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(54) EVACUATION PORT AND CLOSURE FOR DEWARS

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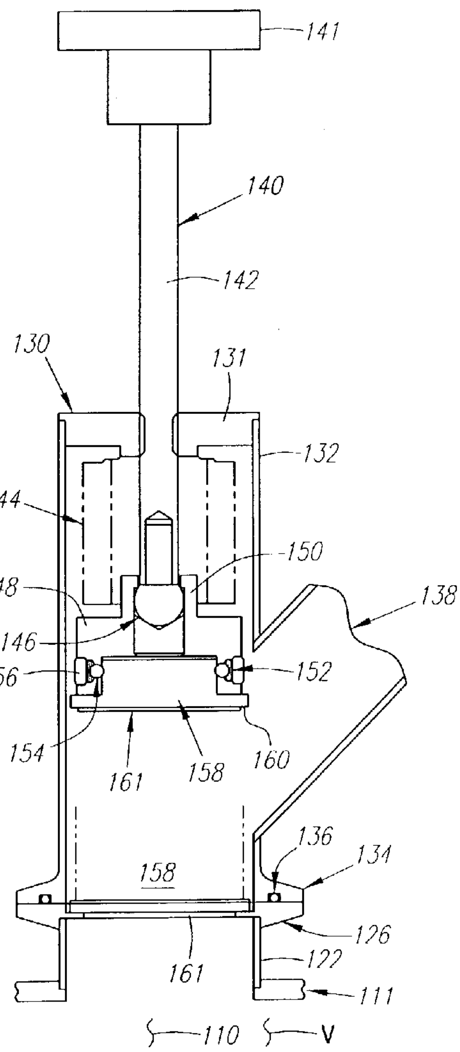
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An improved dewar design that accelerates the manufacturing process of a dewar. In a preferred embodiment, the dewar includes an evacuation port that may be larger in size by a factor of ten over the size of evacuation ports of conventional dewars. The oversized evacuation port, however, does not result in an increase in the overall size or profile of the dewar. The dewar is evacuated and hermetically sealed using an re-usable evacuation tool.



