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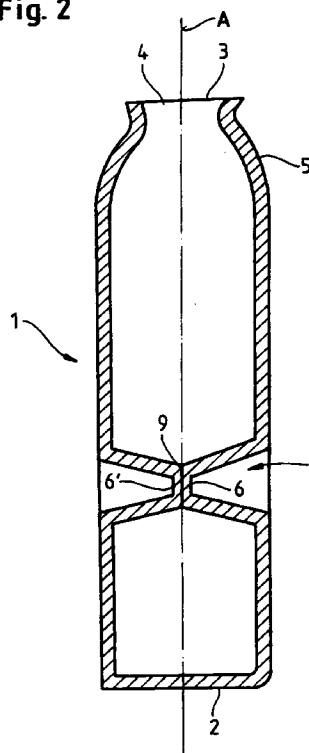
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(54) A shipping unit comprising rigidified containers

(57) The present invention relates to a shipping unit (30) comprising a plurality of lightweight plastic containers (1), the containers being held in position relative to each other by an outer supporting layer (31), the outer supporting layer (31) being essentially a film in tension.

Substantially all of the containers (1) comprise a base portion (2), a top portion (3), a side wall (5) and optionally a handle (10), wherein at least two opposing regions (6, 6') of the side wall (5) are joined together to form a rigidifying portion (7) of the container other than the optional handle (10).

Fig. 2



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 95 20 3501

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Y	US 4 409 776 A (SHINWA KAGAKU KOGYO KABUSHIKI KAISHA) * column 1, line 8-28; figure 2 *	1,2,5,6	B65D71/00 B65D1/02
Y	DE 81 16 800 U (C. A. HEINZ) * the whole document *	1,2,5,6 3	
Y	FR 2 505 789 A (PROTEO SRL) * figures 1-3 *	1,2,6 3	
Y	US 4 969 922 A (ANN ARBOR INTERNATIONAL INC.) * figures 1-8 *	1,2,6 3	
Y	EP 0 173 194 A (HENKEL) * figures 1-4 *	1,2,6 3	
Y	GB 1 007 563 A (FRASER & GLASS LTD) 13 October 1965 * figures 1-6 *	1,2,6 3	
Y	NL 6 900 689 A (PROCTER & GAMBLE) * figures 1-10 *	1,6 3	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6) B65D
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 20 September 1996	Examiner Lenoir, C
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- ☐ All claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ Only part of the claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

X LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirement of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

See sheet B

- ☐ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respects of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☒ None of the further search fees has been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims **1-6**



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LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirement of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1-Claims 1-6

2-Claims 7,8

3-Claims 9,10

Documents DE-U-8116800, FR-A-2505789, US-A-4969922, GB-A-1007563, EP-A-173194 and NL-A-6900689 disclose lightweight plastic containers comprising a base portion, a top portion, a side wall and optionally a handle, wherein at least two opposing regions of the side wall are joined together to form a rigidifying portion of the container other than the optional handle.

Documents US-A-4409776 discloses a shipping unit comprising a plurality of objects, the objects being held in position relative to each other by another supporting layer, the outer supporting layer being essentially a film in tension.

It falls within the scope of the skilled man to form a unit from a plurality of the disclosed containers and to apply the teaching of US-A-4409776 in order to get a shipping unit as claimed in claim 1. The subject-matter of claim 1 does not therefore involve an inventive step in the sense of Art. 56 EPC.

The subject-matter of independent claim 1 being not inventive, the requisite unity of invention no longer exists in as much as the subject-matter of the dependent claims 2 to 6, even when considering the description, is no longer linked with the subject-matter of dependent claims 7-8 and 9-10 by a common inventive concept. The requirements of Art 82 EPC are therefore not fulfilled :

- claims 7 and 8 relate to containers packaged in sub-units
- claims 9 and 10 relate to ridges and depressions on the bottom and side walls.