenhofen	
5,789,665	A		8/1998	Voelker et al.	73/53.05	6,285,734	B1		9/2001	von Alfthan	
5,790,246	A		8/1998	Kuhnell et al.		6,304,176	B1		10/2001	Discenzo	
5,817,928	A		10/1998	Garvey, III et al.		6,356,205	B1		3/2002	Salvo et al.	
5,818,578	A	*	10/1998	Inman et al.	356/246	6,408,048	B2		6/2002	Opsal et al.	
5,964,318	A		10/1999	Boyle et al.	184/1.5						

* cited by examiner

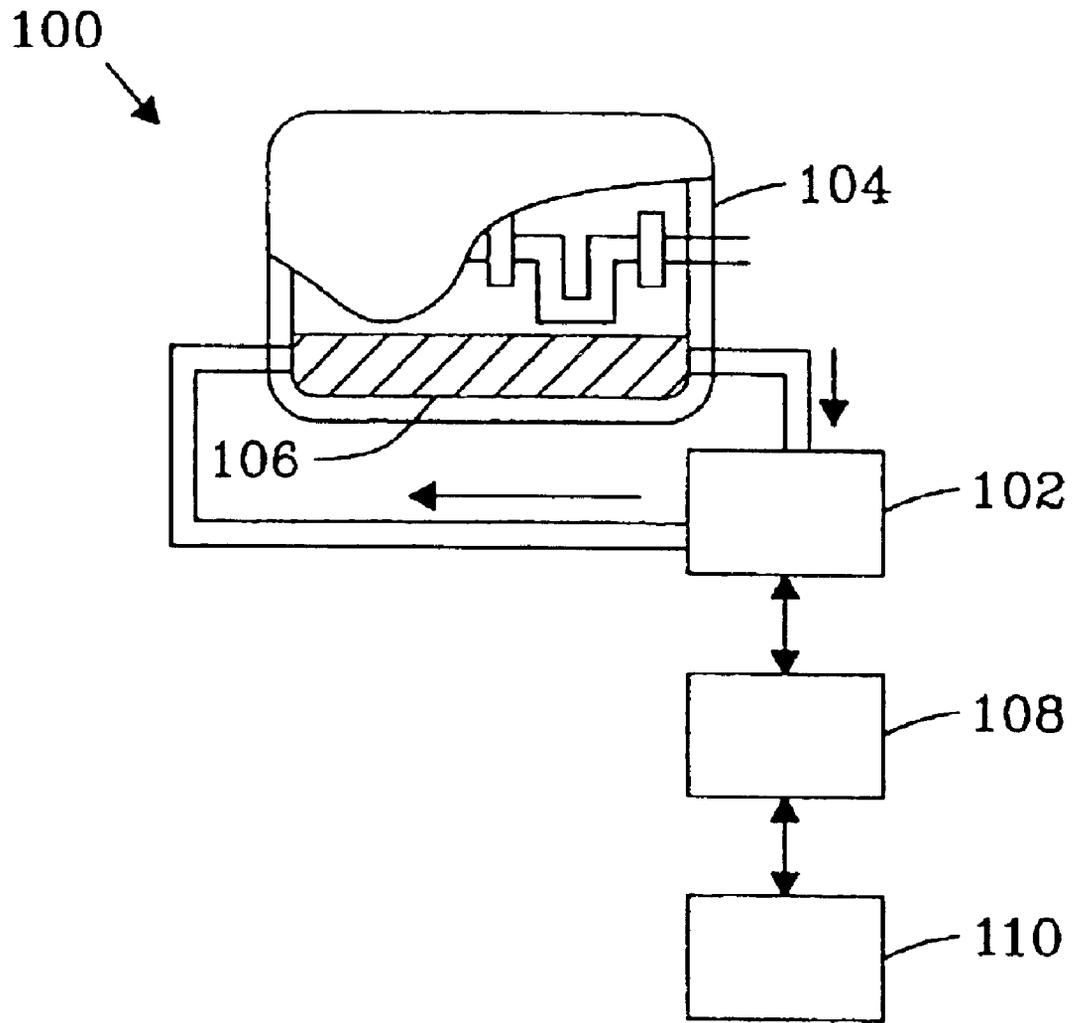


Fig. 1

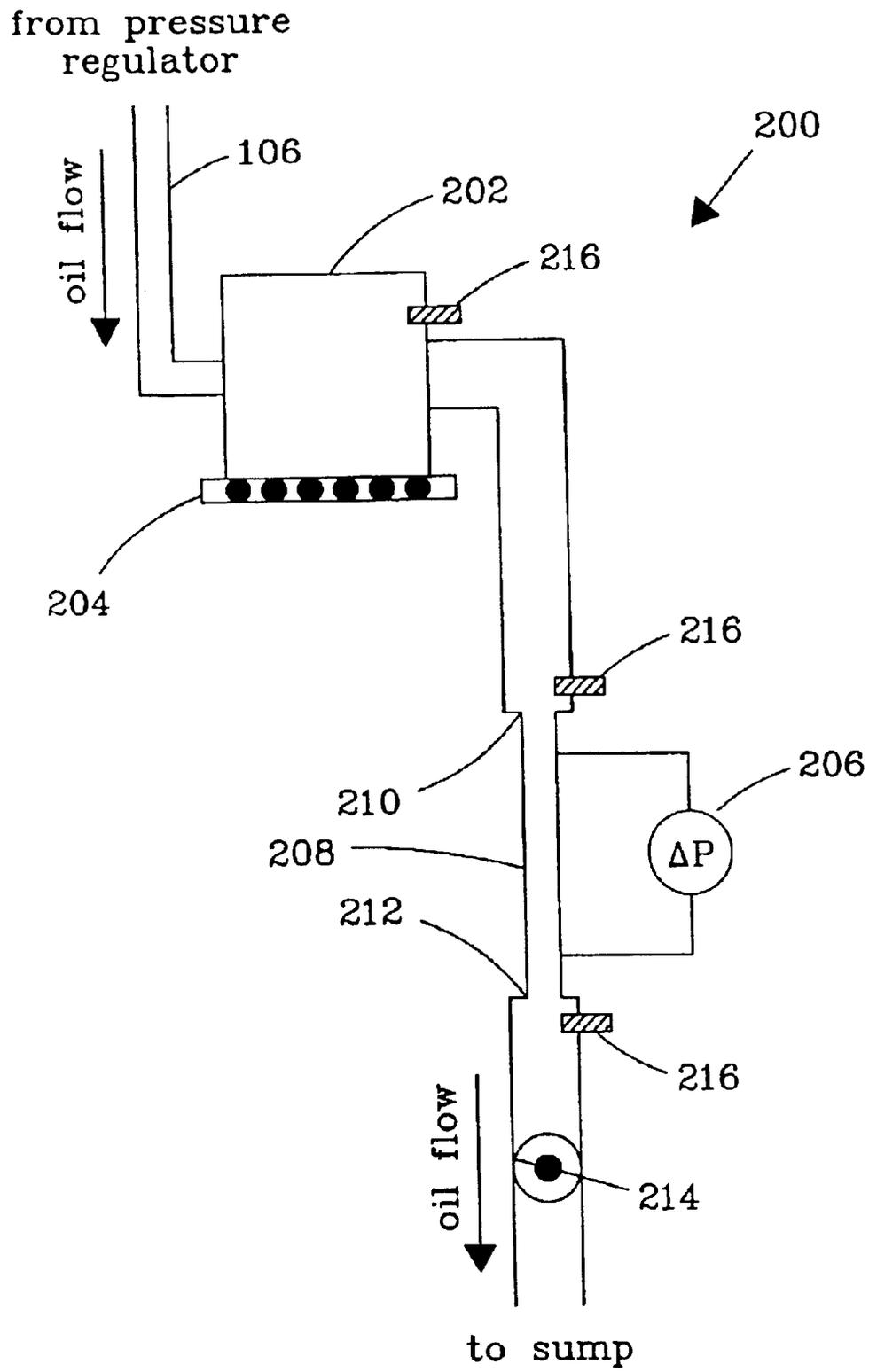


Fig. 2

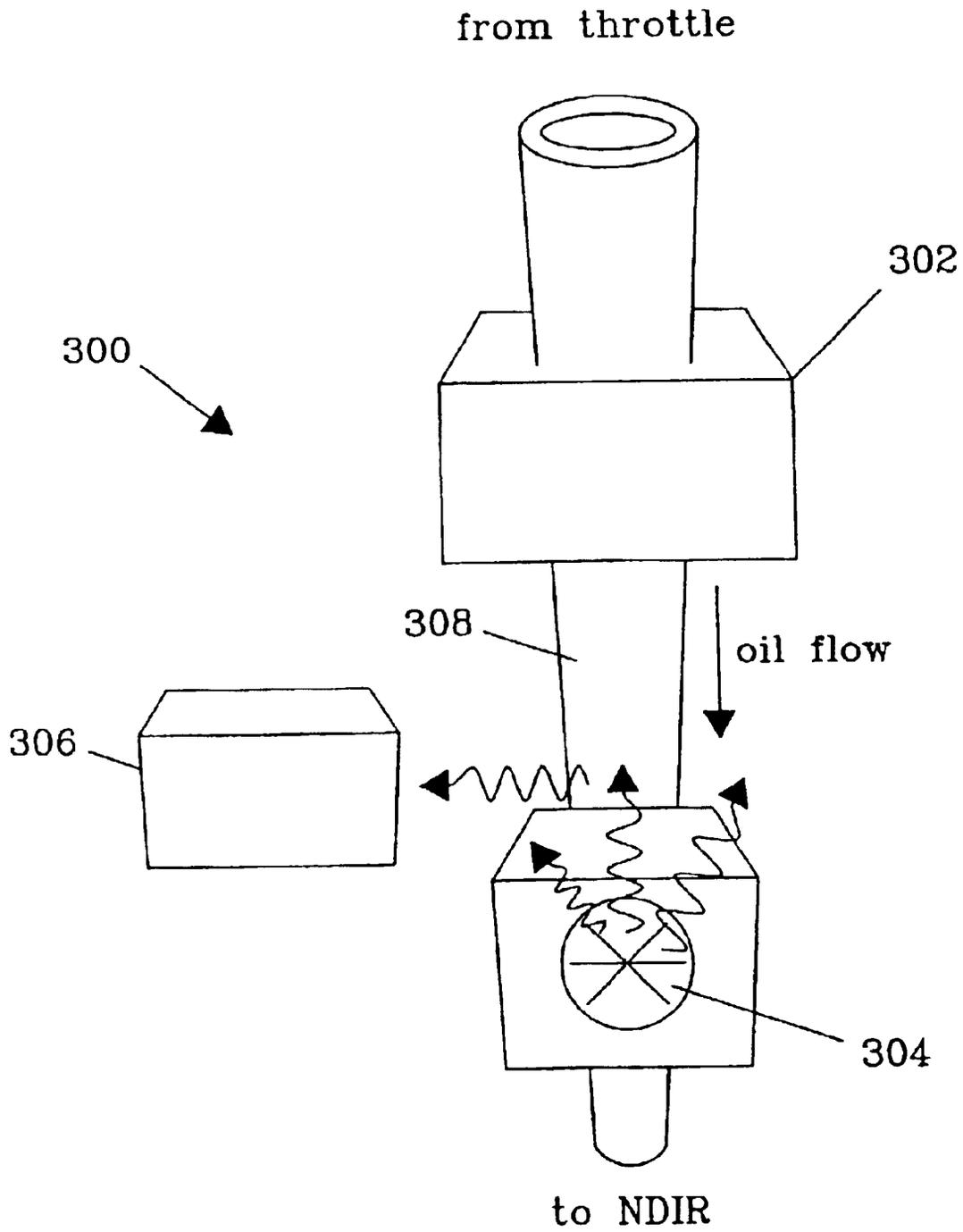


Fig. 3

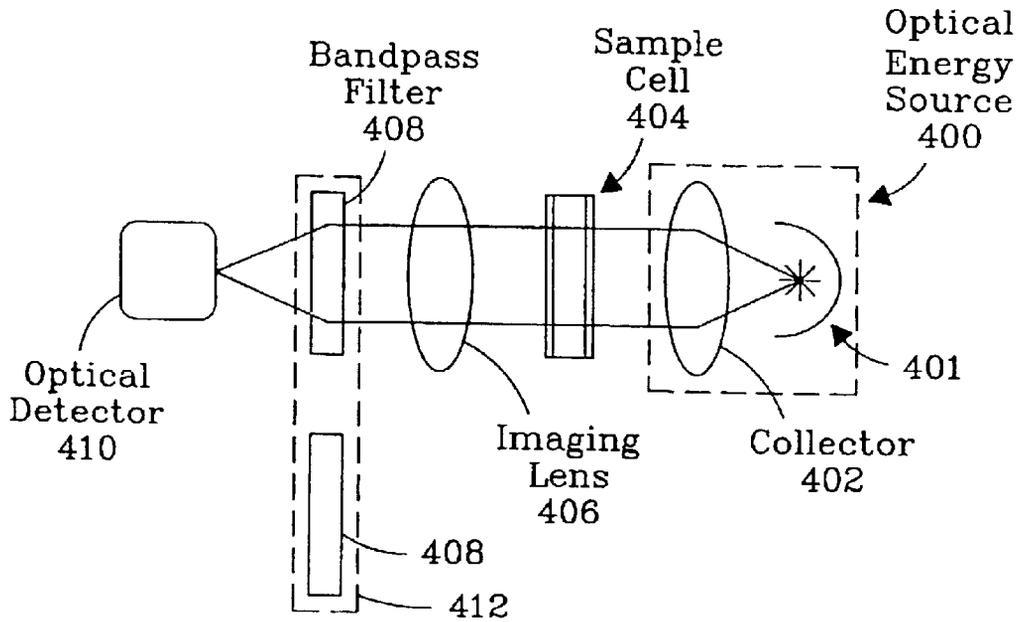


Fig. 4a

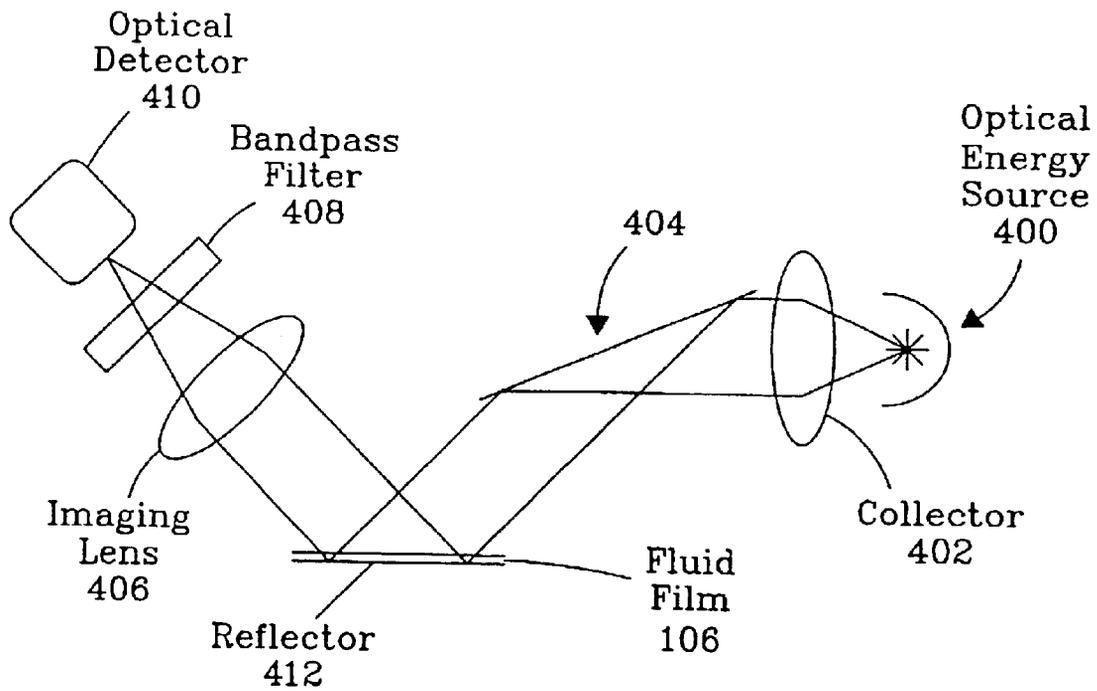


Fig. 4b

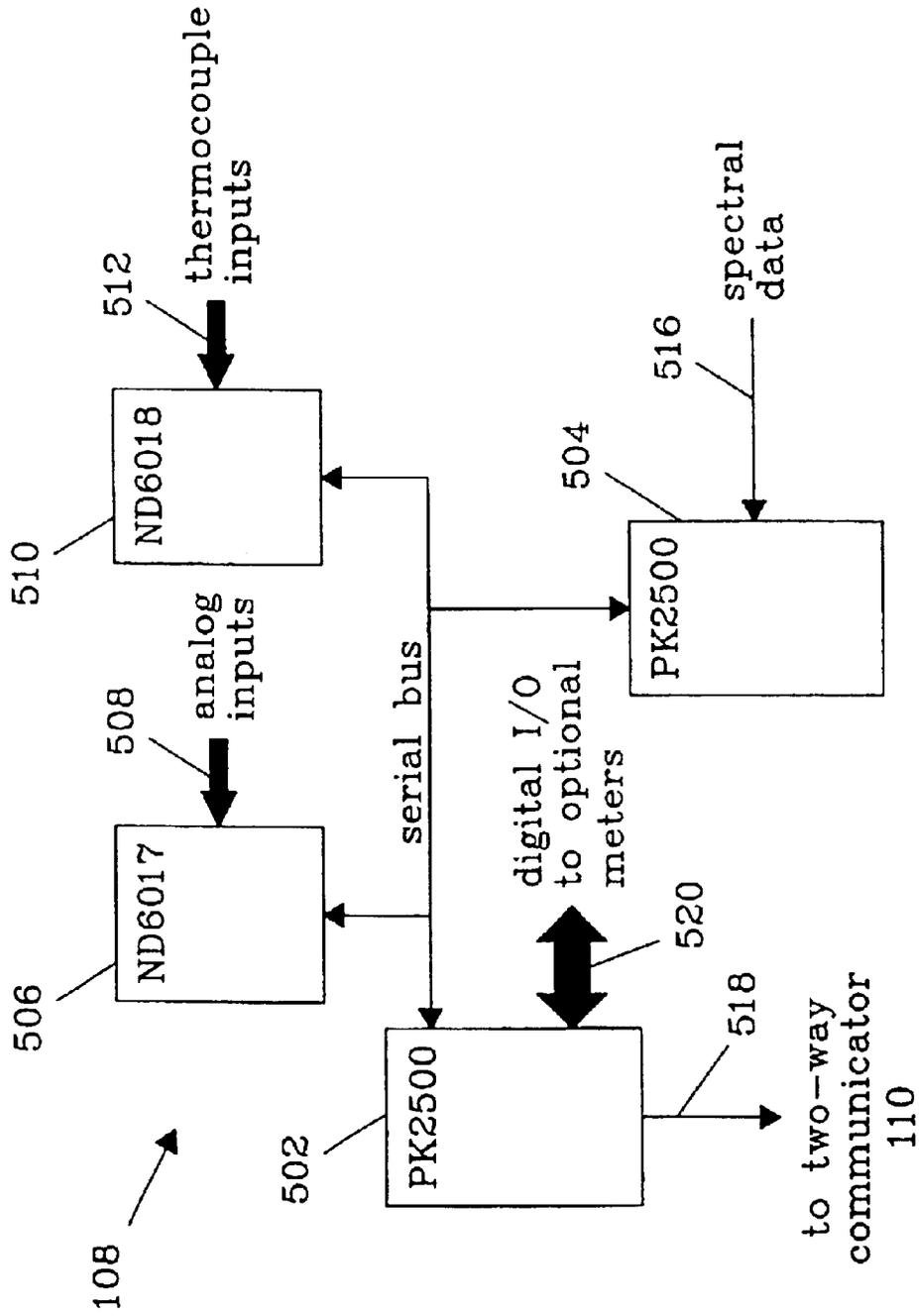


Fig. 5

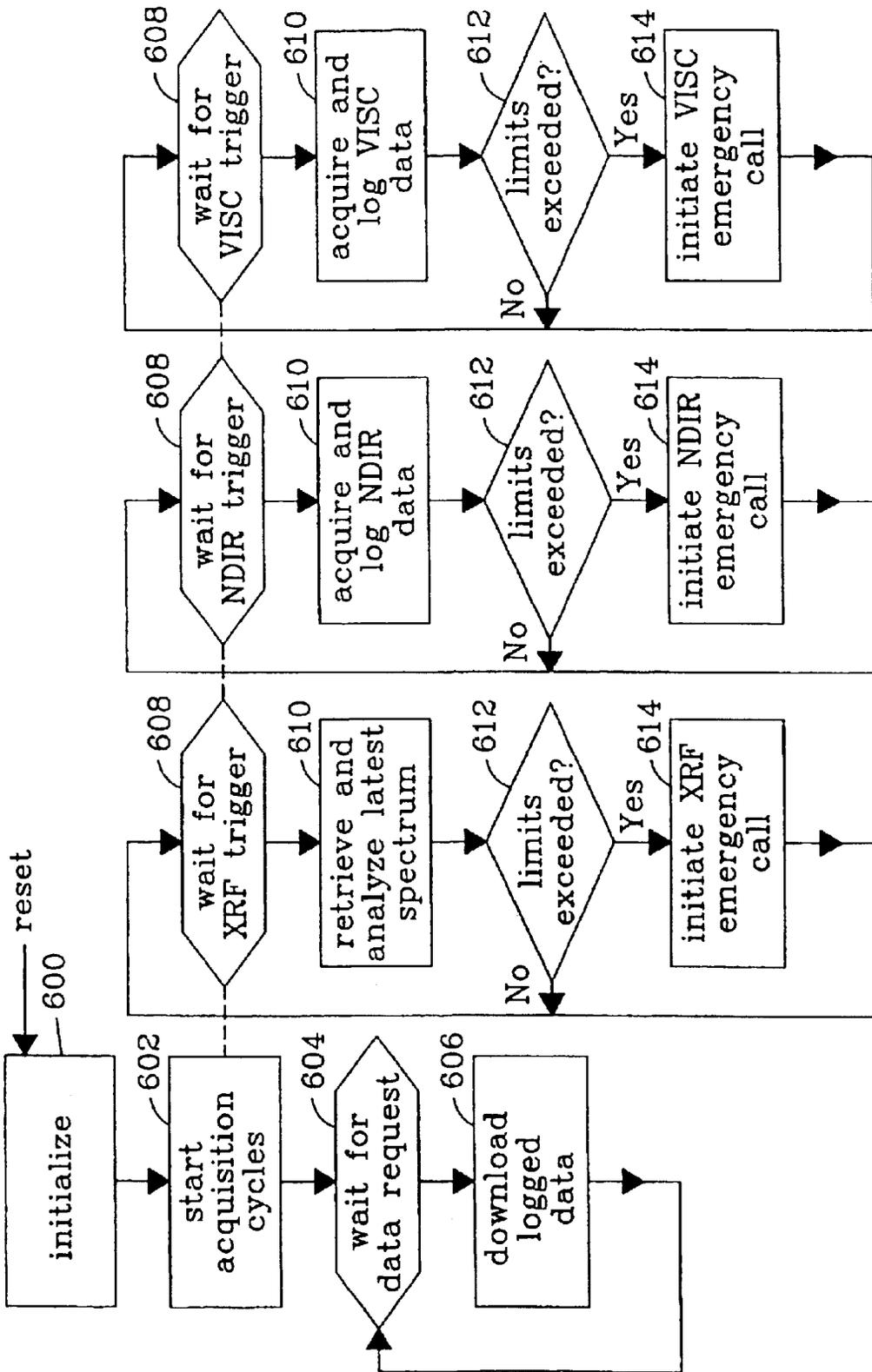


Fig. 6

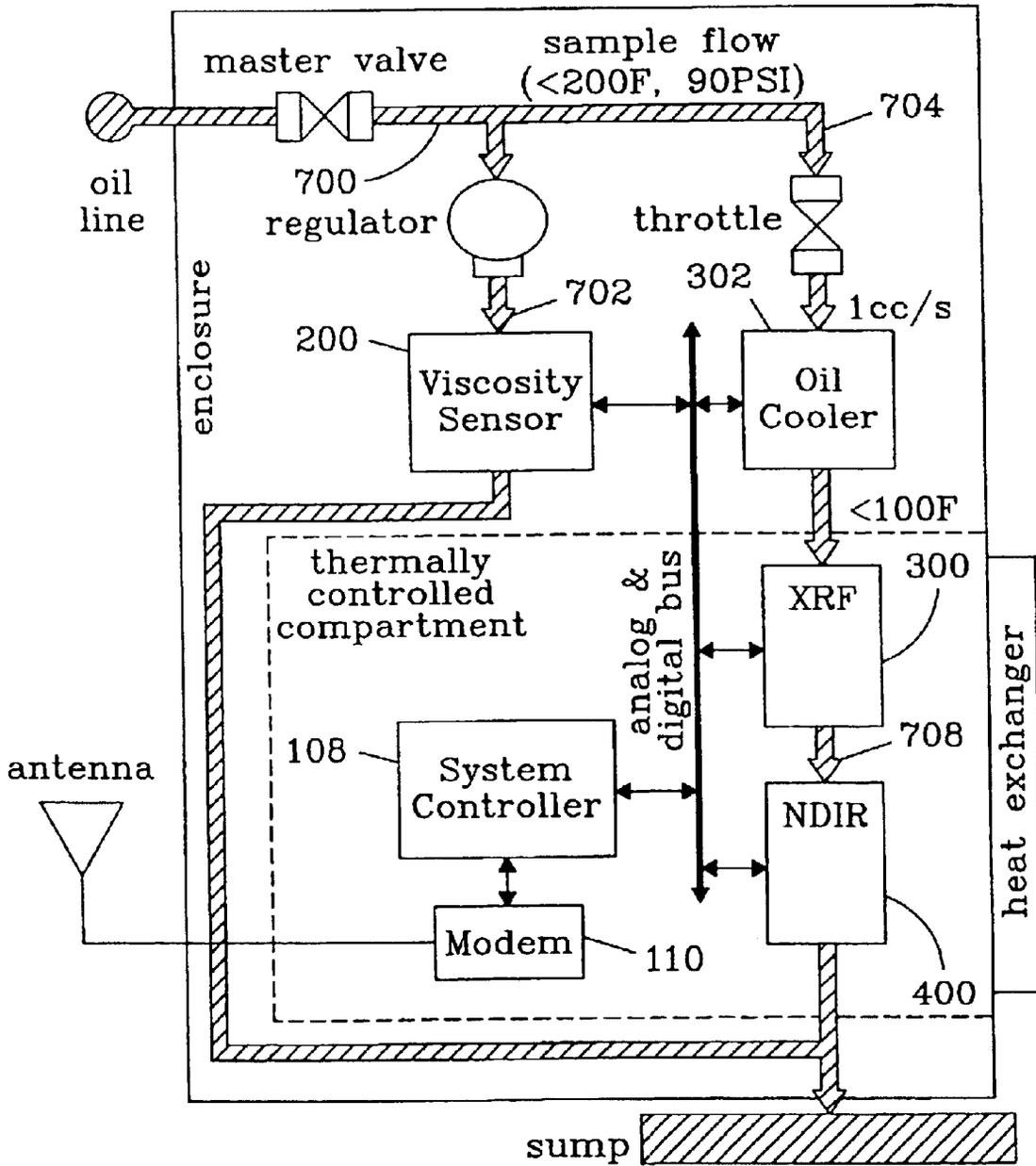


Fig. 7

1

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR FLUID ANALYSIS

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 09/776,109 filed on Feb. 1, 2001 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,561,010 which is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 09/447,036 filed on Nov. 19, 1999 now abandoned.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

This invention was made with Government support under Contract DEAC0676RL01830 awarded by the U.S. Department of Energy. The Government has certain rights in the invention.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an apparatus and method for fluid analysis. Particular embodiments of the present invention relate to on-board analysis of multiple attributes of operating machine fluids necessary for the determination of machine health.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

