

**Abstract**  
**Process Economics Program Report 37C**  
**ACETIC ACID**  
**(December 2001)**

This report appraises the current commercially dominant methanol carbonylation technologies for acetic acid production based on the recent developments in catalyst technology. In addition, two alternate but comparatively newer technologies employing the oxidation of hydrocarbons (ethylene and ethane) are evaluated. The following technologies are dealt with:

- BP Cativa™ technology.
- Celanese Acid Optimization (AO) technology.
- Showa Denko Single-step Ethylene Oxidation technology.
- SABIC (Saudi Basic Industries Corporation) Ethane Oxydehydrogenation technology.

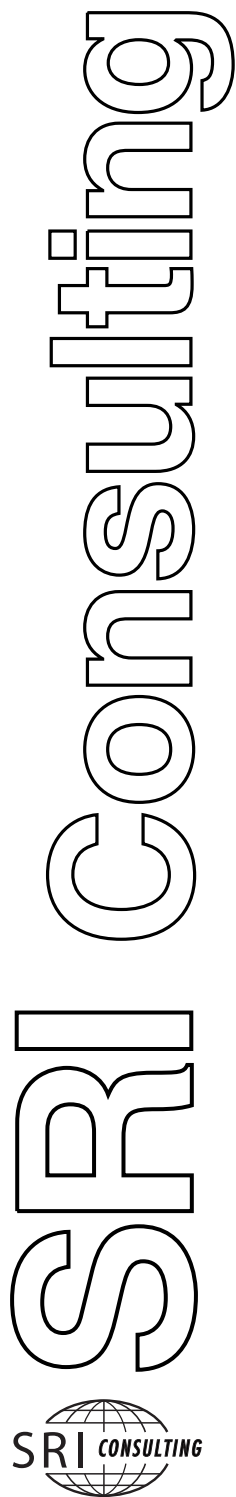
BP's Cativa™, a methyl carbonylation technology, is an improved version of the original Monsanto's rhodium catalyzed acetic acid technology which BP inherited from Monsanto in 1986. Instead of rhodium, Cativa™ employs BP's proprietary iridium (and iodides) based promoted catalyst. The new catalyst offers a higher reactivity, increased catalyst stability, reduced by-products and lower energy consumption in product purification as compared to original rhodium catalysts.

Celanese also originally licensed the acetic acid technology from Monsanto in the late 1970s. But now it is the sole owner. The AO technology is a result of a number of improvements and optimizations in the original Monsanto technology. AO technology is founded on proprietary rhodium (and iodide) based catalyst materials, which impart a high stability to the catalyst system permitting carbonylation at lower water concentrations. Some catalyst formulations use iridium in combination with rhodium. By-product formation is much reduced and optimized purification methodologies result in increased product purity. From the capital investment viewpoint, Celanese, as our estimates indicate, has a slightly higher capital intensity than that of BP.

SD's (Showa Denko's) ethylene route to acetic acid makes acetic acid production independent of methanol and carbon monoxide (CO). This process, which offers capability for a single-step ethylene conversion to acetic acid, is a more cost effective variance of the conventional two-step ethylene oxidation process (via acetaldehyde). The (palladium catalyzed) process is useful at small capacities to meet local requirement of acid. However, its economics are not comparable with those of methyl carbonylation technology.

SABIC's (molybdenum, vanadium and niobium/palladium/lanthanum catalyzed) ethane based route to acetic acid is another alternative technology for acetic acid which is being tested for commercialization. Like SD, this technology may offer cost effective means for acid production for regionalized demand. The technology has not been yet demonstrated even on a semi commercial scale and bears of all kinds uncertainties typical to a new process. Ethylene and CO<sub>2</sub> are

the major by-products. CO<sub>2</sub> may be an environmental concern if it does not find an end user. Ethylene and acetic acid production need to be balanced according to their demand.



