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- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **TYCO ELECTRONICS CORPORATION** [US/US]; 1050 Westlakes Drive, Berwyn, PA 19312 (US).
- (72) Inventors; and
- (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **VRANICAR, Anthony** [US/US]; 2368 Stanford Place, Santa Clara, CA 95051 (US). **MATTHIESEN, Martyn, A.** [US/US]; 36670 Montecito Drive, Fremont, CA 94536 (US). **MON-**

TOYA, Wayne [US/US]; 544 Palomar Drive, Redwood City, CA 94062 (US). **CHEN, Jianhua** [US/US]; 1128 Bennington Drive, Sunnyvale, CA 94087 (US). **GALLA, Matthew, P.** [US/US]; 1420 Marinovich Way, Los Altos, CA 94024 (US).

(74) Agent: **GERSTNER, Marguerite, E.**; Tyco Electronics Corporation, Intellectual Property Law Dept., 309 Constitution Drive, MS R34/2A, Menlo Park, CA 94025-1164 (US).

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(54) Title: THREE-FUNCTION REFLOWABLE CIRCUIT PROTECTION DEVICE

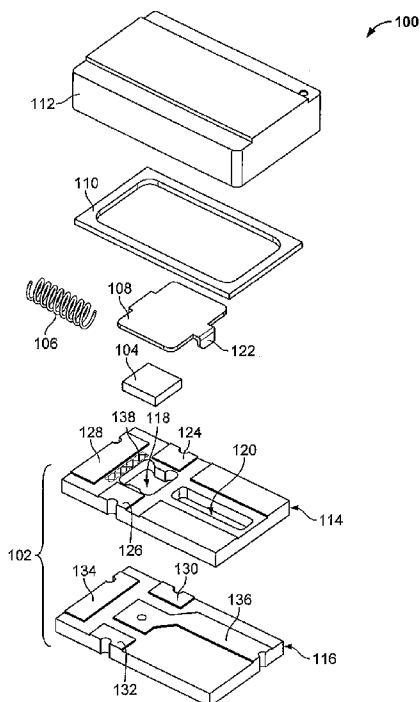


Figure 1

(57) Abstract: A circuit protection device (100) includes a substrate (102) with first and second electrodes (124, 126) connected to the circuit (400) to be protected. The circuit protection device also includes a heater element (104) between the first and second electrodes. A sliding contact (108) is connected by a sensing element to the first electrode, second electrode, and heater element, thereby bridging and providing a conductive path between each. A spring element (106) is held in tension by, and exerts a force parallel to a length of the substrate against, the sliding contact. A flux material (138) may be provided around the sensing element. Upon detection of an activation condition, the sensing element releases the sliding contact and the force exerted by the spring element moves the sliding contact to another location on the substrate at which the sliding contact no longer provides a conductive path between the first electrode, second electrode, and heater element. The optional flux allows the sliding contact to move without dragging the sensing material.

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THREE-FUNCTION REFLOWABLE CIRCUIT PROTECTION DEVICE

BACKGROUND

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of, and claims the benefit of priority from, U.S. Patent Application No. 13/019,976, filed February 2, 2011, which is incorporated herein by reference. This application is related to U.S. Application No. 13/019,983, filed February 2, 2011, which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0002] The present invention relates generally to electronic protection circuitry. More, specifically, the present invention relates to an electrically activated surface mount circuit protection device which may be a three function device.

[0003] Protection circuits are often times utilized in electronic circuits to isolate failed circuits from other circuits. For example, the protection circuit may be utilized to prevent electrical or thermal fault condition in electrical circuits, such as in lithium-ion battery packs. Protection circuits may also be utilized to guard against more serious problems, such as a fire caused by a power supply circuit failure.

[0004] One type of protection circuit is a thermal fuse. A thermal fuse functions similar to that of a typical glass fuse. That is, under normal operating conditions the fuse behaves like a short circuit and during a fault condition the fuse behaves like an open circuit. Thermal fuses transition between these two modes of operation when the temperature of the thermal fuse exceeds a specified temperature. To facilitate these modes, thermal fuses include a conduction element, such as a fusible wire, a set of metal contacts, or set of soldered metal contacts, that can switch from a conductive to a non-conductive state. A sensing element may also be incorporated. The physical state of the sensing element changes with respect to the temperature of the sensing element. For example, the sensing element may correspond to a low melting metal alloy or a discrete melting organic compound that melts at an activation temperature. When the sensing element changes state, the conduction element switches from the conductive to the non-conductive state by physically interrupting an electrical conduction path.

[0005] In operation, current flows through the fuse element. Once the sensing element reaches the specified temperature, it changes state and the conduction element switches from the conductive to the non-conductive state.

[0006] One disadvantage of some existing thermal fuses is that during installation of the thermal fuse, care must be taken to prevent the thermal fuse from reaching the

temperature at which the sensing element changes state. As a result, some existing thermal fuses cannot be mounted to a circuit panel via reflow ovens, which operate at temperatures that will cause the sensing element to open prematurely.

[0007] Further disadvantages include size and versatility. Circuit protection devices are often too tall to meet the height constraints for circuit board mounted devices. Circuit protection devices also often do not provide the versatility to allow the circuit protection device to activate under all the conditions necessary to adequately protect the circuit.

[0008] Thermal fuses described in U.S. Patent Application No. 12/383,595, filed March 24, 2009 and published as U.S. Publication No. 2010/0245022, and U.S. Patent Application No. 12/383,560, filed March 24, 2009 and published as U.S. Publication No. 2010/0245027, the entirety of each of which is incorporated herein by reference, address the disadvantages described above. While progress has been made in providing improved circuit protection devices, there remains a need for improved circuit protection devices.

SUMMARY

[0009] A circuit protection device includes a substrate with first and second electrodes connected to the circuit to be protected. The circuit protection device also includes a heater element between the first and second electrodes. A sliding contact is connected by a sensing element to the first electrode, second electrode, and heater element, thereby bridging and providing a conductive path between each. A spring element is held in tension by, and exerts a force parallel to a length of the substrate against, the sliding contact. A connection is provided by the sensing element, which may be between the sliding contact and the first electrode, second electrode and heater element, and resists the force exerted by the spring element. A flux material may be provided around the sensing element. Upon detection of an activation condition, the sensing element releases the sliding contact and the force exerted by the spring element moves the sliding contact to another location on the substrate at which the sliding contact no longer provides a conductive path between the first electrode, second electrode, and heater element. If present, the flux allows the sliding contact to move without dragging the sensing material.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] Fig 1 is an exploded view of an unassembled exemplary three-function reflowable circuit protection device.

- [0011] Fig. 2a is a bottom view an assembled circuit protection device.
- [0012] Fig. 2b is a top view the assembled circuit protection device shown in Fig. 2a.
- [0013] Fig. 3a is a circuit protection device with the sliding contact in the closed position.
- [0014] Fig. 3b is the circuit protection device of Fig. 3a with the sliding contact in the open position.
- [0015] Fig. 4 is a schematic representation of an exemplary battery pack circuit to be protected by a circuit protection device before the restraining element is blown.
- [0016] Fig. 5 is a schematic representation of the circuit of Fig. 4 with the restraining element blown and the sliding contact in the closed position.
- [0017] Fig. 6 is a schematic representation of the circuit of Fig. 5 with the sliding contact in the open position.
- [0018] Fig. 7 is another embodiment for the substrate of a three-function reflowable circuit protection device.
- [0019] Fig. 8 is top view of another embodiment of a three-function reflowable circuit protection device.
- [0020] Fig. 9 is bottom view of the three-function reflowable circuit protection device shown in Fig. 8.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- [0021] Fig 1 is an exploded view of an unassembled exemplary three-function reflowable circuit protection device 100. The circuit protection device 100 includes a substrate 102, a heater element 104, a spring element 106, a sliding contact 108, and a spacer 110. The circuit protection device 100 may also include a cover 112.
- [0022] The substrate 102 may include a printed circuit board (PCB). For the sake of explanation, the substrate 102 is described as a multilayer PCB including a top PCB 114 and a bottom PCB 116. It will be understood that the substrate 102 may also be fabricated as a single layer.
- [0023] The top PCB 114 includes an opening 118 that receives the heater element 104. The height of the top PCB 114 may be set to allow the top of the heater element 104, when placed in the opening 118, to be co-planar with the top surface of the substrate 102, i.e., with the top surface of the top PCB 114. In another embodiment shown in Fig.

