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**Smith**

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(54) **DRILLING FLUID AND METHOD FOR  
DRILLING IN COAL-CONTAINING  
FORMATIONS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A drilling fluid and method for drilling in a coal containing  
formation with a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid  
including at least 0.05% calcium sulfate.

**35 Claims, No Drawings**



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# DRILLING FLUID AND METHOD FOR DRILLING IN COAL-CONTAINING FORMATIONS

## FIELD

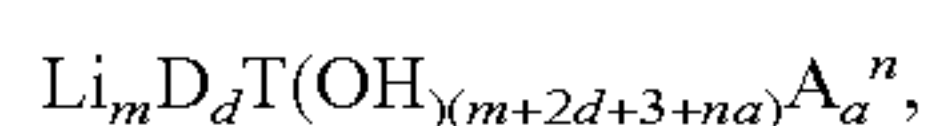
This invention relates to methods and fluids used for drilling and completing oil wells.

## BACKGROUND

The process of drilling a hole in the ground for the extraction of a natural resource requires a fluid for removing the cuttings from the wellbore, lubricating and cooling the drill bit, controlling formation pressures and maintaining hole stability.

Many earth formations contain coal seams through which a wellbore must be drilled to either access the coal itself or reservoirs of interest below the coal.

For coal bed methane (CBM) wells, minimization of formation damage is paramount given the lower permeability of coal seams than conventional reservoirs. A fluid that minimizes formation damage and reduces whole mud loss by limiting the invasion into the cleats and fractures and permits easy flow back has been developed, termed herein as mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids. Such drilling fluids include a mixed metal viscosifier, which is an inorganic particle based on magnesium/aluminum oxides and/or hydroxides. They are commonly known mixed metal hydroxides and sometimes referred to as mixed metal oxide (MMO), mixed metal hydroxide (MMH) and combinations of mixed metal oxide and hydroxide (MMOH). Mixed metal viscosifier is a mixed metal layered hydroxide compound of the following empirical formula:



Where

m represents the number of Li ions present (preferably 0);  
D represents divalent metal ions such as Mg, Ca, Ba, Sr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, most preferably Mg, or mixtures thereof;

d is the number of ions of D in the formula, preferably from 0 to about 4, and most preferably about 1;

T represents trivalent metal ions and may be Al, Ga, Cr or Fe, preferably Al;

A represents monovalent or polyvalent anions other than OH ions and may be inorganic ions such as: halide, sulfate, nitrate, phosphate, carbonate, most preferably halide, sulfate, phosphate, or carbonate, or they may be hydrophilic organic ions such as glycolate, lignosulfate, polycarboxylate, or polyacrylates;

a is the number of ions of A in the formula;

n is the valence of A; and

(m+2d+3+na) is equal to or greater than 3.

Particularly preferred is the mixed metal hydroxide of the formula  $\text{Al/Mg}(\text{OH})_{4.7}\text{Cl}_{0.3}$ .

Mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids include an aqueous-based mixture of at least one of the mixed metal moieties and an amount of bentonite. The rheology of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids limits fluid invasion into the formation due to high viscosity but the main formation protection comes from the formation of an external filter cake that is easy to remove. Simple displacement to water or brine should be sufficient for the well to flow back and remove the filter cake.

Unfortunately, however, the rheology of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids has broken down when coming

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into contact with coal fines generated from drilling into coal seams, especially young coal. When the drilling fluid comes in contact with coal fines generated by drilling through the seams, the fluid thins, moving toward the rheology of water and therefore loses many of its beneficial properties. Since coal seams are, in fact, often considered loss zone formations, and are weak and friable, the unsuitability of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids for drilling in coal containing formations is particularly problematic.

In WO 2008/106786, published Sep. 12, 2008, the present applicant proposed the use of potassium salts including, for example, one or more of potassium sulfate, potassium chloride, potassium acetate and potassium formate to substantially maintain the rheology of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids when drilling with coal contaminants.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with a broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for drilling in a coal containing formation, the method comprising: providing a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid including at least 0.05% (w/v) calcium sulfate; circulating the drilling fluid through the well; and drilling into the coal seam.

In accordance with another broad aspect of the present invention, there is provided a drilling fluid comprising: an aqueous mixture of bentonite and a mixed metal viscosifier with a pH above about pH 10; and at least 0.05% (w/v) calcium sulfate.

It is to be understood that other aspects of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, wherein various embodiments of the invention are shown and described by way of example. As will be realized, the invention is capable for other and different embodiments and its several details are capable of modification in various other respects, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Accordingly the detailed description and examples are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not as restrictive.

## DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS EMBODIMENTS

The detailed description and examples set forth below are intended as a description of various embodiments of the present invention and are not intended to represent the only embodiments contemplated by the inventor. The detailed description includes specific details for the purpose of providing a comprehensive understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details.

Until now mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids have been used generally unsuccessfully in coal seams due to the fluid thinning effect from the coal. It is believed that the polyanionic nature of coal fines, such as of lignite and lignosulfonates, interfere with the electrostatic interactions of the mixed metal moiety and the bentonite in the drilling fluid, sometimes resulting in a complete collapse of the fluid's rheology.

We have determined that some salts reduce or prevent the thinning effect from drilling coals with mixed metal-viscosified fluids. We previously proposed the use of potassium salts including, for example, one or more of potassium sulfate, potassium chloride, potassium acetate and potassium formate to substantially maintain the rheology of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids when drilling with



coal contaminants. We have now found that calcium sulfate, such as, for example, in the form of gypsum, may also substantially maintain the rheology of mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids when drilling with coal contaminants. Calcium sulfate prevents the thinning effect of drilling coals with mixed metal-viscosified fluids, such as those based on MMH, MMO or MMOH. Such a salt may also add a benefit of shale swelling inhibition, possibly as a result of the presence of the calcium ion from the salt.

the amount of salt added to the drilling fluid may be determined by the amount of coal to be drilled and/or by the shale reactivity. For example, younger coals, more so than older coals, tend to create greater rheological instability for mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids and, thus, higher concentrations of the salts may be useful in the drilling fluid. Also, if it is determined that there are significant coal deposits through which the well must be drilled, again higher concentrations of the salts may be useful.

