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(54) Title: PERSONAL RESPIRATORY PROTECTION DEVICE

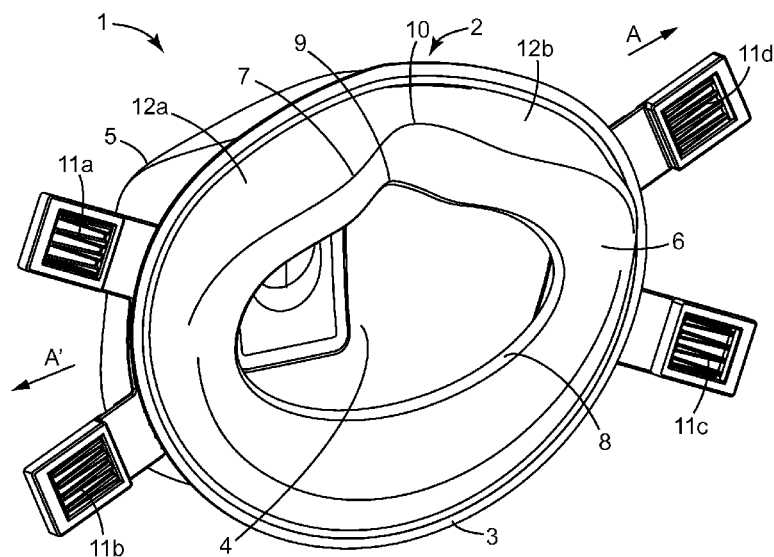


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a personal respiratory protection device, in particular, such a device comprising a respirator body having a periphery, a filter media, forming at least part of the respirator body, and a gasket, the gasket being located at the periphery and extending along at least a portion of its length.



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PERSONAL RESPIRATORY PROTECTION DEVICE

Background

Personal respiratory protection devices, also known as respirators or face masks are used in a wide variety of applications where it is desired to protect the human respiratory system from air borne particulates or noxious or unpleasant gases. Generally such respirators are in either a moulded cup-shape, such as those discussed in US 4,827,924, or flat-folded format, such as those discussed in EP 814 871.

Moulded cup-shaped masks typically comprise at least one layer of a filter media supported by either an inner and/or an outer support shell. A gasket is provided around the inner edge of the cup-shape to ensure a good fit against the face of the wearer. The gasket is usually formed from a flexible material such that it moulds around the facial features of the wearer, providing a seal and good engagement between the mask and the face of the wearer. The quality of the fit of such respirators should be high, since it is essential that as much air as possible passes through the filter media and not around the edges of the respirator in use. Such respirators may also be provided with a valve to aid breathing.

The gasket itself is therefore a key factor in achieving reproducible, reliable fit of the respirator. Given the variation in facial features of wearers the gasket needs to be flexible enough and sized accordingly to fit around many different contours. One problematic area is around the nose of the wearer, where the respirator needs to fit closely and firmly against the skin to ensure minimal movement of the respirator during use as well as an airtight fit. To aid with fit, respirators are typically provided with a nose clip, such as a strip of metal, provided on the outer surface of the respirator and designed to be bent around the nose of the wearer to hold the respirator in place. One alternative to providing a nose-clip is to use a foamed in place gasket that fills the gap around the edge of the nose of the wearer, thus providing an improved fit. Such a solution is discussed in EP 1 614 361, where a rubber-like edge bead is moulded around the edge of the respirator, with deformable flanges included in the nasal region.

However, various issues may still arise with the use of a nose clip or other gasket: firstly, the inclusion of a nose clip may create additional manufacturing costs; secondly, the nose clip may be uncomfortable for some wearers since facial features and sizes vary greatly across the population of wearers; and thirdly, the fit achieved when not using a nose clip may be poorer in general without such close contact between the gasket and the skin of the wearer. Further, where fit is less than ideal, additional problems are encountered by wearers who also require eyewear to perform tasks, such as safety eyewear or prescription eyewear. For example, it may be difficult to wear safety glasses in the correct or a comfortable position if the base of the lenses or

the frame impinges on the upper edge of the respirator or gasket. Even if worn in the correct position, a poorly fitting gasket encourages moist breath to escape the respirator and travel under the frame or lens of the eyewear, causing the eyewear to fog.

Reference to any prior art in the specification is not, and should not be taken as, an acknowledgment or any form of suggestion that this prior art forms part of the common general knowledge in Australia or any other jurisdiction or that this prior art could reasonably be expected to be understood and regarded as relevant by a person skilled in the art.

