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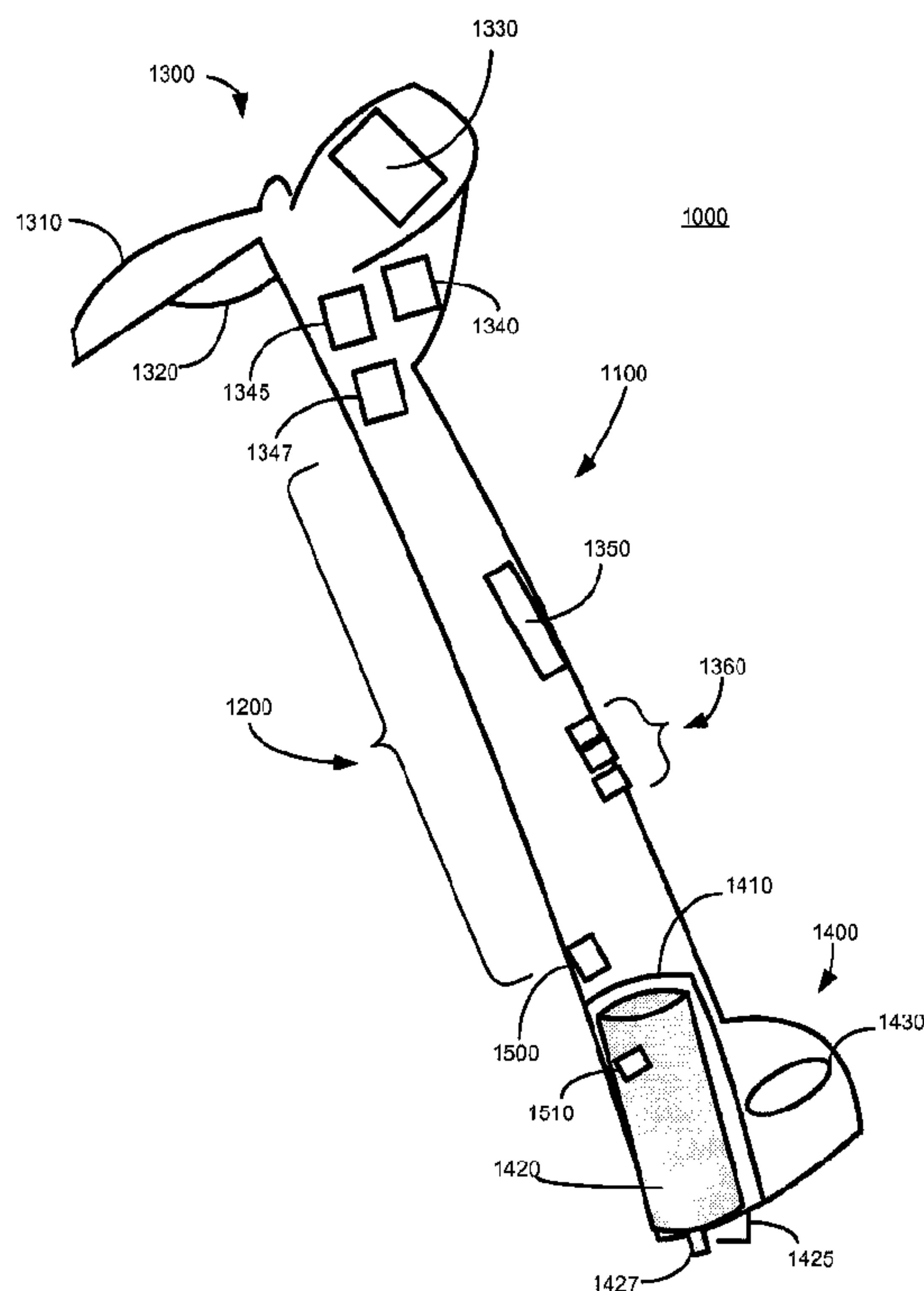
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(54) Titre : SYSTEME DE MARQUAGE ET METHODE DE DETERMINATION D'EMPLACEMENT

(54) Title: MARKING SYSTEM AND METHOD WITH LOCATION TRACKING



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

(57) Abrege/Abstract. One or more markers are dispensed on ground, pavement or other surface in a dig area to be excavated or disturbed during excavation activities, so as to provide a visual indication of a presence or an absence of one or more underground utilities in the dig area. One or more signals are wirelessly transmitted in response to the dispensing of the one or more markers, wherein the signal(s) represent(s) first data relating to a location at which the marker(s) is/are dispensed, and/or one or more characteristics of the dispensed marker(s).

ABSTRACT

One or more markers are dispensed on ground, pavement or other surface in a dig area to be excavated or disturbed during excavation activities, so as to provide a visual indication of a presence or an absence of one or more underground utilities in the dig area. One or more signals are wirelessly transmitted in response to the dispensing of the one or more markers, wherein the signal(s) represent(s) first data relating to a location at which the marker(s) is/are dispensed, and/or one or more characteristics of the dispensed marker(s).