7 and described in more detail below, the heater element 104 may be laid up into the substrate 102 during the fabrication process. In this example, the substrate 102 may not include the opening 118.

[0024] The top PCB 114 may also include another opening 120 for receiving a cantilever portion 122 of the sliding contact 108. The opening 120 in Fig. 1 extends parallel to the length of the substrate 102, allowing the sliding contact 108 to slide in a direction parallel to the length of the substrate 102. In another embodiment shown in Figs. 8-9 and described in more detail below, the cantilever 122 may extend away from the substrate 102 towards the cover 112. In this example, substrate 102 may not include the opening 120.

[0025] The top PCB 114 includes pads/electrodes, 124, 126 and 128. The electrodes 124 and 126 may be positioned on opposite sides of the opening 118 along a width of the top PCB 114. The electrode 128 may be positioned on a side of the opening 118 opposing the side the opening 120 is located on opposite sides of the opening 118. As shown in Figs. 3a-3b, the sliding contact 108 bridges the electrodes 124 and 126 and the heater element 104 when the sliding contact 108 is in a ready or closed position, thus facilitating an electrical connection between the heater element 104, electrode 124 and electrode 126.

[0026] The bottom PCB 116 includes pads 130, 132 and 134 corresponding to the location of the electrodes 124, 126 and 128, respectively, of the top PCB 114. The bottom PCB 116 may also include pad 136 corresponding to the location of the heater element 104. As shown in Fig. 2a, the bottom side of the bottom PCB 116 includes terminals corresponding to the pads 130, 132, 134 and 136 for connection to the circuit to be protected.

[0027] As noted, the heater element 104 fits into the opening 118 in the substrate 102. The heater element 104 may also constitute another electrode of the circuit protection device 100. The heater element 104 may be a positive temperature coefficient (PTC) device, such as the PTC device disclosed in U.S. Application No. 12/383,560, filed March 24, 2009 and published as U.S. Publication No. 2010/0245027, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference. Other heater elements, such as a conductive composite heater, that generate heat as a result of current flowing through the device, may be utilized in addition to or instead of the PTC device. In another example, the heater element 104 may be zero temperature coefficient element or constant wattage heater. As

shown in Fig. 7, in another embodiment the heater element may also be a thin-film resistor or heating device laid up into the substrate during a PCB process.

[0028] The sliding contact 108 may be a conductive and planar element with the cantilever portion 122. The cantilever portion 122 fits into the opening 120. The spring element 106 is located between the cantilever 122 and a side of the opening 120. The sliding contact 108 may be fused to the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 with, for example, a low melt-point sensing element (not shown). When the sensing element changes state, e.g., melts at a threshold temperature, the sliding contact 108 is no longer fused to the electrodes 124, 126 and heater element 104, and the spring element 106 expands and pushes the sliding contact 108 down the channel 120. The sensing element may thus provide mechanical, and electrical, contact between the sliding contact 108 and the electrodes 124, 126 and heater element 104.

[0029] The sensing element may be, for example, a low melt-point metal alloy, such as solder. For the sake of explanation, the sensing element is described herein as a solder. It will be understood that other suitable materials may be used as the sensing element such as, for example, a conductive thermoplastic having a softening point or melting point.

[0030] With the sliding contact 108 soldered to the heater element 104 and first and second electrodes 124, 126, the spring element 106 between the cantilever 122 and the side of the opening 120 is held in a compressed state. When the solder that holds the sliding contact 108 to the heater element and electrodes 124, 126 melts, the spring element 106 is allowed to expand, pushing against the cantilever 122 and causing it to slide down the opening 120, which in turn pushes the sliding contact 108 off the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126. In this manner, the electrical connection between the heater element 104, electrode 124 and electrode 126 is broken. Figs. 3a and 3b, described below, show a circuit protection device in a closed and an open position, respectively.

[0031] The spring element 106 may be a coil spring made of copper, stainless steel, plastic, rubber, or other materials known or contemplated to be used for coil springs. The spring element 106 may be of other compressible materials and/or structures known to those of skill in the art. For the sake of explanation, the spring element 106 is described as being held under tension in a compressed state by the sliding contact 108. It will be understood that a spring element may also be configured to be held under tension in an expanded or stretched state, such as if the spring element comprises an elastic material.

In this example, when an activation condition is detected and the solder melts, the spring element may pull the sliding contact off a heater element and electrodes of the substrate.

[0032] The circuit protection device 100 is configured to open under at least three conditions. The solder can be melted by an over current condition, i.e., by a current through electrodes 124 and 126. When a current passing through the electrodes 124 and 126 reaches a threshold current, i.e., a current that exceeds a designed hold current, Joule heating will cause the solder to melt, or otherwise lose resilience, and the sliding contact 108 to move to the open position by being pushed open by the spring element 106.

[0033] The solder can be melted by an over temperature condition where the temperature of the device 100 exceeds, such as by an overheating FET or high environmental temperatures, the melting point of the solder holding the sliding contact 108 to the electrodes 124, 126 and the heater element 104. For example, the ambient temperature surrounding the circuit protection device 100 may reach a threshold temperature, such as 140 °C or higher, that causes the solder to melt or otherwise lose resilience. After the solder melts, the sliding contact 108 is pushed down the channel 120 and into an open position, thus preventing electrical current from flowing between the electrodes 124, 126 and the heater element 106.

[0034] The solder can also be melted by a controlled activation condition where the heater element 104 is activated by a control current supplied by the circuit into which the circuit protection device 100 is installed. For example, the circuit protection device may pass a current to the heater element 104 upon detection of an overvoltage in the circuit, causing the device to act as a controlled activation fuse. As the current flowing through the heater element 104 increases, the temperature of the heater element 104 may increase. The increase in temperature may cause solder to melt, or otherwise lose resilience, more quickly, resulting in the sliding contact 108 moving to an open position.

[0035] The circuit protection device 100 also includes a restraining element (not shown) that holds the sliding contact 108 in the closed position during reflow. During a reflow process, the solder holding the sliding contact 108 to the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 can melt, which would result in the sliding contact 108 moving to the open position due to the force of the compressed spring 106. For example, the melt point of the solder may be approximately 140 °C, while the temperature during reflow may reach more than 200 °C, for example 260 °C. Thus, during reflow the solder would melt, causing the spring element 106 to prematurely move the sliding contact 108 to the open position.

[0036] To prevent the force applied by the spring element 106 from opening the circuit protection device 100 during installation, the restraining element may be utilized to maintain the holding sliding contact 108 in place and resist the expansion force of the spring 106. After the reflowable thermal fuse is installed on a circuit or panel and passed through a reflow oven, the restraining element may be blown by applying an arming current through the restraining element. This in turn arms the reflowable thermal fuse.

[0037] A spacer 110 may be placed on the substrate 102. The spacer 100 is an insulating material, such as a ceramic, polymeric, or glass, or a combination of thereof. For example, the spacer 100 may be made of a fiber or glass-reinforced epoxy. The spacer 100 includes an opening that forms a channel that allows the sliding contact 108 to slide under the conditions discussed above. The spacer 110 may have a height slightly greater than a height of the sliding contact 108 such that when the cover 112 is placed on the circuit protection device 100, the underside of the cover abuts with the spacer 110, allowing the sliding contact 108 to slide freely and avoiding any friction between the sliding contact 108 and the cover 112.