It is well known that chemical and physical analysis of a machine fluid can provide information about the condition of the fluid as well as the wear status of the machine in which the fluid is used. Machine fluid analysis is widely used for determination of lubricant condition, lubricant contamination and wear status in engines, drive components and hydraulic systems in fleet or industrial service. For example, lubrication oil analysis is widely used for railroad engines and is conducted by the military on most motorized equipment including aircraft and naval engines and lubricated drive components. In industry, commercial fluid analysis providers offer fluid analysis service for engine and drive train lubricants as well as hydraulic fluids.

Locomotive engine manufacturers such as General Electric (GE) and General Motors Electro-Motive Division (EMD) promulgate recommended limits for wear elements as determined by spectrographic analysis of lubrication oil samples. Manufacturers and railroad operators also set limits on such parameters as water or fuel dilution of lubricating oil, soot and pentane insolubles (compounds in oil that do not dissolve in pentane). These limits indicate when maintenance is required to prevent impending component failures that may result in severe and expensive engine damage. Properly interpreted, the analytical data can also indicate specific maintenance operations that need to be performed on the engine.

Traditionally, an oil sample has been taken from the lubricant reservoir on the engine being analyzed, and each of these parameters was then measured in the laboratory by different instruments for different purposes. Viscosity is measured with a viscometer and provides an indication of