MARKING SYSTEM AND METHOD WITH LOCATION TRACKING

This application is a divisional application of co-pending application serial No. 2,734,754 filed March 15, 2011, which is a divisional application of Patent No. 2,623,466 filed March 4, 2008 and issued June 14, 2011.

BACKGROUND

Underground man-made objects, such as utility lines and pipes (hereinafter "utility lines"), are very susceptible to damage from excavation activities. Local and federal regulations require that notification be given to owners of underground utility lines in an area to be excavated before any excavation takes place. The owners of the utility lines typically must locate and mark the location of any underground utility lines.

The tasks of locating and marking underground utility lines can be performed by either the utility line owner or by third party contractors. A marking tool is typically used to mark the ground, pavement or other surfaces in order to provide a visual indication of the location of underground utilities. Paint is commonly used as the marker, and it is typically applied using a paint marking tool. The color of the paint is typically chosen based on the type of utility line being marked (e.g., red for an electrical line).

Inaccurate marking of the utility lines can result in physical damage to utility lines, property damage, and/or personal injury during the excavation process that, in turn, can expose the utility line owner or contractor to significant legal liability. When utility lines are damaged and/or when property damage or personal injury results from hitting a utility line during an excavation, the excavator may assert that the utility line was not accurately marked by the entity that carried out the marking, while the entity that marked the utility line will assert that the utility line was properly marked. Proving whether the utility line was properly marked can be difficult after the excavation, because in many cases the paint line used to mark the utility line will have been disturbed or destroyed during the excavation process.

SUMMARY

According to one aspect, a marking system may include a marker dispenser to hold and dispense markers; a location tracking system to determine location data; a processor; and a triggering system in communication with the marker dispenser and the processor to

substantially simultaneously trigger the marker dispenser to dispense a marker and the processor to log the location data to identify a geographic location of the marker.

According to another aspect, a marking tool may include a housing; a marker dispenser mounted to the housing to hold and dispense markers; a location tracking system mounted to, connected to, or located within the housing to determine location data; and a triggering system mounted to, connected to, or located within the housing to substantially simultaneously trigger the marker dispenser to dispense a marker and logging of the location data from the location tracking system to identify a geographic location of the marker.

According to yet another aspect, a method may include dispensing a marker in an area to be marked, and logging at least one of location data identifying a geographic location of where the marker is dispensed or time data identifying a time at which the marker is dispensed while the marker is dispensed.

According to a further aspect, a marking tool may include means for dispensing a marker; means for determining location data or time data; and means for substantially simultaneously triggering the dispensing of the marker and logging of the location data that identifies a geographic location at which the marker is dispensed or the time data that identifies a time at which the marker is dispensed.

According to another aspect, a marking tool may include a marker dispenser to hold and dispense markers; a timing system to output time data; a processor; and a triggering system to substantially simultaneously trigger the marker dispenser to dispense a marker and the processor to log the time data to identify a time at which the marker is dispensed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate one or more embodiments described herein and, together with the description, explain these embodiments. In the drawings:

Figure 1 is block diagram of a marking system with location and/or time tracking;

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a marking tool with location and/or time tracking; and

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram of a triggering system used in the marking tool of Figure 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The following detailed description refers to the accompanying drawings. The 5 same reference numbers in different drawings may identify the same or similar elements. Also, the following detailed description does not limit the invention.

Figure 1 is block diagram of a marking system 100 with location and/or time tracking. The system 100 may include an optional communication system 200, interface 300, local memory 400, processor 500, marker dispenser 600, triggering system 700, 10 location tracking system 800, and timing system 900. In other implementations, system 100 may include fewer, different, or additional elements.

In one implementation, the system 100 may be used to accurately record the geographic location where markers are dispensed using data from the location tracking system 800 and/or the time at which the markers are dispensed using data from the timing system 900. In one exemplary application of the system 100, the location of markers used 15 to mark underground utility lines and/or the time at which the markers are dispensed can be accurately and reliably recorded. The marker that is used to mark underground utility lines may include a liquid, such as paint. However, other types of markers, such as objects (e.g., flags, stakes, etc.), may be used in other implementations.

20 The location tracking system 800 may include any device that can determine its geographic location to a certain degree of accuracy, such as a global positioning system (GPS) or a global navigation satellite system (GNSS) receiver. In another implementation, the location tracking system 800 can include a device that determines 25 location using another technique, such as tower (e.g., cellular tower) triangulation.

The location tracking system 800 may receive location tracking signals (e.g., GPS signals) and determine its location based on these signals. In one implementation, the location tracking system 800 may be capable of determining its location within less than approximately thirty centimeters.

30 The timing system 900 may include any device that can output time data to some level of accuracy (e.g., accuracy to the minute, the second, the millisecond, etc.). In one implementation, the timing system 900 may be capable of generating the time data itself.

In this situation, the timing system 900 may take the form of a clock. In another implementation, the timing system 900 may receive the time data from another timing system. In this situation, the timing system 900 may take the form of a receiver. In some situations, it may be beneficial for the timing system 900 to be synchronized to another timing system.

