

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
7 August 2008 (07.08.2008)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2008/095187 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:
G01F 11/00 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US2008/052854

(22) International Filing Date: 1 February 2008 (01.02.2008)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:

11/670,380 1 February 2007 (01.02.2007) US

11/839,426 15 August 2007 (15.08.2007) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM,

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: ELECTRIC SOAP DISPENSER

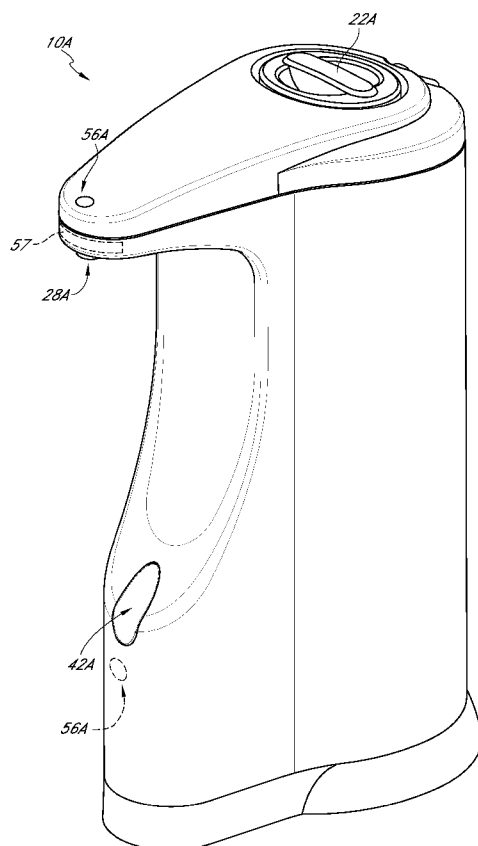


FIG. 2

(57) Abstract: An electric soap dispenser that includes sensors for detecting the presence of an object. The dispenser can be configured to dispense an amount of liquid soap, for example, upon detecting the presence of an object. The dispenser can include various features for enhancing the performance thereof. For example, the dispenser can include an additional button for manual operation of the pump. Additionally, the dispenser can detect the voltage of a power supply and compensate for a drop in voltage of the power supply so as to produce more uniform dispensations of the liquid product.



ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM),
European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI,
FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MT, NL,
NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG,
CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

- *with international search report*
- *before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments*

ELECTRIC SOAP DISPENSER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTIONS

Field of the Inventions

[0001] The present inventions relate to soap dispensers, and more particularly, electric soap dispensers.

Description of the Related Art

[0002] Users of modern public washroom facilities increasingly desire that each of the fixtures in the washroom operate automatically without being touched by the user's hand. This is important in view of increased user awareness of the degree to which germs and bacteria may be transmitted from one person to another in a public washroom environment. Today, it is not uncommon to find public washrooms with automatic, hands-free operated toilet and urinal units, hand washing faucets, soap dispensers, hand dryers, and door opening mechanisms. This automation allows the user to avoid touching any of the fixtures in the facility, and therefore lessens the opportunity for the transmission of disease-carrying germs or bacteria resulting from manual contact with the fixtures in the washroom.

[0003] It is desirable that, with regard to automatic soap dispensers, that such a soap dispenser delivers uniform measure doses of fluid soap to users upon each actuation of the device. Several automatically operated washroom fluid soap dispensers have been proposed in patents such as, for example, U.S. Patent No. 6,929,150 (Muderlak, et al.), U.S. Patent No. 4,967,935 (Celest), U.S. Patent No. 4,938,384 (Pilolla), as well as others.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTIONS

[0004] An aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that in certain environments of use, such as residential use, the user of an electric soap dispenser may wish to discharge a more continuous stream of soap than that normally dispensed by an electric soap dispenser. For example, if an owner or user of such a dispenser wishes to create a sink full of soapy water for washing dishes or to discharge a significant amount of soap to clean counters or other surfaces or devices, it would be more convenient for the user if they could operate the soap dispenser in a mode in which more than a single small amount of soap is discharged.

[0005] Thus, in accordance with at least one embodiment, an electric soap dispenser can comprise a housing, a power supply supported by the housing, and a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing. A pump can be disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir, and an electric motor can be supported by the housing and can drive the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply. A soap discharge nozzle can be connected to the pump with a soap conduit and disposed in an upper portion of the housing. A trigger sensor can be configured to detect the presence of an object. An electronic control unit can be connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit can also be configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor. A button can also be disposed on an upper portion of the housing, the button being connected to the electronic control unit. The electronic control unit can be further configured to actuate the electric motor when the button is activated.

[0006] In accordance with at least another embodiment, an electric soap dispenser can comprise a housing, a power supply supported by the housing, and a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing. A pump can be disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir. An electric motor can be supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply. A soap discharge nozzle can also be connected to the pump with a soap conduit and disposed in an upper portion of the housing. A trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object. An electronic control unit can also be connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit being configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor. Additionally, the dispenser can include means for allowing a user to operate the pump without activating the trigger sensor.

[0007] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that electric soap dispensers occasionally need to be primed because typically, liquid type pumps normally must be filled with liquid before the pump can actually pump liquid. Thus, if the pump dries out and contains only air, the pump does not operate until the pump has been pumped. Certain previous designs for electric soap dispensers have

included additional features for priming the pump, such as those described in U.S. Patent No. 6,929,150 (Muderlak et al.).

[0008] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that with the recent increased availability of high speed switching and other devices that have the ability to switch between on and off states at a high speed, further power savings can be achieved by using sensors which are operated only briefly yet at a sufficiently high frequency so as to avoid any unacceptably long delays perceptible by the operator.

[0009] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that the useful life of a battery for a battery powered dispenser can be extended by modulating the power draw from the battery over time. For example, known battery powered devices often draw power from the battery in the same manner for each actuation over the entire life of the battery. Thus, as the battery power drains, the device operates more slowly, for example. However, by changing the manner in which power is drawn from the batteries as the power from the battery drains over time, the associated device can provide consistent performance over a greater period of time, even as the battery power drains. For example, initially, when the battery is fully charged, less than the full power of the battery is applied or is drawn for operating the pump. Then, over time, as the battery power drops, greater effective loads are put on the battery to compensate for its reduced charge. As a result, the operation of the pump is more uniform over a longer period of time. Additionally, the full charge of the battery is used more effectively.

[0010] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that in some environments, such as the residential or retail use, it is desirable to be able to adjust the amount of soap discharged each discharge cycle. For example, owners of such soap dispensers who have small children might prefer to adjust the soap dispenser to issue the smallest amount of soap possible each cycle. In this way, it is less likely that a child who plays with the soap dispenser will cause the soap dispenser to run out of soap too frequently. On the other hand, some users, for example, users with larger hands may wish to have to more soap dispensed each cycle so that they have an adequate amount of soap to wash their hands from a single discharge of soap.

[0011] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that dripping, which is a problem for many manual and automatic soap dispensers, can be prevented where the dispenser uses a reversible pump. For example, such a soap dispenser using a reversal pump can reverse the actuation of a pump at the end of each dispensing cycle, so as to draw the soap in a reverse direction through the soap discharge nozzle and/or conduit attached to it, to thereby reduce or eliminate dripping.

[0012] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that the power consumption of the device can be lowered by adjusting or manipulating the actuation of a sensor used to trigger dispensation. For example, some modern sensors can be activated at high frequencies, due to the availability of newer, lower power sensors that are capable of switching between on and off states at a very high frequency. Thus, using such a sensor, the associated control electronics can be configured to activate the sensors at an activation period or frequency, and can also be configured to further specify a very brief activation duration. By making the activation duration significantly less than the activation period or frequency, the total amount of time that the sensor is activated can be quite low, while the sensor is activated sufficiently often that a user does not perceive an unacceptable delay in response from the device. For example, some kinds of sensors can be activated at a frequency of about four times per second. Additionally, these sensors can be activated for a duration of about 50 microseconds. Thus, as such, the sensor is off much of the time. However, it is activated four times per second, or in other words, once every quarter of a second. As such, a user would experience only a one quarter of a second maximum delay from between the time of moving a part of their body into a position to trigger the sensor and the sensor detecting the presence of that portion of their body.

[0013] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that although automatic soap dispensers that include an indicator triggered off of a timer for reminding users how long they should wash their hands for, would prefer to occasionally deactivate this indicator. For example, such an automatic soap dispenser can include a user input device configured to allow a user to cancel an indicator that is designed to emit a tone at a predetermined amount of time after soap has been dispensed.

[0014] A further aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that significant savings can be achieved by using a single piece or member as both a gasket and a support leg or foot for a device. For example, in the context of a soap dispenser, a pliable or resilient member can be disposed around at least one opening disposed in the bottom of the dispenser. A cover can be used to cover the opening into the cavity and the gasket can be used to provide a seal around the opening between the cover and the mouth of the opening. Additionally, the gasket can be shaped to extend downwardly from the other adjacent portions of the housing so as to form a support foot or leg for the device. As such, the single member forming the gasket and the foot can be made from one piece and thereby reduce the cost of the overall device. A further advantage is achieved where the lower surface of the gasket extends substantially uniformly around the entire opening. As such, the gasket can help form a wall or a seal around the entire periphery of the footprint of the device and therefore prevent water, soap scum, or other liquids or materials from collecting under the device, thereby keeping the portion of a support surface directly under the device cleaner.

[0015] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that an automatic soap dispenser can, particularly in the retail environment, be left inoperable for a significant amount of time, for example, when the owner goes on vacation. As such, the liquid soap in the device, and in particular in the discharge nozzle, can dry out and form a clog. Further, additional advantages can be provided by configuring the soap dispenser device to operate in a clog clearing mode in which a soap pump is operated in forward and reverse modes cyclically which can clear a clog. Additionally, an owner or operator can optionally hold a cup of hot water or other liquid at the discharge nozzle so that this hot liquid can be drawn into and pushed out of the discharge nozzle repeatedly, thereby helping to unclog the nozzle.

[0016] Another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that some problems associated with motion sensors that detect movement of a user's hand can be avoided by incorporating a light read module configured to read and store values corresponding to ambient light. For example, but without limitation, the sensor can be of the type that emits a predetermined frequency of light during operation.

The light read module can be activated to read ambient light values when there is no object near the sensor and to store the detected light values as a calibration value. As such, those stored calibration values can be used to prevent the sensor from activating the associated device. Thus, when a user's hand (or other object) moves in front of the sensor, and reflects back the infrared light at the same frequency it was being emitted, for a predetermined period of time, a light read module within the soap dispenser's controller can be activated. The stored calibration values can be compared with the detected light reflections to determine if the detected reflections are more intense than the stored calibration values. Thus, the sensor is less susceptible to false detections caused by other light reflecting sources in the room, including but not limited to lamps and interior lighting.

Thus, in accordance with at least one embodiment disclosed herein, a soap dispenser can comprise a housing, a power supply supported by the housing, a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, a pump disposed in the housing, an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit, a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, and an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle, and wherein the electronic control unit further comprises a light read module configured to read and stores values corresponding to ambient light.

[0017] Yet another aspect of at least one of the embodiments disclosed herein includes the realization that the voltage difference across a battery or other power source may change over time due to accumulation of charge at one or both ends. In order to accommodate for this change, and ensure motor speeds and soap dispersion times which are substantially similar each time the soap dispenser is used, a soap dispenser can include a module which applies a load across the battery, then senses the voltage across the battery and creates a scaled motor drive time value prior to each use.

[0018] Thus, in accordance with at least one embodiment disclosed herein, an enclosed receptacle can comprise a housing, a power supply supported by the housing, a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, a pump disposed in the housing, an electric motor

supported by the housing and driving the pump, a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit, a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, and an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor. The electronic control unit can be configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle, and can further comprise a power supply sense module configured to apply a load to the power supply and to sense a power supply voltage and create a scaled motor drive time value based on the sensed power supply voltage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] These and other features, aspects and advantages of the inventions disclosed herein are described below with reference to the drawings of preferred embodiments, which are intended to illustrate and not to limit the inventions. The drawings comprise the following figures:

[0020] Figure 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating an automatic liquid soap dispenser in accordance with an embodiment;

[0021] Figure 2 is a front, top, and left side perspective view of a modification of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 1;

[0022] Figure 3 is a left side elevational view of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2;

[0023] Figure 4 is a top plan view of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2;

[0024] Figure 5 is a rear elevational view of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2;

[0025] Figure 6 is a front, bottom, and right side exploded perspective view of the liquid soap dispenser in Figure 2, showing a pump and motor cavity cover member, a battery compartment cover member, and a gasket separated from the main housing thereof;

[0026] Figure 7 is a sectional view of a liquid soap reservoir of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2, illustrating a portion of the reservoir, a pump body, a pump cover, and a portion of a drive sheave for the pump illustrated in sections;

[0027] Figure 8 is another sectional view of the pump, cover, and pulley illustrated in Figure 7;

[0028] Figure 9 is a front, left, and bottom perspective view of the reservoir of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2 and having the pump member exploded and separated from the bottom;

[0029] Figure 10 is a schematic flow chart of a control routine that can be used with the automatic liquid soap dispensers of Figures 1-9;

[0030] Figure 11 is a flow chart of another control routine that can be used with the liquid soap dispensers of Figures 1-9;

[0031] Figure 12 is a flow chart of another control routine that can be used with the liquid soap dispensers of Figures 1-9.

[0032] Figure 13 is a schematic diagram illustrating an automatic liquid soap dispenser in accordance with another embodiment.

[0033] Figure 14 is a front, top, and left side perspective view of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 13.

[0034] Figure 15 is a left side perspective view of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 13.

[0035] Figure 16 is a top plan view of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 13.

[0036] Figure 17 is a back side perspective view of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 13.

[0037] Figure 18 is a front, bottom, and right side perspective view of the automatic liquid soap dispenser of Figure 13.

[0038] Figure 19 is a front, right, and top perspective view of the reservoir of the liquid soap dispenser of Figure 2 and having the pump member exploded and separated from the dispenser.

[0039] Figure 20 is a schematic flow chart of a control routine that can be used with the automatic liquid soap dispensers of Figures 13-19.

[0040] Figure 21 is a flow chart of another control routine that can be used with the liquid soap dispensers of Figures 13-19.

[0041] Figure 22 is a flow chart of another control routine that can be used with the liquid soap dispensers of Figures 13-19.

[0042] Figure 23 is a flow chart of another control routine that can be used with the liquid soap dispensers of Figures 13-19.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0043] Figure 1 schematically illustrates an embodiment of an electric liquid soap dispenser 10 that can include various features and embodiments of the inventions disclosed herein. The present inventions are disclosed in the context of a liquid soap dispenser 10 because they have particular utility in this context. However, many of the inventions disclosed herein can be used in many other diverse contexts and environments of use. For example, many or all of the inventions disclosed herein can be used in other types of dispensers, battery-powered devices, or even any other electric device. For example, some of the inventions disclosed herein regarding sensor actuation can be used in any type of device that includes sensors that detect the presence of an object or other parameters or characteristics. Those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize, from the description set forth below, many of the other environments of use in which the present inventions can be used, although those environments are not described herein.

[0044] With continued reference to Figure 1, the liquid soap dispenser 10 includes a housing 12. The housing 12 can take any shape.

[0045] The dispenser 10 can include a liquid handling system 14. The liquid handling system can include a reservoir 16, a pump 18, and a discharge assembly 20.

[0046] The reservoir 16 can be any type of container. In the illustrated embodiment, the reservoir 16 is configured to contain a volume of liquid soap, such as liquid soap for hand washing. In some embodiments, the reservoir 16 can include a lid 22 configured to form a seal at the top of the reservoir for maintaining the liquid soap L within the reservoir 16. Additionally, in some embodiments, the lid 22 can include an air vent (not shown), so as to allow air to enter the reservoir 16 as the level of liquid soap L falls within the reservoir 16.

[0047] The reservoir 16 can also include an outlet 24 disposed at a lower end of the reservoir 16. The reservoir 16 can be connected to the pump 18 through the opening 24.

[0048] In some embodiments, the pump 18 can be disposed directly below the outlet 24 of the reservoir 16. As such, the pump 18, depending on the type of pump used, can

be automatically primed due to the force of gravity drawing liquid soap L into the pump 18 through the opening 24.

[0049] The pump 18 can be connected to the discharge system 20 with a conduit 26. Any type or diameter of conduit can be used.

[0050] The discharge assembly 20 can include a discharge nozzle 28. Any type of discharge nozzle can be used. For example, the size of the discharge nozzle 26 can be determined to provide the appropriate flow rate and/or resistance against flow of liquid soap L from the pump 18.