possible dilution of the oil by fuel or water. Viscosity can also indicate oil degradation from heat or oxidation. Chemical degradation of the oil (e.g., oxidation, nitration) is commonly determined by infrared (IR) spectrometric analysis, which may also be used to infer total acid number (TAN) and total base number (TBN) for the oil. Water in the oil may also be detected by IR analysis. Slow coolant leaks into the lubricating oil system may be detected by quantitative analysis of boron, chromium or other elements present

2

in the coolant water as salts. Elemental analysis is typically accomplished by atomic emission spectrometry (AES) or other atomic spectroscopy methods, but may also be accomplished by X-ray fluorescence (XRF). Such analyses provide an indication of component wear according to the type and amount of metal(s) in the sample.

Monitoring of machine fluids to specifically determine the parameters described above presently requires that samples of the machine fluid(s) be obtained and sent to a laboratory for chemical and physical analysis. However, the machines for which laboratory analysis is most valuable are often mobile, and may at any time be in remote locations, making sampling and laboratory analysis impractical on a frequent or regular basis. Moreover, the small sample amounts obtained for analysis may not be representative of the bulk machine fluid, and analyses in the laboratory require a day or more to perform. The logistical impracticality of laboratory analysis is overcome in practice with scheduled maintenance and service for machines. Such routine maintenance schedules are designed so that machine fluid change-out occurs prior to the time damage to the machine may result, and are scheduled to ensure that they provide sufficient leeway before a problem is projected to occur. It is believed that the frequency of maintenance and service could be reduced by the use of more frequent and regular machine fluid analysis.

Additionally, there are environments wherein immediate indicators of machine health are critical. As an example, when an engine on a helicopter or airplane fails, the result to passengers can be disastrous. An indication to the pilot of a failing engine, prior to actual engine failure, may provide sufficient time to either save the engine from destruction, or provide time for the pilot to safely return to the ground under power.

On-board or in situ machine fluid analysis has been investigated with several proposed approaches. For example, Voelker et al (U.S. Pat. No. 5,789,665) described a method and apparatus for determining deterioration of lubricating oils by measuring electrical properties of a polymeric matrix or by exploiting volumetric change behavior of the polymeric matrix in the form of beads. Disadvantages of this approach include that it responds only to a single parameter (free water) but does not quantify the free water, and there is a need to replace used polymer beads.

Freese et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 5,604,441) relies on measurement of changes in dielectric properties of a lubricant (oil) in a changing magnetic field. The change in dielectric properties indicates a change in oil condition. Dielectric constant is non-specific and at best may provide an indirect indication of oil degradation. The magnetic field is also used to attract and quantify ferromagnetic particles.