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## ACETIC ACID

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## CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1-1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2-1</b>
	OVERVIEW .....	2-1
	Industry Status.....	2-1
	Technology Status.....	2-2
	TECHNOLOGIES .....	2-2
	BP CATIVA™ TECHNOLOGY FOR ACETIC ACID.....	2-3
	CELANESE TECHNOLOGY FOR ACETIC ACID .....	2-4
	SHOWA DENKO ONE-STEP ETHYLENE OXIDATION PROCESS FOR ACEDIC ACID.....	2-6
	SABIC ETHANE OXIDATION PROCESS FOR ACETIC ACID .....	2-7
	PROCESS ECONOMICS.....	2-8
	Methanol carbonylation (BP's Cativa™ versus Celanese Acid Optimization).....	2-8
	C <sub>2</sub> Hydrocarbons Oxidation (SD's Ethylene-versus SABIC's Ethane-based Oxidation) .....	2-9
<b>3</b>	<b>INDUSTRY STATUS.....</b>	<b>3-1</b>
	WORLD CAPACITIES.....	3-1
	GLOBAL PRODUCTION / CONSUMPTION.....	3-4
<b>4</b>	<b>BP CATIVA™ TECHNOLOGY FOR ACETIC ACID .....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
	TECHNOLOGY REVIEW .....	4-1
	Carbonylation Rate.....	4-2
	Catalyst System.....	4-2
	Reaction & Reaction Conditions.....	4-3
	By-products/Impurities.....	4-3
	Products Separation .....	4-4
	PROCESS DESCRIPTION .....	4-5

## CONTENTS (Continued)

Section 100 - Methanol Carbonylation .....	4-5
Section 200 - Product Purification .....	4-6
PROCESS DISCUSSION.....	4-15
Design Conditions .....	4-15
Catalyst.....	4-15
Reactor .....	4-15
By-Product Steam .....	4-16
Gas Scrubbing.....	4-16
Product Purification .....	4-16
Materials of Construction.....	4-17
Process Waste Effluents .....	4-17
COST ESTIMATES .....	4-18
Fixed - Capital Costs .....	4-18
Production Costs .....	4-18
<b>5 CELANESE TECHNOLOGY FOR ACETIC ACID .....</b>	<b>5-1</b>
TECHNOLOGY REVIEW .....	5-1
Catalyst System.....	5-2
Carbonylation Rate.....	5-2
Carbonylation Conditions .....	5-3
Main Reactions.....	5-3
By-products.....	5-4
Products Purification.....	5-4
PROCESS DESCRIPTION .....	5-6
Section 100 - Methanol Carbonylation .....	5-6
Section 200 - Product Purification .....	5-7
PROCESS DISCUSSION.....	5-17
Design Conditions .....	5-17

## CONTENTS (Continued)

Catalyst.....	5-17
Reactor .....	5-17
By-Product Steam .....	5-18
Gas Scrubbing.....	5-18
Product Purification .....	5-18
Materials of Construction.....	5-19
Process Waste Effluents .....	5-19
<b>COST ESTIMATES .....</b>	<b>5-19</b>
Fixed - Capital Costs .....	5-19
Production Costs .....	5-20
<b>6 SHOWA-DENKO ONE-STEP ETHYLENE OXIDATION PROCESS FOR ACETIC ACID .....</b>	<b>6-1</b>
TECHNOLOGY REVIEW .....	6-1
Catalyst System.....	6-2
Reaction Mechanism .....	6-2
Oxidation Conditions .....	6-3
By-products.....	6-3
Product Purification .....	6-3
<b>PROCESS DESCRIPTION .....</b>	<b>6-4</b>
Section 100 - Ethylene Oxidation .....	6-5
Section 200 - Acid Purification.....	6-6
<b>PROCESS DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>6-15</b>
Design Conditions .....	6-15
Catalyst.....	6-15
Reactor .....	6-16
By-product Steam .....	6-16
Product Purification .....	6-16

## CONTENTS (Continued)

Materials of Construction .....	6-16
Process Waste Effluents .....	6-17
COST ESTIMATES .....	6-17
Fixed - Capital Costs .....	6-17
Production Costs .....	6-18
<b>7 SABIC ETHANE OXIDATION PROCESS FOR ACETIC ACID.....</b>	<b>7-1</b>
TECHNOLOGY REVIEW .....	7-1
Catalyst System.....	7-2
Major Reactions.....	7-3
Oxidation Conditions .....	7-3
By-products.....	7-4
Product Purification .....	7-4
PROCESS DESCRIPTION .....	7-4
Section 100 - Ethane Oxidation.....	7-5
Section 200 - Acid Purification.....	7-6
PROCESS DISCUSSION.....	7-15
Selection of Process Design .....	7-15
Feed.....	7-15
Catalyst.....	7-15
Reactor .....	7-16
By-product Steam .....	7-16
Product Purification .....	7-16
Materials of Construction.....	7-16
Process Waste Effluents .....	7-16
COST ESTIMATES .....	7-17
Fixed - Capital Costs .....	7-17
Production Costs .....	7-18



