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charide exhibiting an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least 17 and retaining at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.

47. The method according to claim 46 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is prepared from a polysaccharide selected from the group consisting of cellulose, chitin, and mixtures thereof.

48. The method according to claim 46 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is a carboxyalkyl cellulose.

49. The method according to claim 46 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is a carboxymethyl polysaccharide.

50. The method according to claim 49 wherein the carboxymethyl polysaccharide is carboxymethyl cellulose.

51. The method according to claim 46 wherein said carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is recovered from the mixture by evaporative drying.

52. The method according to claim 46 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 20.

53. The method according to claim 46 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide retains at least about 70 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.

54. The method according to claim 46 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at about 100 percent relative humidity.

55. The method according to claim 46 wherein potassium hydroxide is used as an alkali to prepare the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide.

56. The method according to claim 46 wherein a less than stoichiometric ratio of an alkali to the carboxyalkylating reagent is used to prepare the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide.

57. The method according to claim 56 wherein the ratio of the alkali to the carboxyalkylating reagent is less than about 2 to 1.

58. The method according to claim 46 wherein a reactant molar ratio of the carboxyalkylating reagent to the polysaccharide is less than 1 to 1.

59. The method according to claim 56 wherein the carboxyalkylating reagent is chloroacetic acid and the polysaccharide is cellulose.

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60. A method for producing a water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide comprising:

a. preparing a mixture comprising a water-insoluble, water-dispersible carboxyalkyl polysaccharide, wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide comprises a crystalline structure and a non-crystalline structure, and water, wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is dispersed in the water and the non-crystalline structure of the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide dissolves into the water, and

b. recovering the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide from the mixture to result in a water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide exhibiting an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least 17 and retaining at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.

61. The method according to claim 60 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is prepared from a polysaccharide selected from the group consisting of cellulose, chitin, and mixtures thereof.

62. The method according to claim 60 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is a carboxyalkyl cellulose.

63. The method according to claim 60 wherein the carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is a carboxymethyl polysaccharide.

64. The method according to claim 63 wherein the carboxymethyl polysaccharide is carboxymethyl cellulose.

65. The method according to claim 60 wherein said carboxyalkyl polysaccharide is recovered from the mixture by evaporative drying.

66. The method according to claim 60 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 20.

67. The method according to claim 60 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide retains at least about 70 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.

68. The method according to claim 60 wherein the water-swellaable, water-insoluble carboxyalkyl polysaccharide retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24° C. and at about 100 percent relative humidity.

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