Summary

It would be desirable therefore to be able to deal with all of these issues by providing a gasket that gives optimum fit for all facial types and sizes, at minimal cost increase compared with current products, or, ideally, at a lower manufacturing cost.

The present disclosure aims to address or reduce at least some of these issues by providing a personal respiratory protection device for use by a wearer.

According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a personal respiratory protection device for use by a wearer, comprising: a respirator body having a periphery, a filter media, forming at least part of the respirator body, and a gasket, the gasket being located at the periphery and extending along at least a portion of its length, wherein the gasket comprises a sheet-like flexible elastomeric material and is contoured, the contour comprising a deformable ridge that projects away from the periphery and comprises regions of increased thickness of the sheet-like flexible elastomeric material.

The flexibility of the gasket and the contouring create an adaptable structure that conforms easily and fully to the facial features of the wearer. The ridge enables accurate positioning of the gasket across the nose and cheekbones, preventing inward leakage of air during use.

In an embodiment the ridge forms a cushioning means for the gasket.

In an embodiment, the gasket comprises an indent disposed on the ridge, and the indent is adapted to accommodate the nose of a wearer.

In an embodiment, the device further comprises headband means to secure the personal respiratory device onto a wearer such that the gasket flexes and conforms to the facial features of the wearer. In an embodiment, the headband means are adjustable, such that when the adjustable headband means are adjusted the gasket flexes and conforms to the facial features of the wearer.

In an embodiment, the gasket fits substantially flush against the nose and cheeks of a wearer.

In an embodiment, the gasket extends along the entire periphery of the respirator body.
In an embodiment, the ridge extends along only a portion of the gasket.

In an embodiment, the gasket fits substantially flush against the nose, cheeks and chin of a wearer.

In an embodiment, the ridge is formed in the region of the gasket that contacts the nose of a wearer during use.

The contour may be substantially V-shaped.

In an embodiment, the ridge is formed from a local increase in thickness of elastomeric material. The ridge may vary in thickness along its length.

In an embodiment, the ridge is formed from a fold in the elastomeric material.

In an embodiment, the gasket comprises a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE). The gasket may be injection moulded.

The filter media may be in the form of a cover, and the respirator body may comprise an inner cup shaped support and the filter media is overlaid on the inner cup shaped support. In an embodiment, the cover and the inner cup shaped support are joined at the periphery of the respirator body. The respirator body may comprise at least two panels.

In an embodiment, the gasket extends along the entire periphery of the respirator body.

In an embodiment, the device is a maintenance-free respirator device.

The gasket may be provided with an aperture adapted to accommodate the nose and mouth of a wearer.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention will now be described by way of example only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

25 Figure 1 is a perspective view of a personal respiratory device comprising a gasket in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 2 is a side view of a personal respiratory device comprising a gasket in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 3 is a plan view of a gasket indicating a number of cross-sections;

30 Figure 4a is a cross-section along A-A' in Figure 3

Figure 4b is a cross-section along B-B' in Figure 3;

Figure 4c is a cross-section along C-C' in Figure 3;

Figure 4d is a cross-section along D-D' in Figure 3;

Figure 4e is a cross-section along E-E' in Figure 3;

Figure 4f is a cross-section along F-F' in Figure 3;
Figure 4g is a cross-section along G-G' in Figure 3; and
Figure 4h is a cross-section along H-H' in Figure 3.

Detailed Description

To create an improved fit without the use of nose clips, and to avoid issues resulting from poor fit, such as misting of eyewear, the present invention employs a contoured gasket formed from a flexible, elastomeric material. The gasket is attached to the periphery of the personal

respiratory device, and extends along at least a portion of its length. The contour comprises a ridge that projects away from the periphery. This ridge enables the gasket to deform around the nose, cheeks and chin of a wearer, ensuring contact with the skin at all points along the gasket and therefore around the periphery of the device where it extends. Preferably the gasket extends
5 along the entire periphery, thus creating an extremely good fit, regardless of the shape and size of the wearers' facial features.