For calcium sulfate, concentrations greater than 0.05% (weight by volume), may be effective in the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid. While amounts of up to 5% or more may be used, generally concentrations of 0.05%-1.0% (weight by volume) calcium sulfate and, for example, 0.05-0.5% salt (weight by volume) or 0.1-0.5% concentrations have been found to be both effective for stabilizing the drilling fluid against adverse rheological changes due to coal contamination and advantageous in terms of economics. In younger coals or where significant coal deposits must be drilled, higher concentrations (for example greater than 0.3% and for example 0.3-1.0%) of calcium sulfate in the drilling fluid may be useful. It is believed that the calcium sulfate reaches saturation at about 2 to 3 kg/m<sup>3</sup>, (0.2 to 0.3% (w/v)), but excess amounts may be added without an adverse effect and in fact may create a buffer of salt to maintain activity, provided the fluid remains a liquid which can be circulated through the wellbore. Generally, based on a cost/benefit analysis, an upper limit of 1.0% or more likely 0.5% is considered sound.

If desired, potassium salt may also be added to the drilling fluid. A wide range of potassium salt concentrations, such as concentrations greater than 1% (weight by volume), may be effective in the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid. Generally concentrations of 1-10% (weight by volume) salt and, for example, 1-5% salt (weight by volume) concentrations have been found to be both effective for stabilizing the drilling fluid against adverse rheological changes due to coal contamination and advantageous in terms of economics. In younger coals or where significant coal deposits must be drilled, higher concentrations (for example greater than 3% and for example 3-10%) of potassium salts in the drilling fluid may be useful.

Although the salt may be added after the coal contamination occurs, it is recommended to pre-treat the system for best results. In one embodiment, for example, the surface hole can be drilled down to approximately the level of the first coal deposit using any drilling fluid of interest, including for example, prior art mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids. When it is determined that the coal seam is close below bottom hole or when the coal seam has been reached, the drilling fluid may be changed over to a drilling fluid according to the present invention, including a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid containing an amount of a calcium sulfate. When considering surface drilling and possible contact with aquifers and surface water, calcium sulfate may be particularly of interest.

Alternately, the borehole may be drilled down to and through a coal seam using a drilling fluid according to the

present invention. For example, the entire well substantially from surface, which it will be appreciated may include drilling from surface or from below the overburden or after the casing point, may be drilled using a drilling fluid according to the present invention. For example, the use of the current drilling fluid may be initiated upon initiation of the drilling operation.

After drilling through the coal seams in the path of the borehole, the present drilling fluid may continue to be used for the remainder of the wellbore or other drilling fluids may be used. However, if coal fines may continue to become entrained in the drilling fluid, for example where a coal seam remains open to contact by the drilling fluid, it may be useful to continue using the present drilling fluid until drilling is complete or the possibility of coal contamination is eliminated. If desired, the drilling fluid returning to the mud tanks at surface may be monitored to determine the concentration of potassium salt and/or calcium sulfate therein, as well as other parameters, to ensure that appropriate levels and fluid characteristics are maintained. For example, any one or more of the bentonite, mixed metal viscosifier, base, or the salt being employed (the potassium salt and/or calcium sulfate) may be added during drilling to adjust the drilling fluid parameters. In one embodiment, for example, an amount of mixed metal viscosifier may be added to the fluid during the course of a drilling operation where reactive formations are drilled and drill cuttings become incorporated to change the rheology of the drilling fluid. In such a case, the addition of an amount of mixed metal viscosifier can cause the viscosity of the fluid to increase.

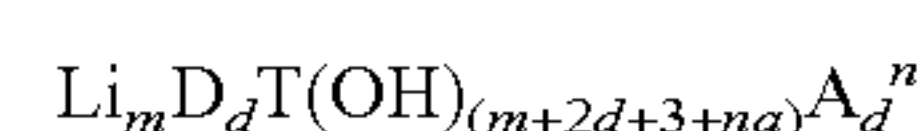
As will be appreciated, the drilling fluid may be circulated through the drill string, drill bit and well bore annulus while drilling. Circulation of the drilling fluid may continue even when drilling is stopped in order to condition the well, prevent string sticking, etc.

During the drilling and circulation, the yield point of the drilling fluid may be maintained above 10 Pa to provide advantageous effects.

Mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids include bentonite and a mixed metal viscosifier in water and are pH controlled.

Bentonite is commonly used in drilling fluids and its use will be well understood by those skilled in the art. While various forms of bentonite may be used, bentonites that contain polyanionic additives or impurities should be avoided, with consideration as to the electrostatic interaction of the bentonite and mixed metal viscosifier. An untreated bentonite may be particularly useful. Such an untreated bentonite may alternately be known commercially as unpeptized or natural bentonite and has a high content of sodium montmorillonite or Wyoming bentonite. Herein, the general term bentonite includes at least all of these forms.

As noted above, a mixed metal viscosifier is an inorganic particle based on magnesium/aluminum oxides and/or hydroxides. While sometimes referred to as mixed metal oxide (MMO), mixed metal hydroxide (MMH) and combinations of mixed metal oxide and hydroxide (MMOH), mixed metal viscosifiers are commonly known as mixed metal hydroxides and are understood to be represented by the formula:



where

m represents the number of Li ions present including 0;

D represents divalent metal ions such as Mg, Ca, Ba,

Sr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu and Zn;

d is a number from 1 to about 4;

T is a trivalent metal;



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A is a mono or polyvalent anion other than OH;  
a represents the number of ions of A ions present;  
n is the valence of A; and  
(m+2d+3+na) is equal to or greater than 3.