A user can control the operation of the system 100 via interface 300. In one implementation, interface 300 may include a touch screen interface that can provide various operational controls and status indicators of the system 100, and can allow the user to navigate the controls by touching particular areas of the screen. In another implementation, interface 300 may include another form of input and/or output, such as, for example, a display for displaying information and a keypad for entering information.

The triggering system 700 may trigger the logging of location and/or time data and the dispensing of markers. In one implementation, the system 100 may log location and/or time data only when a marker is being dispensed by the marker dispenser 600. This may be accomplished via a triggering mechanism that, when actuated by the user, triggers both the marker dispenser 600 and the logging of location and/or time data. The location data may be received from the location tracking system 800, and logged and stored in local memory 400 by the processor 500. The time data may be received from the timing system 900, and logged and stored in local memory 400 by the processor 500.

The marker dispenser 600 may hold the markers and may also contain an actuation mechanism (not shown in Fig. 1) that causes the markers to be dispensed. As described above, the markers dispensed by the marker dispenser 600 may include a liquid (e.g., paint) or an object (e.g., flags or stakes). Details of the marker dispenser 600 will be discussed in more detail below.

In operation, a user may engage a triggering mechanism in the triggering system 700 (explained in more detail below) in order to dispense the markers. When the triggering mechanism is engaged, the triggering system 700 may also initiate logging of location data received from the location tracking system 800 and/or time data received from the timing system 900. This may be done by sending a signal to the processor 500, which may cause processor 500 to store a log of the location and/or time data in local memory 400.

Communication system 200 may include an interface for transmitting data to and/or receiving data from one or more external devices and/or systems located either local to or remote from the system 100. Communication system 200 may include any type of interface, such as an interface for communicating via Ethernet, Bluetooth, Wifi, radio frequency (RF), a wide area network (WAN), or another type of network or protocol.

In one implementation, communication system 200 may send location and/or time data logs stored in local memory 400 to an external device/system and/or receive information from an external device/system. The location data logs may be used by the external device/system to accurately track the location where the markers were dispensed. The time data logs may be used by the external device/system to accurately track a time at which the markers were dispensed.

System 100, as broadly described herein, may be particularly suited for incorporation into marking tools for marking underground utilities. As discussed above, a marking tool is used to mark the ground, pavement or other surfaces in order to provide a visual indication of the location of underground utilities. The type of marker that may be used includes paint that may be supplied in aerosol cans that are oriented axially with respect to the long axis of the aerosol cans. The marking tool enables a user to walk or stand erect while dispensing the markers.

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a marking tool 1000 with location and/or time tracking. For the description to follow, assume that the marking tool 1000 uses paint as the marker. However, it should be appreciated that any other marker, such as another type of liquid, flags, stakes, etc., may be used in other implementations.

The marking tool 1000 may include a housing 1100 with an elongated center housing portion 1200, a top housing portion 1300 and a bottom housing portion 1400. The housing 1100 may be formed of any at least semi-rigid material, and may be formed of a lightweight material such as aluminum or plastic.

A paint canister holder 1410 may be attached to the bottom housing portion 1400. The paint canister holder 1410 may include an open-ended tubular structure that is attached to the bottom housing portion 1400 by any suitable attachment mechanisms, such as rivets, adhesive, mechanical fasteners or the like. The paint canister holder 1410 may be formed of any material such as injection-molded plastic, formed sheet metal or any

other appropriate material that may be fabricated into an open tubular configuration or any other configuration that will serve to support a paint canister 1420 with the paint canister axis substantially parallel to the housing 1100.

The housing 1100 may optionally include a tag (e.g., radio frequency identification (RFID)) reader 1500 that may read tags (e.g., RFID tags). The tag reader 1500 may include an antenna (not shown) that emits radio waves and the tag may respond by sending back its data. A tag 1510 can be attached to the paint canister 1420 and can incorporate data, readable by the tag reader 1500, that corresponds to characteristics of the paint (e.g., paint color). Other examples of marker characteristics may include, but are not limited to, 10 the type of marker. The data read by the tag reader 1500 can then be sent to a processor 1340 for a determination of the corresponding characteristic. The corresponding characteristic can then be displayed by a display 1330, logged, and/or sent to an external device or system for processing. The tag reader 1500 may be mounted anywhere on the housing or on the paint canister 1410. However, the tag reader 1500 does not have to be 15 mounted anywhere on the marker tool itself. For example, the tag reader 1500 may be carried by a user. In general, the tag reader 1500 may be mounted or located at any location, as long as it can receive data transmitted from the tag 1510.

An actuation mechanism 1425 may be attached to the bottom housing portion 1400 at a location from which it can actuate the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420. The 20 actuation mechanism 1425 may include a rigid material that depresses the nozzle 1427 when actuated. However, any mechanism may be used to actuate the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420.

A handle 1310 may be provided at the top housing portion 1300. The handle 1310 may be formed of injection-molded plastic or any other appropriate material, and may be 25 attached to the top housing portion 1300 by rivets, adhesive, or any other suitable means. A mechanical trigger 1320 may be provided on the top housing portion 1300. The mechanical trigger 1320 may be located on the handle 1310 and attached using any suitable means.