[0038] A flux 138 may be applied to the top PCB 114 near the location where the sliding contact 108 is soldered to the electrodes 124, 126 and the heater element 104. The flux 138 may be a thermoplastic flux or other material characterized by a viscosity of less than 150 centipoise, and a melting point less than the melting point of the solder holding the sliding contact 108 to the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126. The flux 138 may also be a material characterized by an acid number of at least 30. The flux 138 may be, for example, a carboxylic acid. As another example, the flux 138 may include a mixture of carboxylic acid or other like material with a wax, e.g. a polyethylene wax. The ratio of carboxylic acid or other like material to wax is selected to increase the melting point of the mixture, relative to the melting point of the carboxylic acid or other like material alone, closer to the melting point of the solder without exceeding the melting point of the solder.

[0039] After application of the flux 138, the flux 138 is heated to its melting point. The flux 138 melts and spreads over the adjacent area. Fig. 1, for example, shows the flux 138 before being melted. The melted flux may spread around the solder holding the sliding contact 108 to the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126, as well as over parts of the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126, such as parts of the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 not covered by the solder. The melted flux may also spread over parts of the electrode 128. The melted flux is then cooled, forming a film around the solder and over other parts over which the melted flux spread.

[0040] During operation after the circuit protection device 100 is armed, the flux 138 will melt before the solder holding the sliding contact 108 in place will melt in that the flux 138 is a material characterized by a melting point less than that of the solder. In other words, when an activation condition is detected and the solder melts, allowing the sliding contact 108 to slide, the flux 138 will have already melted as well. The melted flux 138 allows the sliding contact to smoothly slide away from the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 without dragging the melted solder. Solder dragged by the sliding contact 108 can result in the solder bridging the sliding contact 108 and heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126, resulting in an electrical connection between the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 even after the circuit is intended to be open. As noted, the flux 138 described herein allows the sliding contact 108 to slide without dragging the solder and causing the bridging effect without interfering with the normal operation of the device 100.

[0041] Described below is an exemplary process for assembling the circuit protection device 100. The substrate 102 may be fabricated by a PCB panel process, where circuit board pads form primary terminals, and plated vias make the connection from these terminals to surface mount pads. Slots may be cut using known drill and router processes. As an alternative, discrete, injection-molded parts with terminals that are insert-molded, or installed in a post-molding operation, may be used.

[0042] After the substrate 102 is fabricated and patterned, the heater element 104 may be installed in the substrate 102, such as by soldering the bottom of the heater element 104 to the substrate 102. The spring element 106 is inserted into the channel 120. The sliding contact 108 is inserted and slid to place the spring element 106 in a compressed state between the cantilever 122 and a side of the channel 120. The sliding contact 108 is soldered to the heater element 104 and the electrodes 124, 126.

[0043] The restraining element is attached to the sliding contact 108 on one end, and to the electrode 128 on the other end. Alternatively, one end of the restraining element may be attached to the sliding contact 108 before the sliding contact is soldered to the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126. In this example, the other end of the restraining element is attached to the electrode 128 after soldering of the sliding contact 108. The restraining element may be attached by resistance welding, laser welding, or by other known welding techniques.

[0044] The flux 138 is applied to the top PCB 114 and then heated to the flux's melting point. The melted flux 138 spreads out over the heater element 104 and

electrodes 124, 126. The melted flux 138 is then cooled, forming a film over the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126 and adjacent areas. The film may be located around the solder connection between the sliding contact 108 and heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126. The flux 138 is applied and melted after the solder connection has been made between the sliding contact 108 and the heater element 104 and electrodes 124, 126, as well as after attachment of the restraining element which holds the sliding contact 108 in place before the circuit device 100 is armed. In this manner, if while heating and melting the flux 138 the temperature reaches the melting point of the solder, the restraining element will hold the sliding contact 108 in place until the solder cools again.

[0045] The spacer 110 may then be placed on top of the substrate 102, the opening within the spacer having a width sufficient for the sliding contact 108 to fit within. The cover 112 may then be installed to keep the various parts in place.

[0046] Figs. 2a-2b show bottom and top views, respectively, of an assembled circuit protection device 200. The bottom of the circuit protection device may include terminals 202, 204, 206, 208 that facilitate electrical connection of the electrodes 124, 126, 128 and the heater element 106, respectively, to external circuit board elements. In this manner the terminals 202, 204, 206, 208 may be utilized to mount the circuit protection device 200 to a surface of a circuit panel (not shown) and bring the heater element 106, electrodes 124, 126, 128 into electrical communication with circuitry outside of the device 200.

[0047] In order to achieve a low profile, the height of the circuit protection device 200 may be 1.5 mm or less. The width of the circuit protection device 200 may be 3.8 mm or less. The length of the circuit protection device 200 may be 6.0 mm or less. In one embodiment, the circuit protection device may be 6.0 mm x 3.8 mm x 1.5 mm. Due to the expansion force of the spring element being parallel to the plane of the substrate surface, which results in the sliding contact also sliding parallel to the plane of the substrate, a substantially thin circuit protection device 200 is achieved.

[0048] Figs. 3a-3b show a circuit protection device 300 with the sliding contact 302 in the closed and open positions, respectively. In the closed position the sliding contact 302 bridges and provides an electrical connection between the electrodes 304, 306 and the heater element 308. In the open position, when the solder holding the sliding contact 302 to the electrodes 304, 306 and heater element 308 melts, the force of an expanding spring element pushes the sliding contact 302 down the channel 310 in the substrate 312,

severing the electrical connection between the electrodes 304, 306 and heater element 308. As discussed above, the circuit protection device 300 is a three-function reflowable thermal fuse that is configured to open under three conditions: over current, over temperature, and controlled activation.

[0049] Fig. 3a also shows the restraining element 314 discussed above. The restraining element 314 may be a welded, fusible restraining wire that holds the sliding contact 302 in place during reflow. In particular, the restraining element 314 is adapted to secure the sliding contact 302 in a state that prevents it from sliding down the channel 310 during reflow. For example, the restraining element 314 may enable keeping the spring element in a compressed state even with the solder or other material holding the sliding contact 302 to the electrodes 304, 306 and heater element 308 melts, thereby preventing the spring element from expanding and pushing the sliding contact 302 down the channel 310.

[0050] The restraining element 314 may be made of a material capable of conducting electricity. For example, the restraining element 314 may be made of copper, stainless steel, or an alloy. The diameter of the restraining element 314 may be sized so as to enable blowing the restraining element 314 with an arming current. The restraining element 314 is blown, such as by running a current through the restraining element 314, after the device 300 is installed. In other words, sourcing a sufficiently high current, or arming current, through the restraining element 314 may cause the restraining element 314 to open. In one embodiment, the arming current may be about 2 Amperes. However, it will be understood that the restraining element 314 may be increased or decreased in diameter, and/or another dimension, allowing for higher or lower arming currents.

[0051] To facilitate application of an arming current, a first end 314a and second end 314b of the restraining element 314 may be in electrical communication with various pads disposed about the housing. The first end 314a may be connected to the electrode 316, which corresponds to the electrode 128 in the embodiment of Figs. 1-2. Referring to the embodiment of Figs. 1-2, the electrode 316 (or 128) is in electrical communication with the terminal 206. The second end 314b may be connected to the sliding contact 302. The arming current may be supplied to the electrode 316 through terminal 206.

[0052] Figs. 3a-3b also show a flux 318, such as the flux 138 described above with respect to Fig. 1, applied to the circuit protection device 300. In particular, Fig. 3a shows the flux 318 positioned below the sliding contact 302, while Fig. 3b shows that the flux 318 is positioned above the heater element 308 and electrodes 304, 306.

[0053] Described below is an exemplary process for installing the three-function reflowable circuit protection devices described herein. The circuit protection device is placed on a panel. Solder paste may be printed on a circuit board before the circuit protection device is positioned. The panel, with the circuit protection device, is then placed into a reflow oven which causes the solder on the pads to melt. After reflowing, the panel is allowed to cool.