In one embodiment, the mixed metal hydroxide has the formula:

$$D_dT(OH)_{(2d+3+na)}A_a^n$$

where

D represents divalent metal ions such as Mg, Ca, Ba, 10  
Sr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu and Zn;  
d is a number from 1 to about 4;  
T is a trivalent metal;  
A is a mono or polyvalent anion other than OH;  
a represents the number of ions of A ions present; 15  
n is the valence of A; and  
(2d+3+na) is equal to or greater than 3.

For example, the divalent metal may be Mg and the trivalent metal may be Al. In one embodiment, the mixed metal viscosifier of greatest interest is a mixed metal hydroxide having the formula  $MgAl(OH)_{4.7}Cl_{0.3}$ .

Mixed metal viscosifiers are commercially available such as from BASF Oilfield Polymers Inc. under the trademark Polyvis II™.

Generally, mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids may include low concentrations of bentonite (for example, about 15 to 50 kg/m3 or 25 to 45 kg/m3 bentonite in water). Considering that many bentonite based (non-mixed metal) drilling fluids can contain many multiples more (i.e. two to four times) bentonite than in a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid, it can be appreciated that the viscosity generated using such low concentrations of bentonite for mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluids might be insufficient for hole cleaning. The addition of mixed metal oxide, mixed metal hydroxide or mixed metal oxide and hydroxide, including activated forms thereof, at a weight ratio of 1:8 to 1:12 or 1:9.5 to 1:10.5 to the bentonite produces a stable fluid when the pH is initially maintained above about 10.0 and possibly between about 10.5 and 13, as may be achieved by addition of caustic soda and/or caustic potash. While other bases may be used to adjust the pH, care may be taken to avoid precipitation with calcium sulfate. Once the bentonite/mixed metal viscosifier reaction is complete and a gel is formed, it appears that the pH can be lowered to pH 9 or possibly even lower without any significant loss in viscosity.

In one embodiment, a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid may include an aqueous mixture of 25 to 45 kg/m3 bentonite, a mixed metal moiety in a weight ratio of about 1:10 MMO, MMH or MMOH to bentonite, pH controlled to greater than pH 11 and 0.05 to 1.0% calcium sulfate.

If desired, an amount of potassium salt may be added.

Additives for fluid loss control, lost circulation, etc. may be added to the drilling fluid mixture, as desired. Non or minor-ionic additives may be most useful. Some examples may include starch for fluid loss reduction, organophillic lost circulation materials (LCM), etc. Simple testing may verify the compatibility of any particular additive with the drilling fluid.

To produce the drilling fluid, the bentonite may first be hydrated in water. Then the mixed metal moiety is added and pH is adjusted. The salt can be added to the aqueous mixture of bentonite and mixed metal any time before it is needed for drilling with coal contamination. Additives such as LCM, fluid loss control agents, etc. can also be added when appropriate, as will be appreciated.

A typical drilling fluid formulation may be according to Table 1A.

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TABLE 1A

A typical drilling fluid useful for drilling in coal-containing formations		
Product	Concentration	Notes
Untreated bentonite	30 kg/m3	Prehydrate first in fresh water
MMH or MMO or MMOH	3 kg/m3	
Caustic Soda	0.5 to 1 kg/m3	To control pH at 11-12.5
Potassium Sulfate	20 to 50 kg/m3	
Starch	5 to 10 kg/m3	

Another typical drilling fluid formulation may be according to Table 1 B.

TABLE 1B

A typical drilling fluid useful for drilling in coal-containing formations		
Product	Concentration	Notes
Untreated bentonite	25 to 45 kg/m3	Prehydrate first in fresh water
MMH or MMO or MMOH	2.5 to 4.5 kg/m3	
Caustic Soda	0.5 to 1 kg/m3	To control pH at 11-12.5
Calcium Sulfate	0.5 to 50 kg/m3	
Starch	5 to 10 kg/m3	

The following examples are included for the purposes of illustration only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention or claims.

EXAMPLES

Example I

In the following examples, drilling fluids were prepared according to the sample descriptions by hydrating the bentonite, adding the mixed metal moiety and adjusting the pH, as needed. Thereafter, gypsum and lignite (to simulate coal contamination) were added in various orders of addition to measure the effects of both agents on their own and in combination on fluid rheology.

The rheological properties have been tested using a Fann™35 and Brookfield™ viscometers. As will be appreciated, in the following examples: RPM means revolutions per minute, PV means plastic viscosity, YP means yield point, LSRV means low-shear-rate viscosity and MBT means methylene blue test.

Federal Supreme™ is used as the bentonite (untreated). Federal Supreme is a natural untreated bentonite (sodium montmorillonite). The MMH used is Polyvis II™ from BASF.

Below is a set of experiments with a basic 40 kg/m3 natural bentonite (untreated sodium montmorillonite) slurry that was pre-hydrated for 16 hours in fresh water followed by additions of Mixed metal hydroxide (MMH; BASF Polyvis II) and then caustic to raise the pH to 11.0 or above. The slurry quickly becomes viscous with the addition of the caustic. The rheology is measured with a Fann 35 rotary viscometer. The effect of the addition of small amounts (5 g/L) of lignite to this thick slurry is measured. In the case of a control, the fluid changes from very viscous to very thin (almost the consistency of water) after the addition of lignite. This is now compared to a slurry that has been pre-treated with 5 g/L of gypsum prior to the addition of lignite to the test slurry. It can be seen that the thinning effect of lignite is completely avoided.