Finally, Boyle et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 5,964,318) designed a system to measure the level and quantity of lubricant in an engine lubricant reservoir. On-board in situ sensors are provided to measure the quantity of lubricant in the system, as well as the quality (temperature, pressure, dielectric and/or viscosity). If the quality drops below a predetermined level, the system diverts a portion of the lubricant to a reservoir for storage or reintroduction as a fuel additive, and a coincident addition of fresh lubricant to the system to maintain the desired level of lubricant. However, the apparatus/process disclosed in the '318 patent is a totally self-contained system; it does not provide an indication to those remotely monitoring engine health of the current status of lubricant within the engine—it is solely an internally-monitored lubricant quality indicator.

The above-cited patents describe measurements that do not provide to remote observers information sufficient to determine the wear status of the machine containing the measured fluid, and so they cannot be used in lieu of standard laboratory oil analysis. In particular, the above-

cited patents do not describe a system that allow real time and remote assessment of machine condition, because they lack the capability to determine wear metal concentrations. On-board measurement and analysis of operational parameters, including determination of fluid levels and fluid and gas temperatures and pressures for a gas turbine engine, has been described (Greitzer et al, 1994). These authors described the use of sensors and artificial neural network software to analyze engine operational status and condition. This approach has been termed machine health monitoring. However, these authors did not attempt to measure standard laboratory analysis parameters for any machine fluid.

Hence, there remains a need for in situ or on-board analysis of machine fluid that provides information similar in nature and utility to that obtained from standard laboratory machine fluid analysis.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is an apparatus and method for analyzing a fluid used in a machine or in an industrial process line. In one embodiment of the present invention, the apparatus has at least one meter (or sensor) placed proximate a machine and in contact with the machine fluid for measuring at least one parameter related to the machine fluid. The at least one parameter is a standard laboratory analysis parameter. The at least one meter includes, but is not limited to, viscometer, element meter, optical meter, particulate meter, and combinations thereof. Additionally, the results of this machine fluid analysis are made immediately available to remote observers of machine-related system health, whether the analyzed machine fluid is engine lubricant, hydraulic fluid, fuel, coolant fluid, or the like.

As used herein, "proximate" means on or near.

As used herein, "meter . . . in contact with the machine fluid" means that the machine fluid passes to the meter(s) or sensor(s) under pressure of the machine. This is in contrast to collecting a sample in a separate container and introducing the sample to the meter(s) independently of, or separate and distinct from, the machine and the machine pressure.

As used herein, the term or phrase "standard laboratory analysis parameter(s)" refers to parameters specified for direct determination of fluid or machine condition. More specifically, standard laboratory analysis parameter includes, but is in no way limited to, viscosity, low viscosity and high viscosity; pentane insolubles; soot, additive package (presence of chemical additives used to improve lubrication characteristics), oxidation or oil polymer breakdown products, nitration, sulfation, fuel dilution, water concentration; or concentration of specific elements including, but not limited to, iron, lead, copper, silicon, chromium, aluminum, silver, and zinc. In contrast, a non-standard parameter would be an indirect measure including, but not limited to, dielectric constant, polymer swelling, and combinations thereof and are specifically excluded from "standard laboratory analysis parameter".

As used herein, "machine fluid" means any fluid used in the process of operation of machinery. Examples include, but are not limited to, oil, engine oil, differential oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid including, but not limited to, power steering fluid, brake fluid, and hydraulic cylinder fluid, and combinations thereof whether petroleum-based or

synthetic; electrical fluid including, but not limited to, battery fluid, condenser fluid (e.g. PCB), and electrochemical electrolyte; refrigerant; cutting fluid; fuel; coolants including water; and combinations thereof.

As used herein, the phrase "remote observer of machine health" means another machine or an individual outside the monitored engine or machine itself, which is programmed or trained to recognize non-routine measurements transmitted by the meter in contact with the machine fluid. The remote observer may be a machine programmed to issue a warning signal if a significantly non-routine measurement is transmitted, or it may be a person, such as the machine operator.

An advantage of the present invention is that it provides to a remote observer of machine health an accurate on-board determination of machine fluid and/or machine condition because of the use of the standard laboratory analysis parameter. Further advantages include real-time machine fluid data capture and machine fluid data capture for remote locations of the machine.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a plurality of standard laboratory analysis parameters is measured or obtained thereby permitting real-time and/or remote assessment of machine and/or machine fluid condition while the machine is in or available for service. An advantage of this preferred embodiment is more timely and cost effective service based on machine condition rather than more traditional service and maintenance based simply on the length of time a machine has been operating.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus on a machine and in contact with a machine fluid for analysis of the machine fluid by measuring at least one standard laboratory analysis parameter.

It is a still further object of the present invention to provide a system for determining on-board real time parameters of machine fluid systems relating to the health of a machine whereby a plurality of sensors are placed proximate the machine such that a plurality of standard laboratory analysis procedures are determined on-board the machine, with such characteristics being transmitted to a remote observer of machine health.

While an embodiment of the present invention is disclosed with particular reference to an engine lubricant system, it is equally applicable to numerous other systems that determine machine health as well as to industrial fluid processes that would benefit from the types of in situ fluid analysis disclosed herein. Likewise, the invention is not limited to particular apparatuses and methods disclosed herein, but is rather broad enough to encompass the entire system regardless of the particular apparatus utilized.

The subject matter of the present invention is particularly pointed out and distinctly claimed in the concluding portion of this specification. However, both the organization and method of operation, together with further advantages and objects thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following description taken in connection with accompanying drawings wherein like reference characters refer to like elements.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of a single meter embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a schematic of a viscometer according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a diagram of an energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer according to the present invention.

5

FIG. 4a is a schematic diagram of an optical meter with a tubular sample cell.

FIG. 4b is a schematic diagram of an optical meter with a planar sample cell.

FIG. 5 is a schematic representation of the communicator of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart of software within the controller.

FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram of a multiple meter embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is an improvement to an apparatus and method for analyzing a fluid used in, or associated with, a machine or industrial process, wherein the machine is generally, but not necessarily, an engine. In FIG. 1, the apparatus 100 has at least one meter 102 placed proximate the machine 104 (or an industrial process line) and in contact with the machine fluid 106 (or process fluid) for measuring at least one parameter of a standard laboratory analysis parameter related to the machine fluid 106 (or process fluid). The at least one meter includes, but is not limited to, a viscometer, element meter, optical meter, particulate meter, and combinations thereof.

“Meter placed proximate the machine” is herein defined as the meter being either mounted directly on the operating machine, or mounted near the machine(s), rather than in a laboratory separate and remote from the machine(s).

“Machine” 104 is defined as an assembly of mechanical elements wherein at least one of the mechanical elements is in contact with the machine fluid 106 for at least one purpose including, but not limited to, lubrication, heat transfer, electrical charge isolation, electrical charge transfer, movement of another mechanical element and combinations thereof. Without intending to be limited by the following list, machine 104 can include an engine, turbine, transmission, differential, power steering, pump, air compressor, heat pump, refrigerator, machine tool, for example, lathe, milling machine, and saw, electrical motors and associated drive components, and other electrical elements including, but not limited to, batteries, and condensers.

“Vehicle” is defined as an assembly of machines including, but not limited to, railroad locomotives, railroad freight cars (especially refrigerated railroad cars), flatroad vehicles including, but not limited to, automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, and recreational vehicles, off-road vehicles including, but not limited to, tractors, earth movers (e.g. bulldozers, road graders, power shovels, backhoes), cranes, aquatic vehicles including, but not limited to, ships, boats, submarines, and hydrofoils, aircraft including fixed wing propeller, jet, or turboprop, and rotating wing (helicopter), and spacecraft.

Examples of standard laboratory analysis parameters for machine fluids are shown in Table 1. Also shown are the meters that are used to determine these standard laboratory analysis parameters, both measured and derived, in accordance with the present invention. The standard laboratory analysis parameters for oil include, but are not limited to, viscosity; turbidity; particulate size and quantity; total acid number (TAN); total base number (TBN); water content (includes free water and dissolved water); concentrations of cooling water elements including, but not limited to, boron, magnesium, iodine and combinations thereof; wear metal including, but not limited to, iron, lead, copper, silicon,

6

chromium, aluminum, silver, magnesium, tin, and zinc, and combinations thereof.

Standard laboratory analysis parameters for cooling water include, but are not limited to, concentration of carbon, oil presence, fuel presence, concentrations of inhibitors including, but not limited to, chromate and boron, concentrations of rust metals and rust oxides including, but not limited to, iron and iron oxides, and combinations thereof.