[0054] An arming current is run through pins of the circuit protection device so as to blow the restraining element. Referring to Fig. 2, sufficient current, for example, 2 Amperes, may be applied to the terminal 206, which is electrically connected to the restraining element, so as to blow the restraining element and allow the spring element to push the sliding contact in the open position under one of the three conditions described herein. Blowing the restraining element places the circuit protection device in an armed state.

[0055] Figs. 4-6 are a schematic representation of an exemplary battery pack circuit 400 to be protected by a circuit protection device. In the example shown in Figs. 4-6, the circuit 400 utilizes the circuit protection device 300 of Fig. 3. For the sake of explanation, the circuit protection device 300 can be positioned in series with two terminals 402, 404 connected to circuit components to be protected, such as one or more FETs. It will be understood that the circuit protection device 300 may be used in other circuit configurations. The heater element 308 is electrically connected to an activation controller 406.

[0056] Fig. 4 shows the circuit protection device 300 before the restraining element 314 is blown. Fig. 5 shows the circuit protection 300 after the restraining element 314 is blown. Further, in Figs. 4-5 the sliding contact 302 is in the closed position, thus bridging and providing an electrical connected between electrode 304, electrode 306, and electrode 308 (i.e., the heater element). Fig. 6 shows the circuit protection device 300 in the open position in which the electrical connected between the electrodes 304, 306, 308 is severed, such as after a fault condition (over current or over temperature) is detected, or after an activation signal by the activation controller 406.

[0057] Fig. 7 shows another embodiment for the substrate 700 of a three-function circuit protection device. In this embodiment utilizes an embedded resistor concept used in PCB construction. The substrate 700 includes a top PCB layer 702 and a bottom PCB layer 704. The top PCB layer 702 includes pads 706, 708 for electrical connection to patterned electrodes 710, 712, respectively, in the bottom PCB layer. The top PCB layer

702 also includes a via connection 714 to the heater element 716 that is laid up into the substrate 700 during a PCB process. In this example, the heater element 716 is a thin-film resistor or other heating device. With the film in this embodiment, the resistance path is transverse to the plane of the film. Fig. 7 also shows a flux 718 applied above the substrate 700, in particular, above the electrodes 706, 708 and above the contact pad 720 electrically connected with the heater element 716 via the via connection 714.

[0058] Figs. 8-9 show top and bottom views, respectively, of another embodiment of a three-function reflowable circuit protection device 800. In the circuit protection device 800, the spring element 802 is located in the cover 804 instead of within the substrate 806. The cantilever portion 808 of the sliding contact 810 extends up into the cover 804 instead of down into an opening in the substrate 806. The substrate 806 in Figs. 8-9 need not be patterned to include an opening that receives the cantilever portion 808 of the sliding contact 810. The substrate 806 includes a flux 816 applied thereon, such as the flux 138 described above with respect to Fig. 1.

[0059] The underside of the cover 804 (shown in Fig. 9) includes a depression, or channel 902, into which the cantilever portion 808 may be inserted, and through which the cantilever portion 808 may slide when the solder holding the sliding contact 810 to the electrodes of the substrate 806 melts.

[0060] The spring element 802 may be installed into the cover 804 through a side of the cover 804. A cap 812 may then be inserted into the side of the cover 804 to hold one end of the spring element 802 in place such that when the spring element 802 expands under of the activation conditions described herein, the resulting force will push the cantilever portion 808 down the channel 902. The cap 812 includes a protrusion 814 that is tapered on one end and normal to the length of the cap 812 on the other end. In this manner, the cap 812 may be inserted into a hole on the side of the cover 804 with a snap-fit connection. It will be understood that other methods may be used to insert the spring element 802 into the cover 804.

[0061] While the three-function reflowable circuit protection device has been described with reference to certain embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the claims of the application. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is intended that the three-function

reflowable circuit protection device is not to be limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but to any embodiments that fall within the scope of the claims.

We claim:

1. A circuit protection device comprising:
a substrate comprising a first electrode and a second electrode;
a sliding contact positioned on the substrate, wherein:
at a first location on the substrate the sliding contact provides a conductive path between the first and second electrodes,
a sensing element holds the sliding contact at the first location, and
at a second location on the substrate the sliding contact does not provide a conductive path between the first and second electrodes; and
a spring element configured to exert on the sliding contact a force parallel to a length of the substrate,
wherein the sliding contact is configured to resist the force when the sliding contact is held at the first location by the sensing element, and
wherein upon detection of an activation condition, the sensing element releases the sliding contact and the force exerted by the spring element moves the sliding contact to the second location.
2. The circuit protection device of claim 1, wherein the spring element is held in a compressed state when the sliding contact is held at the first location.
3. The circuit protection device of claim 1, wherein the sensing element comprises a material that melts at a threshold temperature and the activation condition is detected when sensing element reaches the threshold temperature.
4. The circuit protection device of claim 1, wherein the spring element is held in an extended state when the sliding contact is held at the first location
5. The circuit protection device of claim 1, further comprising a heater element positioned in the substrate between the first and second electrodes, wherein at the first location the sliding contact provides a conductive path between the first electrode, second electrode, and the heater element, preferably wherein the heater element comprises one of a thin-film resistor and a positive temperature coefficient device.

6. The circuit protection device of claim 1, wherein the sliding contact comprises a cantilever portion against which the spring element exerts the force parallel to the length of the substrate.
7. The circuit protection device of claim 6, wherein the cantilever portion extends into a channel defined by one of an opening in the substrate, an opening in an underside of a housing that fits over the substrate, and a depression in an underside of a housing that fits over the substrate and the sliding component, wherein the cantilever portion is located at a first end of the channel when the sliding contact is at the first location, preferably wherein when the sensing element releases the sliding contact, the spring element is configured to move the sliding contact to the second location by pushing the cantilever portion towards a second end of the channel.
8. The circuit protection device of claim 1, further comprising a flux disposed around the sensing element.
9. The circuit protection device of claim 8, wherein the flux comprises at least one of:
 - (a) carboxylic acid;
 - (b) a mixture of carboxylic acid and a polyethylene wax, preferably wherein the mixture comprises a melting point less than a melting point of the sensing element;
 - (c) a melting point that is less than a melting point of the sensing element;
 - (d) a viscosity of less than approximately 150 centipoise; and
 - (e) an acid number of at least approximately 30.
10. A circuit protection device comprising:
 - a substrate comprising a first electrode and a second electrode;
 - a heater element in electrical communication with the first and second electrodes;
 - a sliding contact slidably positioned on the substrate, wherein:
 - at a first location on the substrate the sliding contact provides a conductive path between the first electrode, second electrode, and the heater element, and
 - at a second location on the substrate the sliding contact does not provide a conductive path between any of the first electrode, second electrode, and the heater element; and

a spring element configured to exert on the sliding contact a force parallel to a length of the substrate that slides the sliding contact to the second location upon detection of an activation condition.

11. The circuit protection device of claim 10, wherein the sliding contact is configured to hold the spring element under tension in a compressed state until the detection of the activation condition, preferably wherein the force exerted by the spring element parallel to the length of the substrate is an expansion force.

12. The circuit protection device of claim 10, wherein the circuit protection device comprises a height that is less than or equal to approximately 1.5 mm.

13. The circuit protection device of claim 10, wherein the substrate comprises mounting pads configured to allow surface mounting of the circuit protection device to a panel.

14. The circuit protection device of claim 10, wherein the sliding contact is configured to hold the spring element under tension in an extended state until the detection of the activation condition.

15. A method for manufacturing a circuit protection device, comprising:
providing a substrate comprising a first and a second electrode;
providing a housing that fits over the substrate;
providing an opening defining a channel in one of the substrate and an underside of the housing that fits over the substrate;
providing a spring element in the channel;
providing a sliding contact comprising a cantilevered end that fits into the channel;

placing the sliding contact at a first location on the substrate, wherein at the first location on the substrate the sliding contact provides a conductive path between the first electrode and the second electrode, and at the first location the cantilevered end of the sliding contact holds the spring element under tension in a compressed state or in an extended state;

providing a sensing element that holds the sliding contact at the first location and that provides an electrical connection between the sliding contact and the first and second electrodes;

-17-

providing a flux proximate to the sensing element;
melting the flux until the melted flux spreads around the sensing element; and
cooling the melted flux, wherein the cooled flux produces a film that coats the
sensing element.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising providing a restraining wire
configured to secure the sliding contact at the first location until activation of the circuit
protection device.