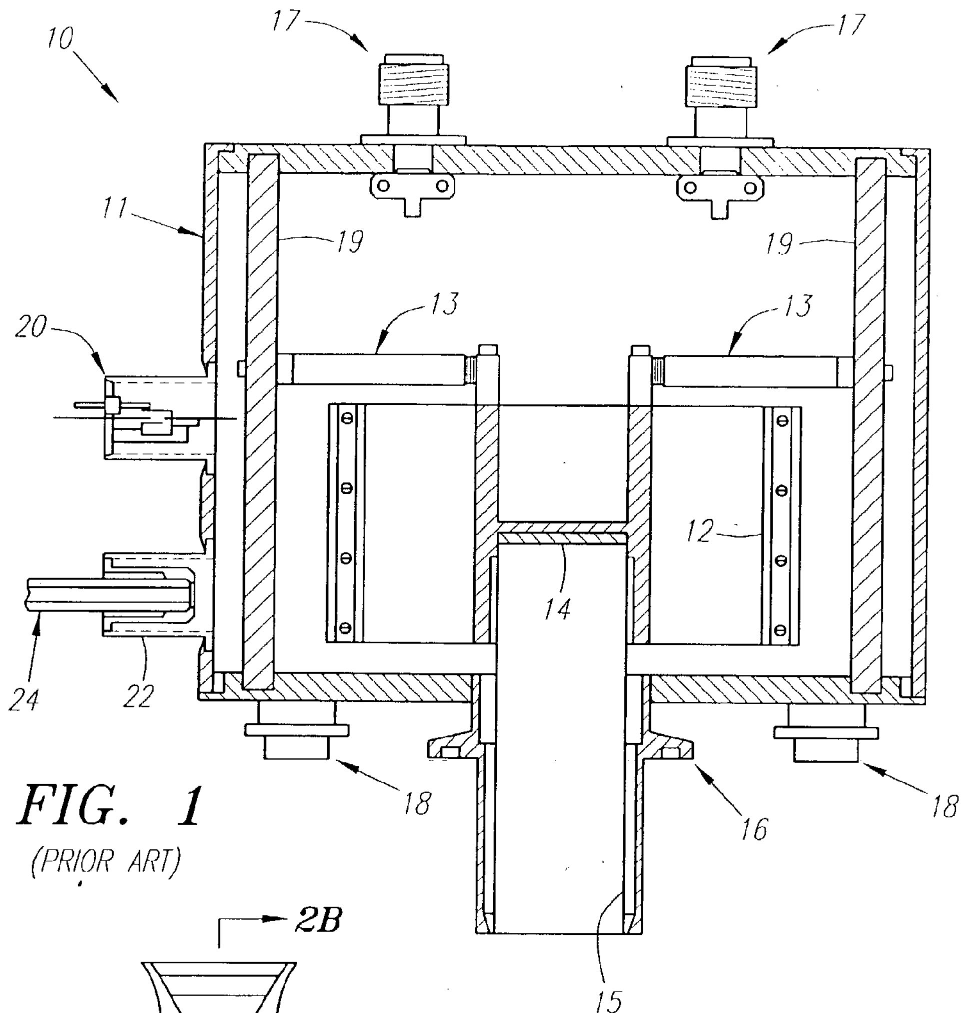


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

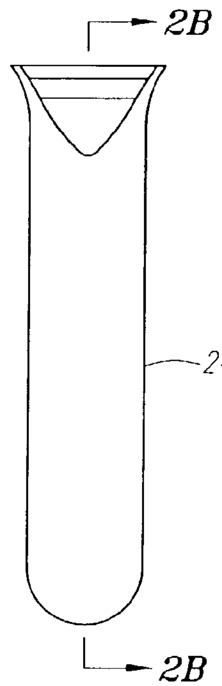


FIG. 2A
(PRIOR ART)

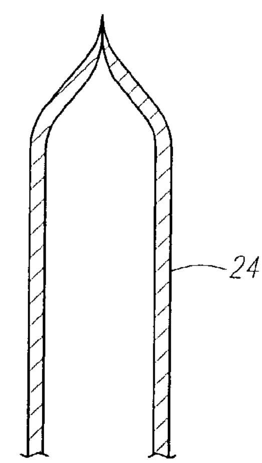


FIG. 2B
(PRIOR ART)

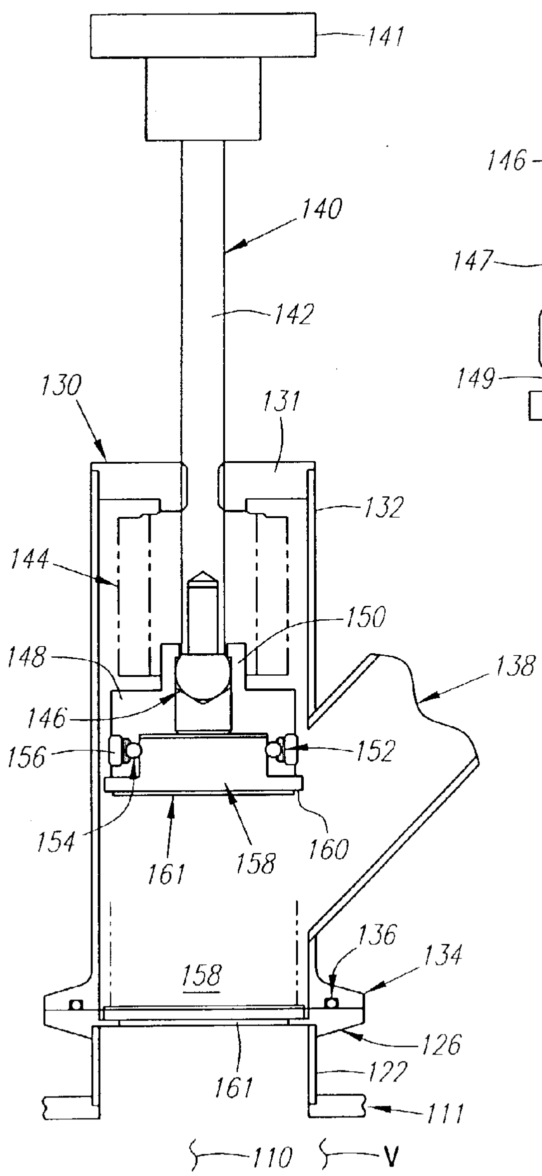
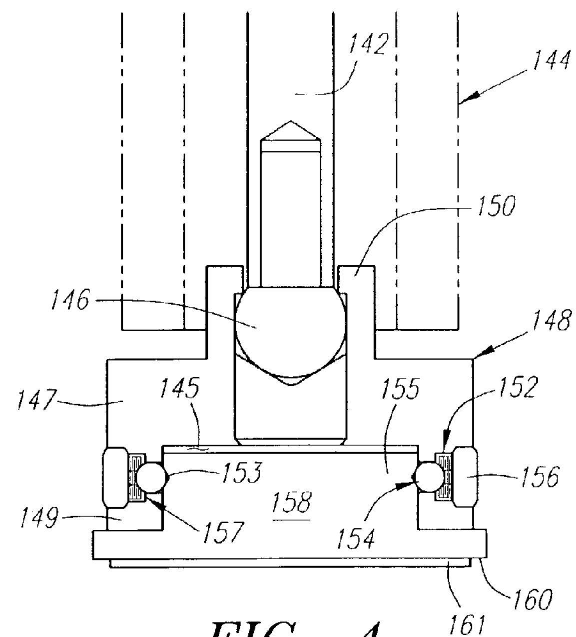