[0051] In some embodiments, the nozzle 28 can be disposed at a location spaced from the lower portion of the housing 12 so as to make it more convenient for a user to place their hand or other body part under the nozzle 28.

[0052] The dispenser 10 can also include a pump actuation system 30. In some embodiments, the pump actuation system can include a sensor device 32 and an actuator 34.

[0053] In some embodiments, the sensor device 32 can include a “trip light” or “interrupt” type sensor. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, the sensor 32 can include a light emitting portion 40 and a light receiving portion 42. As such, a beam of light 44 can be emitted from the light emitting portion 40 and received by the light receiving portion 42.

[0054] The sensor 32 can be configured to emit a trigger signal when the light beam 44 is blocked. For example, if the sensor 32 is activated, and the light emitting portion 40 is activated, but the light receiving portion 42 does not receive the light emitted from the light emitting portion 40, then the sensor 32 can emit a trigger signal. This trigger signal can be used for controlling operation of the motor or actuator 34, described in greater detail below. This type of sensor can provide further advantages.

[0055] For example, because the sensor 32 is merely an interrupt-type sensor, it is only triggered when a body is disposed in the path of the beam of light 44. Thus, the sensor 32 is not triggered by movement of a body in the vicinity of the beam 44. Rather, the sensor 32 is triggered only if the light beam 44 is interrupted. To provide further prevention of unintentional triggering of the sensor 32, the sensor 32, including the light emitting portion 40 and the light receiving portion 42, can be recessed in the housing 12.

[0056] In addition to these advantages, other advantages can also be provided. For example, the sensor 32 only requires enough power to generate a low power beam of light 44, which may or may not be visible to the human eye, and to power the light receiving portion 42. These types of sensors require far less power than infrared or motion-type sensors. Additionally, the sensor 32 can be operated in a pulsating mode. For example, the light emitting portion 40 can be powered on and off in a cycle such as, for example, but without limitation, for short bursts lasting for any desired period of time (e.g., .01 second, .1 second, 1 second) at any desired frequency (e.g., once per half second, once per second, once per ten seconds). These different time characteristics can be referred to as an activation period or frequency, which corresponds to the periodic activation of the sensor 32. Thus, an activation frequency of four times per second would be equivalent to an activation period of once per quarter second.

[0057] The other aspect of this characteristic can be referred to as an activation duration. Thus, if the sensor 32 is activated for 50 microseconds, 50 microseconds is the activation duration time period. As such, this type of cycling can greatly reduce the power demand for powering the sensor 32. In operation, such cycling does not produce unacceptable results because as long as the user maintains their body parts or other appendage or device in the path of the light beam 44 long enough for a detection signal to be generated, the sensor 32 will be triggered.

[0058] The sensor 32 can be connected to a circuit board, an integrated circuit, or other device for triggering the actuator 34. In the illustrated embodiment, the sensor 32 is connected to an electronic control unit ("ECU"). However, other arrangements can also be used.

[0059] The ECU 46 can include one or a plurality of circuit boards providing a hard wired feedback control circuits, a processor and memory devices for storing and performing control routines, or any other type of controller. In an exemplary but non-limiting embodiment, the ECU 46 can include an H-bridge transistor/MOSFET hardware configuration which allows for bidirectional drive of an electric motor, and a microcontroller such as Model No. PIC16F685 commercially available from the Microchip Technology Inc., and/or other devices.

[0060] The actuator 34 can be any type of actuator. For example, but without limitation, the actuator 34 can be an AC or DC electric motor, stepper motor, server motor, solenoid, stepper solenoid, or any other type of actuator. Optionally, the actuator 34 can be connected to the pump 18 with a transmitter device 50. For example, the transmitter device 50 can include any type of gear train or any type of flexible transmitter assembly.

[0061] The dispenser 10 can also include a user input device 52. The user input device 52 can be any type of device allowing a user to input a command into the ECU 46. In a non-limiting embodiment, the input device 52 is in the form of a button configured to allow a user to depress the button so as to transmit a command to the ECU 46. For example, the ECU 46 can be configured to actuate the actuator 34 to drive the pump 18 any time the input device 52 is actuated by a user. The ECU 46 can also be configured to provide other functions upon the activation of the input device 52, described in greater detail below.

[0062] The dispenser 10 can also include a selector device 54. The selector device 54 can be in any type of configuration allowing the user to input a proportional command to the ECU 46. For example, the selector can have at least two positions, such as a first position and a second position. The position of the input device 54 can be used to control an aspect of the operation of the dispenser 10.

[0063] For example, but without limitation, the input device 54 can be used as a means for allowing a user to select different amounts of liquid soap L to be dispensed from the nozzle 28 during each dispensation cycle. As such, when the input device 54 is in a first position, the ECU 46 can operate the actuator 34 to drive the pump 18 to dispense a predetermined amount of liquid soap from the nozzle 28, each time the sensor 32 is triggered. When the input device 54 is in the second position, the ECU 46 can actuate the actuator 34 to dispense a larger amount of liquid soap L from the nozzle 28.

[0064] Optionally, in some embodiments, the input device 54 can provide a more continuous range of output values to the ECU 46, or a larger number of steps, corresponding to different volumes of liquid soap L to be dispensed each dispensation cycle performed by the ECU 46. Although the positions of the input device 54 may correspond to different volumes of liquid soap L, the ECU 46 can correlate the different positions of the input device 54 to different duty cycle characteristics or durations of operation of the actuator 34, thereby

at times discharging differing or slightly differing volumes of liquid soap L from the nozzle 28.

[0065] The dispenser 10 can also include an indicator device 56 configured to issue a visual, aural, or other type of indication to a user of the dispenser 10. For example, in some embodiments, the indicator 56 can include a light and/or an audible tone perceptible to the operator of the dispenser 10. In some embodiments, the ECU 46 can be configured to actuate the indicator 56 to emit a light and/or a tone after a predetermined time period has elapsed after the actuator 34 has been driven to dispense a predetermined amount of liquid soap L from the nozzle 28. As such, the indicator provides a reminder to a user of the dispenser 10 to continue to wash their hands until the indicator has been activated. As such, this predetermined time period can be about 20 seconds, although other amounts of time can also be used. Optionally, the indicator 56 can be used for other purposes as well.

[0066] Further advantages can be achieved where the indicator is activated for a predetermined time after the pump has completed a pumping cycle (described in greater detail below with reference to Figure 4. For example, but without limitation, the ECU 46 can be configured to activate the indicator 56 for 20 seconds after the pump 18 has been operated to discharge an amount of soap from the nozzle 28. As such, the indicator 56 will be activated at the appropriate time for advising the user as to how long they should wash their hands.

[0067] In some embodiments, the indicator 56 can be a Light Emitting Diode (LED) type light, and can be powered by the ECU 46 to blink throughout the predetermined time period. Thus, a user can use the length of time during which the indicator 546 blinks as an indication as to how long the user should continue to wash their hands with the soap disposed from the nozzle 28. Other types of indicators and predetermined time periods can also be used.

[0068] The dispenser 10 can also include a power supply 60. The power supply 60 can be a battery or can include electronics for accepting AC or DC power.

[0069] In operation, the ECU 46 can activate the sensor 32, continuously or periodically, to detect the presence of an object between the light emitting portion 40 and the light receiving portion 42 thereof. When an object blocks the light beam 44, the ECU 46

determines that a dispensing cycle should begin. The ECU 46 can then actuate the actuator 34 to drive the pump 18 to thereby dispense liquid soap L from the nozzle 28.

[0070] As noted above, in some embodiments, the ECU 46 can vary the amount of liquid soap L dispensed from the nozzle 28 for each dispensation cycle, depending on a position of the selector 54. Thus, for example, the dispenser 10 can be configured to discharge a first volume of liquid soap L from the nozzle 28 when the selector is in a first position, and to discharge a second different amount of liquid soap L when the selector 54 is in a second position.

[0071] Optionally, as noted above, the indicator 56 can be activated, by the ECU 46, after a predetermined amount of time has elapsed after each dispensation cycle. Further, the ECU 46 can be configured to cancel or prevent the indicator 56 from being activated if the button 52 has been actuated in accordance with a predetermined pattern. For example, but without limitation, the ECU 46 can be configured to cancel the activation of the indicator 56 if the button 52 has been pressed twice quickly. However, any pattern of operation of the button 52 can also be used as the command for canceling the indicator 56. Additionally, the dispenser 10 can include other input devices for allowing a user to cancel the indicator 56.

[0072] Optionally, the ECU 46 can be configured to continuously operate the actuator 34 or to activate the actuator 34 for a maximum predetermined time when the button 52 is depressed. As such, this allows an operator of the dispenser 10 to manually operate the dispenser to continuously discharge or discharge larger amounts of liquid soap L when desired. For example, if a user of the dispenser 10 wishes to fill a sink full of soapy water for washing dishes, the user can simply push the button 52 and dispense a larger amount of soap that would normally be used for washing one's hands. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0073] Figures 2 and 3 illustrate a modification of the dispenser 10, identified generally by the reference numeral 10A. Some of the components of the dispenser 10A can be the same, similar, or identical to the corresponding components of the dispenser 10 illustrated in Figure 1. These corresponding components are identified with the same reference numeral, except that an "A" has been added thereto.

[0074] As shown in Figures 1 and 3, the lower end 100 of the dispenser 10A is designed to support the housing 12A on a generally flat surface, such as those normally found on a countertop in a bathroom or a kitchen. In some embodiments, the nozzle 28 can be disposed in a manner such that the nozzle 28A extends outwardly from the periphery defined by the lower portion 100. As such, if a user misses soap dispensed from the nozzle 28A, and the soap L falls, it will not strike on any portion of the housing 12A. This helps prevent the dispenser 10A from becoming soiled from dripping soap L.

[0075] In some embodiments the indicator 56, which can be a visual indicator such as an LED light, can be positioned on the outer housing 12A, above the nozzle 28A. As such, the indicator 56A can be easily seen by an operator standing over the pump. Additionally, in some embodiments, the visual type indicator 56A can be disposed on a lower portion of the housing (illustrated in phantom line). However, the indicator 56A can also be positioned in other locations.

[0076] As shown in Figure 3, the reservoir 16A can be disposed within the housing 12A. The pump 18A can be disposed beneath the reservoir 16A such that the outlet 24A of the reservoir 16A feeds into the pump 18A. As such, as noted above, this helps the pump 18A to achieve a self-priming state due to the force of gravity drawing liquid soap L through the outlet 24A into the pump 18A.

[0077] In some embodiments, the reservoir 16A can include a recess 102. As such, the actuator 34A can be disposed somewhat nested with the reservoir 16A. This provides for a more compact arrangement and allows the reservoir 16A to be as large as possible.

[0078] In some embodiments, the housing 12A can define a pump and motor chamber 104 and a battery chamber 106. The pump 18A and actuator 34A can be disposed within the pump and motor chamber 104 and the power supply 60A can be disposed in the battery chamber 106. In some embodiments, the chambers 104, 106 can be defined by inner walls of the housing 12A and/or additional walls (not shown). However, other configurations can also be used.

[0079] With reference to Figures 4 and 5, the button 52A can be disposed anywhere on the housing 12A. In some embodiments, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, the

button 52A can be disposed on an upper portion 110 of the housing 12A. As such, the button 52A is positioned conveniently for actuation by a user of the dispenser 10A.

[0080] Further, in some embodiments, the button 52A can be disposed proximate to an outer periphery of the housing 12A, on the upper portion 110, and approximately centered along a rear surface of the housing 12A. As such, this provides a location in which a user can easily grasp the outer surface of the housing 12A with three fingers and their thumb, and actuate the button 52A with their index finger.

[0081] Optionally, the housing 12A can include surface textures 112 configured to allow a user to obtain enhanced grip on the housing 12A when attempting to lift the dispenser 10A and depress the button 52A. Such surface textures 112 can have any configuration. In some embodiments, the surface textures 112 are in the form of finger shaped recesses. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0082] With reference to Figure 6, as noted above, the dispensers 10, 10A can include a support member arrangement 120 that can achieve the dual functions of providing a support leg or foot for the associated dispenser and provide a sealing function for internal cavities disposed within the associated dispenser.

[0083] As noted above, the dispenser 10A can include internal cavities 106, 104 for containing the power supply 60A and the pump 18A and actuator 34A, respectively. Of course, as noted above, other interior compartments can also be used.

[0084] As shown in Figure 6, an interior wall 122 is disposed between the compartments 104, 106. However, this is merely optional.

[0085] The sealing arrangement 120 can include a gasket member 124 and lid members 126, 128. The gasket 124 can be configured to extend around an opening 130 of the compartment 106 and an opening 132 of the compartment 104. Thus, in some embodiments, the gasket member 124 can include a battery compartment portion 134 and a pump and motor compartment portion 136.

[0086] The battery compartment portion 134 is configured to extend around an interior periphery of the opening 130. However, this is just one configuration that can be used. The portion 134 can be configured to straddle a lower-most edge of the opening 130, or to extend around an outer periphery of the opening 130.

[0087] Similarly, the portion 136 is configured to extend along an inner periphery of the opening 132. In some embodiments, the portions 134, 136 are configured to rest against a shelf defined along the inner peripheries of the openings 130, 132. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0088] A center dividing portion 138 of the gasket 124 can be configured to form a seal along the lower-most edge of the wall 122. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0089] The lids 126, 128 are configured to rest against inner walls 140, 142 defined by the portions 134, 136, respectively. As such, the lid members 126, 128 form seals with the inner peripheral walls 140, 142, respectively. The seals help protect the components disposed within the compartments 106, 104.

[0090] Optionally, fasteners 140 can be used to secure the lid members 126, 128 to the housing 12A. For example, the lid members 126, 128 can include apertures 142 through which the fasteners 140 can extend. The fasteners 140 can engage mounting portions disposed within the housing 12A. As such, the lid members 126, 128 can be secured to the housing 12A and form a seal with the gasket member 124.

[0091] Optionally, at least one of the lid members can include an additional aperture 144 configured to allow access to a device disposed in one of the compartments 104, 106. In the illustrated embodiment, the aperture 144 is in the form of a slot. However, any type of aperture can be used.

[0092] The slot 144 can be configured to allow a portion of the selector 54 to extend therethrough. For example, the selector 54A is in the configuration of a slider member 150 slidably disposed in a housing 152. As such, for example, the selector 54 can be in the configuration of a rheostat or other type of input device that allows for a proportional signal.

[0093] For example, as noted above, the housing 152 can be configured to allow the member 150 to be slid between at least two positions. For example, the two positions can be a first position corresponding to a first amount of liquid soap L to be discharged by the nozzle 28A and a second position corresponding to a second larger volume of liquid soap L to be discharged by the nozzle 28A. Optionally, the housing 152 can be configured to allow

the member 150 to be slid between a plurality of steps or continuously along a defined path to provide continuously proportional signals or a plurality of steps.

[0094] In some embodiments, with the gasket member 124 and lid member 128 in place, the slider member 150 can be configured to extend through the slot 144 such that a user can conveniently move the slider member 150 with the lid 128 in place. In other embodiments, the slider member 150 can be smaller such that an object such as a pen can be inserted into the slot 144 to move the slider member 150. Other configurations can also be used.

[0095] With continued reference to Figure 6, when the lids 126, 128 and gasket member 124 are in place, the compartments 104, 106 are substantially sealed and thus protected from the ingress of water and/or other substances. Additionally, as noted above, the gasket member 124 can be configured to extend downwardly from the housing 12A such that the gasket member 124 defines the lower-most portion of the device 10A. As such, the gasket member provides a foot or a leg for supporting the device 10A.

[0096] Further, in a configuration in which the lower-most edge of the gasket member 124 is substantially continuous and smooth, the gasket member 124 can provide a suction cup-like effect when it is placed and pressed onto a smooth surface. For example, where the gasket member 124 is made from a soft or resilient material, by pressing the device 10A downwardly when it is resting on a smooth surface, air can be ejected from the space between the lid members 126, 128 and the surface upon which the device 10A is resting. When the device 10A is released, the slight movement of the device 10A upwardly can cause a suction within that space, thereby creating a suction cup-like effect. This effect provides a further advantage in helping to anchor the device 10A in place on a counter, which can become wet and/or slippery during this period.

[0097] With reference to Figures 7-9, the pump 18A can be configured to be a reversible pump. For example, in the illustrated embodiment, the pump 18A is a gear-type pump. This type of a pump can be operated in forward or reverse modes. Additionally, this type of pump provides a compact arrangement and can provide a 90 degree turn which provides a particularly compact arrangement in the device 10A. For example, as shown in Figure 7, the outlet 24A of the reservoir 16A feeds directly into an inlet of the pump 18A.

More particularly, in the illustrated embodiment, a lower-most surface of the reservoir 16A defines an upper wall of the pump 18A. Thus, the outlet 24A also forms the inlet to the pump 18A. A gasket 160 extends around the outlet 24A and is configured to form a seal with a body of the pump 18A.