The display 1330 may be provided on the top housing portion 1300. The display 30 1330 may include a touch-screen display for displaying information to a user, as well as acting as an input device. The processor 1340 and a local memory 1345 are located in the housing 1100. In one implementation, the processor 1340 and local memory 1345 may be

located in the top housing portion 1300 so as to be in close proximity to the display 1330 and mechanical trigger 1320. In another implementation, the processor 1340 and local memory 1345 may be located elsewhere within the housing 1100.

The timer 1347 may be provided on the top housing portion 1300. Alternatively, 5 the timer 1347 may be located elsewhere within housing 1100. The timer 1347 may output time data to the processor 1340.

A wireless communication antenna 1350 may be located on the housing 1100, and used to transmit data, such as location and/or time data logs stored in local memory 1345, to an external device/system and/or to receive information from an external device/system.

10 A location tracking system receiver 1430 for receiving location tracking signals (e.g., GPS signals) may be mounted inside the housing 1100. In the embodiment of Figure 2, the location tracking system receiver 1430 may be located at the bottom housing portion 1400. In another embodiment, the location tracking system receiver 1430 may be located elsewhere within or on the housing 1100 at a location that optimizes signal reception.

15 However, the location tracking system receiver 1430 does not have to be mounted anywhere on the marker tool itself. For example, the location tracking system receiver 1430 may be carried by a user. In general, the location tracking system receiver 1430 may be mounted or located at any location, as long as it can receive the location tracking signals.

20 The tool 1000 may also optionally include one or more input/output ports 1360, such as USB, SCSI, Firewire, Ethernet and/or other ports, for interfacing with other equipment and/or computers.

25 In operation, a user may operate the paint marking tool 1000 while standing or walking in an upright manner. A user may control the operation of the tool 1000 via display 1330, mechanical trigger 1320, and/or a wireless interface that may be provided via wireless communication antenna 1350 and/or input/output ports 1360.

30 The various operational controls and status indicators of the tool 1000 are displayed on display 1330, and the user can also navigate the controls by touching particular areas of the display 1330. Although a touch-screen display is one form of the display 1330, any other type of display or interface may be used such as, for example, a display for displaying information and a keypad for entering information. The user may

use the display 1330 to substantially simultaneously trigger the logging of the location and/or time data, and the dispensing of paint.

The mechanical trigger 1320 may trigger the logging of the location data (e.g., GPS coordinate) and/or the time data, and the dispensing of paint. In one implementation, 5 the tool 1000 may log the location and/or time data only when paint is being dispensed. This may be accomplished by utilizing a mechanical trigger 1320 that, when actuated by the user, substantially simultaneously triggers both the actuation mechanism 1425 for the paint canister 1420 and the logging of the location and/or time data by the processor 1340. The processor 1340 may receive the location data from the location tracking system 10 receiver 1430, the time data from the timer 1347, and store the location and/or time data in local memory 1345.

The mechanical trigger 1320 can trigger the actuation mechanism 1425 via a mechanical connection between the trigger 1320 and the actuation mechanism 1425. For example, the actuation mechanism 1425 can be a rigid material that is connected to the 15 mechanical trigger 1320 via a mechanical linkage (not shown), in which case depressing the mechanical trigger 1320 may cause the actuation mechanism to apply pressure to the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420. However, the mechanical trigger 1320 may also, or alternatively, trigger the actuation mechanism 1425 via an electronic connection. The electronic connection may be a hardwired connection or a wireless connection. If the 20 connection between the mechanical trigger 1320 and the actuation mechanism 1425 is an electronic connection, the actuation mechanism 1425 may include a mechanism for generating the force necessary to depress the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420.

The wireless interface may be capable of capturing signals that reflect a user's intent. For example, the wireless interface may include a microphone that can capture a 25 user's intent by capturing the user's audible commands. Alternatively, the wireless interface may interact with a device that monitors a condition of the user, such as eye movement, brain activity, or heart rate. In either event, the wireless interface may generate signals that may be sent to the processor 1340 for processing. The processor 1340 may use the signals to substantially simultaneously trigger the logging of the location and/or time data, and the dispensing of paint. 30

Figure 3 is a diagram of one embodiment of a triggering system 2000 used in the marking tool 1000 of Figure 2. As shown in Figure 3, the triggering system 2000 may

include the mechanical trigger 1320, a wireless trigger 1322, and/or a touch screen display 1330, the mechanical actuation device 1425, and a signal generator 1325.

In operation, a user may substantially simultaneously trigger the logging of location and/or time data and the dispensing of paint by actuating the mechanical trigger 5 1320. The logging of location and/or time data and the dispensing of paint may also, or alternatively, be triggered by a trigger signal from wireless trigger 1322 or by choosing a command that is displayed on the touch screen display 1330. It should be appreciated that triggering system 2000 may include a mechanical trigger 1320, a trigger signal from wireless trigger 1322, a trigger command on a touch screen display 1330 or a combination 10 of a mechanical trigger 1320, a trigger signal from wireless trigger 1322, and/or a trigger command on a touch screen display 1330 for initiating the logging of location and/or time data and the dispensing of paint.