141
140
142
130
131
132
144
150
138
148
146
156
152
154
161
158
160
136
134
158
126
122
161
111
110
V

FIG. 3


142
144
150
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148
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145
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149
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160
161

FIG. 4

EVACUATION PORT AND CLOSURE FOR DEWARS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 09/765,178, filed Jan. 17, 2001, allowed, which is fully and expressly incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to dewars for high temperature superconducting (HTS) filter systems for use in, for example, cellular PCS systems and, more particularly, an evacuation port and closure for such dewars.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Recently, substantial attention has been devoted to the development of high temperature superconducting radio frequency (RF) filters for use in, for example, cellular telecommunications systems. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that, when multiple HTS filters are deployed, for example, within a dewar cooled by a cryocooler, on a telecommunications tower, substantial durability and reliability issues may arise. For example, when a system is to be mounted at the top of a tower, the system must be able to withstand significant changes in climate and weather, and the system must be reliable and require minimal maintenance.

[0004] In this regard, the final step in manufacturing a durable, long life dewar, i.e., a dewar having a life span greater than 10 years, is to vacuum bake the dewar at as high a temperature as possible to degas the dewar and its components, which include temperature sensors, HTSC RF filters, getters, etc., without damaging these components and impacting their functional capability. While the dewar is baked, it is attached to a vacuum pump via a tip-off tube and evacuated. The vacuum pump will reduce the pressure within the dewar to less than 10^{-4} torr and typically to less than 10^{-8} torr at the time the tip-off tube is pinched off to seal the dewar. At these low pressures, the gas molecules that are outgassing from the dewar and its components will move in straight lines until the gas molecules strike a wall of the dewar or component, or another gas molecule. The gas molecules will be removed or evacuated from the dewar as they find the inside of the tip-off tube. Because the tip-off tube typically has a relative small inside diameter to minimize the size or footprint of the dewar, the degassing process tends to be quite time consuming. Typically, the dewar is vacuum baked for several days until the outgassing decreases to an acceptable level.

[0005] With the increased demand from the cellular telecommunications industry for these dewar deployed HTS filters, dewar manufacturers must find ways to increase the supply of these dewars at lower costs. Because the vacuum baking of the dewars is the most time intensive step of the manufacturing process, one option to increase the output of dewars would be to invest in more automated vacuum bakeout equipment. However, automated vacuum bakeout equipment is very expensive and, thus, this option is not necessarily the most desirable. Another option would be to reduce the time required to vacuum bake the dewars by increasing the rate at which the gas molecules are evacuated from the dewar. Because the gas molecules are only evacuated as they find the inside of the tip-off tube, the rate at which the gas molecules were evacuated would increase if the size of the tip-off tube were increased. However, because the length of the tip-off tube, or distance from the dewar at which the tip-off tube is pinched off, is directly proportional to the diameter of the tip-off tube, this option would result in an undesirable increase in the overall size or profile of these dewars.