The meter 102 for providing these standard laboratory analysis parameters includes, but is not limited to, a viscometer (for viscosity), an energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence (EDXRF) spectrometer utilizing isotopic or X-ray tube X-ray sources (for elemental analysis), non-dispersive IR/visible light meter (for oxidation, nitration, turbidity), and electric or electromagnetic debris/particulate detectors including inductive reactance particle (IRP) and light extinction particle (LEP) counters.

When a combination of meters 102 is used to obtain a combination of standard laboratory analysis parameters, both status or condition of the machine fluid 106 and the machine 104 may be determined in accordance with accepted standards. More

TABLE 1

Standard Laboratory Analysis Parameter	Meter	Absorption Peak (Wave Number Band, cm ⁻¹)
Concentration of wear or additive metals including: Cu, Fe, Cr, Pb, Sn, Ti, Co, Mo, Ni, V, Zn	EDXRF	N/A
Viscosity (Kinematic Viscosity)	Viscometer	N/A
Fuel Dilution (most hydrocarbon fuels)	Viscometer	N/A
Water in Crankcase Oils	NDIR	3500 to 3150
Water in Esters		3700 to 3595
Water in EP Oils		3400 to 3250
Soot Loading		2000
Oxidation by-products		1800 to 1670
Nitration by-products		1650 to 1600
Sulfate by-products		1180 to 1120
Ester Breakdown I		3595 to 3500
Ester Breakdown II		3330 to 3150
Phosphate Antiwear (TCP, ZDDP)		1025 to 960
Gasoline Dilution		755 to 745
Diesel/JP-5/JP-8 Dilution		815 to 805
Ethylene Glycol Contamination		1100 to 1030
Metal Particles >~100 μm	IRP Counter	N/A
All Particles ~5-100 μm	LEP Counter	N/A
Derived Measurements		
Total Acid Number	NDIR	N/A
Total Base Number	NDIR	N/A
Additive Concentrations	NDIR	N/A

specifically, viscosity provides an indication of possible dilution of the oil by fuel or water. Viscosity can also indicate oil degradation from heat or oxidation. Chemical degradation of the oil (oxidation, nitration, etc.) is commonly determined by IR spectrometric analysis, which may also be used to infer TAN and TBN for the oil. Water in the oil may also be detected by IR analysis. Slow coolant leaks into the lubricating oil system may be detected by EDXRF analysis of boron, chromium or other elements such as iodine or strontium added to the coolant water as salts.

Further advantages are realized by the use of a system controller 108 for controlling the meter(s) 102 and collecting data therefrom. A two-way communicator 110 may also be used to make on-board in situ information available to a remote observer of machine health.

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

60

65

In one embodiment of the present invention, the machine fluid **106** is crankcase oil whereby its condition and the machine **104** (engine) wear on diesel engines of railroad locomotives are monitored by a combination of meters **102**. Meters **102** for crankcase oil, as well as for other machine fluids and industrial process fluids, are described in more detail below.

Viscometer

The viscometer provides a measure of viscosity, specifically kinematic viscosity (the terms viscosity and kinematic viscosity are interchangeable herein), at a controlled fluid temperature from (a) the pressure drop across a tube of precise length and inside diameter and (b) the flow rate maintained by a pump and a pressure regulator. The flow rate is maintained at Reynolds number less than 1000, thereby ensuring laminar fluid flow through the tube. The viscosity is determined from classical expressions for laminar fluid flow.

Referring to FIG. 2, the viscometer **200** is comprised of several components including, but not limited to: (1) an initial reservoir **202** with a heater **204** (preferably electric resistance heater) that receives the machine fluid **106** at a regulated pressure to control flow through the viscometer **200** and where the machine fluid temperature is adjusted (by heating) to a temperature suitable for measurement, (2) a differential pressure transducer **206** which measures the difference in pressure of the machine fluid **106** flowing through (3) a tube **208** of precise length from the inlet **210** to the outlet **212** of the tube **208**, (4) a fluid flowmeter **214** downstream of the tube **208** which measures a constant fluid flow rate through the tube **208**, and, (5) one or more thermocouples **216** for measurement of machine fluid temperature through the viscometer. The tube **208** is preferably of a length of about 40 cm, an inside radius of about 0.735 mm, and an outside diameter of about 0.3 cm. The flowmeter **214** may be any flowmeter, but is preferably a model FT0-1NYBBLHC-1 (turbine) with a model LN-5-CMAA-7 (signal conditioner) available from Flow Technologies (Phoenix, Ariz.). Highly accurate measurement of flow cannot be performed over a wide dynamic range due to the changing nature of the flow. The above flowmeter is most accurate near its mid-range and should be operated there. The differential pressure transducer can be of any manufacture as long as the pressure span is sufficient and it possesses an absolute uncertainty of less than 1% over its dynamic range.

Because viscosity is a strong function of temperature, the temperature of the machine fluid must be accurately known to obtain reliable viscosity measurements. For machines that reject heat, it is preferred to measure viscosity at a stable temperature, preferably held slightly above the normal fluid temperature. Heating a machine fluid sample to a temperature slightly above the machine operating temperature is simpler and easier to control than cooling to maintain a lower temperature. The viscometer is preferably insulated to improve temperature stability and control, and preferably temperature controlled with a heater. "Stable temperature" means a temperature that is constant to within about 10° C. of the machine operating temperature, preferably within about 5° C. "Slightly above the machine operating temperature" means a temperature that is from about 0° C. to about 100° C. above the machine fluid temperature, preferably from about 5° C. to about 25° C. above the machine fluid temperature.

A standard viscometer permits viscosity measurement over a typical dynamic range from about 5 cST to 500 cST with an absolute uncertainty of about $\pm 3\%$ over this range.

Because variation of viscosity of a machine fluid is much less than the range of a standard viscometer, the uncertainty of a standard viscometer is large enough to mask a change in fluid viscosity. Use of a limited-range viscometer according to the present invention reduces the range to from about 10 cST to about 20 cST, preferably from about 12 cST to about 14 cST with an absolute uncertainty of about $\pm 0.5\%$ over this range, thereby permitting more accurate measure of changes in viscosity of the machine fluid. Although the relative uncertainty is the same between standard and limited-range viscometers, the absolute uncertainty is less for this limited-range viscometer.

For many machine fluid analysis applications, commercially-available miniature electromagnetic viscometers can be used. Such viscometers typically have an absolute uncertainty of about $\pm 1\%$ over a larger limited viscosity range from about 20 cST to about 60 cST.

Element Meter

The element meter may be an EDXRF spectrometer utilizing a sealed isotopic X-ray source or source X-rays generated with an X-ray tube, for the purpose of identifying chemical elements, preferably metals in the machine fluid. Referring to FIG. 3, a preferred EDXRF spectrometer **300** receives machine fluid **106** contained in a tube **308**, whereby the machine fluid **106** has been cooled in a reservoir **302** so that the machine fluid temperature is below approximately 60° C. An X-ray source **304** in a source block **310** provides X-rays in a suitable energy range (approximately 5–30 KeV) to the machine fluid **106** in the tube **308**. The X-ray emitting radionuclides useful as the X-ray source **304** include, but are not limited to, Cadmium-109, Iron-55, Americium-241, and combinations thereof. X-ray tubes are an alternative means to provide X-rays of similar energies.

Any metals in the machine fluid **106** intercept the X-rays and produce an X-ray fluorescence signal. The resulting X-ray fluorescence signal is detected by an X-ray detector **306**, preferably a silicon-based detector. The tube **308** exposed to the X-ray source **304** is preferably comprised of low atomic weight elements (e.g., C, H, N) that are relatively transparent to X-rays and do not significantly contribute to the fluorescence background signal in the energy bandwidth of interest. Candidate materials for the tube **308** include polymers, for example, polyimides. The tube **308** must be thin to reduce X-ray attenuation, must withstand any machine vibration, and must be chemically compatible with the machine fluid. For example, the tube **308** used for engine oil analysis in accordance with the present invention was made of polyimide, had a 4.8 mm diameter, and had a 0.08 mm wall thickness.