When a user actuates the mechanical trigger 1320, the mechanical actuation device 1425 and the signal generator 1325 are both activated. The mechanical actuation device 15 1420 actuates the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420, thus dispensing paint out of the paint canister 1420. The signal generator 1325, when activated, sends a start log signal to the processor 1340 for triggering the logging of location and/or time data. For example, the start log signal may instruct the processor 1340 to read, or otherwise obtain, location data from location tracking system 800 (Figure 1) or the location tracking system receiver 20 1430 (Figure 2), and store the location data in local memory 400 (Figure 1) or 1345 (Figure 2). In addition, or alternatively, the start log signal may instruct the processor 1340 to read, or otherwise obtain, time data from timing system 900 (Figure 1) or the timer 1347 (Figure 2), and store the time data in local memory 400 (Figure 1) or 1345 (Figure 2).

25 The mechanical trigger 1320 can activate the mechanical actuation device 1420 via a mechanical connection, e.g., a mechanical linkage, between the mechanical trigger 1320 and the mechanical actuation device 1425. Alternatively, the mechanical trigger 1320 can activate the mechanical actuation device 1420 via a wired or wireless electronic connection between the mechanical trigger 1320 and the mechanical actuation device 30 1425.

If a trigger signal from wireless trigger 1322 is used by the user to initiate location and/or time data logging and paint dispersal, the wireless trigger 1322 may send a signal to

both the mechanical actuation device 1425 and the processor 1340. The signal sent to the mechanical actuation device 1425 by the wireless trigger 1322 may result in the actuation of the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420 by the mechanical actuation device 1425.

The signal sent to the processor 1340 by the wireless trigger 1322 may trigger the logging of the location and/or time data. The signals sent by the wireless trigger 1322 to the mechanical actuation device 1425 and the processor 1340 may be sent via a wired or wireless connection.

If a command on the touch screen display 1330 is used by the user to initiate location and/or time data logging and paint dispersal, the touch screen 1330 sends a signal to both the mechanical actuation device 1425 and the processor 1340. The signal sent to the mechanical actuation device 1425 by the touch screen display 1330 may result in the actuation of the nozzle 1427 of the paint canister 1420 by the mechanical actuation device 1425. The signal sent to the processor 1340 by the touch screen display 1330 may trigger the logging of the location and/or time data. The signals sent by the touch screen display 1330 to the mechanical actuation device 1425 and the processor 1340 may be sent via a wired or wireless connection.

The logged location and/or time data may be used by an external device and/or system to track the dispensing of markers with a high degree of accuracy. The logged location and/or time data may be useful when disputes arise regarding whether the dispensed markers were placed in the correct location. Also, the logged data may be used to visually depict (e.g., in real time as the dispensing occurs) or reconstruct (e.g., at a later time after the dispensing is complete) the dispensing of the markers on an electronic representation of the area that is currently being marked or was previously marked.

The processors 500 and 1340 can be general purpose computers. Alternatively, they can also be special purpose computers, programmed microprocessors or microcontrollers and peripheral integrated circuit elements, ASICs or other integrated circuits, hardwired electronic or logic circuits such as discrete element circuits, programmable logic devices such as FPGA, PLD, PLA or PAL or the like. In general, any device capable of executing code can be used to implement processors 500 and 1340. Local memories 400 and 1345 can be implemented with any type of electronic memory and/or storage device using any type of media, such as magnetic, optical or other media.

The foregoing description is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the description to the precise form disclosed. Modifications and variations are possible in light of the above disclosure or may be acquired from practice of the invention.

It will be apparent that aspects, as described above, may be implemented in many
5 different forms of software, firmware, and hardware in the implementations illustrated in the figures. The actual software code or specialized control hardware used to implement these aspects is not limiting of the description provided herein. Thus, the operation and behavior of the aspects were described without reference to the specific software code--it being understood that software and control hardware can be designed to implement the
10 aspects based on the description herein.

The term "substantially simultaneously," as used herein, is intended to mean simultaneously or approximately simultaneously.

No element, act, or instruction used in the present application should be construed as critical or essential to the invention unless explicitly described as such. Also, as used
15 herein, the article "a" is intended to include one or more items. Where only one item is intended, the term "one" or similar language is used. Further, the phrase "based on" is intended to mean "based, at least in part, on" unless explicitly stated otherwise.

CLAIMS:

1. A marking apparatus, comprising:
 - a marking dispenser to dispense at least one marker in a dig area to be excavated or disturbed during excavation activities, the at least one marker to mark ground, pavement or other surface in the dig area so as to provide a visual indication of a presence or an absence of at least one underground utility in the dig area;
 - a triggering system communicatively coupled to the marking dispenser to trigger the marking dispenser so as to dispense the at least one marker; and
 - a communication system communicatively coupled to the triggering system and including a wireless interface to transmit at least one signal from the marking apparatus relating to use of the marking apparatus,
wherein the at least one signal transmitted by the wireless interface represents first data relating to at least one of:
 - a location of the marking apparatus upon at least one actuation of the triggering system; and
 - at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed from the marking dispenser.
2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first data relates to both the location of the marking apparatus upon the at least one actuation of the triggering system and the at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed from the marking dispenser.
3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first data further relates to a time of the at least one actuation of the triggering system.
4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first data relates to the location of the marking apparatus upon the at least one actuation of the triggering system, the at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed from the marking dispenser, and a time of the at least one actuation of the triggering system.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the wireless interface is configured to transmit the at least one signal to at least one external device located remote from the apparatus.
6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the wireless interface includes a Bluetooth interface.
7. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the wireless interface includes a radio frequency interface.
8. A system, comprising:
the apparatus of claim 5; and
the at least one external device located remote from the apparatus and communicatively coupled to the communication system of the apparatus, wherein the at least one external device comprises a processor to receive and process the at least one signal representing the first data so as to display a dispensing of the at least one marker on an electronic representation of an area that is marked and includes the location of the at least one underground utility.
9. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a location tracking system communicatively coupled to the communication system, to provide at least some of the first data relating to the location of the marking apparatus upon the at least one actuation of the triggering system, wherein the location tracking system includes a global positioning system (GPS) or a global navigation satellite system (GNSS) receiver.
10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the at least one marker includes paint or a flag, and wherein the at least one characteristic of the at least one marker includes a color or a type of the paint or the flag.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising at least one processor communicatively coupled to the communication system, to log location or time data upon the at least one actuation of the triggering system, wherein the at least one signal transmitted by the wireless interface relates to the logged location or time data.

12. A marking apparatus, comprising:

a marking dispenser to dispense at least one marker in a dig area to be excavated or disturbed during excavation activities, the at least one marker to mark ground, pavement or other surface in the dig area so as to provide a visual indication of a presence or an absence of at least one underground utility in the dig area;

a triggering system communicatively coupled to the marking dispenser to trigger the marking dispenser so as to dispense the at least one marker;

a location tracking system to provide location data relating to a location of the marking apparatus upon at least one actuation of the triggering system; and

a communication system communicatively coupled to the triggering system and the location tracking system, the communication system including a wireless interface to transmit at least one signal from the marking apparatus relating to use of the marking apparatus,

wherein the at least one signal transmitted by the wireless interface represents:

the location data relating to the location of the marking apparatus upon the at least one actuation of the triggering system; and

at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed from the marking dispenser.

13. A marking method, comprising:

A) dispensing at least one marker on ground, pavement or other surface in a dig area to be excavated or disturbed during excavation activities so as to provide a visual indication of a presence or an absence of at least one underground utility in the dig area; and

B) wirelessly transmitting at least one signal, in response to A), wherein the at least one signal represents first data relating to at least one of:

a location at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A); and

at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed in A).

14. The method of claim 13, wherein in B), the first data relates to both the location at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A), and the at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed in A).

15. The method of claim 13, wherein in B), the first data further relates to a time at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A).

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the first data relates to the location at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A), the at least one characteristic of the at least one marker dispensed in A), and a time at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A).

17. The method of claim 13, wherein B) comprises:

transmitting the at least one signal to at least one external device located remote from the location at which the at least one marker is dispensed in A).

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the at least one signal transmitted in B) is a radio frequency signal.