[0006] Thus, it would be desirable to increase the manufacturing output of these dewar deployed HTS filters without drastically increasing a manufacturers capital equipment investment or increasing the size of the dewar.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention is directed to an improved dewar for high temperature superconducting RF filter systems and process for manufacturing the same. In a particularly innovative aspect, a dewar in accordance with the present invention includes an oversized evacuation port, which may be greater in size by about a factor of ten than the size of an evacuation port of a conventional dewar, without increasing its overall size or profile. The incorporation of an oversized evacuation port is particularly advantageous from a manufacturing standpoint in that the time it takes to vacuum bake the dewar is substantially reduced. Specifically, there is a greater probability that the gas molecules being outgassed from the dewar and its components will find the inside diameter of a larger evacuation port and, thus, will be more quickly evacuated from the dewar. Moreover, a dewar in accordance with the present invention comprises a low profile cap that seals the evacuation port.

[0008] Prior to vacuum baking the dewar, a re-useable evacuation tool is coupled to the evacuation port of the dewar. The tool includes a housing, a capping tool positioned in the housing, and a side arm extending from the housing, which is attachable to a vacuum pump. The tool is advantageously bakeable up to a temperature of 100° C. to 125° C. Once the vacuum bakeout process is completed, the capping tool is actuated to cold weld the low profile cap to the tip-off flange on the end of the evacuation port and hermetically seals the dewar.

[0009] Other objects and features of the present invention will become apparent from consideration of the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] **FIG. 1** is a cross-sectional view of a typical dewar of the prior art that has high temperature superconductor RF filter assemblies thermally attached to a heatsink.

[0011] **FIG. 2A** is a plan view of a tip-off tube of the prior art that has been pinched off.

[0012] **FIG. 2B** is a partial cross-sectional view of the tip-off tube shown in **FIG. 2A** taken along line 2B-2B.

[0013] **FIG. 3** is a partial plan view of a cap port and evacuation tool of the present invention, wherein the evacuation tool is attached to the tip-off flange of a dewar.

[0014] **FIG. 4** is a partial plan view of the cap port captured by the evacuation tool.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0015] Turning now to the drawings, **FIG. 1** provides a cross-sectional view of a typical dewar **10** of the prior art. The dewar **10** includes a hermetically sealed cylindrical drum-like housing **11** preferably formed from stainless steel. A heatsink **12**, to which high temperature superconductor (HTS) RF filter assemblies (not shown) are thermally attached, is fixed in place within the housing **11** via a series of struts **13** which attach to a series of supports **19** embedded in the housing **11**. The heatsink **12** is cooled by a closed cycle cryogenic cooler (not shown) that thermally interfaces to a dewar coldfinger **14** through a supply tube **15**. The supply tube **15**, which extends through the base of the housing **11**, includes a flange **16** that mates to a cryocooler flange (not shown). The dewar **10** also typically includes a series of DC power connectors **18**, a series of RF connectors **17**, and a getter **20**. Lastly, a tip-off tube **24**, which is typically formed from annealed copper tubing, is brazed to mate with an evacuation port **22**.

[0016] A final step in the process of manufacturing a durable dewar **10** with a life expectancy of **10** years or more, is to vacuum bake the dewar **10** at as high a temperature as possible to degas the dewar **10** and its components, which include temperature sensors, HTSC RF filters, getters, etc., without damaging these components and impacting their functional capability. While the dewar **10** is baked, the tip-off tube **24** is attached to a vacuum pump (not shown) to evacuate the dewar **10**. The vacuum pump will reduce the pressure within the dewar **10** to less than 10^{-4} torr and typically to less than 10^{-8} torr at the time the tip-off tube **24** is pinched off, i.e. squeezed between two rollers that cause the copper tubing of the tip-off tube **24** to cold weld to itself, to create a hermetic seal (see **FIGS. 2A and 2B**). At these low pressures, the gas molecules that are outgassing from the dewar **10** and its components will move in straight lines until the gas molecules strike a wall of the dewar **10**. or component, or another gas molecule. The gas molecules will be removed or evacuated from the dewar **10** as they find the inside of the tip-off tube **24**. The larger the inside diameter of the tip-off tube **24**, the easier it is for the molecules to be removed by the vacuum pump. However, because the distance from the dewar **10** at which the tip-off tube **24** can be pinched-off is directly proportional to the diameter of the tip-off tube **24**, and because it is desirable to minimize the dewar's **10** profile, the tip-off tube **24** typically has a relative small inside diameter. As a result, the degassing process tends to be quite time consuming as the gas molecules slowly find the inside of the small diameter tip-off tube **24**. Typically, the dewar **10** is vacuum baked for several days until the outgassing decreases to an acceptable level.