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a personal respiratory device comprising a gasket in accordance with the present invention. The personal respiratory device 1 is generally cup-shaped, with a respirator body 2 having a periphery 3, and comprises an inner cup-shaped support 4 and a filter media in the form of an outer cover 5, the filter media being overlaid on the
10 inner cup-shaped support 4, forming at least part of the respirator body 2. A gasket 6 is provided at the periphery 3 of the device 1, and in this embodiment extends around the entire periphery 3 of the device 1. The gasket 6 is formed from a flexible elastomeric material. The gasket 6 is contoured, as illustrated by the contoured region, with the contour comprising a ridge 7 that projects away from the periphery 3. The ridge is deformable, and preferably forms a cushioning means for the gasket 6. The contour is substantially V-shaped. The ridge 7 is formed in the
15 region of the gasket 6 that contacts the nose of the wearer during use, and is formed from a local increase in thickness of the elastomeric material of the gasket 6. The gasket 6 forms a central aperture 8, substantially elliptical in shape, for receiving the oro-nasal region of the wearer, such that the gasket 6 contacts the nose, cheeks and chin of the wearer. At the uppermost point, where, in use, the gasket 6 contacts the bridge of the nose of the wearer, the gasket 6 is provided with an indent 9. The indent 9 is adapted to accommodate the nose of the wearer. A flexion point 10 is disposed on the ridge 7, generally corresponding with the position of the indent 9, such that the indent 9 forms the flexion point 10. The flexion point 10 is formed from a local
20 reduction in thickness of the elastomeric material of the gasket 6. The gasket 6 is adapted to flex about this flexion point 10.

Headband means 11a – d are provided to secure the device 1 onto a wearer such that the gasket 6 flexes and conforms to the facial features of the wearer. The headband means 11a – d are secured to the device 1 at the periphery 3 by means of ultrasonic welding. An additional lip
30 may be provided at the periphery 3, extending around at least a part, preferably all of, the periphery, forming a base to which the headband means 11a – d may be attached, if desired. Preferably the headband means 11a – d are welded to the periphery 3, by means of ultrasonic welding, although other suitable and equivalent techniques may be used. The headband means 11a – d are adjustable such that when they are adjusted the gasket 6 flexes and conforms to the
35 facial features of the wearer. When the adjustable headband means 11a – d are pulled tight, the

gasket 6 flexes towards the face of the wearer, about the flexion point 10, pulling the indent 9 into contact with the nose. The headband means 11a – d each comprise a plastic buckle, through which a length of elastic material is threaded, and can be pulled through to be lengthened and shortened as desired. Two head bands (not shown) join each of two buckles, the head bands being formed from widths of elastic material. The structure of the buckle prevents easy movement in one direction thus holding the elastic material tightly in position. Alternatively, non-adjustable headband means may be used, such as strips of braided elastic, which may be glued, welded or stapled to the periphery 3.

The region of the gasket 6 at and adjacent the indent 9 contacts the nose and cheeks of the wearer intimately, creating a good fit. This is aided by the ridge 7 being deformable such that the gasket 6 fits substantially flush against the nose and cheeks of the wearer. The ridge 7 forms a cushioning means for the gasket 6, that in use, the ridge deforms against the face of the wearer, creating a cushioning effect such that the facial features are cushioned against the periphery 3. Since the components of the device 1 are welded together, as discussed below, the periphery 3 may feel hard and uncomfortable against the face of the wearer when the adjustable headband means 11a – d are pulled tight to create an airtight fit for the device in use. By providing a deformable ridge 7 on the gasket 6 this is effectively avoided and the device feels comfortable and well-fitting to the wearer regardless of the size and shape of the wearers' facial features. In this example, the gasket 6 extends substantially the entire periphery 3, such that the gasket 6 fits substantially flush against the nose, cheeks and chin of a wearer.

The inner cup-shaped support 4 is preferably formed from a thermally bonded polyester non-woven air-laid staple fibre material, although may optionally be polyolefin, polycarbonate, polyurethane, cellulose or combination thereof fibre material. The outer cover web 5 is preferably formed from spun bond polypropylene bi-component fibre non-woven materials. An inner cover web, not shown, may optionally be provided between the outer cover web 5 and inner cup-shaped support 4, and is preferably also formed from spun bond polypropylene bi-component fibre non-woven material. The inner-cup shaped support 4, outer cover web 5 and gasket 6 are welded together at the periphery 3. Preferably, ultrasonic welding is used, however, thermal and other welding techniques are equally suitable.