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TABLE 2

Composition of Sample #1	
Products	Sample #1
Untreated Bentonite	40 kg/m3
MMH	4 kg/m3
Caustic	0.5 kg/m3

TABLE 3

Results without and with the addition of Gypsum			
Mud Properties	Sample #1	Sample #1 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #1 + 5 kg/m3 Gypsum + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	134	21	153
300 RPM	128	12	134
200 RPM	121	9	129
100 RPM	112	6	115
6 RPM	71	1	68
3 RPM	69	1	65
PV (mPa * s)	6	9	19
YP (Pa)	61	1.5	57.5
pH	10.7	10.7	10.5

The above experiment is repeated but with a slurry containing less MMH and Natural bentonite (30 kg/m3). Additional caustic is added along with the gypsum to maintain a constant pH in the slurry.

TABLE 4

Composition of Sample #2	
Products	Sample #2
Untreated Bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3
Caustic	0.5 kg/m3

TABLE 5

Results without and then with the addition of Gypsum			
Mud Properties	Sample #2	Sample #2 + 5 kg/m3 Gypsum + 0.2 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #2 + 5 kg/m3 Gypsum + 0.2 kg/m3 Caustic + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	100	113	82
300 RPM	88	100	73
200 RPM	81	90	67
100 RPM	70	76	58
6 RPM	42	44	34
3 RPM	41	35	29
PV (mPa * s)	12	13	9
YP (Pa)	38	43.5	32
pH	11	11	11

In another test a MMH-bentonite (30 kg/m3) slurry is examined; first 5 kg/m3 lignite is added to the basic slurry and then gypsum is added after the lignite: The MMH-bentonite slurry is mixed by the same method as the experiment above; that is first the untreated bentonite is mixed and hydrated in fresh water for at least 16 hours. Then the MMH is mixed in followed by the addition of the caustic to raise the pH to 11.0 or above to initiate the viscosifying process.

The rheology is measured using a Fann 35 rotary viscometer and recorded. Then 5 g/l of lignite is added and the

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rheology is measured and compared again. Finally 5 g/l gypsum is added to the thin mixture containing lignite and allowed to mix for 30 minutes followed by caustic to raise the pH again to 11; when the rheology is measured again.

TABLE 6

Results without and then with the addition of Gypsum			
Mud Properties	Sample #2	Sample #2 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #2 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite then + 5 kg/m3 Gypsum + Caustic
600 RPM	100	8	52
300 RPM	90	4	46
200 RPM	75	3	42
100 RPM	67	2	37
6 RPM	22	0	23
3 RPM	19	0	20
PV (mPa * s)	10	4	6
YP (Pa)	40	0	20
pH	11.5	10.5	11

This experiment shows that the adverse thinning effect of lignite on these slurries can be at least partially reversed with the addition of gypsum.

Example II

In the following examples, drilling fluids were prepared according to the sample descriptions by hydrating the bentonite, adding the mixed metal moiety and adjusting the pH, as needed. Thereafter, any additives, including potassium salt if any, were added.

TABLE 7

Composition of Sample #3	
Products	Sample #3
Untreated Bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3
Caustic	0.5 kg/m3
Starch	10 kg/m3

TABLE 8

Results without the addition of Salt			
Mud Properties	Sample #3	Sample #3 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	86	47	43
300 RPM	64	29	25
200 RPM	53	21	18
100 RPM	40	13	10
6 RPM	19	2	1.5
3 RPM	17	1	1
10 sec Gel (Pa)	8	1	0.5
PV (mPa * s)	22	18	18
YP (Pa)	21	5.5	3.5
LSRV (cP)	54,000	12,000	0
Temperature (° C.)	22.8	22.3	23.0



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TABLE 9

Results using Potassium Chloride			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% KCl	Sample #3 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% KCl + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	66	47	44
300 RPM	52	31	27
200 RPM	46	23	21
100 RPM	38	16	14
6 RPM	18	4	3
3 RPM	16	3	2
10 sec Gel (Pa)	7	2	1.5
PV (mPa * s)	14	16	17
YP (Pa)	19	7.5	5
LSRV (cP)	25,000	12,000	9,000
Temperature (° C.)	21.6	22.1	22.3

TABLE 10

Results using Potassium Acetate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Acetate	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Acetate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Acetate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	66	52	48
300 RPM	47	38	35
200 RPM	39	32	29
100 RPM	30	25	22
6 RPM	12	10	10
3 RPM	8	8	7
10 sec Gel (Pa)	4	4	4
PV (mPa * s)	13	14	13
YP (Pa)	20	12	11
LSRV (cP)	31,000	20,000	12,000
Temperature (° C.)	23.2	23.3	23.2

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 11

Results using Potassium Formate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Formate	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Formate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Formate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	66	47	42
300 RPM	53	32	28
200 RPM	47	26	22
100 RPM	38	18	16
6 RPM	19	6	5
3 RPM	18	4	4
10 sec Gel (Pa)	7	2	2
PV (mPa * s)	13	15	14
YP (Pa)	20	8.5	7
LSRV (cP)	21,000	13,000	12,000
Temperature (° C.)	22.1	22.3	22.6

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TABLE 12

Results using Calcium Nitrate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Nitrate	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Nitrate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Nitrate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	60	57	47
300 RPM	46	42	34
200 RPM	38	34	28
100 RPM	31	27	22
6 RPM	12	11	7
3 RPM	9	9	5
10 sec Gel (Pa)	5	5	3
PV (mPa * s)	14	15	13
YP (Pa)	16	13.5	10.5
LSRV (cP)	33,000	23,000	22,000
Temperature (° C.)	21.5	22.1	22.7

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 13

Results using Calcium Chloride			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Chloride	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Chloride + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Calcium Chloride + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	61	51	47
300 RPM	44	35	34
200 RPM	36	30	29
100 RPM	27	22	23
6 RPM	10	8	8
3 RPM	8	7	6
10 sec Gel (Pa)	3.5	3.5	3
PV (mPa * s)	17	16	13
YP (Pa)	13.5	9.5	10.5
LSRV (cP)	27,000	23,000	22,000
Temperature (° C.)	24.4	24.4	24.2