[0017] To accelerate the vacuum baking step of the manufacturing process, the evacuation port of a dewar of the present invention has a cross-sectional area that is significantly larger than the cross-sectional area of the tip-off tube of a conventional dewar. Moreover, a dewar evacuation port according to the present invention can be increased in size by a factor of ten over the conventional dewar evacuation port without increasing the overall size or profile of the dewar. Increasing the cross-sectional area of the evacuation port significantly increases the probability that a gas molecule will be removed by the vacuum pump and, thus, shortens the time the dewar must be vacuum baked.

[0018] Turning to **FIG. 3**, the dewar **110** of the present invention includes a large diameter evacuation port **122** that extends from the housing **111** of the dewar **110**. A tip-off flange **126** is formed on the end of the evacuation port **122**. A reusable evacuation tool **130**, which is used to evacuate the dewar **110** and seal its large diameter evacuation port **122**, is coupled to the dewar **110**. The evacuation tool **130** is advantageously bakeable at a temperature of up to 125° C. and comprises metallic surfaces that are low outgassing.

[0019] The evacuation tool **130** includes an elongated cylindrical housing **132** and a cylindrical side arm or vacuum port **138** that opens into the housing **132** and extends from the housing **132** to a vacuum pump (not shown). A flange **134** is formed on the end of the housing **132** adjacent the dewar **110** and is coupled to the tip-off flange **126** of the dewar **110** with a clamp (not shown). A vacuum seal is maintained between the tip-off flange **126** and the flange **134** of the evacuation tool by a low outgassing o-ring **136** such as a VITON® or KAL REZ™ (Dupont trademarks) o-ring. The other end of the housing **132** is sealed with a cover **131**.

[0020] The evacuation tool **130** includes a capping tool **140** used to cap the evacuation port **122** on the dewar **110**. The capping tool **140** includes a clamping knob **141** connected to an elongated threaded shaft **142** that slidably extends through the threaded section of cover **131** of the evacuation tool **130**. The shaft **142**, which includes a tooling ball **146** attached to its end, is mechanically coupled to a tooling head **148** and a diaphragm bellows **144**. The tooling ball **146** is rotatably captured in a tooling seat **150** of the tooling head **148**. Rotation of the clamping knob **141** and, hence, the shaft **142**, of the capping tool **140** causes the bellows **144** to linearly expand or contract without rotating. Expansion of the bellows **144** causes the shaft **142** to extend into the housing **132** and forces the tooling head **148** toward the flange **134** end of the evacuation tool **130**. Rotation of the clamping knob **141** in the opposite direction causes the bellows to linearly contract, which causes the shaft **142** to withdraw from the housing **132** and the tooling head **148** to withdraw toward the cover **131** end of the evacuation tool **130**.

[0021] A preferably low profile port cap **158** (see, in detail, **FIG. 4**) is releasably captured by the tooling head **148**. The tooling head **148** is substantially cup shaped having a base **147** and sidewall **149** defining a holding area **145**. Hardened CRES balls **154** are mounted in retaining cavities **157** formed in the side wall **149** of the tooling head **148**, such that only a portion of the CRES balls **154** extend into the holding area **145** of the tooling head **148** to engage a recess **153** formed in the perimeter of a head portion **155** of the port cap **158**. The CRES balls **154** are lightly loaded with disc or coil springs **152** to releasably retain the port cap **158**. Spring covers **156** hold the disc springs **152** in the retaining cavities **157**.

[0022] The surface **160** of the port cap **158** that makes contact with the tip-off flange **126** is preferably electroplated with a layer **161** of indium metal. The layer **161** of indium metal is preferably 0.002 to 0.010 inches thick. Alternatively, the indium metal may be in the form of an o-ring or washer attached to the surface **160** of the port cap **158**. Because indium is a very soft, compliant metal and because the mating surfaces of the indium layer **161** and the tip-off flange **126** are very clean after being vacuum baked over several days at a temperature of about 100° C. to 125° C., the indium layer **161** and tip-off flange **126** are easily cold welded when pressure is applied.