Figure 2 is a side view of a personal respiratory device comprising a gasket in accordance with the present invention. This illustrates the shape of the contour in more detail. The contour is substantially V-shaped, with the apex of the “V” corresponding to the ridge 7. When the headband means 11a – d are pulled tight in the direction of arrows A, A', the gasket 6 flexes downwards at the flexion point pushing the regions 12a, 12b on either side of the flexion point 10 and indent 9 against the cheekbones of the wearer. The portion of the gasket 6 at the

periphery 3 opposite the indent 9 is pulled tight against the chin of the wearer simultaneously. This creates an airtight fit around the entire periphery 3 of the device 1.

The gasket 6 is formed from a flexible elastomeric material, preferably a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE). Suitable materials include Evoprene® G 967 and G 953, both available from AlphaGary Limited, Beler Way, Leicester Road Industrial Estate, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 0DG, UK. Preferably the thermoplastic elastomer material is injection moulded to create the gasket 6. A two-part mould is preferably pressure-filled from at least one injection point on the face of the mould, resulting in the final gasket 6 having the at least one injection point on a surface, rather than an edge. Injecting onto the face of the mould, rather than into an edge, results in excellent resistance to tearing and mechanical strength of the finished gasket 6.

Figure 3 is a plan view of a gasket indicating a number of cross-sections. These cross-sections show the contour and ridge 7 in more detail. Figure 3 shows one half of the gasket 6, and it should be understood that the contouring on the half not shown is a mirror image of that in cross-sections A-A' to H-H'. Figure 4a is a cross-section along A-A' in Figure 3, and shows the thickness of the gasket 6 at the region of the indent 9 and flexion point 10. Although in this embodiment of the present invention an internal cup-shaped support is used, it may be preferable to use a different type of support or for the support to be absent altogether. For example, an external cup-shaped support may be used, with an internal filter layer, forming the respirator body 2.

The gasket 6 has a nominal thickness of 1.67mm in the region of the ridge 7, 0.80mm at the periphery 3 and 0.65mm at the remainder of the gasket 6. Hence the ridge 7 is formed by a local increase in thickness of the elastomeric material. Figure 4b is a cross-section along B-B' in Figure 3, and Figure 4c is a cross-section along C-C' in Figure 3. Here the nominal thickness of the gasket 6 at the ridge 7 is 2.04mm and 1.73mm respectively, indicating that the flexion point is formed from a local reduction in thickness of the elastomeric material. The thickness of the material forming the ridge 7 decreases moving away from the indent 9, as indicated in Figures 4d (1.50mm) and 4e (1.14mm). Where the ridge 7 is angled towards the periphery 8 at sections F-F' and G-G', as shown in Figures 4f and 4g, the thickness increases slightly (1.34mm and 1.67mm respectively), where the gasket 6 contacts the jawbone of the wearer around the edges of the mouth. Finally, the portion of the gasket 6 that fits across the chin of the wearer, as shown at section H-H' in Figure 4h, has approximately the same nominal thickness as the remainder of the gasket away from the ridge 7 and periphery 3, that is 0.65mm. From Figures 4b and 4c in particular it can be seen how the variation in thickness of the gasket 6 allows it to deform and contact the nose and cheeks of the wearer, yet remain structural enough at the ridge 7 to form an

airtight seal. Unlike prior art devices, the gasket comprises a sheet-like elastomeric material, with the performance characteristics being determined by the variations in thickness of the material and contours formed by injection moulding.

Examples

In order to determine the effectiveness of the gasket, testing was carried out to measure the total inward leakage (TIL) of the device. This is where the leakage of air into the device from external surroundings due to a poor seal with the face of the wearer is tested, and is a measure of the quality of the fit of the device. The performance requirements in respect of total inward leakage are laid out in clause 7.9.1 of EN149:2001+ A1:2009 for a class FFP3 device (filtering half mask). To test total inward leakage, test subjects don the device and adjust the fit accordingly to best fit their facial features, and perform a variety of tasks whilst wearing the device, in an atmosphere containing a particulate suspension (salt concentration inside the mask ratio to salt concentration outside the mask as %). The TIL is determined by the amount of particles present inside the device after use, as a measure of the leakage around the gasket and seal with the wearers' face. To meet the criteria of EN149:2001+ A1:2009, a test panel of people with a variety of facial sizes is used, with the standard requiring that only 4 test subjects out of 10 should exceed a maximum permitted TIL value of 5%, and that the mean TIL value over all activities should not exceed 2% for any test subject. The test activities included: a walk, moving head side-to-side, moving head up and down, talking and a second walk. Out of 10 subjects tested, none exceeded the 5% maximum or the 2% mean value such that the device in accordance with the present invention met the requirements of the standard.