[0098] With continued reference to Figure 7, an outlet 162 of the pump 18A is connected to an outlet chamber of the pump 18A. Although not illustrated in Figure 7, the outlet 162 is connected to the conduit 26A so as to connect the outlet 162 to the nozzle 28A.

[0099] Figure 13 illustrates an exploded view of the pump 18A. As shown in Figure 13, the gear pump 18A includes a pair of gear members 170, a gear pump body 172, from which the outlet 162 extends.

[0100] The pump body 172 defines a generally oval and/or partially figure 8-shaped internal chamber in which the gears 170 rotate. This configuration is well known in the art, and in particular, with regard to devices known as gear pumps. Thus, a further description of the operation of the gear pump 18A is not included herein.

[0101] The housing 172 can also include a drive shaft aperture 174. A gasket 176 can be configured to form a seal against the pump housing aperture 174 and a drive shaft 178. One end of the drive shaft 178 can be connected to a driven sheave 180. The other end of the drive shaft 178 extends through the gasket 176, the aperture 174, and engages with one of the gears 170.

[0102] In some embodiments, a member 182 can be also used to retain the pump housing 172 against the lower face of the reservoir 16A. For example, in the illustrated embodiment, four fasteners 184 extend through corresponding apertures in the member 182 and into engaging portions 186 attached to the lower face of the reservoir 16A.

[0103] As is well known in the art of gear pumps, the gears 170 are meshed within the pump chamber 172. Thus, when a shaft 178 is rotated to rotate one of the gears 170, the other gear 170 is also rotated. As such, the pump 18A can displace fluid entering the pump body 172 through the outlet 24A and discharge the fluid through the outlet 162.

[0104] With reference again to Figure 6, the sheave 180 defines a part of the transmitter 50A. The actuator 34A can also include a drive sheave 190 configured to drive the driven sheave 180 through a flexible transmitter 192. The flexible transmitter 192 can be

any type of flexible transmitter, such as those well known in this art. For example, but without limitation, the flexible transmitter 192 can be a toothed belt, rubber belt, chain, etc. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0105] Figure 10 schematically illustrates a control routine 200 that can be used with any of the dispensers 10, 10A described above, or with other devices. As noted above, the ECU 46, which can be disposed anywhere in the device 10A, can include modules for controlling various aspects of the operation of the dispenser 10, 10A. The modules described below with reference to Figures 10-13 are described in the form of flowcharts representing control routines that can be executed by the ECU 46. However, as noted above, these control routines can also be incorporated into hard wired modules or a hybrid module including some hard wire components and some functions performed by a microprocessor.

[0106] With reference to Figure 10, the control routine 200 can be used to control the actuation of the sensor 32 (Figure 1) or any other sensor. The control routine 200 is configured to periodically activate the sensor 32, so as to reduce power consumption. Although only sensor 32 is referenced below, it is to be understood that any sensor or combination of sensors can be controlled to reduce power consumption using the techniques illustrated with reference to the control routine 200.

[0107] For example, the control routine 200 can begin operation in the operation block 202. In the operation block 202, the control routine 200 can be started when batteries are inserted into the battery compartment 106, when a power switch (not shown) is moved to an on position, when an AC power source is connected to the ECU 34, or at any other time. After the operation block 202, the routine 200 moves onto a decision block 204.

[0108] In the decision block 204, it can be determined whether a timer has reached a predetermined time activation interval. For example, the ECU 46 can include a timer and, initially setting a timer counter value to zero, determine whether the timer has reached a predetermined actuation time interval, such as, for example, one quarter of one second. However, other time intervals can also be used.

[0109] If, in the decision block 204, the timer has not reached the predetermined time interval, the routine 200 returns and repeats. On the other hand, if in the decision block

204, the timer has reached the predetermined time interval, the routine 200 moves onto an operation block 206.

[0110] In the operation block 206, a sensor can be activated. For example, the ECU 46 can activate the sensor 32. In some embodiments, the ECU 46 can activate the light emitter portion 40 and the light receiver portion 42 of the sensor 32.

[0111] In some embodiments, a further advantage can be achieved by activating the sensor 32 for a period of time shorter than the predetermined activation time interval used in decision block 204. For example, in some embodiments, the sensor 32 can be activated for a predetermined duration time period of about 50 microseconds. However, other time periods can also be used.

[0112] With the activation duration time period of the operation block 206 being shorter than the predetermined activation time interval of decision block 204, the sensor 32 is not continuously operating. Thus, the power consumption of the sensor 32 can be reduced. When the exemplary embodiment in which the predetermined activation time interval of the sensor block 204 is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a second and the duration time period of operation block 206 is 50 microseconds, the sensor 32 is only operating about .02% of the time. Thus, a user will only have to wait a maximum of about $\frac{1}{4}$ of one second before the ECU 46 can detect the activation of the sensor 32.

[0113] With regard to the activation of the sensor 32, the ECU 46 can be configured to, as described above, activate the light emitting portion 40 and determine whether or not the light beam 44 has reached the light receiving portion 42. If during such activation, the light receiving portion 42 does not detect the light beam 44, the ECU 46 can determine that the sensor 32 is activated.

[0114] For example, after the operation block 206, the routine 200 can move on to a decision block 208 in which it is determined whether or not a pulse of light, such as the light beam 44, has reached the light receiving portion 42. More particularly, for example, the ECU 46 can be configured to absorb the output from the sensor 32 for any interruption of the signal. For example, the ECU 46 can be configured to compare the actuation of the light emitting portion 40 with the signal output from the light receiving portion 42. If there is an

interruption, the ECU 46 can determine that a pulse, or an interruption of the light beam 44, has been detected.

[0115] If, in the decision block 208, a pulse has not been detected, the routine 200 can return and repeat. Optionally, in some embodiments, the routine 200 can return to a decision block 204 and repeat, although this return is not illustrated in Figure 10. On the other hand, if it is determined in decision block 208, that a pulse has been detected, the routine 200 can move on to an operation block 210.

[0116] In the operation block 210, the routine 200 can perform a dispensing cycle. For example, the ECU 46 can operate the actuator 34 to drive the pump 18 to dispense liquid soap L from the nozzle 28. In some embodiments, the dispensing cycle can also include the step of operating the indicator 56, 56A to provide the user a timer regarding the time over which the use should continue to wash their hands. For example, but without limitation, such a step can include activating the indicator 56, 56A (which can be a visual indicator such as an LED light, for the predetermined time of about 20 seconds, after the pump has completed discharging an amount of soap. However, other steps or methods can also be used.

[0117] With reference to Figure 11, a control routine 220 can be used for performing the dispensing cycle identified in operation block 210 (Figure 10). However, other control routines can also be used.

[0118] With continued reference to Figure 11, the control routine 220 can be configured to activate certain components of the device 10, 10A at any time. In some embodiments, for example, the routine 220 can begin an operation block 222 at any time. In some embodiments, the operation block 222 can begin when the ECU 46 detects an interruption of the light beam 44. More specifically, for example, but without limitation, the routine 222 can begin if the routine 200 reaches operation block 210. After the operation block 222, the routine 220 can move on to operation block 224.

[0119] In the operation block 224, the amount of soap to be dispensed can be determined. For example, in the operation block 224, the ECU 46 can sample the output from the selector 54. As noted above, the selector 54 can provide output in the form of two or more values. Such values can be a plurality of values or the continuous proportional signal

or values proportional to the position of the member 150 (Figure 6). After the operation block 224, the routine 220 can move on to an operation block 226.

[0120] In the operation block 226, the value from the selector 54 can be correlated to a drive amount indicative of the magnitude of actuation that should be applied to the motor 34, 34A. For example, the drive amount can be a value associated with a duration of time over which the motor 34, 34A should be driven, a number of rotations of the output shaft of the motor 34, 34A or another value corresponding to an amount of liquid soap L to be discharged from a nozzle 28, 28A. After the operation block 226, the routine 220 can move on to an operation block 228.

[0121] In the operation block 228, the voltage of the power source 60, 60A can be detected. For example, the ECU 46 can read the voltage of the power source 60. In some embodiments, the power source 60, 60A is a plurality of batteries. In an exemplary but nonlimiting embodiment, the power source 60A comprises four AA batteries. As is well known in the art, over time, the voltage of such batteries will drop. Thus, by detecting the voltage of these batteries, device 10, 10A can compensate for drops in voltage over time. For example, the ECU 46 can include an analog to digital converter to sample the voltage of the power supply 60, 60A. Other detectors can also be used. After the operation block 228, the routine 220 can move on to a decision block 230.

[0122] In the operation block 230, it can be determined whether the voltage of the power supply 60, 60A is greater than a first predetermined voltage V1. The predetermined voltage V1 can be any voltage.

[0123] In some embodiments, the voltage V1 is set at a voltage that corresponds to a substantially fully charged state of the power supply 60, 60A, for example, where the power supply 60, 60A is a disposable or rechargeable battery. Thus, for example, the power supply 60, 60A comprises four AA cell batteries, each rated at 1.5 volts, and thus, the fully charged state of the power supply 60, 60A would be about 6 volts. However, as well known in the art, fully charged AA cell batteries often carry a charge of about 1.6 volts each when they are fully charged and brand new. Thus, the voltage V1 can be 6 or 6.4 volts depending on the level of accuracy desired.

[0124] In other words, as described below, the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A to be compared to several additional voltage thresholds. The more voltage thresholds that are used, the more accurately the ECU 46 can drive the actuator 34 so as to provide a consistent speed of discharge of liquid soap L from the nozzle 28, 28A.

[0125] With continued reference to a decision block 230, if it is determined that the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A is greater than the first predetermined voltage threshold V1, the routine 220 can move on to an operation block 232.

[0126] In the operation block 232, an offset value can be determined. For example, the offset value 1 can be predetermined to achieve a desired speed of the pump 18, 18A. In some embodiments, the magnitude of the value offset 1 can be the largest of offset values.

[0127] For example, in some embodiments, the value of offset 1 can be -30%. As such, when the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A is at its greatest value, and largest (negative) offset is applied. As such, the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A is at its greatest value, and largest (negative) offset is applied. As such, the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A drops over time, smaller (negative) offset values can be applied to thereby achieve a substantially uniform speed of the pump 18, 18A and thus are substantially uniform speed of discharge of liquid soap L, nozzle 28, 28A, as the voltage of the power supply 60, 60A discharges over time. After the operation of block 232, the routine 220 can move to operation block 234.

[0128] In the operation block 234, the drive value determined in operation block 226 is added with the offset value, at this point when the routine 220, the drive value is added toward the value offset 1. Thus, in an embodiment where the values of Offset 1 is -30%, the drive value claimed in operation block 226 is reduced by 30%. Thus, in the operation block 334, the motor or actuator 34 is driven at this resulting drive value.

[0129] With regard to the drive value applied to the actuator 34, the power output from the power supply 60, 60A can be varied in any known way. For example, where the drive power signals applied to the motor 34A are in the form of a duty cycle, characteristics of the duty cycle can be varied to achieve a varying power applied to actuator 34. For example, but without limitation, the pulse width of the duty cycle applied to the actuator 34

can be increased or decreased. However, there is a maximum point of adjustment for an electric motor, such as the motor 34. Thus, the maximum adjustment allowed by the technique used to adjust power output as the motor 34 would be considered a 100% drive value.

[0130] In reference again to the decision block 230, if it is determined that the voltage of the power supply Vbat is not greater than V1, and the routine 220 moves to operation block 236.

[0131] In the decision block 236, it can be determined whether the voltage of the battery Vbat is less than the voltage V1 and greater than another predetermined voltage V2. As noted above, with regard to the description of the voltage V1, the voltage V2 can be set at a voltage indicative of a voltage normally reached by a power supply as the battery cells discharge but are still useful. First, it is determined in the decision block 236, that the voltage Vbat is less than the voltage V1 but greater than the voltage V2, the routine can move on to operation block 238.

[0132] In the operation block 238, another offset value can be determined. For example, in the operation block 238, the offset can be determined as Offset 2. In an exemplary but nonlimiting embodiment, the value of Offset 2 can be -20%. As such, as noted above, as the voltage of the power supply 60, 60A drops, the magnitude of the offset value drops (to a smaller negative value) thereby compensating for the decrease in voltage of the power supply 60, 60A. After the operation block 238, the routine 220 can move on through operation block 234 and continues as described above.

[0133] With reference again to decision block 236, if the determination therein is negative, the routine can move on to other decision blocks. There can be any number of decision blocks similar to the decision block 230, 236, depending on how many steps or stages of the discharge state of the power supply 60, 60A are contemplated.

[0134] Decision block 240 represents an exemplary final decision block that can be used in the series. In the decision block 240, it can be determined whether the voltage Vbat of the power supply 60, 60A below a final reference voltage V4. The final reference voltage V4 can be a voltage below which there is very little use for power left in the power supply 60 below a final reference voltage V4. The final reference voltage V4 can be a

voltage below which there is very little use for power left in the power supply 60, 60A, and shutdown of the ECU 46 is imminent. However, other reference voltages can also be used. If, in the decision block 240, it is determined that the voltage Vbat is less than the reference voltage V4, the routine 220 moves on to operation block 242.

[0135] In the operation block 242, a final offset value Offset 4 can be determined. In some exemplary, but nonlimiting embodiments, the offset value offset 4 is 0%. Thus, for example, the full value of the drive value determined in the operation block 226 is applied to the actuator 34, in the operation block 234. However, in some embodiments, the value of Offset 4 can be a value that will result in a 100% value for the drive value. After the operation block 234, the routine 220 can move on to operation block 244.

[0136] In the operation block 244, the ECU 46 can operate the actuator 34 in reverse, to thereby reverse operation of the pump 18, 18'. The amount of actuation of the actuator 34, 34A can be predetermined to provide sufficient movement of liquid soap L, backwards through the conduit 26, 26A such that liquid soap L does not drip from the nozzle 28, 28A. This amount can be predetermined through routine experimentation. Additionally, the amount of actuation of the actuator 34, 34A can be varied based on battery voltage, in the same manner as that set forth in the routine 220 with regard to the discharge of a liquid soap L from a nozzle 28, 28A.

[0137] After the operation block 224, the routine 220 can move on to operation block 246. Thus, each time the routine 200 (Figure 10) reaches operation block 210 which is described as the performance of dispensing cycle, the routine 220 can operate, provide a substantially uniform dispensations of liquid soap L, regardless of battery voltage, then reverse the flow of liquid soap L therein to prevent dripping, and then end.

[0138] Additionally, in some embodiments, the device 10, 10A can include another timer, which can be in the form of another control routine (not shown) to prevent the routine 220 from being repeated within a predetermined time period. For example, this timer or control routine can prevent the repeat of operation block 220 within two seconds. As such, there is at least a two-second delay between dispensation cycles. However, other predetermined time periods can also be used.

[0139] With reference to Figure 12, the devices 10, 10A can also be configured to cyclically reverse flow of liquid soap L for clearing clogs.

[0140] For example, the routine 250 can begin an operation block 252. For example, the operation block 252 can allow the control routine 250 to continue at any time during operation, for example, immediately after putting in new batteries connecting any other type of power supply, or at any other time. After the operation block 252, the routine 250 can move on to a decision block 254.

[0141] In the decision block 254, it can be determined whether or not the device 10, 10A is to be operated in a flush mode. For example, the ECU 46 can determine if the button 52 has been actuated in a predetermined pattern, indicating that the user wishes to enter the flush mode. For example, but without limitation, the predetermined pattern of operation can be two or more quick and serial actuations of the button 52. If it is determined that the flush mode is not to be entered in the decision block 254, the routine 250 can return and repeat. If, on the other hand, it is determined that the flush mode is to be entered, the routine 250 can move on to operation block 256.

[0142] In the operation block 256, the device 10, 10A can enter a flush operation. For example, but without limitation, the ECU 46 can operate the actuator 34 in forward and reverse mode, to thereby drive the pump 18, 18A, and forward in reverse modes cyclically. The number of forward and reverse cycles of the corresponding pump 18, 18A can be any number. Additionally, the duration of the drive of the pump 18, 18A in each direction can be any value. For example, the magnitude of the forward and reverse drives can be equal to or less than the amount of time required for the pump 18, 18A to draw all the liquid soap L in the conduit 26, 26A back to the outlet of the pump 18, 18A. As such, it will prevent air from being sucked into the pump 18, 18A. Additionally, the long duration of the reverse and forward modes can further enhance the ability to flush a clog out of the conduit 26, 26A. For example, when entering the flush mode operation, a user can hold a cup of warm or hot water against the nozzle 28, 28A. Thus, during reverse operation of the cup 18, 18A, warm or hot water can be drawn down into the conduit 26, 26A thereby speeding the removal of a clog from the nozzle 28, 28A, or the conduit 26, 26A. After the operation block 256, the routine 250 can move on to operation block 258.