[**0023**] In operation, the evacuation tool **130** is connected to the dewar **110** by clamping the flange **134** of the evacuation tool **130** to the tip-off flange **126** of the dewar **110**. The evacuation tool **130** is placed in an open position, as shown in **FIG. 3**, with the tooling head **148** and port cap **158** withdrawn toward the cover **131** end of the housing **132**. The vacuum port **138** is attached to a vacuum pump (not shown). While the dewar **110** and tool **130** are baked at a temperature of about 100° C. to 125° C., the vacuum pump is operated to evacuate the gas molecules through the opening of evacuation port **122** and tip-off flange **126** and create a vacuum "V" within the dewar **110**. The opening in the evacuation port **122** and tip-off flange **126** is preferably about 1.57 inches in diameter. Such a large opening will tend to reduce the vacuum baking time necessary to sufficiently evacuate the gas molecules being outgassed from the dewar **110** and its components.

[**0024**] When the vacuum baking process is completed, the evacuation tool **130** is used to hermetically seal the opening of the tip-off flange **126** of the dewar **110**. The clamping knob **141** of the capping tool **140** is rotated to expand the bellows **144**. The bellows **144** is expanded until the evacuation tool **130** is effectively closed and the evacuation port **122** of the dewar **110** is sealed by cold welding the indium layer **161** of the port cap **158** to the tip-off flange **126**.

[**0025**] With the evacuation tool **130** closed and the evacuation port **122** sealed, atmospheric pressure enters the housing **132** of the tool **130** through vacuum port **138** by opening a valve at the vacuum pump to atmosphere. As a result, atmospheric pressure is asserted on the port cap **158** to hold it in place. With the cap **158** of the preferred embodiment at atmospheric pressure, i.e., 14.7 pounds per square inch, more than 28.4 pounds of force is applied to the cap **158** that has a diameter greater than the 1.57 inch diameter opening of the tip-off flange **126**. As a result, when the clamping knob **141** is rotated to open the evacuation tool **130** by contracting the bellows **144**, the atmospheric pressure exerted on the port cap **158** overcomes the pressure exerted by the CRES balls **154** and disk springs **152**, and causes the port cap **158** to disconnect from the tooling head **148** and remain connected to the dewar **110**. With the port cap **158** hermetically sealed to the dewar **110**, the clamp physically holding the evacuation tool **130** to the tip-off flange **126** is removed to remove the evacuation tool **130**.

[**0026**] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, a specific example thereof has been shown in the drawings and is herein described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not to be limited to the particular form disclosed, but to the contrary, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A process for manufacturing dewars, comprising the steps of

providing a dewar having an oversized evacuation port,

coupling an evacuation tool to the evacuation port of the dewar, the evacuation tool comprising a housing, a capping tool positioned in the housing, a low profile cap releaseably retained by the capping tool, and a side arm extending from the housing and being attachable to a vacuum pump,

vacuum baking the dewar and evacuation tool, and

actuating the capping tool to sealingly connect the cap to the evacuation port.

2. The process of claim 1 wherein the step of vacuum baking is conducted at a temperature of 100° C. to 125° C.

3. The process of claim 1 further comprising the step of electroplating with a soft metal the surface of the cap that contacts the evacuation port.

4. The process of claim 3 wherein the soft metal comprises indium.

5. The process of claim 1 wherein the step connecting the cap to the evacuation port comprises cold welding the cap to the evacuation port.

6. The process of claim 1 wherein the evacuation port has a cross-sectional area that is larger than a cross-sectional area of an evacuation port of a conventional dewar by a factor of ten.

7. The process of claim 1 wherein the dewar comprises a cold finger.

8. The process of claim 7 wherein the cold finger is coupled to a cryocooler.

9. The process of claim 7 wherein the dewar further comprises a heat sink coupled to the cold finger.

10. The process of claim 9 wherein the dewar further comprises an RF filter coupled to the heat sink.

11. The process of claim 1 wherein the evacuation port has a cross-section larger by a factor of ten than a cross-section of a tip-off tube of a prior art dewar.

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