In the above example, the device 1 is cup-shaped, with the gasket 6 extending along the entire periphery 3 of the respirator body 2. However, it may be desirable to include the gasket on a device that is not cup-shaped. For example, the respirator body 2 may comprise at least two panels, thus forming a flat fold respirator device. Preferably, the device 1 is a maintenance-free respirator device. In either case, the device may also include a valve 15. Alternatively, the device may be a reusable respirator.

CLAIMS

1. Personal respiratory protection device for use by a wearer, comprising:
a respirator body having a periphery, a filter media, forming at least part of the respirator body, and a gasket, the gasket being located at the periphery and extending along at least a portion of its length,
wherein the gasket comprises a sheet-like flexible elastomeric material and is contoured, the contour comprising a deformable ridge that projects away from the periphery and comprises regions of increased thickness of the sheet-like flexible elastomeric material.
2. Device of claim 1, wherein the ridge forms a cushioning means for the gasket.
3. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the gasket comprises an indent disposed on the ridge, and the indent is adapted to accommodate the nose of a wearer.
4. Device of any preceding claim, further comprising headband means to secure the personal respiratory device onto a wearer such that the gasket flexes and conforms to the facial features of the wearer.
5. Device of claim 4, wherein the headband means are adjustable, such that when the adjustable headband means are adjusted the gasket flexes and conforms to the facial features of the wearer.
6. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the gasket fits substantially flush against the nose and cheeks of a wearer.
7. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the gasket extends along the entire periphery of the respirator body.
8. Device of claim 7, wherein the ridge extends along only a portion of the gasket.
9. Device of claim 7 or 8, wherein the gasket fits substantially flush against the nose, cheeks and chin of a wearer.

10. Device of claim 1, wherein the ridge is formed in the region of the gasket that contacts the nose of a wearer during use.

11. Device of claim 1, wherein the contour is substantially V-shaped.

12. Device of claim 1, wherein the ridge is formed from a local increase in thickness of elastomeric material.

13. Device of claim 10, wherein the ridge varies in thickness along its length.

14. Device of any of claims 1 to 11, wherein the ridge is formed from a fold in the elastomeric material.

15. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the gasket comprises a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE).

16. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the filter media is in the form of a cover, and the respirator body comprises an inner cup shaped support and the filter media is overlaid on the inner cup shaped support.

17. Device of claim 16, wherein the cover and the inner cup shaped support are joined at the periphery of the respirator body.

18. Device of any preceding claim, wherein the gasket is provided with an aperture adapted to accommodate the nose and mouth of a wearer.