[0143] In the operation block 258, the device 10, 10A can return to normal operation. For example, the device 10, 10A can return to the control routine 200 (Figure 10). After the operation block 258, the routine 250 can move on to the operation block 260 and end.

[0144] Figure 13 schematically illustrates another embodiment of an electric liquid soap dispenser 10B that can include any or all of the various features and embodiments of the inventions disclosed above with reference to Figures 1-12, as well as those described below. Additionally, the features and inventions disclosed below with reference to Figures 13-23 can also be used with any of the soap pumps described above with reference to Figures 1-12.

[0145] With continued reference to Figure 13, the liquid soap dispenser 10B includes a housing 12B. The housing 12B can take any shape.

[0146] The dispenser 10B can include a liquid handling system 14B. The liquid handling system can include a reservoir 16B, a pump 18B, and a discharge assembly 20B.

[0147] The reservoir 16B can be any type of container. In the illustrated embodiment, the reservoir 16B is configured to contain a volume of liquid soap, such as liquid soap for hand washing. In some embodiments, the reservoir 16B can include a lid 22B configured to form a seal at the top of the reservoir for maintaining the liquid soap L within the reservoir 16B. Additionally, in some embodiments, the lid 22B can include an air vent (not shown), so as to allow air to enter the reservoir 16B as the level of liquid soap L falls within the reservoir 16B.

[0148] The reservoir 16B can also include an outlet 24B. The reservoir 16B can be connected to the pump 18B through the outlet 24B, as shown in Figures 13 and 15.

[0149] With continued reference to Figure 13, the ECU 46B can include one or a plurality of circuit boards providing a hard wired feedback control circuits, a processor and memory devices for storing and performing control routines, or any other type of controller. In an exemplary but non-limiting embodiment, the ECU 46B can include an H-bridge transistor/MOSFET hardware configuration which allows for bidirectional drive of an electric motor, and a microcontroller such as Model No. PIC16F685 commercially available from Microchip Technology, Inc, and/or other devices.

[0150] An actuator 34B can be any type of actuator. For example, but without limitation, the actuator 34B can be an AC or DC electric motor, stepper motor, server motor, solenoid, stepper solenoid, or any other type of actuator. Optionally, the actuator 34B can be connected to the pump 18B with a transmitter device (not shown). For example, the transmitter device can include any type of gear train or any type of flexible transmitter assembly.

[0151] With continued reference to Figures 13 and 15, the discharge assembly 20B can include a discharge nozzle 28B. Any type of discharge nozzle can be used. For example, the size of the discharge nozzle 26B can be determined to provide the appropriate flow rate and/or resistance against flow of liquid soap L from the pump 18B.

[0152] In some embodiments, the nozzle 28B can be disposed at a location spaced from the lower portion of the housing 12B so as to make it more convenient for a user to place their hand or other body part under the nozzle 28B.

[0153] The dispenser 10B can also include a pump actuation system 30B. In some embodiments, the pump actuation system can include a sensor device 32B and an actuator 34B.

[0154] In some embodiments, the sensor device 32B can include an infrared type sensor. For example, as illustrated in Figure 13, the sensor 32B can include a light emitting portion and a light receiving portion. The light emitting and light receiving portions can be separate, or in some embodiments they can be part of the same device. Thus, in use, a beam of infrared light can be emitted from the light emitting portion and reflected back and received by the light receiving portion. This reflection occurs as a result of the user placing his or her hand or some object in front of the infrared sensor and reflecting back the emitted infrared light for a predetermined period of time at a predetermined frequency.

[0155] The sensor 32B can be configured to emit a trigger signal when the infrared light beam is reflected back to the light receiving portion. For example, if the sensor 32B is activated and the light receiving portion receives the reflected infrared light emitted from the light emitting portion, then the sensor 32B can emit a trigger signal. This trigger signal can be used for controlling operation of the motor or actuator 34B.

[0156] The sensor 32B can be operated in a pulsating mode. For example, the light emitting portion can be powered on and off in a cycle such as, for example, but without limitation, for short bursts lasting for any desired period of time (e.g., .01 second, .1 second, 1 second) at any desired frequency (e.g., once per half second, once per second, once per ten seconds). These different time characteristics can be referred to as an activation period or frequency, which corresponds to the periodic activation of the sensor 32B. Thus, an activation frequency of four times per second would be equivalent to an activation period of once per quarter second.

[0157] The sensor 32B can be connected to a circuit board, an integrated circuit, or other device for triggering the actuator 34B. In the illustrated embodiment of Figure 13, the sensor 32B is connected to an electronic control unit 46B ("ECU"). However, other arrangements can also be used.

[0158] The dispenser 10B can also include a power supply 60B. The power supply 60B can be a battery or can include electronics for accepting AC or DC power.

[0159] In operation, the ECU 46B can activate the sensor 32B, continuously or periodically, to detect the presence of an object in front of sensor 32B. When an object reflects a sufficient amount of the infrared light back, the ECU 46B determines that a dispensing cycle should begin. The ECU 46B can then actuate the actuator to drive the pump 18B to thereby dispense liquid soap L from the nozzle 28B.

[0160] Figures 14-19 include scale drawings of the embodiment of the dispenser 10B. Some of the components of the dispenser 10B can be the same, similar, or identical to the corresponding components of the dispensers 10 and 10A illustrated in Figures 1-9. These corresponding components are identified with the same reference numeral, except that a "B" has been added thereto.

[0161] As shown in Figures 14 and 15, the lower end 100B of the dispenser 10B can be designed to support the housing 12B on a generally flat surface, such as those normally found on a countertop in a bathroom or a kitchen. In some embodiments, the nozzle 28B can be disposed in a manner such that the nozzle 28B extends outwardly from the periphery defined by the lower portion 100B. As such, if a user misses soap dispensed from

the nozzle 28B, and the soap L falls, it will not strike on any portion of the housing 12B. This helps prevent the dispenser 10B from becoming soiled from dripping soap L.

[0162] As shown in Figure 15, the reservoir 16B can be disposed within the housing 12B. In some embodiments, the housing 12B can define a pump and motor chamber 104B and a battery chamber 106B as shown in Figure 18. The pump 18B and actuator can be disposed within the pump and motor chamber 104B and the power supply can be disposed in the battery chamber 106B. In the embodiment in Figure 18, the battery chamber 106B is defined by walls 108 resembling the shape of the batteries themselves. However, other configurations are also possible.

[0163] As noted above, the dispenser 10B can include internal cavities 106B and 104B for containing the power supply and the pump 18B and actuator, respectively. Of course, as noted above, other interior compartments can also be used.

[0164] As shown in Figure 18, an interior wall 122B can be disposed between the compartments 104B and 106B. A sealing arrangement 120B can include a gasket member 124B and lid member 126B. The gasket 124B can be configured to extend around at least an opening 130B of the compartment 104B.

[0166] The lid 126B can be configured to rest against inner wall 140B. As such, the lid member 126B forms a seal with the inner peripheral walls 140B, respectively. The seal helps protect the components disposed within the compartments 106B, 104B.

[0167] Optionally, fasteners 142B can be used to secure the lid member 126B to the housing 12B. For example, the lid members 126B can include apertures through which the fasteners 142B can extend. The fasteners 142B can engage mounting portions disposed within the housing 12B. As such, the lid members 126B can be secured to the housing 12B and form a seal with the gasket member 124B.

[0168] Optionally, at least one of the lid members can include an additional aperture 144B configured to allow access to a device disposed in the compartment 104B. In the illustrated embodiment, the aperture 144B is in the form of a slot. However, any type of aperture can be used.

[0169] The slot 144B can be configured to allow a portion of a selector to extend therethrough. For example, in Figure 18 the selector is in the configuration of a wheel

member. The selector 54B can be in the configuration of a rheostat or other type of input device that allows for a proportional signal.

[0170] For example, the selector 54B can be configured to move between at least two positions. For example, the two positions can be a first position corresponding to a first amount of liquid soap L to be discharged by the nozzle 28B and a second position corresponding to a second larger volume of liquid soap L to be discharged by the nozzle 28B. Optionally, the selector 54B can be configured to move between a plurality of steps or continuously along a defined path to provide continuously proportional signals or a plurality of steps.

[0171] In some embodiments, with the gasket member 124B and lid member 126B in place, the selector 54B can be configured to extend through the slot 144B such that a user can conveniently move the selector 54B with the lid 126B in place. In other embodiments, the selector 54B can be smaller such that an object such as a pen can be inserted into the slot 144B to move the selector 54B. Other configurations can also be used.

[0172] Figure 19 illustrates an exploded view of the pump 18B. As shown in Figure 19, the pump 18B can be in the form of a gear pump and can include a pair of gear members 170B and a gear pump body 172B, from which the outlet 162B extends.

[0173] The pump body 172B can define a generally oval and/or partially figure 8-shaped internal chamber in which the gears 170B rotate. This configuration is well known in the art, and in particular, with regard to devices known as gear pumps. Thus, a further description of the operation of the gear pump 18B is not included herein.

[0174] The housing 172B can also include a drive shaft aperture 174B. A gasket 176B can be configured to form a seal against the pump housing aperture 174B and a drive shaft 178B. One end of the drive shaft 178B can be connected to a driven sheave 180B. The other end of the drive shaft 178B extends through the gasket 176B, the aperture 174B, and engages with one of the gears 170B.

[0175] Fasteners 184B can extend into engaging portions 186B attached to the lower face of the reservoir 16B.

[0176] The sheave 180B defines a part of a transmitter. The actuator can also include a drive sheave configured to drive the driven sheave through a flexible transmitter.

The flexible transmitter can be any type of flexible transmitter, such as those well known in this art. For example, but without limitation, the flexible transmitter can be a toothed belt, rubber belt, chain, etc. However, other configurations can also be used.

[0177] Figures 20-23 schematically illustrate control routines that can be used with dispenser 10, 10A, 10B described above, or with other devices. As noted above, the ECU 46B, which can be disposed anywhere in the device 10B, can include modules for controlling various aspects of the operation of the dispenser 10B. The modules described below with reference are described in the form of flowcharts representing control routines that can be executed by the ECU 46B. However, as noted above, these control routines can also be incorporated into hard wired modules or a hybrid module including some hard wire components and some functions performed by a microprocessor.

[0178] With reference to Figure 20, the control routine 300 can be used to control the actuation of the sensor 32B (Figure 9) or any other sensor. Although only sensor 32B is referenced below, it is to be understood that any sensor or combination of sensors can be used.

[0179] For example, the control routine 300 can begin operation in the operation block 302. In the operation block 302, the control routine 300 can be started when batteries are inserted into the battery compartment 106B, when a power switch (not shown) is moved to an on position, when an AC power source is connected to the ECU 46B, or at any other time. The operation block begins by initializing the hardware and variables. After the operation block 302, operation block 304 ignores any infrared reflection and delays for startup.

[0180] After operation block 304, the control routine 300 moves on to decision block 306. Decision block 306 checks to see if the sensor 32B has detected reflection of the infrared light being emitted by light emitter. Specifically, the decision block 306 checks to see if a user's hand or object has been placed in front of the sensor 32B for a predetermined period of time, resulting in reflection of infrared light at a predetermined frequency.

[0181] If no infrared reflection is detected, operation block 308 places the control routine 300 in a sleep, reduced power mode. In this mode, the sensor 32B continues to emit infrared light, while the decision block 306 continues checking for infrared reflection. If

decision block 306 determines that infrared light is being reflected, then control routine 300 ends and control routine 400 begins.

[0182] With reference to Figure 21, control routine 400 can consist only of operation block 402. In operation block 402, ambient light values can be read and stored as calibrated values in the controller's memory. These calibrated light values can be used to prevent false triggering of the sensor 32B. Often times a light source within a room, such as for example a lamp or overhead light, can emit infrared light or other light which can interfere with a light sensor's ability to detect intended activation. In order to prevent unwanted activation of the sensor and the soap dispenser in general, a light read module can be incorporated in the controller which reads ambient light values and prevents ambient light from interfering with the sensor.

Optionally, the dispenser 10, 10A, 10B can include a movement sensor (not shown) configured to detect if the dispenser has been moved. For example, but without limitation, the dispenser can include a simple contact switch configured to move between two positions, one position corresponding to when the dispenser is resting on its support member arrangement 120B, and another position corresponding to when the dispenser is lifted off of a surface.

In some embodiments, the movement sensor can include a simple pin member extending downwardly from through the support member arrangement 120B and slidably supported at an internal surface of the chamber 104B. This mounting arrangement of such a pin can include a spring configured to bias the pin member toward an extended position. The pin member can be connected to a physical switch configured to open and close a circuit as it moves between the retracted and extended positions. For example, the pin can be connected to the physical switch such that it closes the circuit when in the retracted position and opens the circuit when in the extended position. However, other configurations, switches, electronic devices, and hardware can also be used.

The pin can also be arranged such that when the dispenser 10B is resting on a surface, such as a counter top, the surface pushes the pin into the retracted position. Additionally, the spring can be configured to push the pin into the extended position when the dispenser 10B is lifted off of the surface.

The ECU 46B can use the signal from the movement sensor to trigger the performance of the control routine 400. For example, the ECU 46B can be configured to perform the control routine 400 each time the dispenser 10B is lifted off of a surface and then placed back onto a surface. As such, the dispenser 10B will re-detect and re-store calibration values of the light detected by the sensor 32B. This can improve the performance of the dispenser 46B because each time the dispense 10B is moved, the sensor 32B will receive a different amount of ambient light. For example, as noted above, the sensor 32B detects an intensity of light, such as infrared light, and outputs a signal indicative of that intensity. However, the amount of ambient light, which can include infrared light, that reaches the sensor 32B can change significantly depending on the environment.

For example, if a counter top upon which the dispenser 10B rests is white and is near a large south facing window, the amount of ambient light reaching the sensor 32B can be large. On the other hand, a dark counter top in a windowless, poorly-lit bathroom would reflect very little ambient light to the sensor 32B. Thus, moving the dispenser 32B between such different bathrooms can significantly change the amount of ambient light reaching the sensor 32B. Additionally, in any room, merely changing the orientation of the dispenser or moving it a few feet or even inches can significantly change the amount (intensity) of ambient light reaching the sensor 32B. Thus, by configuring the dispenser 10B to re-detect and re-store ambient light values each time it is moved can reduce false triggers of the pump 18B.

Thus, in some embodiments, the control routine 400 can include a decision block 403 in which it is determined if the dispenser has been moved. For example, as described above, the ECU 46B can be configured to determine if the movement sensor (described above) has been triggered. If, in decision block 403, it is determined that the dispenser has been moved, then the routine moves to operation block 402. On the other hand, if it is determined that the dispenser 10B has not been moved, then the control routine 400 can return to decision block 403 and repeat. It is to be noted that the decision block 403 and operation block 402 can be inserted into any control routine disclosed herein, and/or can run as a separate subroutine parallel to any other or combination of other control routines disclosed herein. Additionally, all of the control routines disclosed herein can be combined into a single control routine.

Such combinations and other arrangements are well within the skill of those of ordinary skill in the relevant art.

Once operation block 402 has finished, control routine 400 ends and control routine 500 begins.

[0183] With reference to Figure 22, control routine 500 can consist of operation blocks 502-508. Operation block 502 first reads a dispense switch. When a user activates the sensor 32B, the dispenser 10B is ready to begin dispensing. Thus, in the operation block 504, a load is applied to the pump motor 34B.

[0184] Prior to dispensing, however, operation blocks 506 and 508 first delay and sense the battery and create a scaled motor drive time value. Often times a battery which sits in a compartment for a period of time can accumulate charges on its outer electrode surfaces. These charges can create unpredictable voltages across the battery, which do not accurately reflect the charge state of the battery. In order to generate more consistent dispersions of soap, and to have the motor 34B moving at a more consistent speed each time the soap dispenser 10B is used, the controller 46B can incorporate a module that applies a load to and senses the battery voltage prior to each dispersion. This sensing helps to more accurately read what the voltage is across the battery in order to create an appropriately scaled motor drive time value. It is this time value which can correspond to the amount of time the soap is dispensed, or the amount of soap dispensed in any given use. Once operation block 508 has completed creating a scaled motor drive time value, control routine 500 ends and control routine 600 begins.

[0185] With reference to Figure 23, control routine 600 begins with decision block 602. Decision block 602 checks for a time out to determine if the drive time value of control routine 500 has elapsed. If the time value has not elapsed, decision block 604 checks to see if the battery is low.