The absorption of an X-ray by the X-ray detector **306** produces an electronic output pulse with an amplitude proportional to the energy of the absorbed X-ray. Signals from the X-ray detector **306** are amplified and shaped and then the individual pulses from individual X-rays are categorized according to amplitude and recorded with a multichannel analyzer (not shown). A suitable EDXRF spectrometer is model CT 5000 that may be obtained from C-Thru Technologies Corporation (Kennewick, Wash.).

In order to be used commercially, the EDXRF spectrometer must provide shielding and containment of the X-rays from the X-ray source **304** whether the X-rays are generated from an isotopic source or from an X-ray tube. In the present invention, shielding and containment is accomplished by placing the X-ray source **304** in a shielded source block **310** that has been machined and assembled such that there is no path for X-rays to escape the source block **310** except in the unshielded direction toward the tube **308**. The X-rays are

typically shielded or attenuated by several mm thickness of any high Z block material, but is preferably tungsten because of its lesser weight compared to other high Z materials with equivalent shielding and containment. The inner surface of the source block **310** may be lined with a thin layer of material, such as aluminum or titanium, to reduce the expected EDXRF signal produced from the X-rays interacting with the high Z block material.

Shielding and containment must be such that no radiation or radionuclide material can escape unintentionally, even in the case of a collision or other high-energy impact to the source block **310**. At the same time, the source block **310** must allow the machine fluid **106** to pass directly in front of the unshielded X-ray source **304** so that the machine fluid **106** is exposed to X-rays in such a manner to produce an EDXRF signal detectable by the X-ray detector **306**.

It is understood that while the primary focus of the description above relates to machine fluids, the present invention should not be so limited. As is apparent to those skilled in the art, such an EDXRF apparatus and method have applications beyond that of machine fluids to any flowing, or intermittently-flowing, fluids. For example, EDXRF elemental analysis would be useful to analyze contaminants, such as suspended metals in a fluid in a process line at an industrial facility.

Non-dispersive Optical Meter

The Non-Dispersive (ND) optical meter **420'**, shown in FIG. **4a**, comprises an optical energy source **400** that emits energy in the visible and/or the IR wavelengths, depending on the type of machine fluid degradation that is being measured. The optical energy source **400** may comprise a radiator **401** that is non-coherent including, but not limited to, a filament light source (e.g., where the filament heats the glass envelope which then emits visible and IR radiation) and a blackbody emitter (e.g., where a black material, such as black paint on metal, is heated so that it emits IR radiation) in combination with a collector **402** for guiding non-coherent optical energy through the sample cell **404** containing the machine fluid **106**. The geometry of the sample cell **404** may be tubular or planar. Alternatively, the optical energy source **400** may comprise a radiator **401** that is coherent (e.g., quantum cascade laser(s), laser diode(s)) operating at specific visible or IR wavelengths, with or without a collector **402** depending upon divergence of the laser and distance of the radiator **401** from the sample cell **404**. In the case of a radiator **401** that is non-coherent, the collector **402** may be a reflector and/or a lens. The transmitted energy is then collected by an imaging lens **406**. In the case of a radiator **401** that is coherent, an imaging lens **406** may or may not be needed.

Coherent optical energy is narrow band in terms of optical frequencies, thereby permitting use of an optical detector **410** in the absence of a bandpass filter **408**. Multiple optical signals of different optical frequencies of coherent optical energy may be obtained by use of two or more radiators **401** radiating at different optical wavelengths.

Non-coherent optical energy is wide band in terms of optical frequencies. Accordingly, non-coherent optical energy transmitted through the machine fluid is passed through a bandpass filter **408** that transmits only certain specific wavelengths to an optical detector **410**. The sample cell **404** may transmit visible, as well as IR, radiation. Materials such as a thin film of polyethylene, zinc selenide, or calcium fluoride, are commercially available that transmit in both the visible and IR wavelength regions of interest. Multiple optical signals of different optical frequencies of non-coherent optical energy may be obtained by using a

filter wheel **412** to hold two or more bandpass filters **408** that transmit at specific wavelength bands.

The transmissivity of a sample cell **404** with no machine fluid in it is compared to a sample cell **404** with machine fluid **106** in it. The difference in transmissivity indicates the condition (e.g., degradation) of the machine fluid. The wavelength bands that exhibit a certain type of condition will vary depending on the type of machine fluid examined. Soot and fine particles will be detected by a decrease in the transmissivity of the machine fluid in selected wavelength regions.

Another embodiment of the ND optical meter **420''**, shown in FIG. **4b**, comprises a sample cell **404** wherein the sample cell **404** is a mirror system. The principle behind this embodiment is similar to that of FIG. **4a**, except now the optical energy is transmitted through a film of the machine fluid **106** twice. In this case, the sample cell **404** includes a reflector **412**, which can be either a glass mirror with a front surface reflector or a metal mirror. The optical energy reflected by the reflector **412** is retransmitted through the machine fluid **106**, to the imaging lens **406** (for non-coherent optical energy), bandpass filter **408**, and optical detector **410**.

According to the present invention, this IR meter lacks a dispersive element compared to standard IR meters. Use of a dispersive element requires elimination of all relative motion between the dispersive element and other elements of the standard IR meter which disqualifies its use on a machine subject to vibration. Omitting the dispersive element according to the present invention provides a non-dispersive IR meter that is insensitive to the vibration of a machine.

Particulate Meter

Particulate meters used in accordance with the present invention may be one of several types that are commercially available. For detection of ferromagnetic particles, for example, the Vickers Tedeco Smart Zapper™ or Vickers Tedeco IQ™ (Eaton TEDECO Glenolden, Pa.) may be selected. These particle detectors are also known as "debris monitors" or "chip detectors". They attract and retain ferromagnetic particles with a magnet mounted concentric with, and in close proximity to, a conductive ring.

For metallic particles of a size greater than approximately 100 microns, the Metal Scan™ system from GASTOPS (Toronto, Canada) may be used. Metal Scan™ detects the particles by the change in inductive reactance the metal particles induce in a coil system when the particles pass through the coil in the machine fluid stream.

A particulate meter may also be selected from a number of optical particle counters including the laser light extinction particle counting meter available from ART Instruments, Inc. (Grants Pass, Oreg.). The light extinction or light refraction counters have the capability to detect both metallic and non-metallic particles in sizes down to 5 microns or less.

Controller

In FIG. **5**, the system controller **108** implements automated control and data acquisition such that standard laboratory analysis parameters can be determined and recorded without human intervention. Continuous logging of data by the system controller **108** creates a record that can be used to determine trends and predict maintenance schedules. It is preferred that the system controller **108** contain one or more embedded controllers **502** and **504**, for example PK2500, available from Z-World (Davis, Calif.), that is c-programmable. It is further preferred that each embedded controller **502** have a microprocessor, memory, digital input/

output, analog input, and mass storage (optional) for control of the meter(s), recording of standard analysis parameter(s) and optional operation of a two-way communicator **110**. An 8-channel analog-to-digital converter **506**, **510**, for example ND-6018, available from Circuit Specialists (Mesa, Ariz.), converts analog signals including, but not limited to, 4–20 mA pressure transducer signals **508**, thermocouple signals **512**, meter signals and combinations thereof.

Preferably, an embedded controller **504** controls and acquires data from meters such as the EDXRF spectrometer **300** which generate spectral data **516**, non-dispersive optical meter, viscometer, solid state cooling device, resistive heater (s), particulate meter(s) and combinations thereof. The embedded controller **504** has sufficient memory and, optionally, mass storage to record data over an extended period of time. Another embedded controller **502** communicates to a two-way communicator **110** or, optionally, a laptop computer over serial I/O **518** and provides control and data acquisition for additional optional meters over digital I/O **520**. The embedded controller **502** also performs reduction of the data produced by the meters and the resulting standard analysis parameters are stored in memory or, optionally, on mass storage. The embedded controller **502** also has sufficient storage and optional mass storage to record standard analysis parameter(s) over an extended period of time. If standard analysis parameters exceed preset limits, the embedded controller **502** can initiate an emergency call through the two-way communicator **110**.