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 14

Results using Potassium Sulfate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Sulfate	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Sulfate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Pot. Sulfate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	75	42	34
300 RPM	60	29	21
200 RPM	52	24	16
100 RPM	41	18	11
6 RPM	21	8	2.5
3 RPM	19	7	2
10 sec Gel (Pa)	9	4	2.5
PV (mPa * s)	15	13	13
YP (Pa)	22.5	8	4
LSRV (cP)	32,000	30,000	25,000
Temperature (° C.)	24.4	24.0	21.3

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TABLE 15

Results using Potassium Chloride			
Mud Properties	Sample #1 +	Sample #1 +	
	5% KCl +	5% KCl +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	61	52	46
300 RPM	49	39	35
200 RPM	45	35	32
100 RPM	42	32	30
6 RPM	16	15	15
3 RPM	12	11	10
10 sec Gel (Pa)	6	6	5
PV (mPa * s)	12	13	11
YP (Pa)	18.5	13	12
LSRV (cP)	30,000	18,000	21,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

TABLE 16

Results using Potassium Acetate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 +	Sample #3 +	
	5% Pot. Acetate +	5% Pot. Acetate +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	63	48	44
300 RPM	55	37	36
200 RPM	51	36	34
100 RPM	47	34	32
6 RPM	14	20	16
3 RPM	9	11	11
10 sec Gel (Pa)	5	5	6
PV (mPa * s)	8	11	8
YP (Pa)	23.5	13	14
LSRV (cP)	27,000	14,000	33,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 17

Results using Potassium Formate			
Mud Properties	Sample #1 +	Sample #1 +	
	5% Pot. Formate +	5% Pot. Formate +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	50	46	42
300 RPM	40	33	33
200 RPM	37	30	30
100 RPM	32	28	29
6 RPM	9	9	14
3 RPM	5	8	10
10 sec Gel (Pa)	3	4	5
PV (mPa * s)	10	13	9
YP (Pa)	15	10	12
LSRV (cP)	30,000	29,000	31,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

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TABLE 18

Results using Calcium Nitrate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 +	Sample #3 +	
	5% Calcium Nitrate +	5% Calcium Nitrate +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	58	49	44
300 RPM	52	42	38
200 RPM	50	41	37
100 RPM	47	35	32
6 RPM	12	11	14
3 RPM	8	8	8
10 sec Gel (Pa)	5	4.5	4.5
PV (mPa * s)	6	7	6
YP (Pa)	23	17.5	16
LSRV (cP)	35,000	43,000	23,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 19

Results using Calcium Chloride			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 +	Sample #3 +	
	5% Calcium Chloride +	5% Calcium Chloride +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	63	48	43
300 RPM	50	37	34
200 RPM	42	34	31
100 RPM	35	29	29
6 RPM	13	12	13
3 RPM	10	9	11
10 sec Gel (Pa)	6.5	6.5	7
PV (mPa * s)	13	11	9
YP (Pa)	18.5	13	11.5
LSRV (cP)	40,000	37,000	27,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

Note:  
Lignite dissolves slower.

TABLE 20

Results using Potassium Sulfate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 +	Sample #3 +	
	5% Pot. Sulfate +	5% Pot. Sulfate +	
	5 kg/m3	15 kg/m3	
	Lignite	Lignite	
600 RPM	165	128	91
300 RPM	150	115	76
200 RPM	143	109	71
100 RPM	131	100	63
6 RPM	85	67	42
3 RPM	37	58	39
10 sec Gel (Pa)	16	29	22
PV (mPa * s)	15	13	15
YP (Pa)	77.5	51	30.5
LSRV (cP)	100,000+	80,000	67,000
Temperature (° C.)	20.1	20.1	20.1

TABLE 21

Results using Sodium Sulfate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 2% Sodium Sulfate	Sample #3 + 2% Sodium Sulfate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 2% Sodium Sulfate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	179	39	31
300 RPM	155	25	19
200 RPM	143	20	15
100 RPM	123	14	9
6 RPM	72	8	3
3 RPM	63	7	2
10 sec Gel (Pa)	31	5	2.5
PV (mPa * s)	24	14	13
YP (Pa)	65.5	5.5	4
LSRV (cP)	90,000	50,000	28,000
Temperature (° C.)	22.0	22.0	22.0

TABLE 22

Results using Sodium Sulfate			
Mud Properties	Sample #3 + 5% Sodium Sulfate	Sample #3 + 5% Sodium Sulfate + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + 5% Sodium Sulfate + 15 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	207	48	33
300 RPM	174	38	22
200 RPM	152	35	18
100 RPM	124	31	13
6 RPM	74	27	11
3 RPM	67	26	10
10 sec Gel (Pa)	28	14	9
PV (mPa * s)	33	10	11
YP (Pa)	70.5	14	5.5
LSRV (cP)	100,000	100,000	80,000
Temperature (° C.)	22.0	22.0	22.0

Example III

Background: Nr Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Drilled 222 mm hole to Intermediate Casing Depth of 1425 mMD and set casing at ~86.2 degrees inclination in the Rex Coal formation. Set and cement 177.8 mm casing.

Drilling Fluid: 60 m3 of mud is premixed with the following formulation: 30 kg/m3 of natural bentonite is pre-hydrated in fresh water for 16 hours. 3 kg/m3 of PolyVis II (MMH) is added over 2 hours. pH is raised to 12.0 with caustic via chemical barrel over pre-mix tank. Fluid becomes viscous. 50 kg/m3 of potassium sulfate is added.

Drilling in Coal: Intermediate casing shoe and cement are drilled out with a 156 mm bit using water and then water is displaced over to the pre-mixed system, described above. This well was drilled horizontally in the Rex Coal formation using the pre-mixed system.

Fluid Properties prior to drilling coal:

Premix: 60 m3 circulating system.