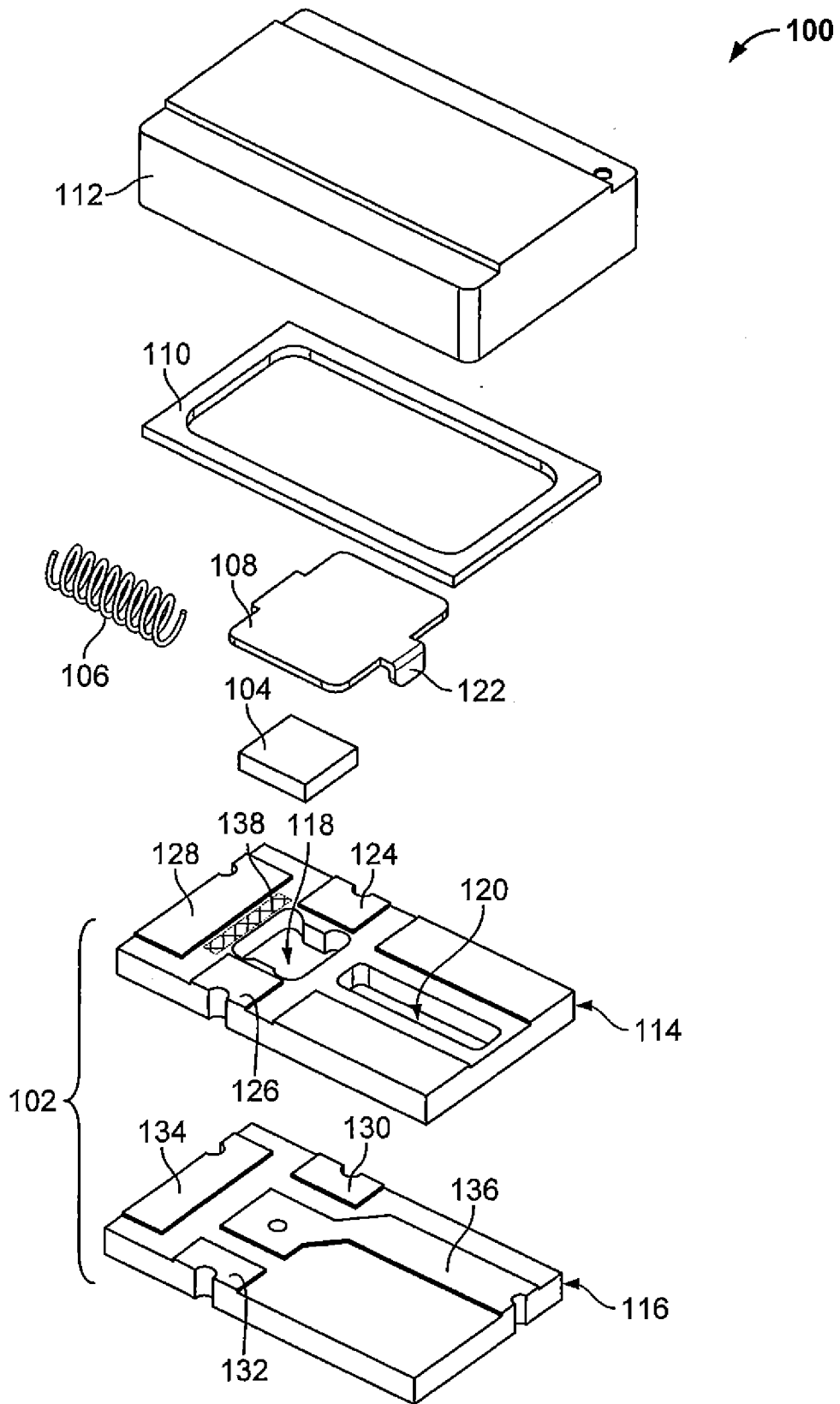


Figure 1

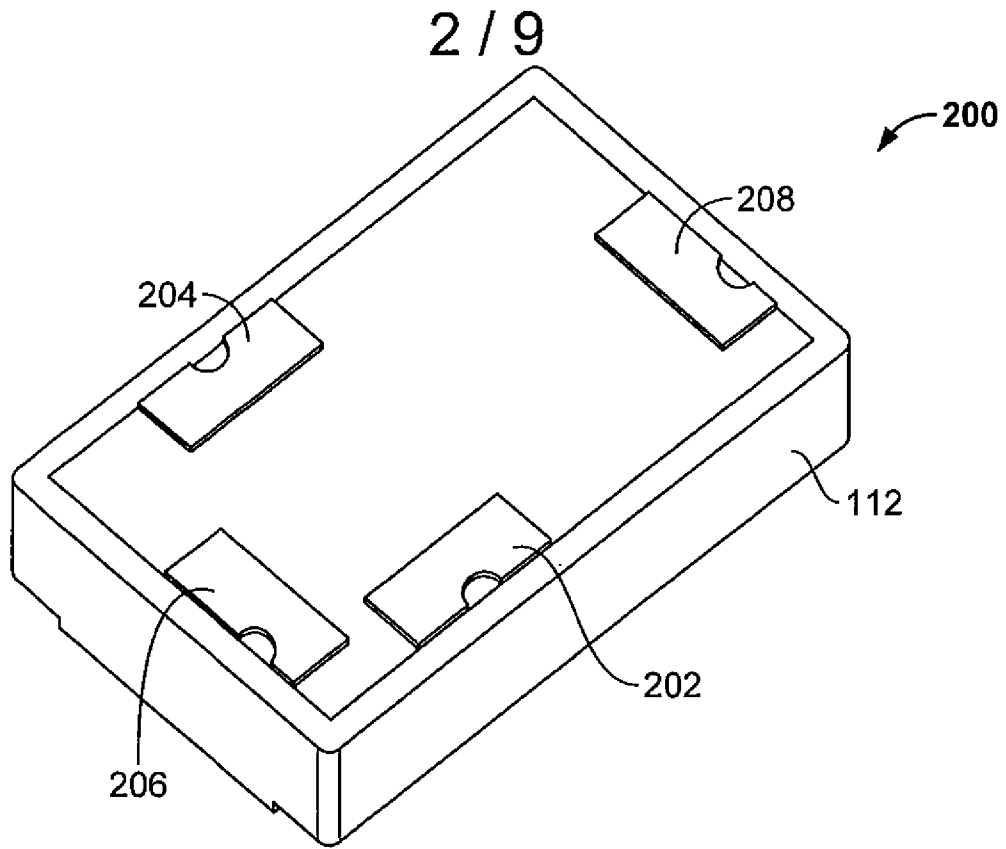


Figure 2a