The system controller **108** may be programmed according to the flow chart in FIG. 6. A reset may either be a user-initiated reset such as when the program is first loaded or a recovery-mode reset resulting from a power failure or software or hardware failure. After reset, interfaces are initialized **600** by setting variables to initial values for a user-initiated reset or restored to previous values for recovery-mode resets. The acquisition cycles are then started **602**. This initiates a separate process for each meter in the system. The main process then waits for download requests **604**. Upon receipt of a download request, the main process transfers logged data **606** to the two-way communicator **110** or optional laptop. All meter processes wait to be triggered **608** either by communications from the meter or by a timer. Data are retrieved from the meter(s) and processed and logged as required **610**. A test for data outside flag limits **612** causes an emergency call **614** for meter data outside the flag limits.

Communicator

As shown in FIG. 5, another improvement is a two-way communicator **110** connected to the system controller **108** for receiving interrogation signals and for transmitting data, thereby obtaining an in situ or on-board machine fluid analysis. Two-way communication enables remote monitoring of machine and machine fluid condition. A communicator **110** may be a two-way, cell-phone based, communicator that may be obtained from Highway Master Systems (Muldrow, Okla.).

System

An embodiment of the present invention is a system for machine fluid analysis as shown in FIG. 7. A sample line **700** leads from a pressurized machine fluid line whereby a first branch sample line **702** leads to the viscometer **200**, and a second branch sample line **704** leads through a throttle **706** to the reservoir **302** of the EDXRF spectrometer **300**. After passing through the EDXRF spectrometer **300**, the machine fluid flows through a connecting tube **708** to the ND optical meter **420**, preferably an IR meter. Thus, in this embodiment, the machine fluid sample is split such that one

part runs through the viscometer **200** while the other part runs through both the EDXRF spectrometer **300** and the ND optical meter **420**. Signals from the meter(s) are collected by the system controller **108** and may be transmitted by the communicator **110**.

In this embodiment of the present invention, the machine fluid analysis system comprises a microprocessor-controlled power supply (not shown) and system controller **108**. The system controller **108** comprises microprocessor controllers for the EDXRF spectrometer **300**, ND optical meter **420**, viscometer **200**, and the laser light extinction particle counter (not shown) and a sample acquisition system (not shown) to adjust the pressure and temperature of the incoming machine fluid, as required. The system can operate in an autonomous mode wherein data are collected from the parameter meters and stored, or it can operate under control of a user interface wherein a human operator directs the functions of the parameter meters.

For deployment on a machine in an environment including, but not limited to, vehicle, industrial plant, outdoors, airborne, outer space, and combinations thereof, the system is preferably housed in an enclosure **710** that is shock mounted to reduce vibration and contains, or is connected to, an electrical power supply. Situated within the enclosure **710** may be a cooler(s) for cooling the X-ray and IR detectors and removing process heat. In another embodiment, the cooler(s) comprises solid state electrical cooling assemblies known as Peltier baffle devices.

CLOSURE

While various embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that many changes and modifications may be made without departing from the invention in its broader aspects. The appended claims are therefore intended to cover all such changes and modifications as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

We claim:

1. A machine fluid analysis system comprising:
 - a plurality of different sensors contacting a fluid under pressure of a machine for detecting different properties of the fluid;
 - a controller operable to initiate acquisition cycles of and to collect data from the plurality of sensors; and
 - a two-way wireless communicator coupled to the controller for receiving interrogation signals and for transmitting the collected data to a remote location.
2. The system of claim 1 wherein each of the different sensors detects a standard laboratory analysis parameter of the fluid.
3. The system of claim 2 wherein the controller is operable to initiate an emergency call through the two-way communicator when a property detected by the sensors exceeds a predetermined limit.
4. The system of claim 1 wherein the controller is operable to collect data for use in determining trends and predicting maintenance schedules of the machine.
5. The system of claim 1 wherein the plurality of sensors are selected from the group consisting of optical meter, viscometer, element meter, and particle counter.
6. The system of claim 1 wherein the controller is operable to collect and store a substantially continuous log of data from the sensors over an extended period of time.
7. The system of claim 1 wherein one of the sensors is an X-ray fluorescence meter including an X-ray source producing source X-rays, a thin walled polymeric tube substantially

13

transparent to the source X-rays and providing a flow path past the X-ray source, and an X-ray detector for receiving an X-ray fluorescence signal from the fluid in the tube.

8. The system of claim 1 wherein one of the sensors is an optical meter including an optical source operable to pass optical energy through the machine fluid and an optical detector operable to receive the optical energy passed through the machine fluid, and wherein there is no optical dispersive element between the optical energy source and the machine fluid or between the machine fluid and the detector.

9. The system of claim 1 wherein one of the sensors is a viscometer including a viscometer tube, a differential pressure transducer mounted on opposite ends of the viscometer tube, and a flowmeter in line with the viscometer tube.

10. A method for determining trends and predicting maintenance schedules of a machine comprising:

determining a plurality of properties of a machine fluid with sensors in contact with the machine fluid under pressure of the machine;

collecting data for use in determining trends and predicting maintenance schedules of the machine from the sensors with a controller;

receiving interrogation signals with a two-way wireless communicator coupled to the controller; and

transmitting the collected data to a remote location with the two-way wireless communicator.

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising transmitting an emergency call with the two-way communicator when a property detected by the sensors exceeds a predetermined limit.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein the collected data includes a substantially continuous log of data from the sensors over an extended period of time.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein collecting data includes storing the data in the memory of a programmable embedded controller.

14. The method of claim 10 wherein the plurality of properties are standard laboratory analysis parameters of the machine fluid.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the plurality of properties are selected from the group consisting of viscosity, pentane insolubles, soot, additive package, oxidation or oil polymer breakdown products, nitration, sulfation, fuel dilution, water concentration, and concentration of a specific element.

16. The method of claim 10 wherein the machine includes an engine and the machine fluid is crankcase oil.

17. A method for machine fluid analysis comprising:

initiating acquisition cycles of a plurality of sensors in contact with a machine fluid with a controller to determine a plurality of properties of the machine fluid;

collecting data from the sensors with the controller for determining trends and predicting maintenance schedules of the machine; and

in response to a download request, transmitting the collected data to a remote location with a two-way wireless communicator operably coupled to the controller.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising providing machine fluid to different ones of the plurality of sensors at substantially different temperatures.

14

19. The method of claim 17 further comprising transmitting an emergency call with the two-way communicator when a property detected by the sensors exceeds a predetermined limit.

20. The method of claim 17 wherein the collected data includes a substantially continuous log of data from the sensors over an extended period of time.

21. The method of claim 20 wherein collecting data includes storing the data in the memory of a programmable embedded controller.

22. The method of claim 17 wherein the plurality of properties are standard laboratory analysis parameters of the machine fluid.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the plurality of properties are selected from the group consisting of viscosity, pentane insolubles, soot, additive package, oxidation or oil polymer breakdown products, nitration, sulfation, fuel dilution, water concentration, and concentration of a specific element.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the machine includes an engine and the machine fluid is crankcase oil.

25. An X-ray fluorescence meter for measuring the concentration of elements in a fluid comprising:

an X-ray source providing source X-rays in an energy range from about 5 KeV to about 30 KeV;

a thin walled polymeric tube of low element weight composition and substantially transparent to the source X-rays, the tube providing a flow path past the X-ray source for flowing a fluid there through whereby the fluid can intercept the source X-rays and produce an X-ray fluorescence signal;

an X-ray detector for receiving an X-ray fluorescence signal from the fluid in the tube;

a multi-channel analyzer for counting the number of X-rays photons in specific energy ranges; and software for quantitative determination of the relative and absolute concentrations of elements in the fluid.

26. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 wherein the fluid is machine fluid.

27. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 wherein the fluid is industrial process fluid.

28. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 wherein the flow of the fluid is intermittent.

29. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 wherein the flow of the fluid is substantially continuous.

30. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 wherein the tube includes polyamide.

31. The X-ray fluorescence meter of claim 25 in combination with

at least one second sensor for detecting at least one additional property of the fluid;

a controller operable to initiate acquisition cycles of and to collect data from the X-ray fluorescence meter and the second sensor; and

a two-way wireless communicator coupled to the controller for receiving interrogation signals and for transmitting the collected data to a remote location.

32. The system of claim 7 wherein the X-ray fluorescence meter is an X-ray fluorescence meter according to claim 25.