**CONTENTS (Concluded)**

<b>APPENDIX A: PATENT SUMMARY TABLES.....</b>	<b>A-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: DESIGN AND COST BASES .....</b>	<b>B-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: CITED REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>C-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: PATENT REFERENCES BY COMPANY.....</b>	<b>D-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: PROCESS FLOW DIAGRAM.....</b>	<b>E-1</b>

## ILLUSTRATIONS

4.1	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Process Flow Diagram .....	E-3
4.2A	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Methanol Price (Co Price Unchanged) for Base Capacity Plant.....	4-24
4.2B	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Co Price (Methanol Price Unchanged ) for Base Capacity Plant.....	4-25
4.3	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Effect of Operating Level and Plant Capacity on Product Value of Acetic Acid....	4-26
5.1	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Process Flow Diagram .....	E-5
5.2A	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Methanol Price (at Constant Co Price) for Base Capacity Plant.....	5-25
5.2B	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Carbon Monoxide Price (at Constant Methanol Price) for Base Capacity Plant.....	5-26
5.3	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Effect of Operating Level and Plant Capacity on Product Value of Acetic Acid....	5-27
6.1	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Process Flow Diagram .....	E-7
6.2	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Ethylene Price for Base Capacity Plant.....	6-23
6.3	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Effect of operating Level and Plant Capacity on Product Value of Acetic Acid ....	6-24
7.1	Sabic Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Process Flow Diagram .....	E-9
7.2	Sabic Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Production Costs and Product Value of Acetic Acid as a Function of Ethylene Price for Base Capacity Plant.....	7-23
7.3	Sabic Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Effect of Operating Level and Plant Capacity on Product Value of Acetic Acid....	7-24

## TABLES

2.1	Methanol Carbonylation Technologies Total Capital Investment.....	2-11
2.2	Methanol Carbonylation Technologies Production Costs .....	2-12
2.3	C <sub>2</sub> Hydrocarbons Oxidation Technologies Total Capital Investment.....	2-13
2.4	C <sub>2</sub> Hydrocarbons Oxidation Technologies Production Costs .....	2-14
2.5	Cativa™, Acid Optimization & Ethane-Oxidation Technologies Total Fixed Costs.....	2-15
2.6	Cativa™, Acid Optimization & Ethane-Oxidation Technologies Production Costs .....	2-16
3.1	Virgin Acetic Acid Producers .....	3-2
3.2	Supply/Demand Summary for Acetic Acid by Acetic Acid-Producing Region - 1999 <sup>a</sup> .....	3-4
3.3	Consumption of Acetic Acid by Product - 1998.....	3-5
3.4	Projected Demand of Acetic Acid by Major Product .....	3-5
4.1	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Patent Summary.....	A-3
4.2	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Design Bases and Assumptions.....	4-8
4.3	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Stream Flows.....	4-9
4.4	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Major Equipment .....	4-12
4.5	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Utilities Summary.....	4-14
4.6	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Total Capital Investment.....	4-20
4.7	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Capital Investment by Section.....	4-21
4.8	BP Cativa™ Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs .....	4-22

**TABLES (Continued)**

5.1	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Patent Summary .....	A-11
5.2	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Design Bases and Assumptions.....	5-9
5.3	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Stream Flows.....	5-10
5.4	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Major Equipment .....	5-14
5.5	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Utilities Summary.....	5-16
5.6	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Total Capital Investment.....	5-21
5.7	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Capital Investment by Section .....	5-22
5.8	Celanese Technology for Acetic Acid Production Costs .....	5-23
6.1	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Patent Summary .....	A-17
6.2	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Design Bases and Assumptions.....	6-7
6.3	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Stream Flows.....	6-8
6.4	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Major Equipment .....	6-12
6.5	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Utilities Summary.....	6-14
6.6	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Total Capital Investment.....	6-19
6.7	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Capital Investment by Section .....	6-20
6.8	Showa Denko One-Step Ethylene Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Production Costs .....	6-21
7.1	Sabic Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Patent summary .....	A-18

## TABLES (Continued)

7.2	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Design Bases and Assumptions.....	7-7
7.3	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Stream Flows.....	7-8
7.4	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Major Equipment .....	7-12
7.5	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Utilities Summary.....	7-14
7.6	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Total Capital Investment.....	7-19
7.7	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Capital Investment by Section.....	7-20
7.8	Sabir Ethane Oxidation Process for Acetic Acid Production Costs .....	7-21