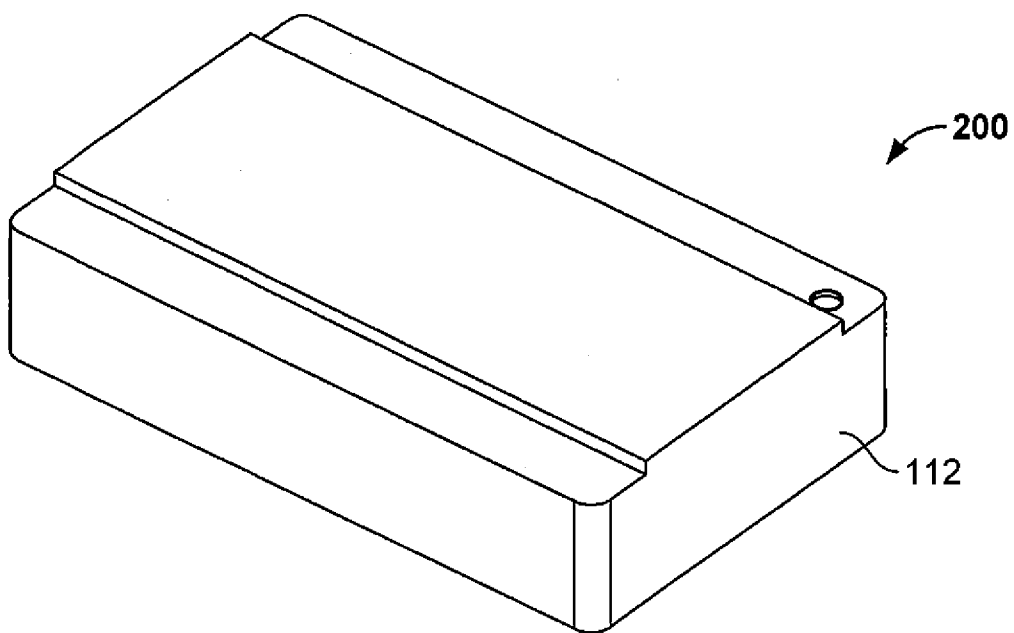
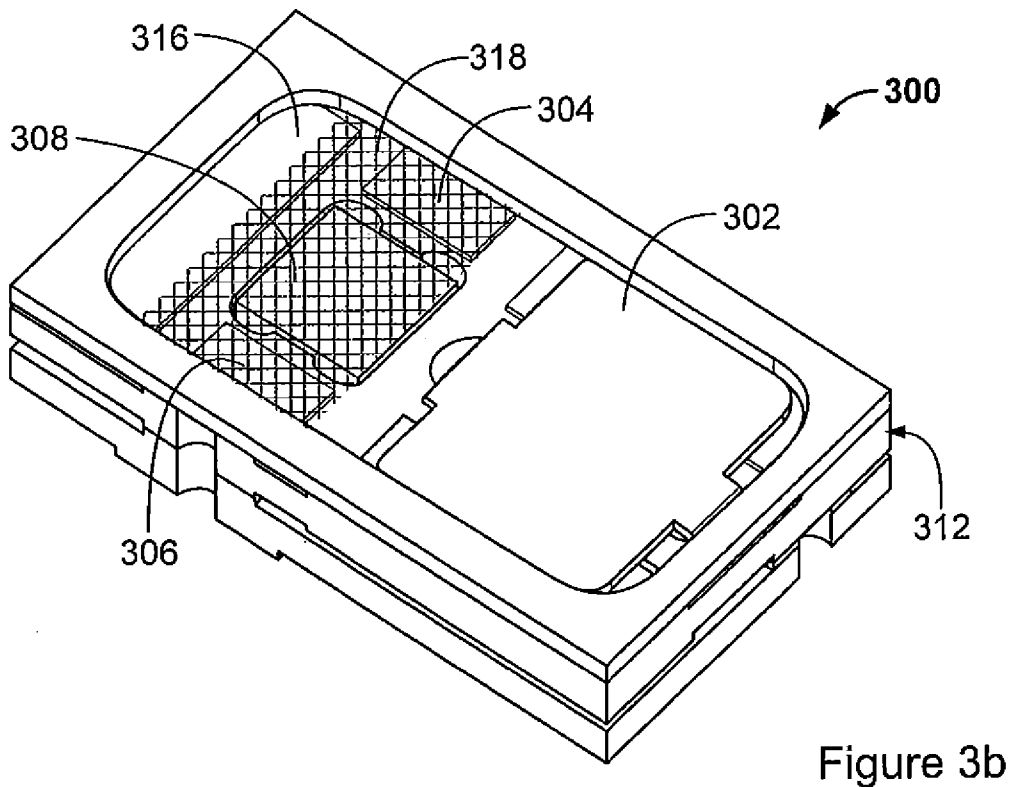
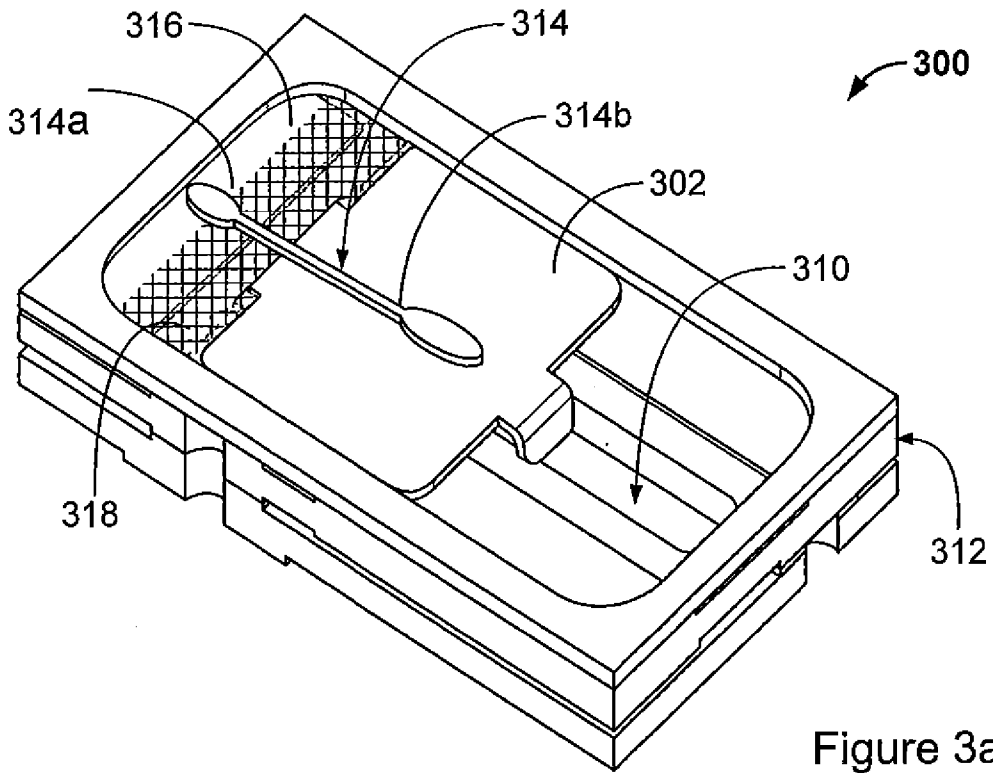