Depth: 1425 m (87.2 degrees inclination)

Funnel Viscosity: 55 s/L

Mud density: 1050 kg/m3

pH: 12.0

600 reading: 64

300 reading: 61

200 reading: 60

100 reading: 56

6 reading: 36

3 reading: 23

PV (mPa·s): 3

YP (Pa): 29

Gels (Pa): 11/11

Filtrate (Fluid Loss, mls/30 min): no control

MBT: 30 Kg/m3

Potassium ion (mg/L): 25,000

Fluid properties after drilling to 1451 m in Rex Coal formation:

Depth: 1451 m (88 degrees inclination)

Funnel Viscosity: 66 s/L

Mud density: 1060 kg/m3

pH: 11.5

600 reading: 62

300 reading: 55

200 reading: -

100 reading: -

6 reading: -

3 reading: -

PV (mPa·s): 7

YP (Pa): 24

Gels (Pa): 6/10

Filtrate (Fluid Loss, mls/30 min): 60

MBT: 24 Kg/m3

Potassium ion (mg/L): 22,000

It was determined that the fluid viscosity remained substantially stable despite drilling pure coal.

Thereafter drilling continued to 1845 m in Rex Coal formation with the addition of 15×22.7 kg sacks of non-ionic starch (Unitrol Starch) for fluid loss control into 80 m3 system:

Fluid properties at depth 1845 m (91.4 degrees inclination):

Funnel Viscosity: 59 s/L

Mud density: 1050 kg/m3

pH: 12.0

600 reading: 64

300 reading: 56

200 reading: -

100 reading: -

6 reading: -

3 reading: -

PV (mPa·s): 8

YP (Pa): 24

Gels (Pa): 9/11

Filtrate (Fluid Loss, mls/30 min): 19

MBT: 22 Kg/m3

Potassium ion (mg/L): 20,400

The addition of starch doesn't affect the rheology substantially.

After drilling to 2050 m in the Rex Coal formation the fluid properties were as follows (89 m3 system):

Depth: 2050 m (87.8 degrees inclination)

Funnel Viscosity: 85 s/L

Mud density: 1050 kg/m3

pH: 12.0

600 reading: 80

300 reading: 70

200 reading: 65

100 reading: 60

6 reading: 47

3 reading: 44

PV (mPa·s): 10

YP (Pa): 30

Gels (Pa): 17/18

Filtrate (Fluid Loss, mls/30 min): 15

MBT: 25 Kg/m3

Potassium ion (mg/L): 22,500



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It was determined that a mixed metal viscosified—natural bentonite type rheology can be maintained when drilling through coal with potassium sulfate as an additive.

Example IV

TABLE 23

Composition of Sample #4	
Products	Sample #4
Untreated bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3

In the following examples, drilling fluids were prepared according to the sample descriptions and in a similar manner to Example I but with less calcium sulfate (gypsum). Sample #4 is prepared as follows: The bentonite (Federal Supreme) is prehydrated 3 hours and then MMH (Polyvis II) is added. Caustic soda (NaOH) is added to adjust pH, followed by gypsum and then lignite to simulate the addition of coal.

TABLE 24

Results using calcium sulfate in bentonite - MMH solution						
Mud Property	Sample #4	Sample #4 +			Sample #3 +	
		Sample #4 + Caustic	Sample #4 + Caustic + 2 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #4 + Caustic + 2 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #3 + Caustic + 5 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #3 + Caustic + 5 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	91	95	98	93	82	71
300 RPM	80	80	91	85	72	66
200 RPM	74	76	89	78	68	60
100 RPM	66	69	81	74	60	53
6 RPM	42	22	24	25	17	17
3 RPM	22	17	18	18	14	12
PV (mPa * s)	11	15	7	8	10	5
YP (Pa)	34.5	32.5	42	38.5	31	30.5
pH	9.2	10.7	10.7	10.0	10.7	9.8

Calcium sulfate acts as a good anionic suppressant of the reaction between coals (lignite) and bentonite—MMH/MMO complexes. The resulting fluid retains the main characteristics—high low end rheology and shear thinning behavior.

Example V

TABLE 25

Composition of Sample #5	
Products	Sample #5
Untreated bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3
Caustic	0.5 kg/m3

Federal Supreme™ is used as the bentonite. The MMH is Polyvis II™. The bentonite was prehydrated for three hours before the MMH was added. Caustic soda was added to adjust the pH. To again investigate the effect of adding calcium sulfate to a mixed metal viscosified fluid, gypsum (Gyp) and lignite was added to sample #5.

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TABLE 26

Results using calcium sulfate in bentonite - MMH solution				
Mud Property	Sample #5	Sample #5 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #5 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #5 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	71	56	54	47
300 RPM	60	48	46	40
6 RPM	27	24	22	20
PV (mPa * s)	11	8	8	7
YP (Pa)	24.5	20	19	16.5

Example VI

The experiment of Example V is repeated, adding commercial drilling fluid starch (M-I's Unitrol™) for fluid loss control to base bentonite—MMH solution (Sample #5). Then add gypsum and thereafter lignite.

TABLE 27

Results using calcium sulfate and starch in bentonite - MMH solution				
Mud Property	Sample #5	Sample #5 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol	Sample #5 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #5 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	67	57	61	59
300 RPM	51	42	47	43
6 RPM	13	13	17	16
PV (mPa * s)	16	15	14	16
YP (Pa)	17.5	13.5	16.5	13.5

The addition of lignite did not significantly reduce the viscosity of the drilling fluid.

Example VII

In the following examples, drilling fluids were prepared according to the composition of Sample #6, with any noted additives. The bentonite (Federal Supreme) is hydrated, the mixed metal moiety (Polyvis II) added and the pH adjusted with caustic soda. Thereafter, any other additives were added. To simulate coal contamination, lignite was added.

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The rheological properties have been tested using a Fann 35 and Brookfield viscometers.

