Author's Accepted Manuscript

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 PII:
 S0376-7388(17)30832-3

 DOI:
 http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.memsci.2017.05.017

 Reference:
 MEMSCI15251

To appear in: Journal of Membrane Science

Received date: 25 March 2017 Revised date: 4 May 2017 Accepted date: 6 May 2017

Cite this article as: Akshay Deshmukh and Menachem Elimelech, Understanding the impact of membrane properties and transport phenomena on energetiperformance of membrane distillation desalination, *Journal of Membran Science*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.memsci.2017.05.017

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Understanding the impact of membrane properties and transport phenomena on energetic performance of membrane distillation desalination

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Abstract

Direct contact membrane distillation (DCMD) is a thermal desalination process that is capable of treating high salinity waters using low-grade heat. As a water treatment process, DCMD has several advantages, including the utilization of waste heat (below 100°C), perfect rejection of nonvolatile solutes, low areal footprint, and high scalability. However, the energy efficiency of DCMD is relatively low compared to other work-based and thermal desalination processes. In this study, we aim to quantify how membrane properties and process conditions affect the exergy or second-law efficiency (η_{II}) of a DCMD desalination system with external heat recovery. In particular, we analyze how the membrane permeability coefficient (B) and thermal conduction coefficient (\overline{K}) impact MD performance. We show that increasing the B value of a membrane by reducing its thickness, initially leads to an increase in η_{II} before conductive heat loss through the membrane causes η_{II} to fall. For a typical MD membrane with a porosity of 0.90, material

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