Figure 2b

3 / 9



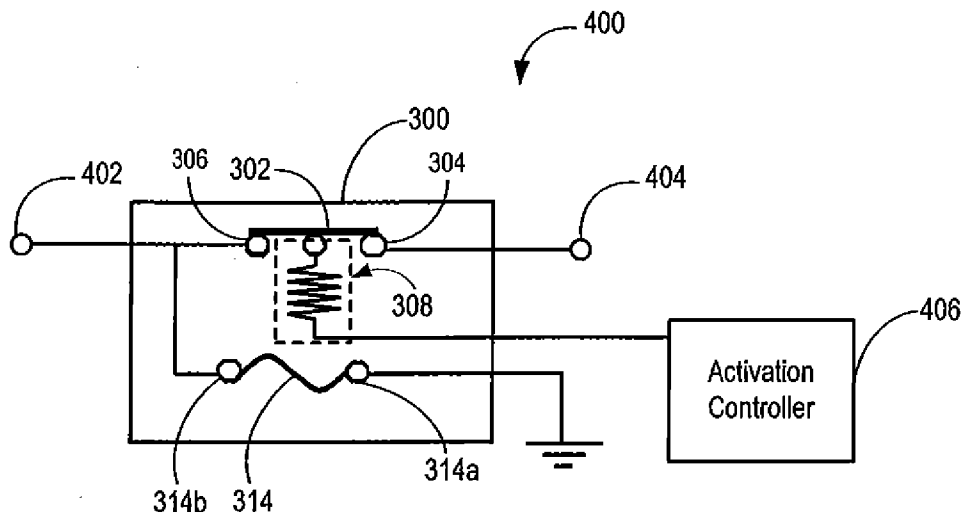


Figure 4

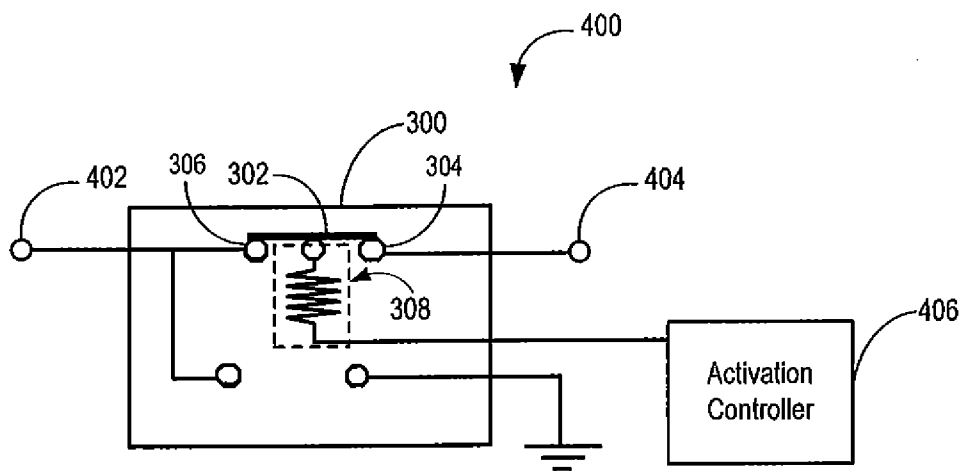


Figure 5

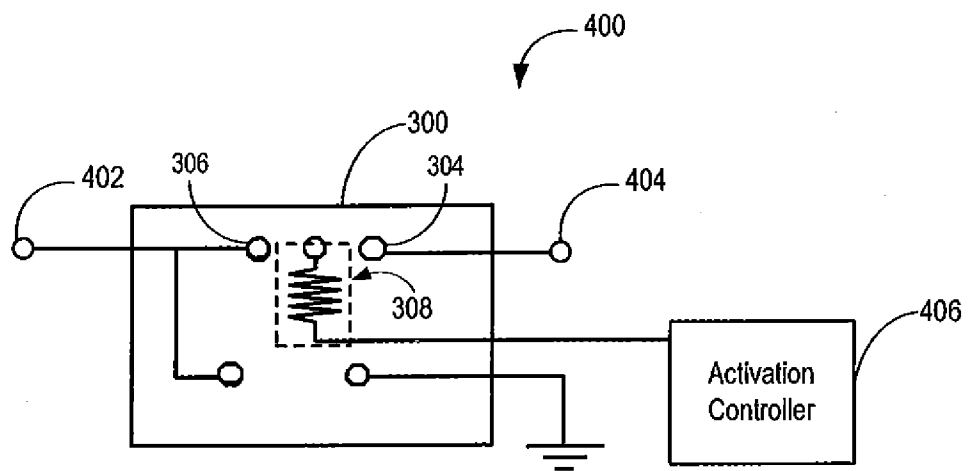


Figure 6

7 / 9

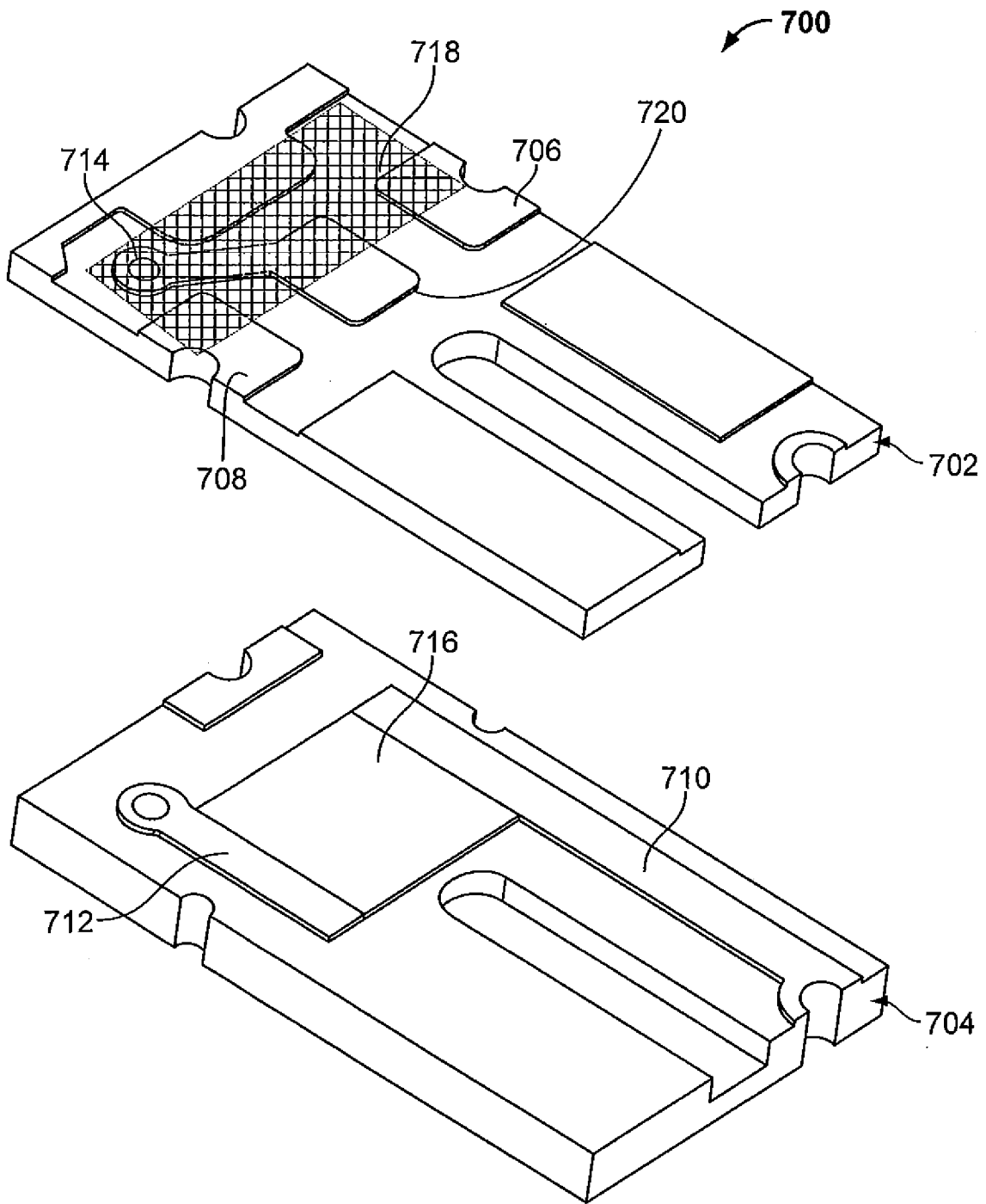


Figure 7

8 / 9

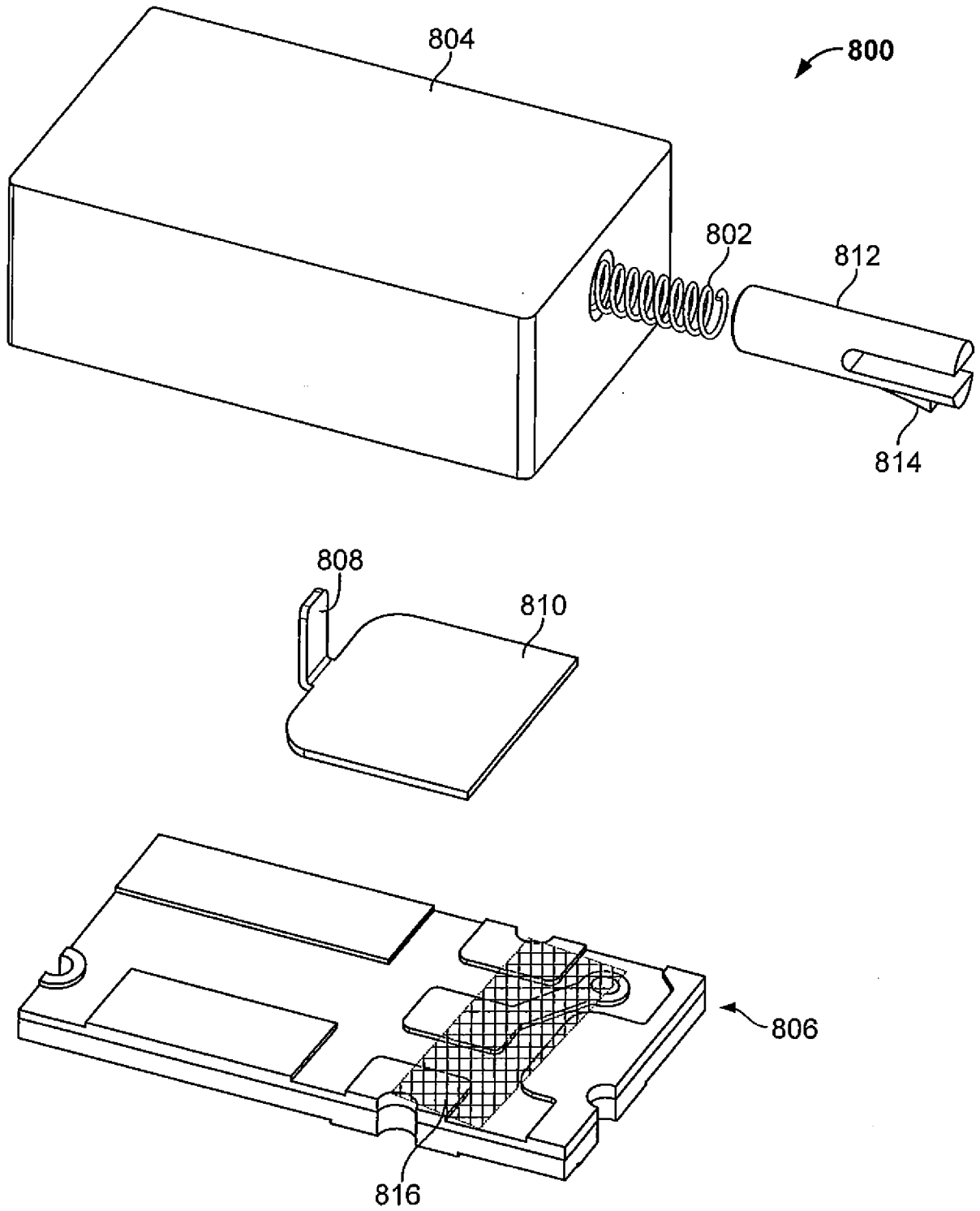


Figure 8

9 / 9

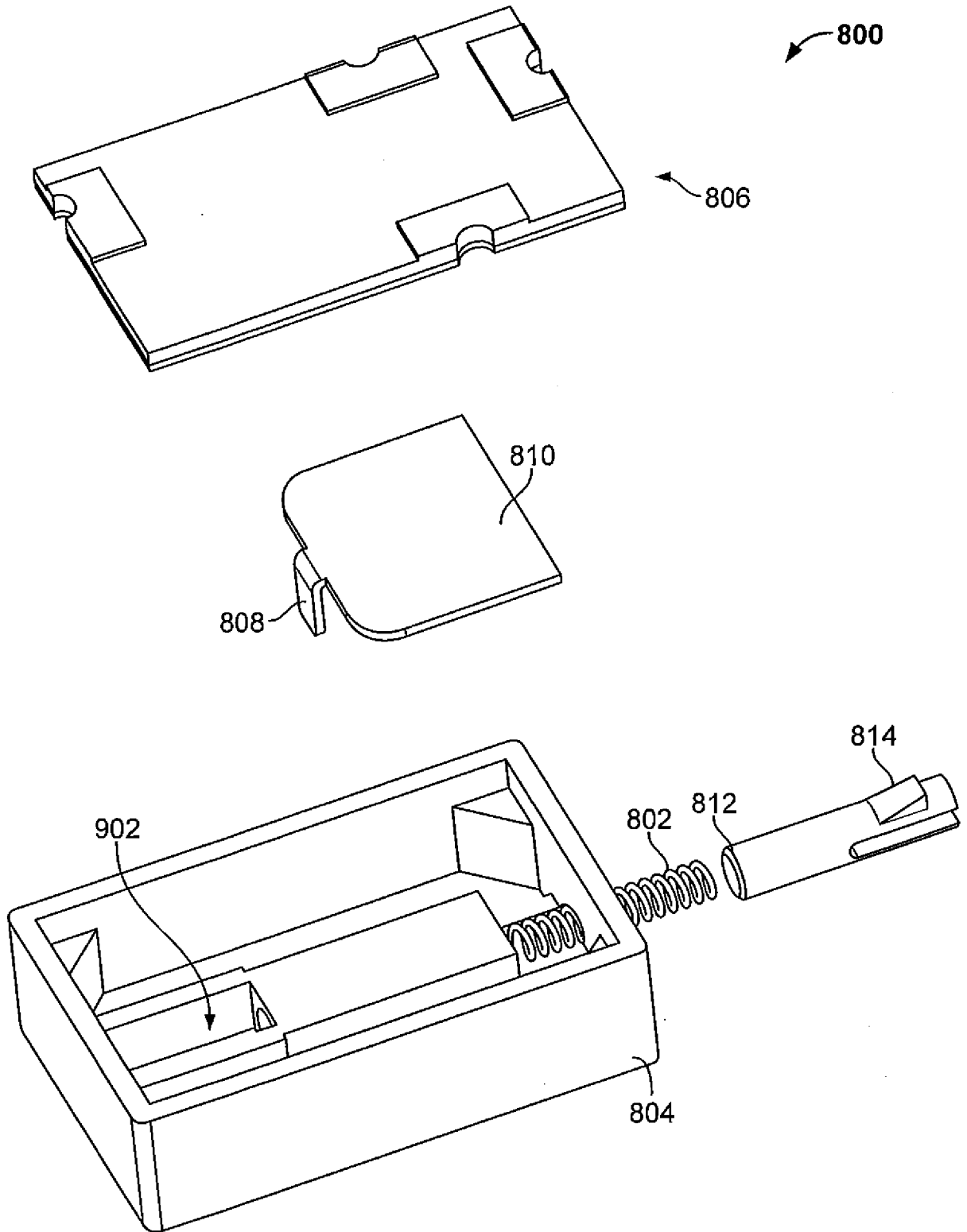


Figure 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2012/023677

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER INV. H01H37/76 ADD. H01H37/04		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) H01H		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) EPO-Internal, WPI Data		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X Y A Y A Y	DE 10 2009 036578 B3 (MAGNA ELECTRONICS EUROP GMBH & [DE] MAGNA ELECTRONICS EUROP GMBH & CO) 9 September 2010 (2010-09-09) paragraphs [0034] - [0041]; figures 1-3 ----- US 2010/245027 A1 (MATTHIESEN MARTYN A [US] ET AL) 30 September 2010 (2010-09-30) cited in the application paragraphs [0018] - [0026]; claims 1,2,4; figures 1,3,4 ----- JP 2001 243863 A (UCHIHASHI ESTEC CO LTD) 7 September 2001 (2001-09-07) abstract -----	1-4,6 5,8-14 7,15,16 5,10-14 1 8,9
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents :		
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family	
Date of the actual completion of the international search <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">7 May 2012</p>	Date of mailing of the international search report <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">11/05/2012</p>	
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.2em;">Glaman, C</p>	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2012/023677

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