TABLE 28

Composition of Sample #6	
Products	Sample #6
Untreated Bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3
Caustic	0.5 kg/m3

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As is known, care may be taken in the use of some additives. As some additives such as amines, for example amine shale inhibitors, appear to destroy the bentonite complexes with or without the presence of calcium sulfate.

Example VIII

In the following examples, drilling fluids were prepared according to the composition of Sample #7 and some noted additives. The bentonite (Federal Supreme) is hydrated for three hours, the mixed metal moiety (Polyvis II) added and the pH adjusted with caustic soda. Thereafter, any additives were added.

To simulate coal contamination, lignite was added.

TABLE 29

Results using calcium sulfate and/or potassium sulfate in bentonite - MMH solution (gel prehydrated 16 hours)										
		Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite			Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp		Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp		Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	
Mud Property	Sample #6	Sample #6 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #6 + 50 kg/m3 K2SO4 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	71	56	54	47	91	61	46		44	
300 RPM	60	48	46	40	76	53	43		37	
200 RPM	56	46	44	38	67	51	41		34	
100 RPM	50	40	38	33	56	46	39		30	
6 RPM	27	24	22	20	21	27	23		20	
3 RPM	16	13	13	12	13	20	21		18	
PV (mPa * s)	11	8	8	7	15	8	3		7	
YP (Pa)	24.5	20	19	16.5	30.5	22.5	20		15	

TABLE 30

Results using calcium sulfate, starch, calcium carbonate and/or other additives in bentonite (gel prehydrated 1 hour)										
Mud Property	Sample #6	Sample #6 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol			Sample #6 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325		Sample #6 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol + 20 kg/m3 Gyp + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325		Sample #6 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol + 20 kg/m3 Gyp + 1.5% Shure Shale	
		Sample #6 + 6 kg/m3 Unitrol	Sample #6 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 120 kg/m3 Natural Gel	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325	Sample #6 + 90 kg/m3 Cal Carb 325
600 RPM	90	86	55	271	58	52	40	41	20	
300 RPM	80	70	41	190	54	38	33	30	13	
200 RPM	74	62	34	125	49	31	31	25	11	
100 RPM	66	49	26	110	38	24	29	21	9	
6 RPM	23	29	13	39	19	11	16	5	3	
3 RPM	17	28	12	36	11	10	14	4	2	
PV (mPa * s)	10	16	14	81	4	14	7	11	7	
YP (Pa)	35	27	13.5	54.5	25	12	13	9.5	3	
Fluid Loss (mL/30 min.)	50	10.5	18.0	54	14.0	16.0	50	32	54	
Mud Property	Sample #6	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 0.5 kg/m3 Caustic			Sample #6 + 1 kg/m3 Caustic Soda		Sample #6 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp		Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	
		Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 0.5 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 0.5 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp + 0.5 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #6 + 1 kg/m3 Caustic Soda	Sample #6 + 1 kg/m3 Caustic Soda	Sample #6 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #6 + 40 kg/m3 Gyp
600 RPM	27	16	16	45	92	92	91	84		
300 RPM	19	12	12	39	81	81	81	75		
200 RPM	17	8	8	36	77	77	77	71		
100 RPM	16	6	6	31	70	70	69	64		
6 RPM	10	3	3	20	46	46	30	28		
3 RPM	9	2	2	14	43	43	21	21		
PV (mPa * s)	8	4	4	6	11	11	10	9		
YP (Pa)	5.5	4	4	16.5	35	35	35.5	33		
pH	10.2	9.6	9.6	11.1	11.5	11.5	11.3	11.3		



TABLE 31

Composition of Sample #7	
Products	Sample #7
Untreated Bentonite	30 kg/m3
MMH	3 kg/m3

TABLE 32

Results using calcium sulfate in bentonite - MMH solution						
Mud Property	Sample #7	Sample #7 + 0.01 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #7 + 0.04 kg/m3 Caustic	Sample #7 + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #7 + 0.01 kg/m3 Caustic + 20 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #7 + 0.04 kg/m3 Caustic + 20 kg/m3 Gyp
600 RPM	91	100	124	61	73	106
300 RPM	80	88	107	53	63	96
200 RPM	74	83	98	48	59	88
100 RPM	66	76	86	41	53	78
6 RPM	42	25	28	23	16	26
3 RPM	22	18	20	11	13	21
PV (mPa * s)	11	12	17	8	10	10
YP (Pa)	34.5	38	45	22.5	26.5	43
pH	9.2	10.3	10.8	8.8	10.2	10.8

Mud Property	Sample #7 + Caustic	Sample #7 + 2 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #7 + 2 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite	Sample #7 + Caustic + 5 kg/m3 Gyp	Sample #7 + Caustic + 5 kg/m3 Gyp + 5 kg/m3 Lignite
600 RPM	95	98	93	82	71
300 RPM	80	91	85	72	66
200 RPM	76	89	78	68	60
100 RPM	69	81	74	60	53
6 RPM	22	24	25	17	17
3 RPM	17	18	18	14	12
PV (mPa * s)	15	7	8	10	5
YP (Pa)	32.5	42	38.5	31	30.5
pH	10.7	10.7	10.0	10.7	9.8

I claim:

1. A method for drilling in a coal containing formation, the method comprising:
- 5 providing a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid including clay, a mixed metal-viscosifier and at least 0.05% (w/v) calcium sulfate;
- circulating the drilling fluid through the well; and
- drilling into the coal containing formation,

Gypsum slightly reduces the rheology of a bentonite-MMH fluid. The higher the initial pH, the lower the viscosity drop after addition of gypsum. Adding caustic soda to raise the pH above 11 restores fluid rheology. Gypsum appears to act as a good anionic suppressant. When additional shale inhibitors are added, the viscosity drops. The fluid retains the main characteristics—high low end rheology and shear thinning behavior.