[0186] If the battery is low, operation block 606 initiates a flash fault warning. In some embodiments, an indicator or flasher can begin to indicate that the batteries are low. If the batteries are low and the flash fault warning is activated, the operation block 606 repeats until new batteries are installed or the soap dispenser 10B is reset. If the batteries are not

low, control routine 600 loops back to decision block 602 to again check if the time value has elapsed.

[0187] If the time value elapses, the control routine 600 moves on to operation block 608. Operation block 608 stops the motor and delays for one second. Other delay time values are also possible. Once the delay has occurred, operation block 610 again stops the motion of the motor and pump and resets the variables, looping back to decision block 306 of control routine 300.

[0188] Although this invention has been disclosed in the context of a certain preferred embodiment and examples, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the present invention extends beyond the specifically disclosed embodiment to other alternative embodiments and/or uses of the invention and obvious modifications and equivalents thereof. In addition, while several variations of the invention have been shown and described in detail, other modifications, which are within the scope of this invention, will be readily apparent to those of skill in the art based upon this disclosure. It is also contemplated that various combination or sub-combinations of the specific features and aspects of the embodiments or variations may be made and still fall within the scope of the invention. It should be understood that various features and aspects of the disclosed embodiment can be combined with or substituted for one another in order to form varying modes of the disclosed invention. Thus, it is intended that the scope of the present invention herein-disclosed should not be limited by the particular disclosed embodiments described above, but should be determined only by a fair reading of the claims that follow.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A battery-powered electric hand soap dispenser comprising:
 - a housing;
 - at least one battery supported by the housing;
 - a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir having an outlet on a bottom surface thereof, the reservoir being supported by the housing;
 - a pump disposed in the housing and disposed below the reservoir, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;
 - an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the battery;
 - a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit and disposed in an upper portion of the housing, the nozzle directed downwardly;
 - a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object;
 - an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor, until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle;
 - a button disposed on an upper portion of the housing, the button being connected to the electronic control unit, the electronic control unit being configured to actuate the electric motor when the button is activated;
 - an indicator device configured to produce a blinking light, the electronic control unit being configured to cause the indicator to generate the blinking light for a first predetermined time period after liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle;
 - a sensor configured to detect a state of the battery, the electronic control unit configured to apply less than the total amount of power available from the battery when the battery is fully charged and to apply the total amount of power available from the battery when the battery is less than fully charged;
 - wherein in the electronic control unit is configured to dispense an amount of liquid soap only after a second predetermined time period has elapsed from a previous ejection of liquid soap;

a gasket extending around the periphery of an opening in a bottom portion of the housing, the gasket extending downwardly from the lowermost portion of the housing so as to form a foot supporting the housing;

a battery compartment defined in the housing and including a battery compartment opening in a portion of the gasket;

a battery compartment cover engaged with the housing and covering the battery compartment opening, the battery compartment cover engaging with an aperture defined in the gasket so as to form a seal around the battery compartment opening;

the housing defining a motor and pump compartment, the motor and the pump being disposed within the motor and pump compartment, the gasket extending around a motor and pump compartment opening in a lower portion of the motor and pump compartment;

a motor and pump compartment cover engaged with the housing and forming a seal with the portion of the gasket extending around the motor and pump compartment opening;

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to actuate the motor so as to drive the pump so as to dispense liquid soap in predetermined amounts;

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to activate the trigger sensor at the end of each third predetermined time period for an amount of time that is less than the third predetermined time period;

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to cyclically operate the motor in forward and reverse directions in order to clear a clog in the nozzle when the button is depressed in accordance with a first predetermined pattern;

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to activate or deactivate the indicator when the button has been depressed in accordance with a second predetermined pattern; and

a soap volume adjustment device configured to allow a user to select different amounts of soap to be discharged, the electronic control unit is configured to vary the amount of soap discharged based on a state of the soap volume adjustment device.

2. An electric soap dispenser comprising:
 - a housing;
 - a power supply supported by the housing;
 - a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;
 - a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;
 - an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;
 - a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit and disposed in an upper portion of the housing;
 - a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object;
 - an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor;
 - a button disposed on an upper portion of the housing, the button being connected to the electronic control unit, the electronic control unit being configured to actuate the electric motor when the button is activated.
3. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the power supply comprises at least one battery.
4. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, the reservoir having an outlet on a bottom surface thereof.
5. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, the pump being disposed below the reservoir.
6. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2 additionally comprising an indicator light configured to blink for a first predetermined time period of about twenty seconds after an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle.
7. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2 additionally comprising a sensor configured to detect a state of the battery, the electronic control unit configured to apply less than the total amount of power available from the battery when the battery is fully charged

and to apply the total amount of power available from the battery when the battery is less than fully charged.

8. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to dispense an amount of liquid soap only after a predetermined time period has elapsed from a previous ejection of liquid soap.

9. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2 additionally comprising a gasket extending around the periphery of an opening in a bottom portion of the housing, the gasket extending downwardly from the lowermost portion of the housing so as to form a foot supporting the housing, the housing defining a motor and pump compartment, the motor and the pump being disposed within the motor and pump compartment, the gasket extending around a motor and pump compartment opening in a lower portion of the motor and pump compartment, a motor and pump compartment cover engaged with the housing and forming a seal with the portion of the gasket extending around the motor and pump compartment opening, a battery compartment defined in the housing and including a battery compartment opening in a portion of the gasket, a battery compartment cover engaged with the housing and covering the battery compartment opening, the battery compartment cover engaging with an aperture defined in the gasket so as to form a seal around the battery compartment opening.

10. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to actuate the motor so as to drive the pump so as to dispense liquid soap in predetermined amounts, the electronic control unit being further configured to reverse the pump after the predetermined amount of liquid soap has been dispensed, thereby drawing liquid soap in the soap conduit backwards away from the discharge nozzle to prevent dripping.

11. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to activate the trigger sensor at a predetermined activation time frequency for a predetermined duration time that is less than the predetermined activation time frequency.

12. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to cyclically operate the motor in forward and reverse directions in order to clear a clog in the nozzle when the button is depressed in accordance with a first predetermined pattern.

13. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2, wherein the electronic control unit is configured to adjust the actuation of the electric motor to compensate for a viscosity of the liquid soap in the reservoir.

14. The soap dispenser according to Claim 2 additionally comprising a soap volume adjustment device configured to allow a user to select different amounts of soap to be discharged, the electronic control unit is configured to vary the amount of soap discharged based on a state of the soap volume adjustment device.

15. An electric soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

a power supply supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit and disposed in an upper portion of the housing;

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object;

an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor; and

means for allowing a user to operate the pump without activating the trigger sensor.

16. A battery-powered electric hand soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

at least one battery supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir having an outlet, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the battery;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit, the nozzle directed downwardly;

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of infrared light;

an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor, until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle, the electronic control unit comprising:

a light read module configured to read and stores values corresponding to ambient light;

a power supply sense module configured to sense a power supply voltage and create a scaled motor drive time value;

a fault detection module configured to stop operation of the motor and to provide an indication of a fault if the battery's power is below a predetermined level;

wherein in the electronic control unit is configured to dispense an amount of liquid soap only after a predetermined time period has elapsed from a previous ejection of liquid soap; and

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to actuate the motor so as to drive the pump so as to dispense liquid soap in predetermined amounts.

17. An electric soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

a power supply supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit; and

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of light.

18. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 17, wherein the power supply is a battery.

19. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 17, wherein the trigger sensor further comprises a light emitter device and a light receiver device, the trigger sensor being triggered when the light receiver device detects a predetermined frequency of reflected light for a specified period of time.

20. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 19, wherein the light emitted and received by the trigger sensor is infrared.

21. An electric soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

a power supply supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit;

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of infrared light; and

an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor, until an amount of liquid soap has been

ejected from the nozzle, the electronic control unit further comprising a light read module configured to read and stores values corresponding to ambient light.

22. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 21, further comprising a power supply sense module configured to sense a power supply voltage and create a scaled motor drive time value, wherein the light read module calibrates and stores ambient light values prior to each time the power supply sense module senses a power supply voltage.

23. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to use the stored calibrated values to prevent false triggering of the trigger sensor.

24. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to compare a first intensity of light detected by the sensor, to compare the first intensity to a stored value of ambient light, and to determine if the first intensity is greater than the stored value of ambient light.

25. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 24, wherein the controller is configured to actuate the electric motor only if the first intensity is greater than the ambient light.

26. An electric soap dispenser comprising:
a housing;
a power supply supported by the housing;
a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;
a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;
an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;
a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit;
a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of infrared light; and
an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor until an amount of liquid soap has been

ejected from the nozzle, the electronic control unit further comprising a power supply sense module configured to sense a power supply voltage and create a scaled motor drive time value.

27. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 26, wherein the power supply is a battery.

28. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 26, wherein the electric control unit first reads a dispense switch and starts the motor prior to creating a scaled motor drive time value.

29. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 26, wherein the electric control unit first delays and senses a power source prior to creating a scaled motor drive time value.

30. The electronic soap dispenser according to Claim 26, wherein the power supply module is configured first to place a load on the power supply, and then to sense a power supply voltage.

31. An electric soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

a power supply supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit;

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of infrared light; and

an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor, until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle, the electronic control unit further comprising a fault

detection module configured to stop operation of the motor and to provide an indication of a fault if the power supply is below a predetermined level.

32. The electric soap dispenser according to Claim 31, wherein the electronic control unit is further configured to remain in a fault detection mode until the electric soap dispenser is reset or a new power source is installed.

33. An electric soap dispenser comprising:

a housing;

a power supply supported by the housing;

a reservoir configured to store liquid soap, the reservoir being supported by the housing;

a pump disposed in the housing, the pump having an inlet connected to the outlet of the reservoir;

an electric motor supported by the housing and driving the pump, the electric motor being powered by the power supply;

a soap discharge nozzle connected to the pump with a soap conduit;

a trigger sensor configured to detect the presence of an object, wherein the trigger sensor detects a predetermined reflection frequency of infrared light; and

an electronic control unit connected to the trigger sensor and to the electric motor, the electronic control unit configured to actuate the electric motor upon receiving a signal from the trigger sensor until an amount of liquid soap has been ejected from the nozzle;

wherein in the electronic control unit is configured to dispense an amount of liquid soap only after a predetermined time period has elapsed from a previous ejection of liquid soap; and

wherein the electronic control unit is configured to actuate the motor so as to drive the pump and dispense liquid soap in predetermined amounts.

34. The electronic soap dispenser according to Claim 33, wherein the electronic control unit is further configured to check for a time out while dispensing of soap occurs.

35. The electronic soap dispenser according to Claim 34, wherein the electronic control unit is further configured to stop the motor and delay a predetermined amount of time prior to resetting if a time out occurs.