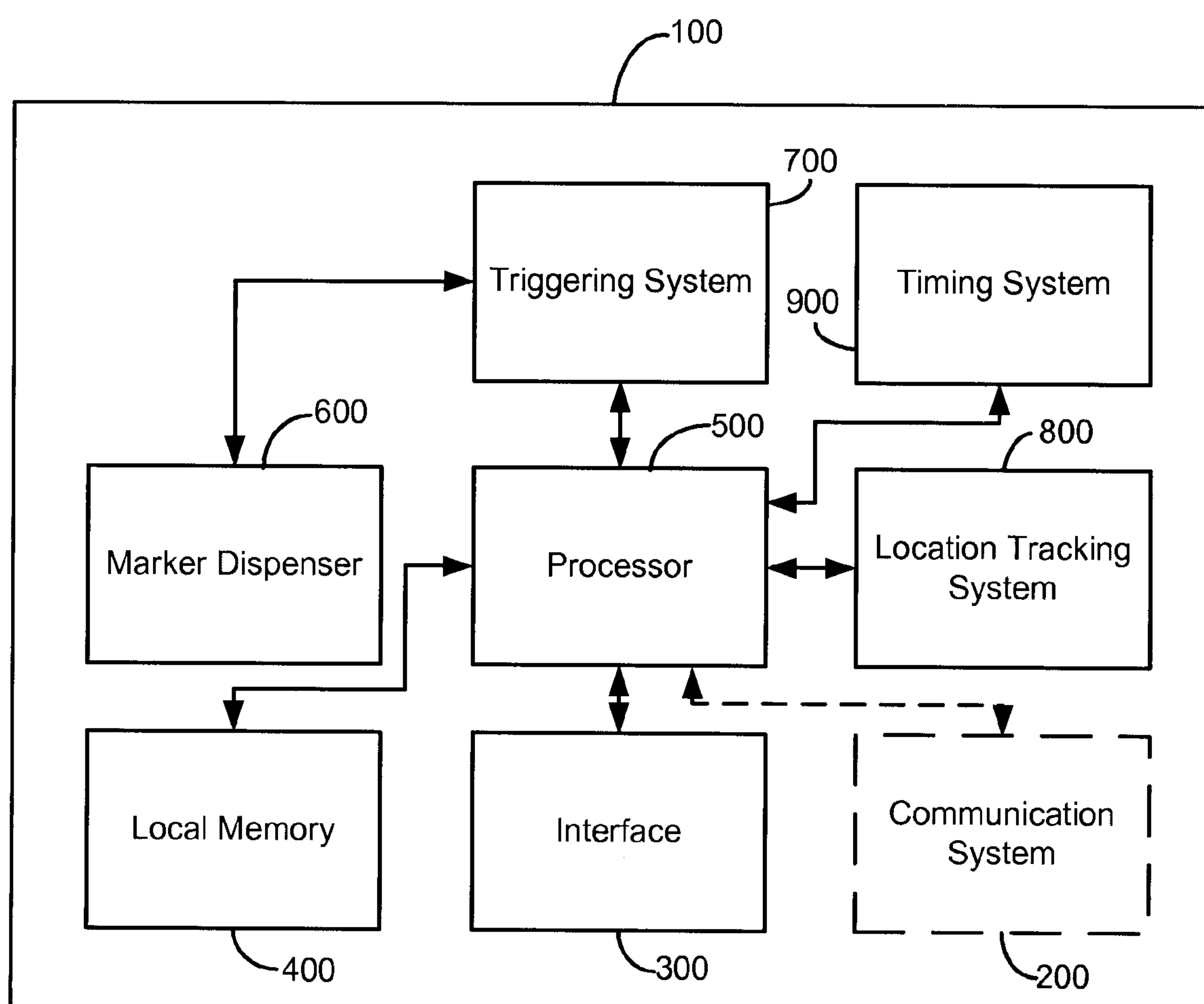
19. The method of claim 17, further comprising:

C) receiving and processing, at the at least one external device, the at least one signal representing the first data so as to display a dispensing of the at least one marker on an electronic representation of an area that is marked and includes the location of the at least one underground utility.

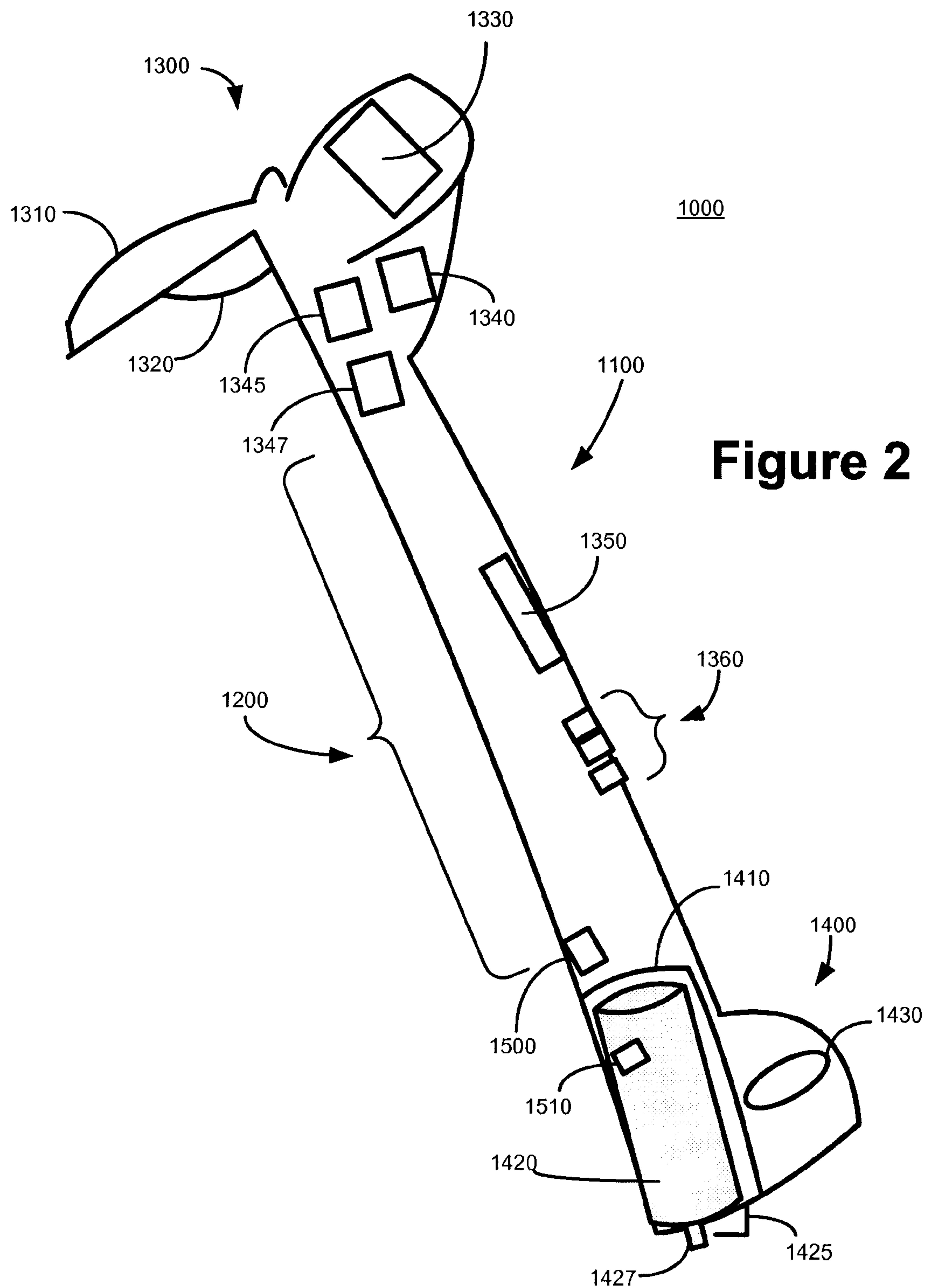
20. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