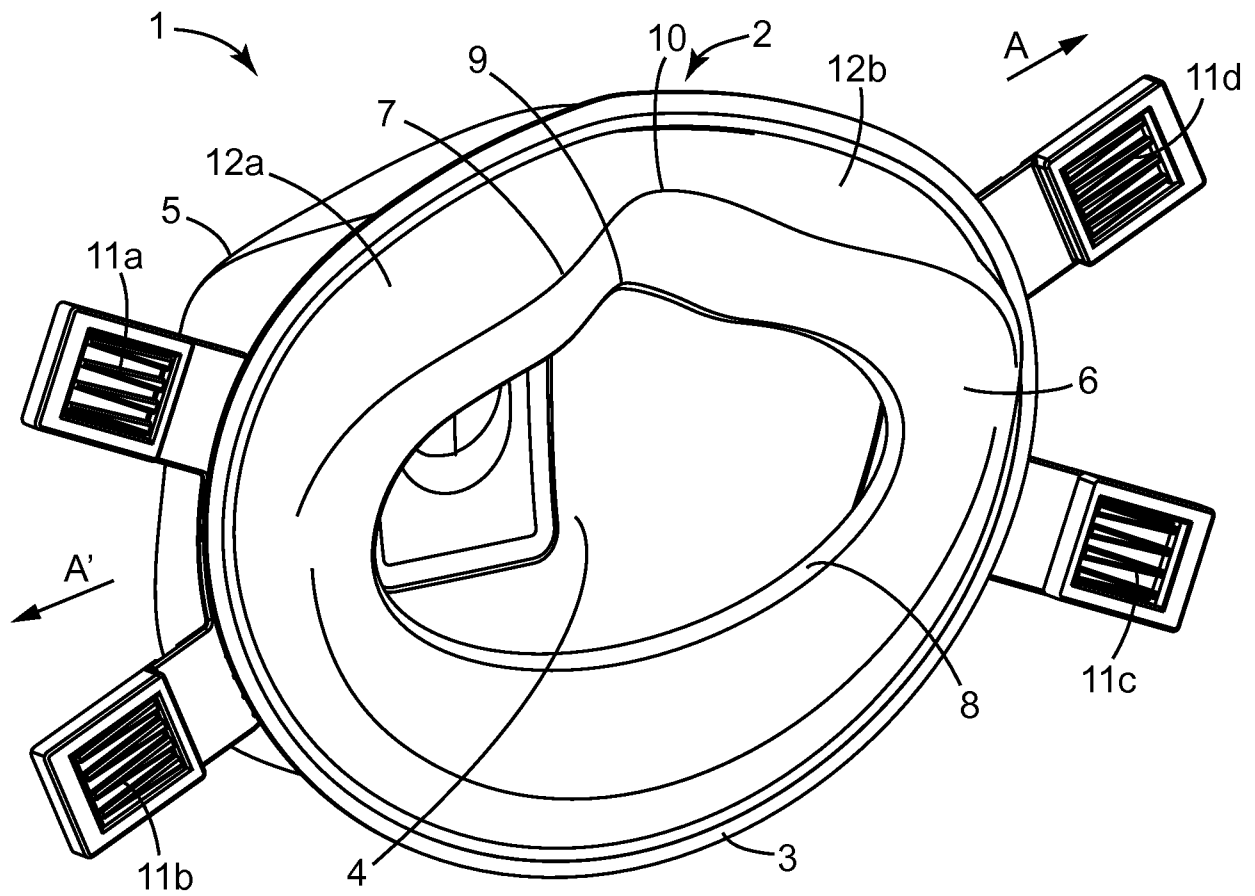


FIG. 1

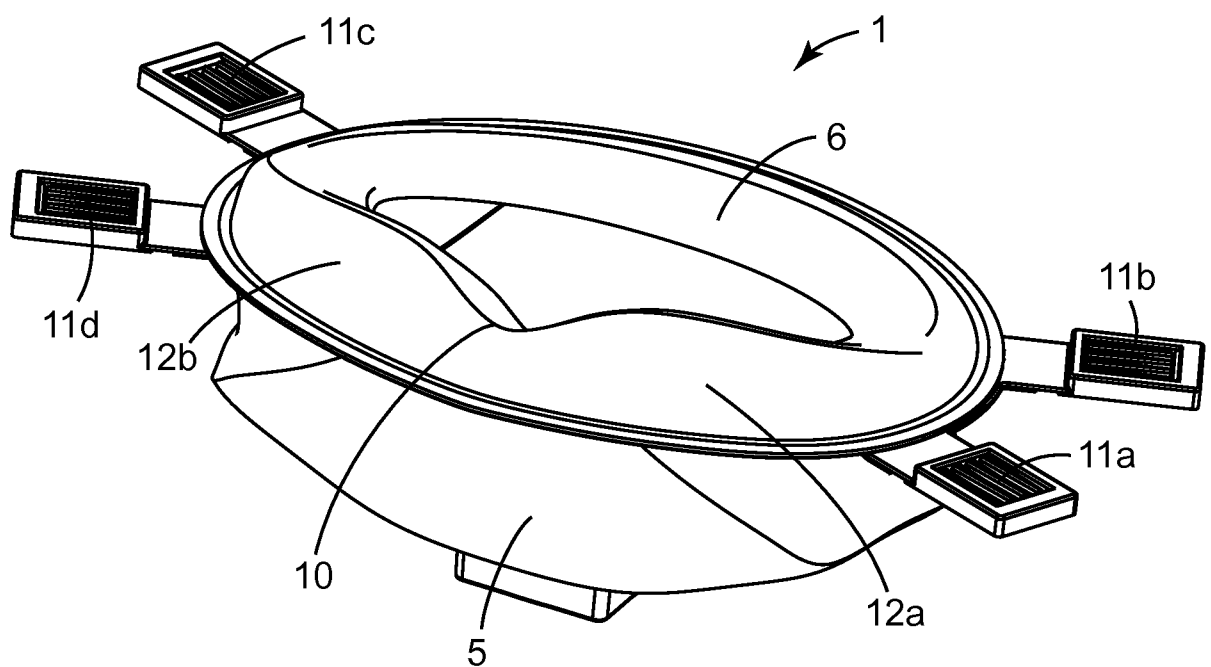


FIG. 2