The previous description of the disclosed embodiments is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to make or use the present invention. Various modifications to those embodiments will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. Thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments shown herein, but is to be accorded the full scope consistent with the claims, wherein reference to an element in the singular, such as by use of the article “a” or “an” is not intended to mean “one and only one” unless specifically so stated, but rather “one or more”. All structural and functional equivalents to the elements of the various embodiments described throughout the disclosure that are known or later come to be known to those of ordinary skill in the art are intended to be encompassed by the elements of the claims. Moreover, nothing disclosed herein is intended to be dedicated to the public regardless of whether such disclosure is explicitly recited in the claims. No claim element is to be construed under the provisions of 35 USC 112, sixth paragraph, unless the element is expressly recited using the phrase “means for” or “step for”.

- provided that the calcium sulfate is added to protect an electrostatic interaction between the clay and the mixed metal-viscosifier, thereby maintaining the viscosity of the drilling fluid at a yield point of greater than 10 Pa.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes obtaining a drilling fluid with a yield point greater than 10 Pa.
3. The method of claim 1 further comprising continuing circulation with entrained coal fines in the drilling fluid.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein circulating the drilling fluid is initiated prior to drilling into the coal containing formation.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein circulating the drilling fluid is maintained while a coal seam is open to the drilling fluid.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein circulating the drilling fluid is initiated when the drilling process is initiated.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the calcium sulfate is in the form of gypsum.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the drilling fluid further comprises an amount of potassium salt selected from the group consisting of potassium sulfate, potassium chloride, potassium acetate and potassium formate.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein the clay is bentonite.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes mixing an aqueous-based drilling fluid including 15 to 50 kg/m3 bentonite, a mixed metal viscosifier at a weight ratio of 1:8 to 1:12 viscosifier to bentonite, a base to maintain a pH above about 10.0 and the at least 0.05% (w/v) calcium sulfate.



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11. The method of claim 9 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes mixing an aqueous-based drilling fluid including about 25 to 45 kg/m<sup>3</sup> bentonite, a mixed metal viscosifier in a quantity of about 1:10 mixed metal viscosifier to bentonite with a pH controlled to greater than pH 11 and 0.05 to 1.0% calcium sulfate.

12. The method of claim 9 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes:

mixing bentonite in water to form a bentonite mixture;  
adding a mixed metal viscosifier to the bentonite mixture;  
adjusting pH to greater than about pH 10; and  
adding the calcium sulfate.

13. The method of claim 12 further comprising adding any of fluid loss control additives and/or lost circulation materials.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the pH is adjusted using caustic soda or caustic potash.

15. The method of claim 9 wherein the bentonite is in the form of untreated bentonite.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein adding the calcium sulfate is at a weight ratio of 1:2.5 to 1:90 calcium sulfate to clay.

17. A method for drilling a wellbore, the method comprising:

providing a mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid including clay and a mixed metal-viscosifier;  
monitoring rheology of the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid; and,

adding calcium sulfate in an amount of at least 0.05% (w/v) to the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid to avoid adverse rheological changes, provided that the calcium sulfate is added to protect an electrostatic interaction between the clay and the mixed metal-viscosifier, thereby maintaining the viscosity of the drilling fluid at a yield point of greater than 10 Pa.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the clay is bentonite.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes mixing an aqueous-based drilling fluid including 15 to 50 kg/m<sup>3</sup> bentonite, the mixed metal viscosifier at a weight ratio of 1:8 to 1:12 viscosifier to bentonite and a base to maintain a pH above about 10.0.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes mixing the aqueous-based drilling fluid including about 25 to 45 kg/m<sup>3</sup> bentonite and the mixed metal viscosifier in a quantity of about 1:10 of mixed metal viscosifier to bentonite with a pH controlled to greater than pH 11.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein providing the mixed metal-viscosified drilling fluid includes:

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mixing bentonite in water to form a bentonite mixture;  
adding the mixed metal viscosifier to the bentonite mixture; and  
adjusting pH to greater than about pH 10.

22. The method of claim 21 further comprising adding any of fluid loss control additives and/or lost circulation materials.

23. The method of claim 17 wherein adding includes adding 0.05 to 1.0% calcium sulfate.

24. The method of claim 17 wherein adverse rheological changes includes viscosity thinning.

25. The method of claim 17 the calcium sulfate is added prior to drilling into a coal seam.

26. The method of claim 17 the calcium sulfate is added prior to initiating the drilling process.

27. The method of claim 17 wherein the calcium sulfate is in the form of gypsum.

28. The method of claim 17 wherein adding the calcium sulfate is at a weight ratio of 1:2.5 to 1:90 calcium sulfate to clay.

29. A method for drilling a wellbore, the method comprising:

providing a drilling fluid, the drilling fluid being aqueous and clay-based including 15 to 50 kg/m<sup>3</sup> clay and a mixed metal viscosifier at a weight ratio of 1:8 to 1:12 viscosifier to clay;

monitoring rheology of the drilling fluid; and

adding to the drilling fluid calcium sulfate at a weight ratio of 1:2.5 to 1:90 calcium sulfate to clay to avoid adverse rheological changes,

provided that the calcium sulfate is added to protect an electrostatic interaction between the clay and the mixed metal-viscosifier, thereby maintaining the viscosity of the drilling fluid at a yield point of greater than 10 Pa.

30. The method of claim 29 wherein providing the drilling fluid includes adding a base to maintain a pH above about 10.0.

31. The method of claim 29 wherein the clay is bentonite and providing the drilling fluid includes:

mixing bentonite in water to form a bentonite mixture;  
adding the mixed metal viscosifier to the bentonite mixture; and  
adjusting pH to greater than about pH 10.

32. The method of claim 31 further comprising adding any of fluid loss control additives and/or lost circulation materials.

33. The method of claim 29 wherein adding the calcium sulfate is conducted prior to drilling into a coal seam.

34. The method of claim 29 wherein adding the calcium sulfate is conducted prior to initiating the drilling process.

35. The method of claim 29 wherein the calcium sulfate is in the form of gypsum.

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