logging location and/or time data in response to A), wherein the at least one signal transmitted in B) relates to the logged location or time data.

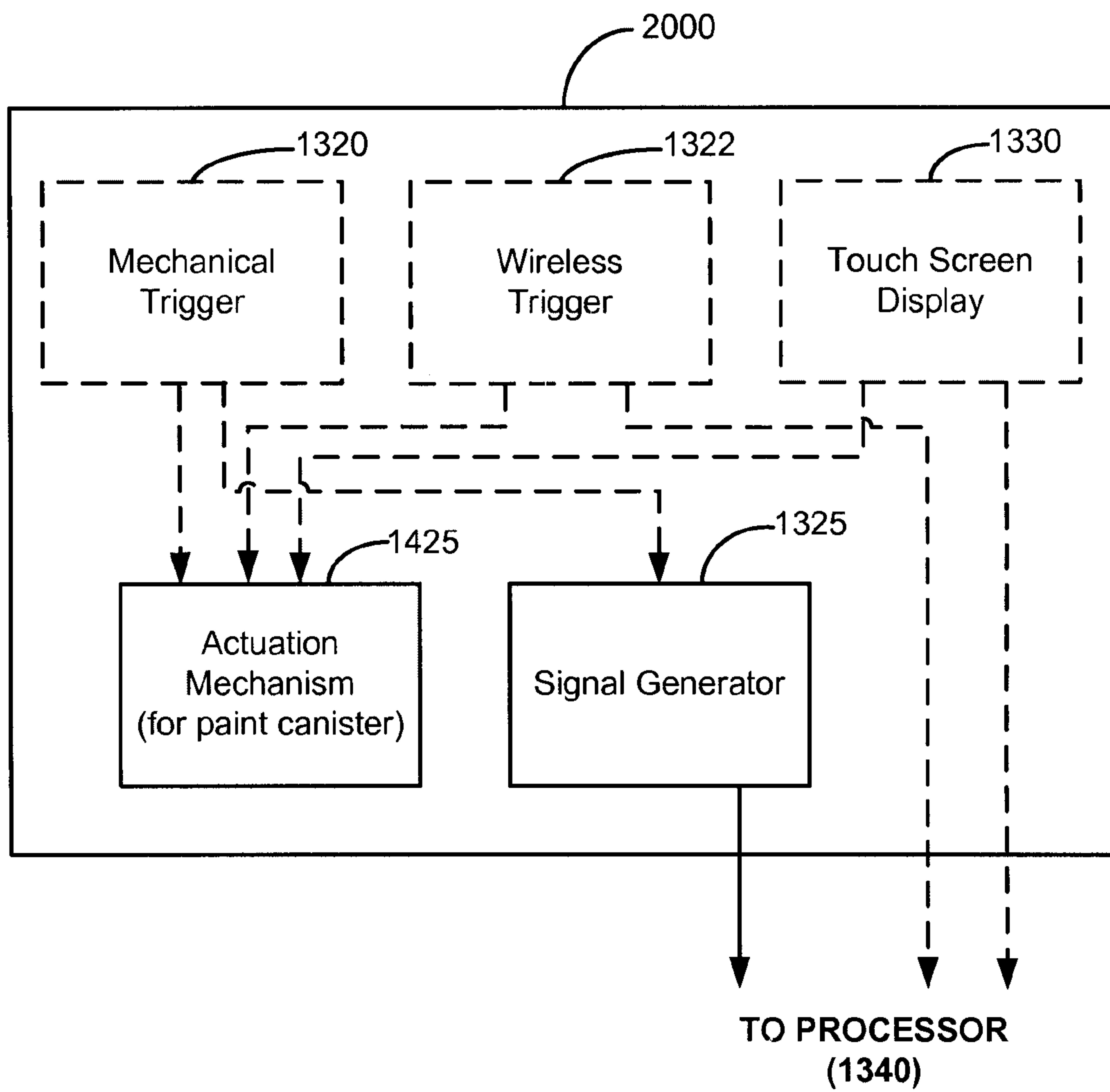
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**Figure 1**

2/3



3/3

**Figure 3**