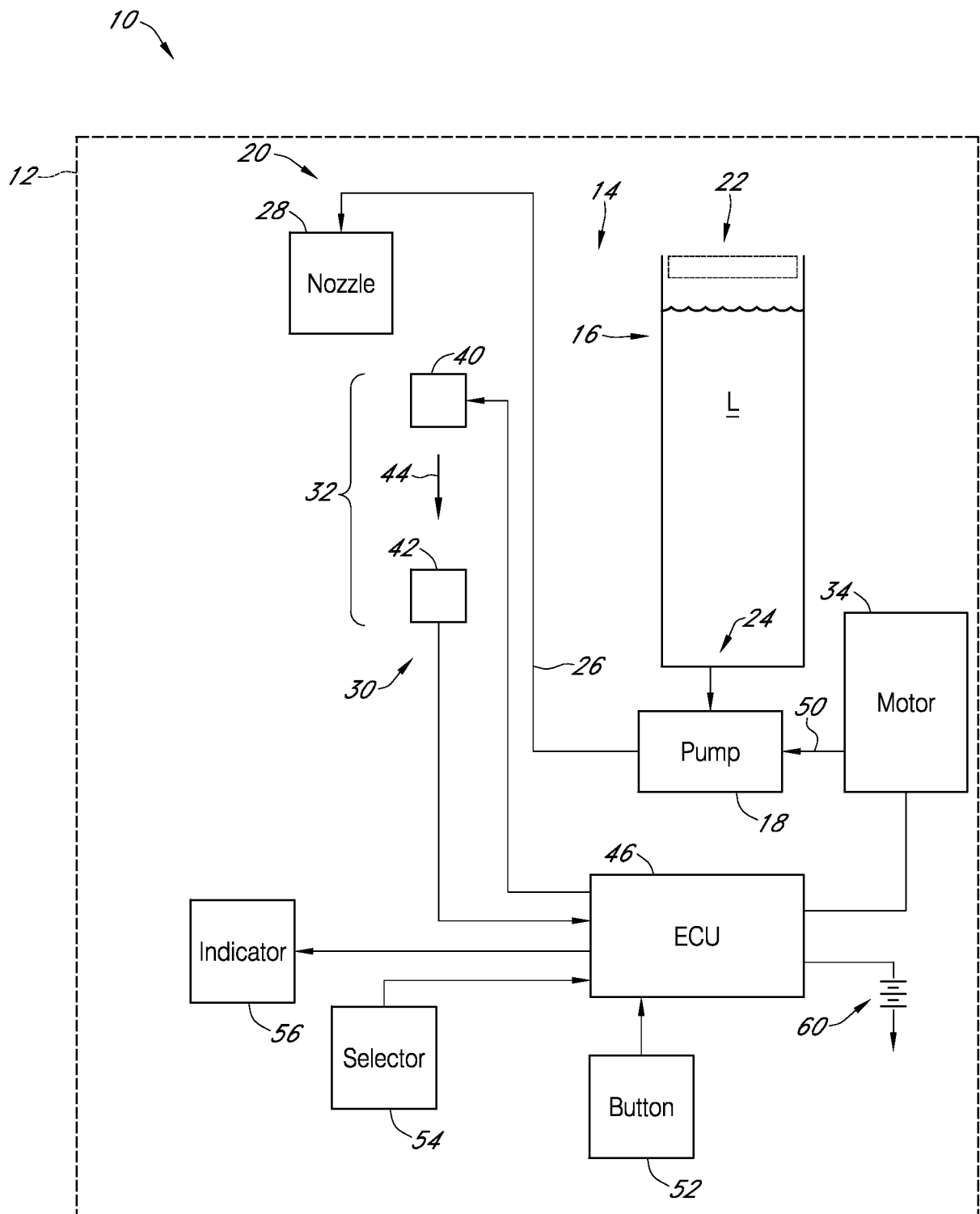


FIG. 1

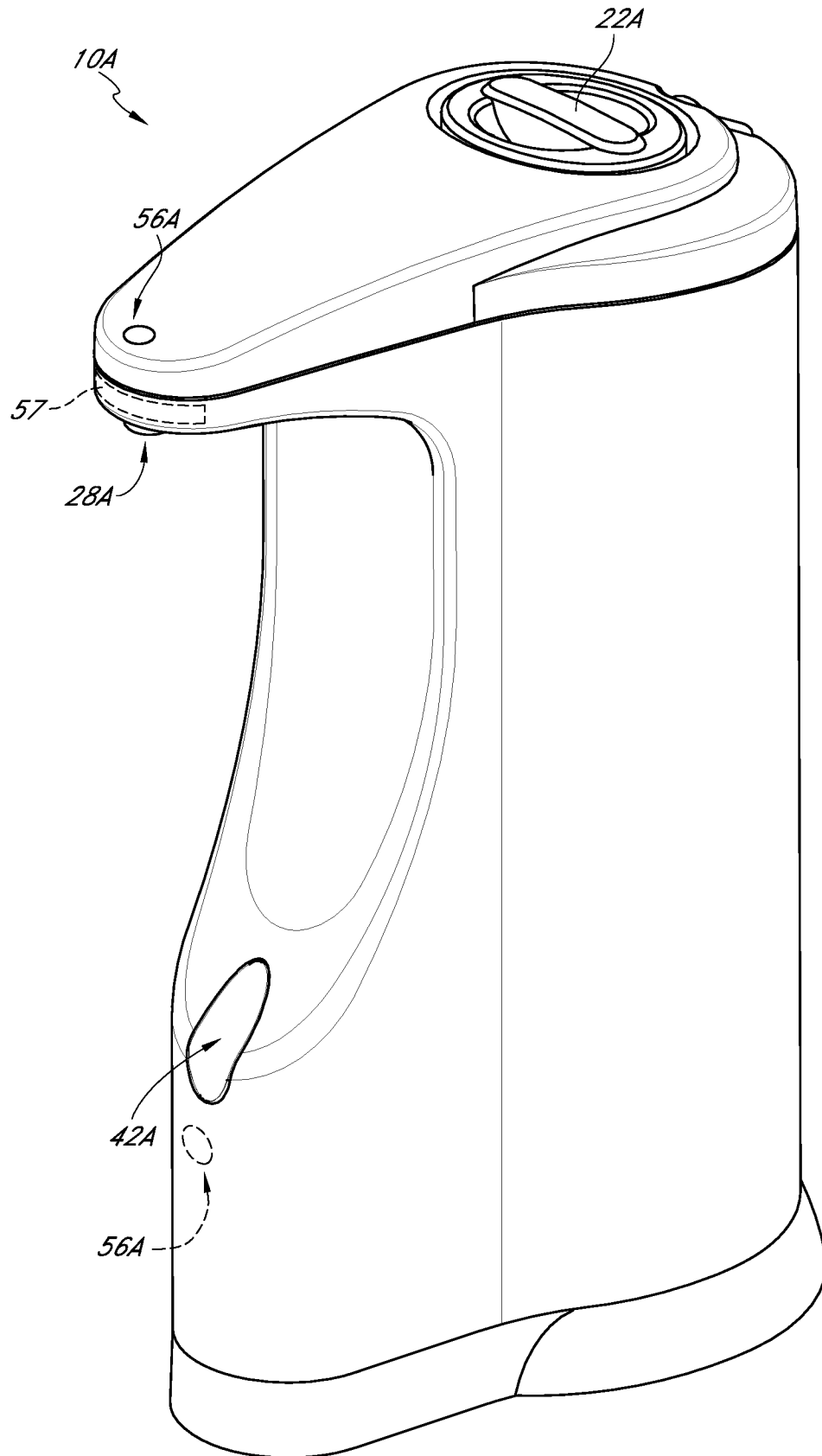


FIG. 2

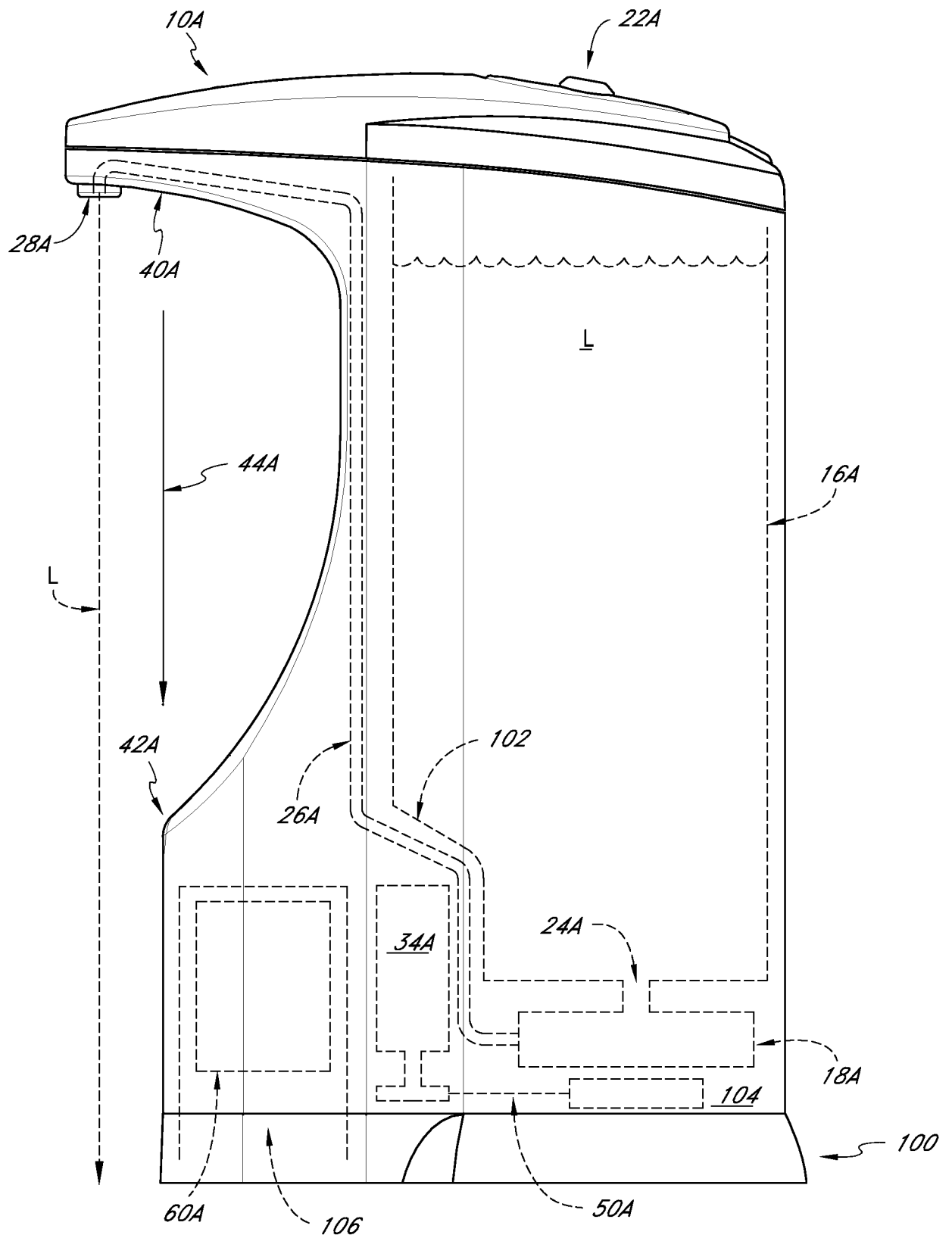


FIG. 3

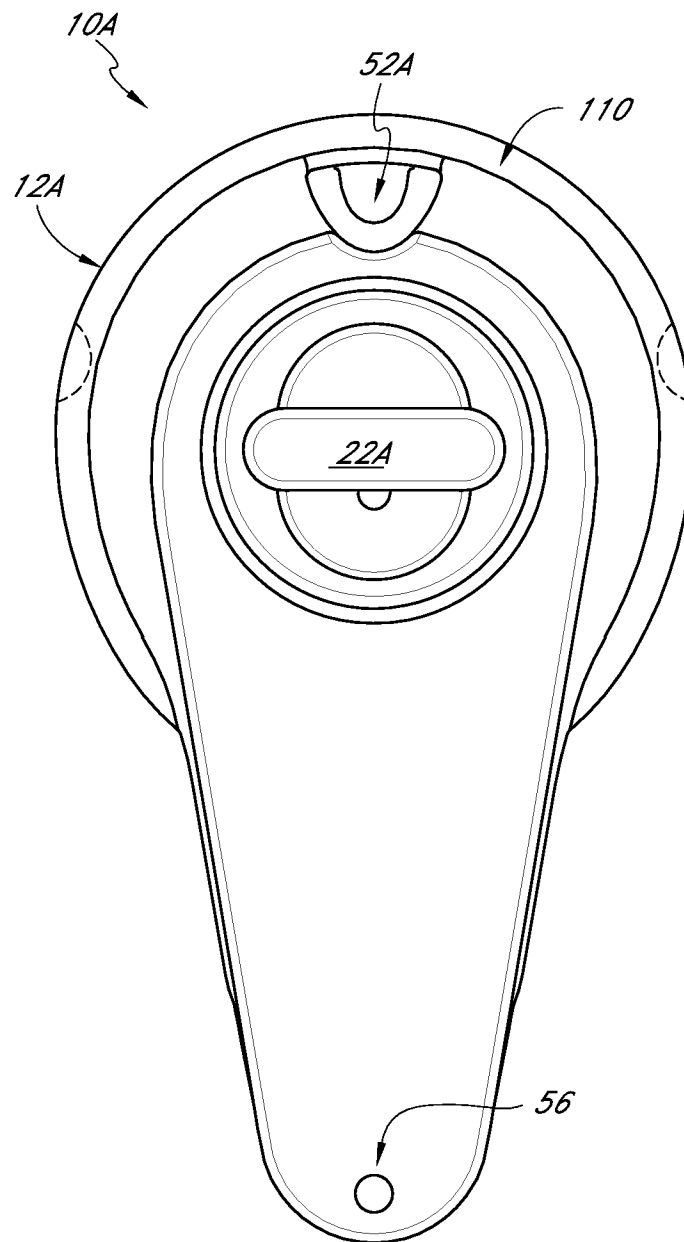


FIG. 4

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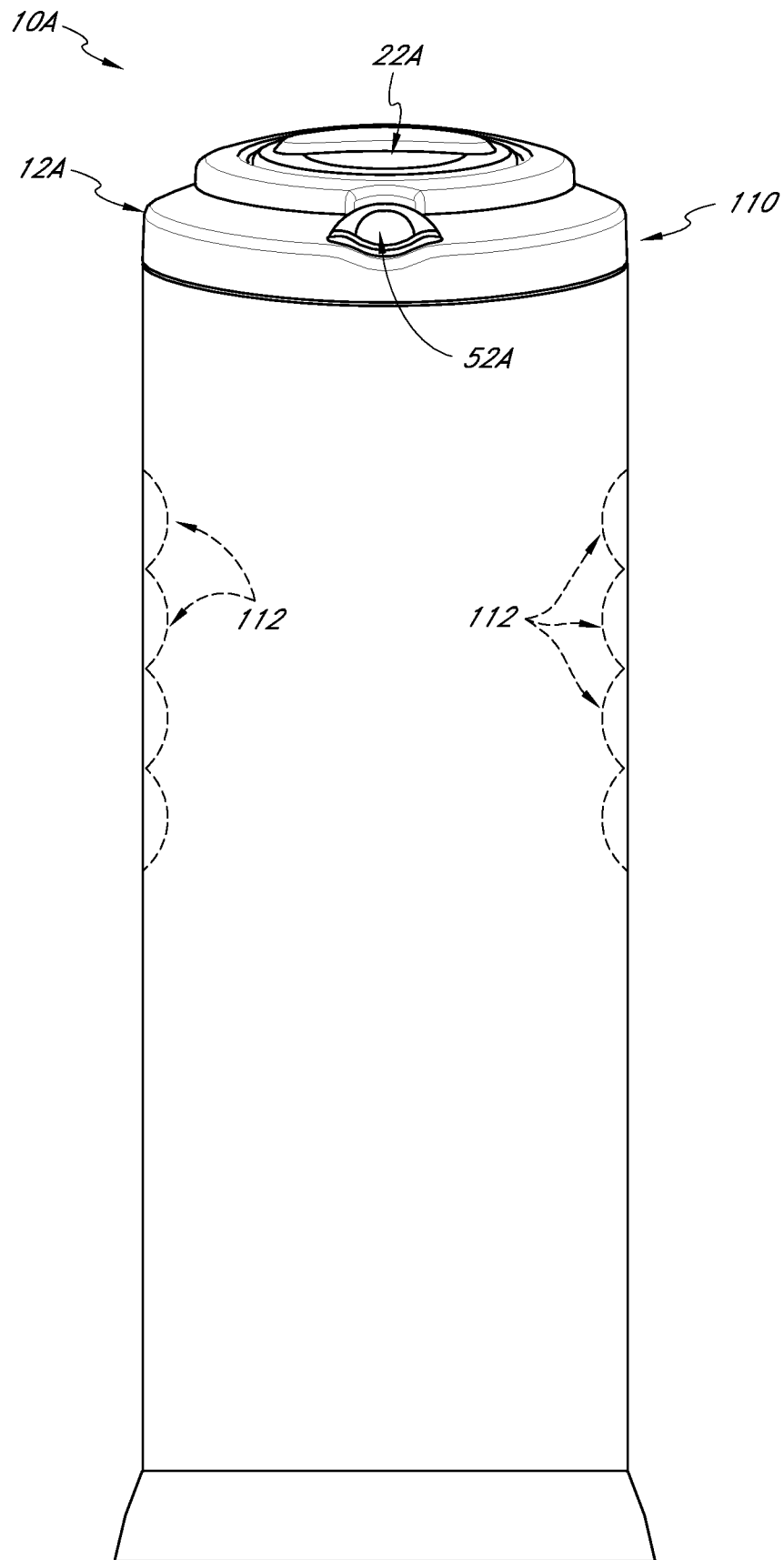


FIG. 5

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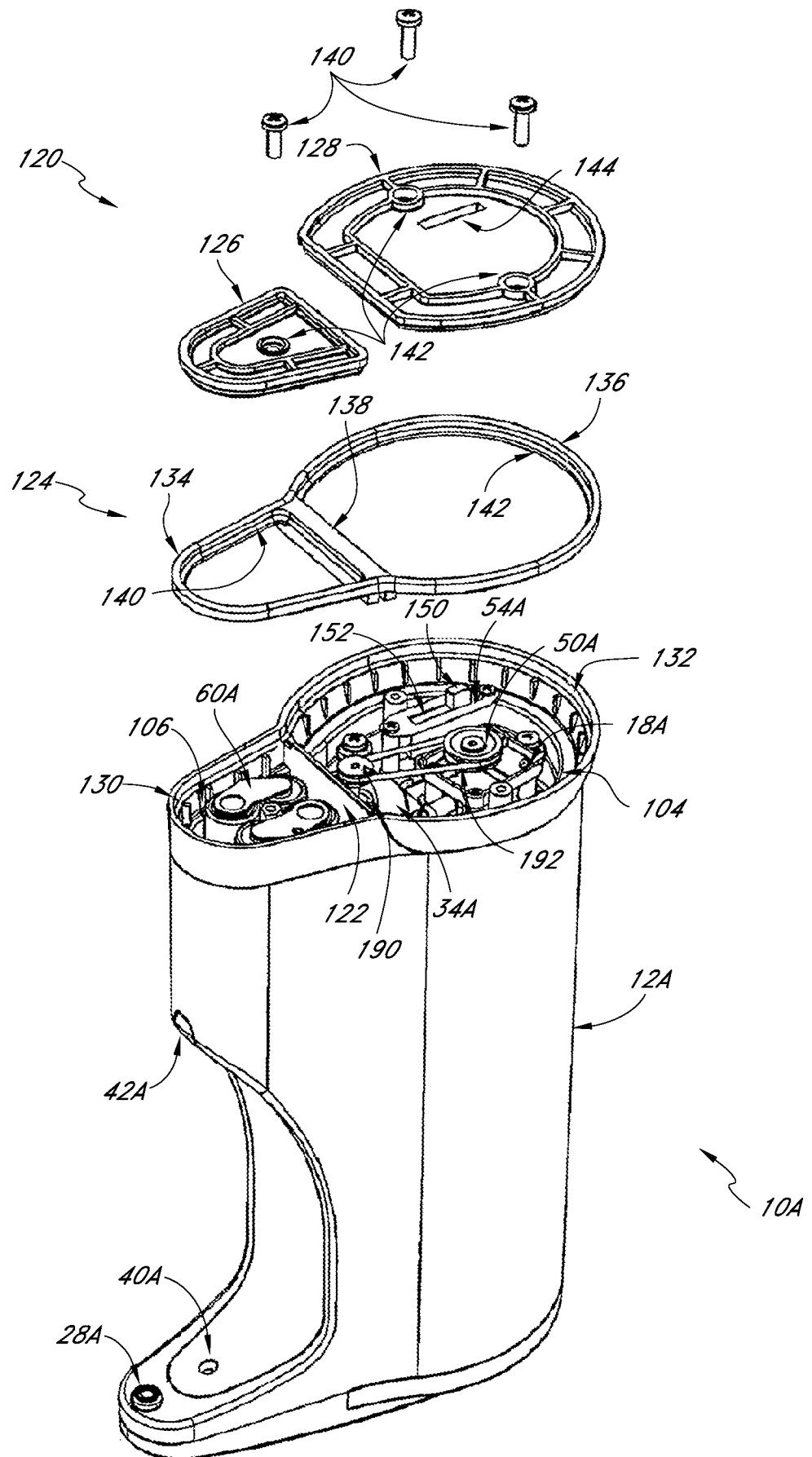
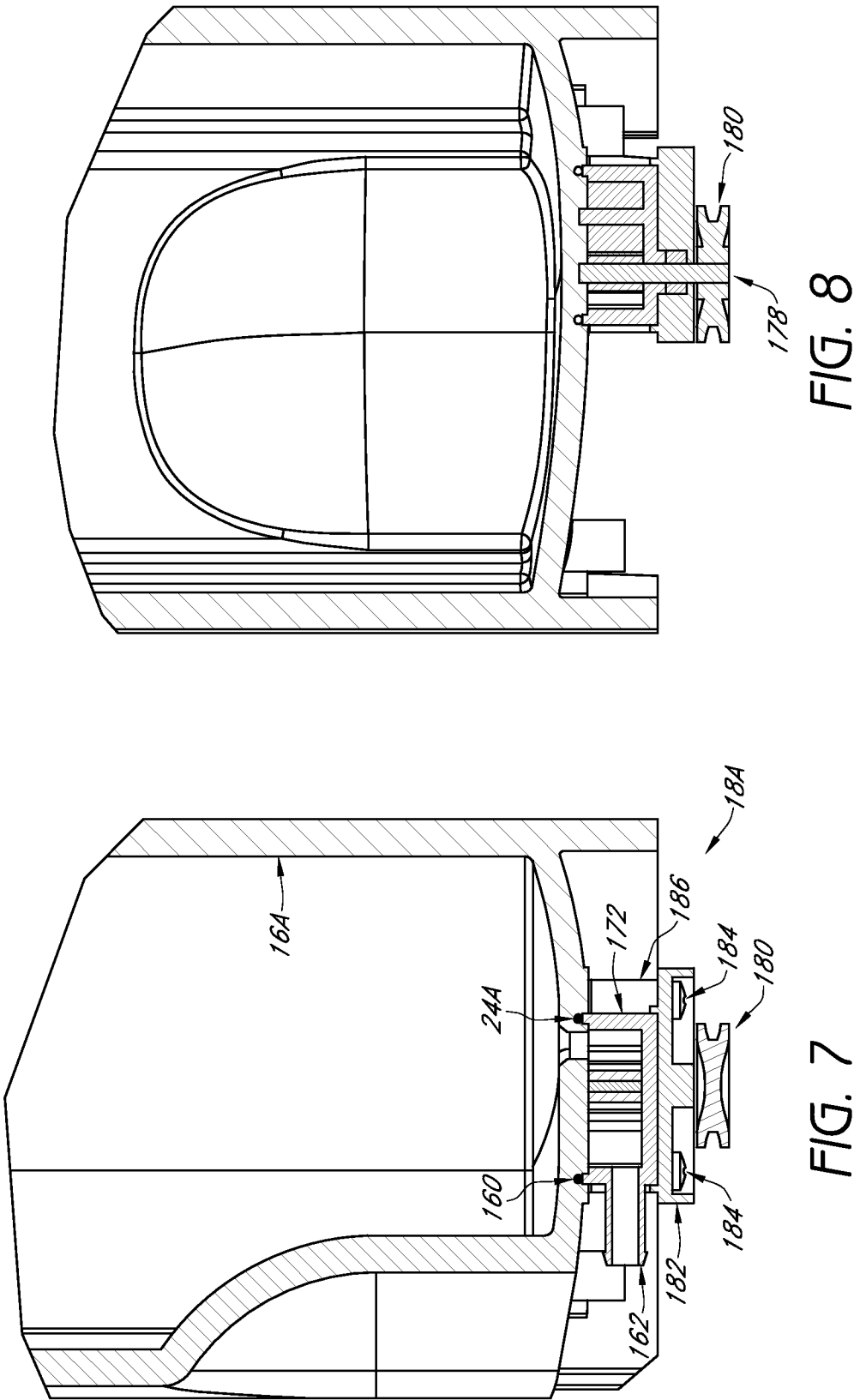


FIG. 6



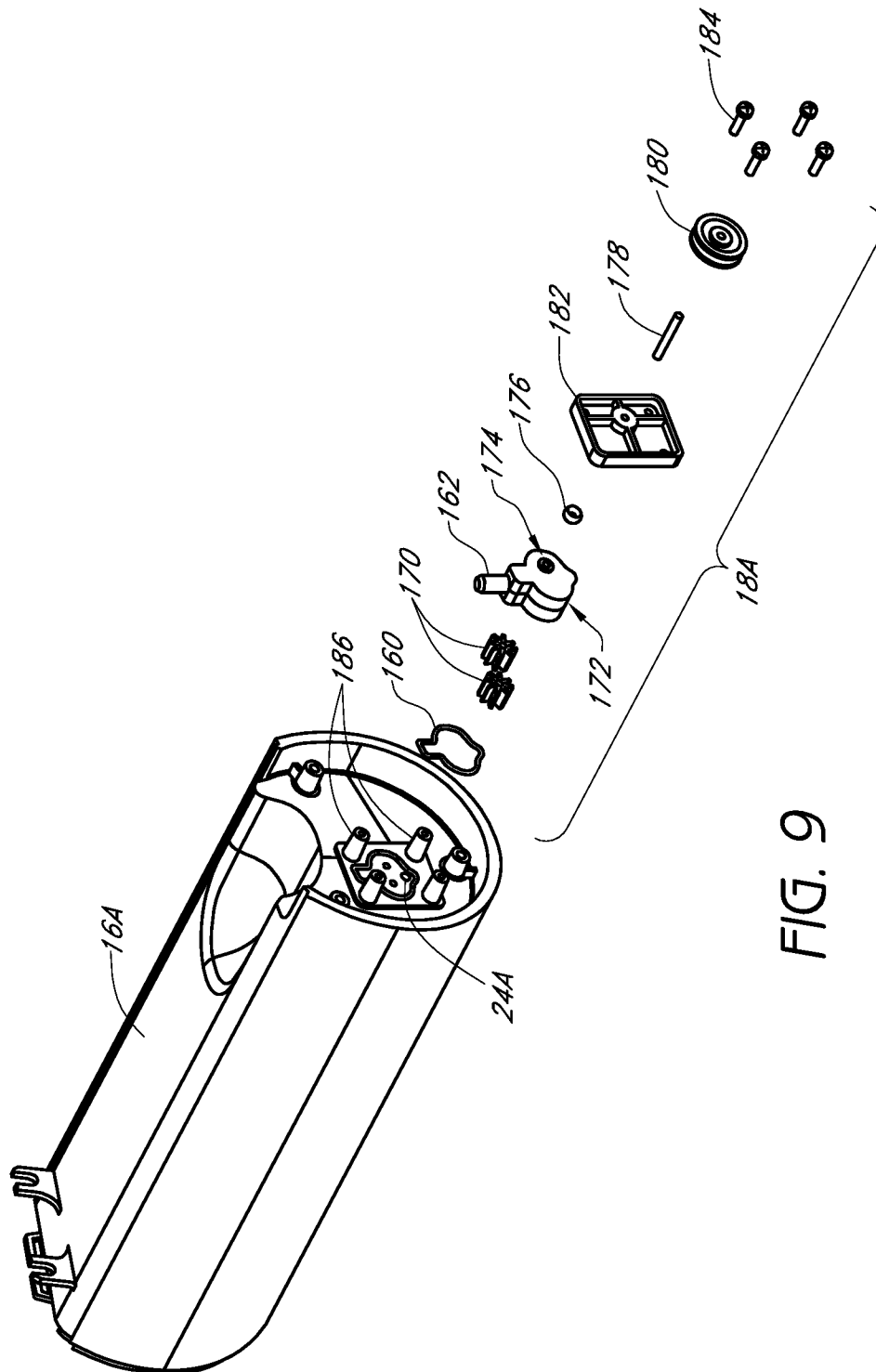
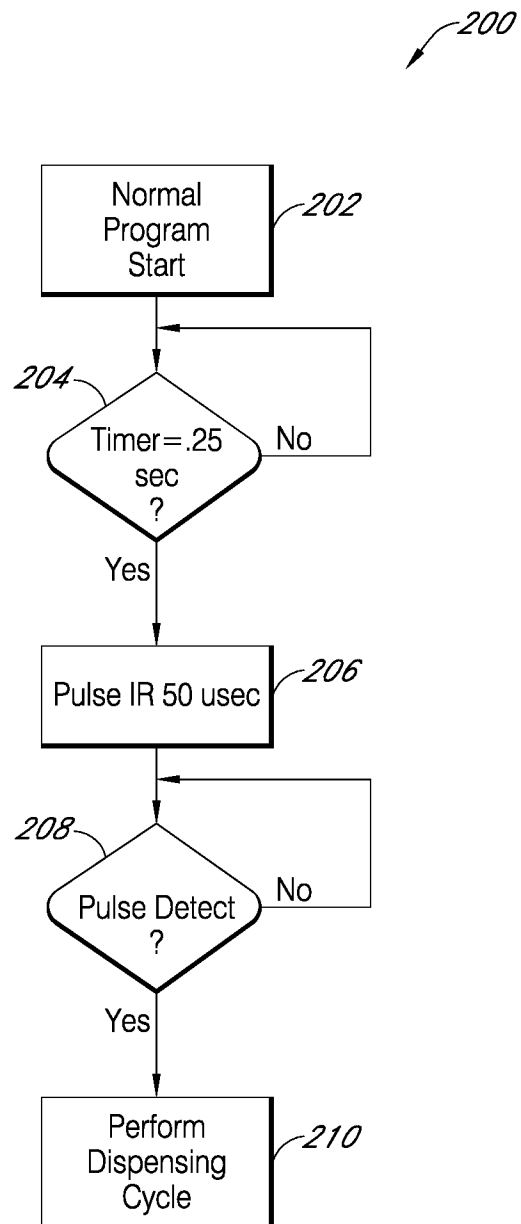


FIG. 9

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*FIG. 10*

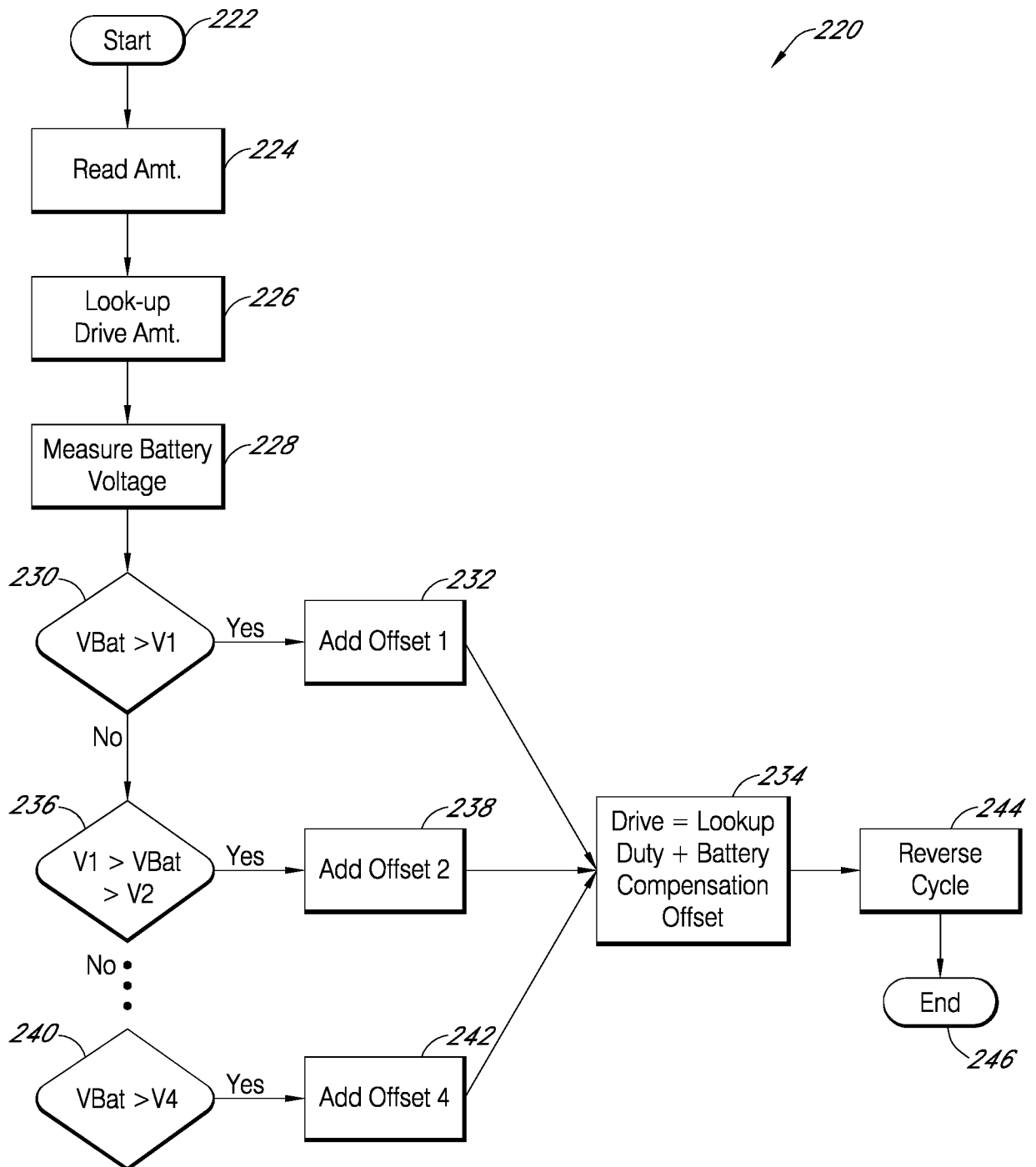
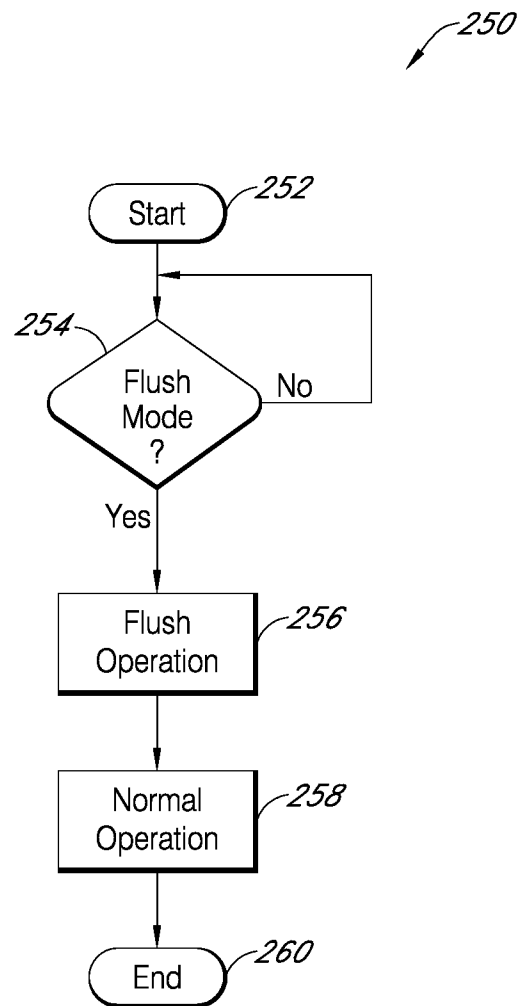


FIG. 11

*FIG. 12*

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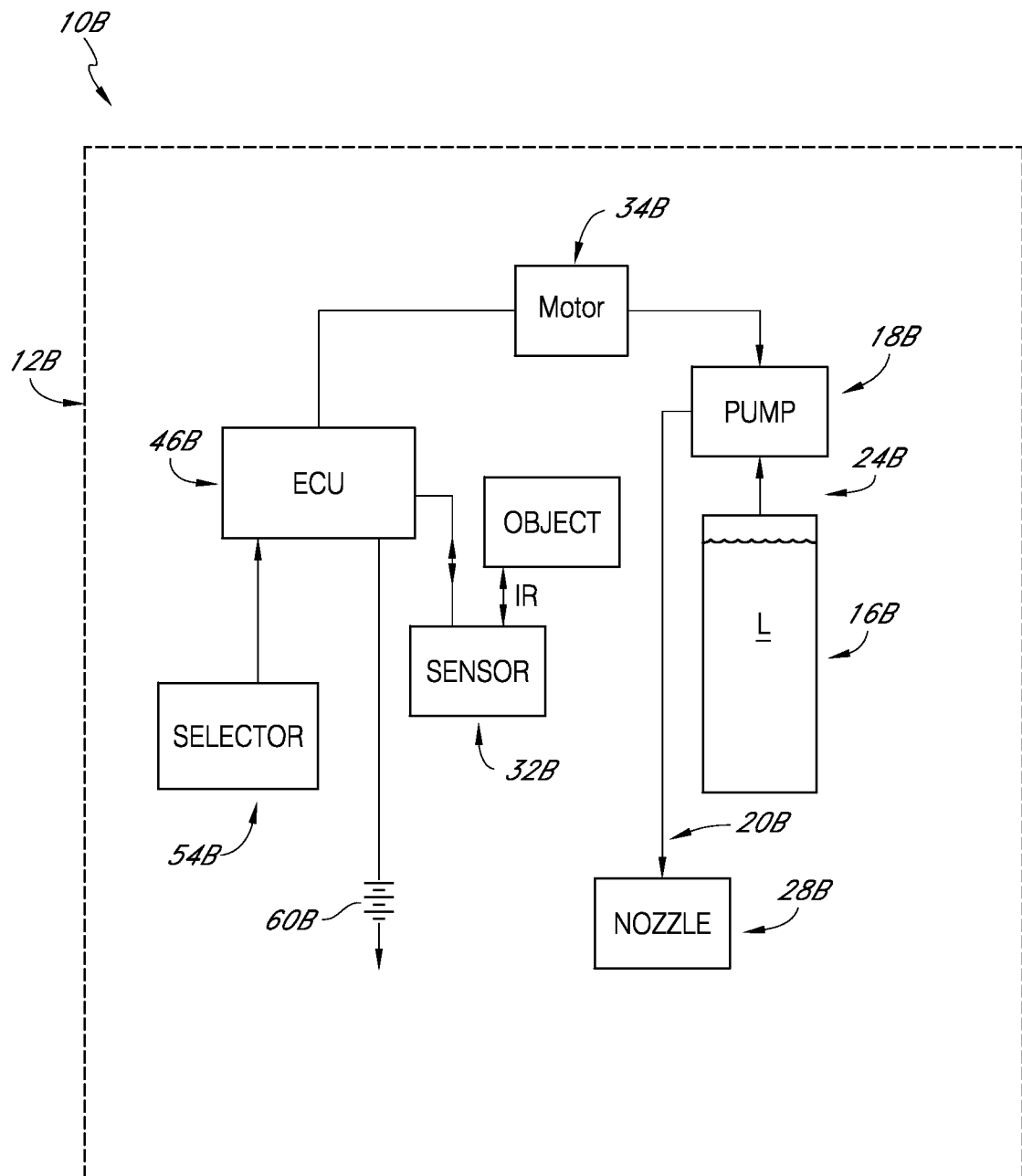


FIG. 13

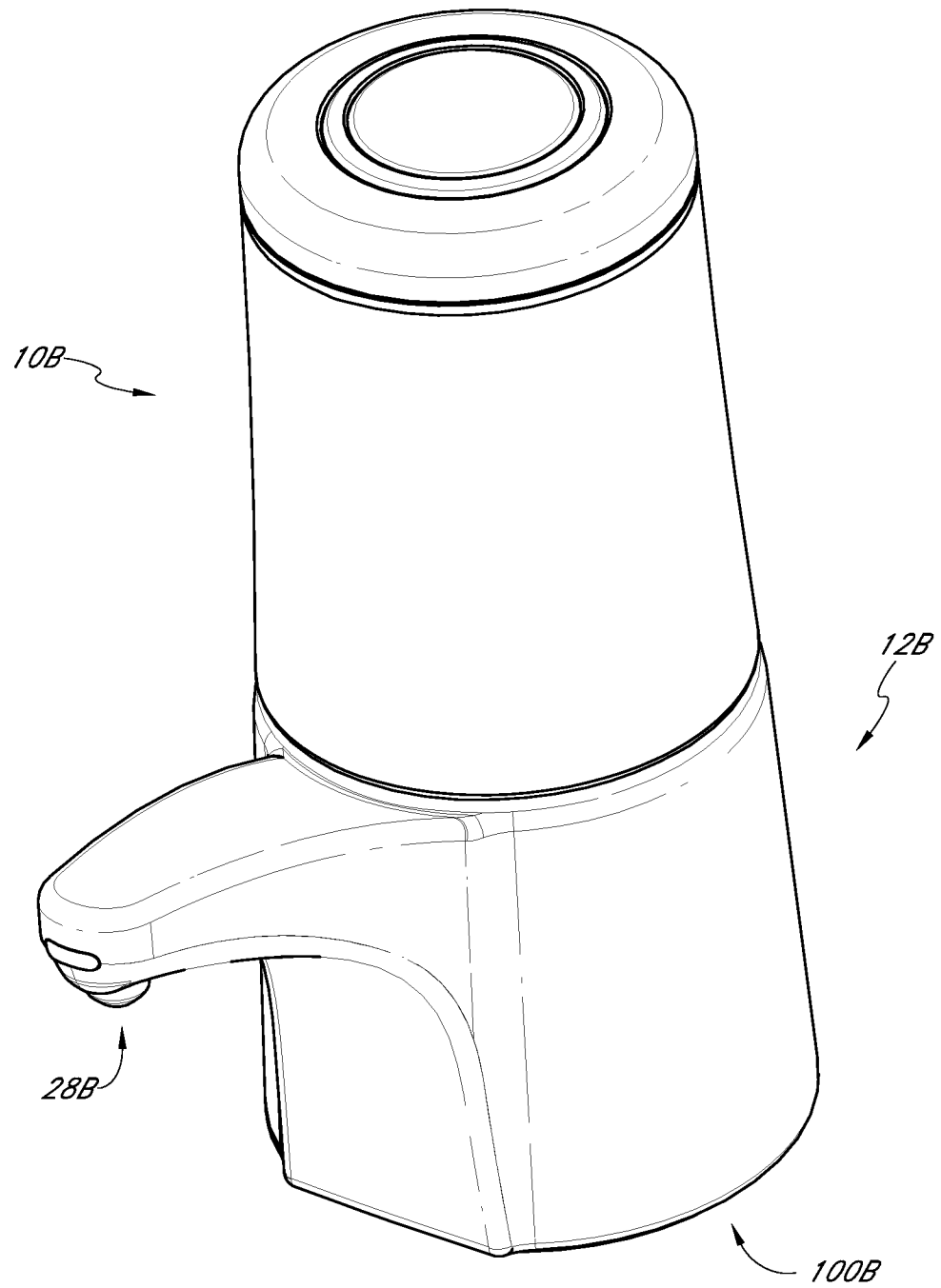


FIG. 14

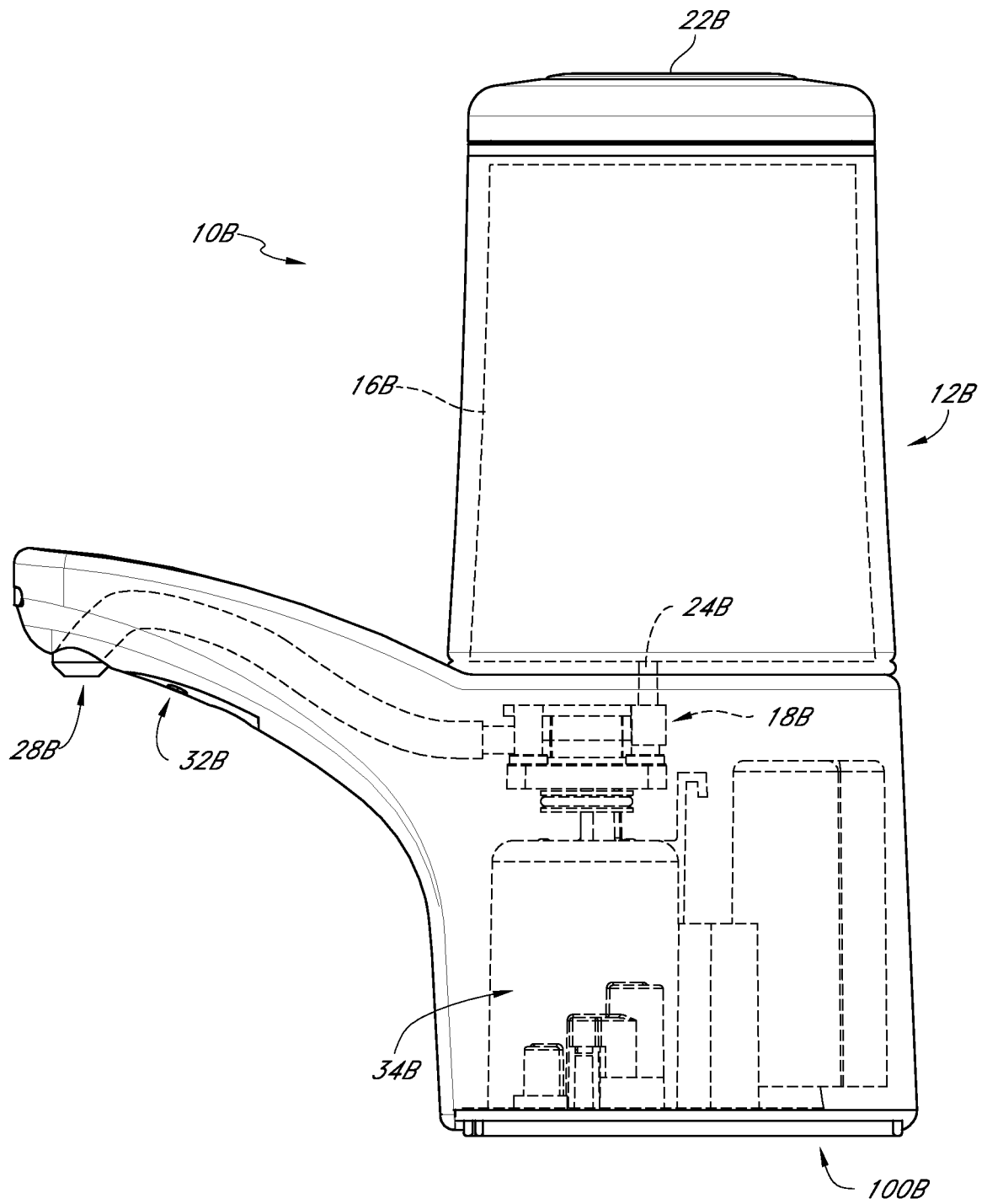


FIG. 15

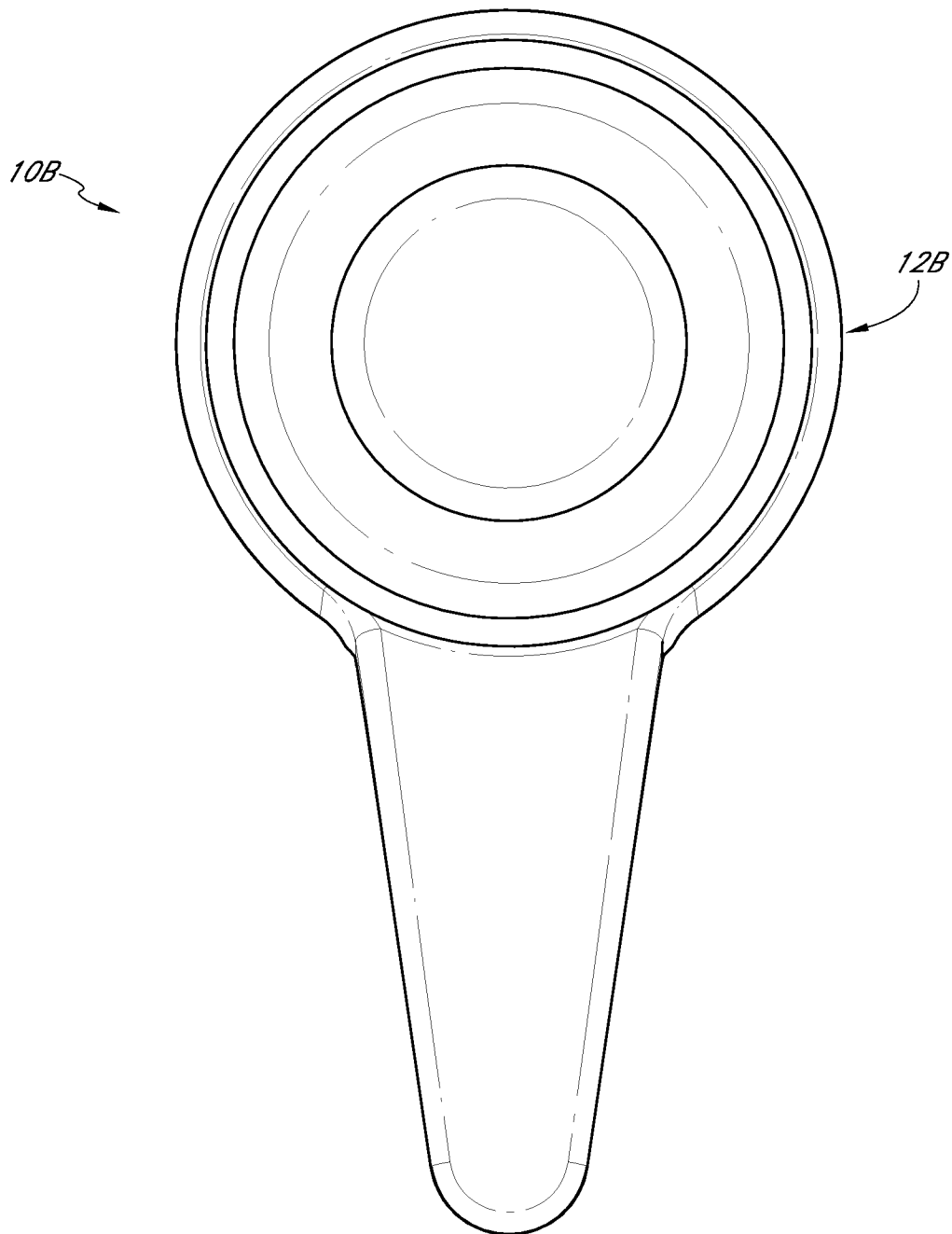


FIG. 16

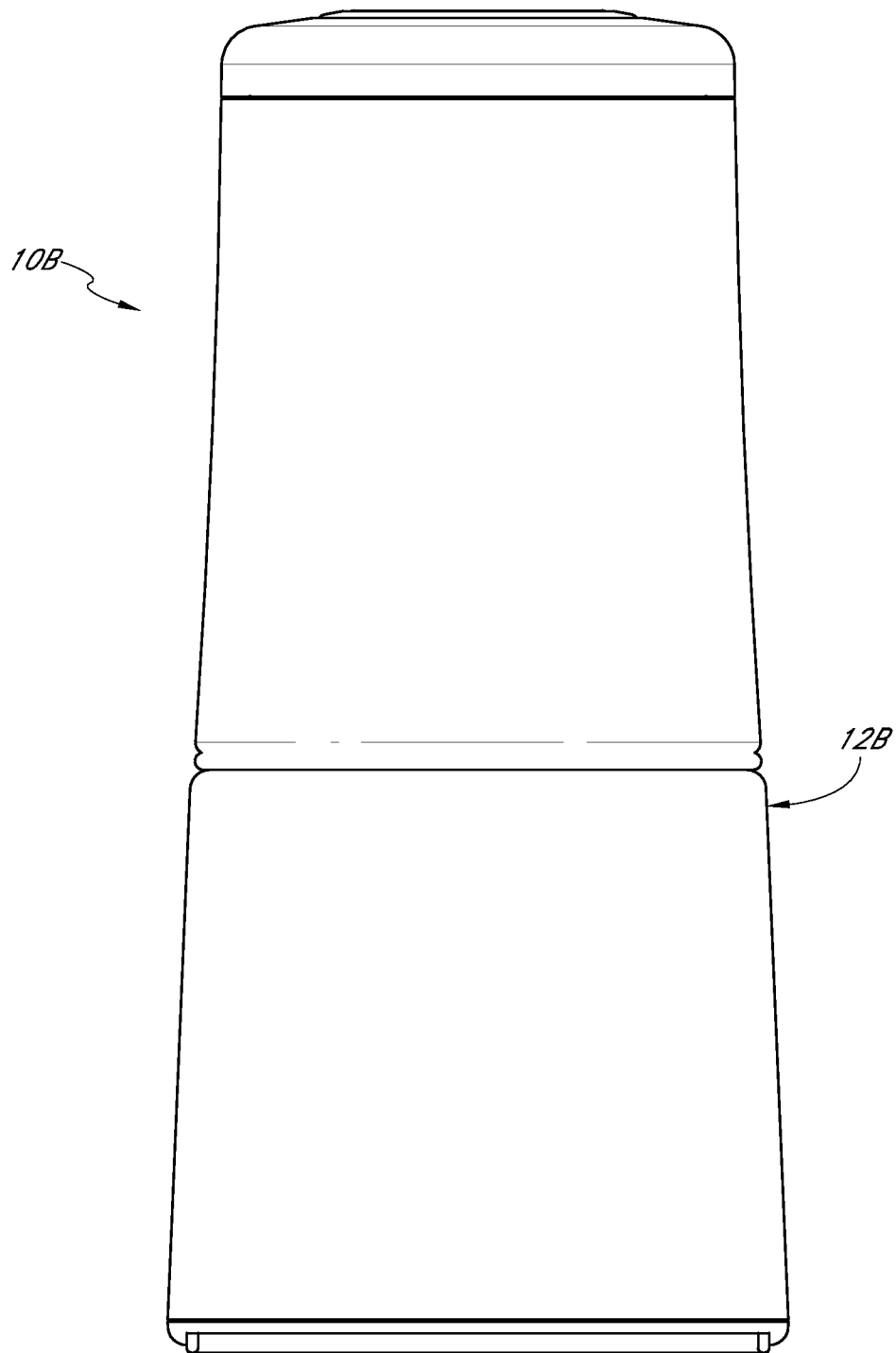


FIG. 17

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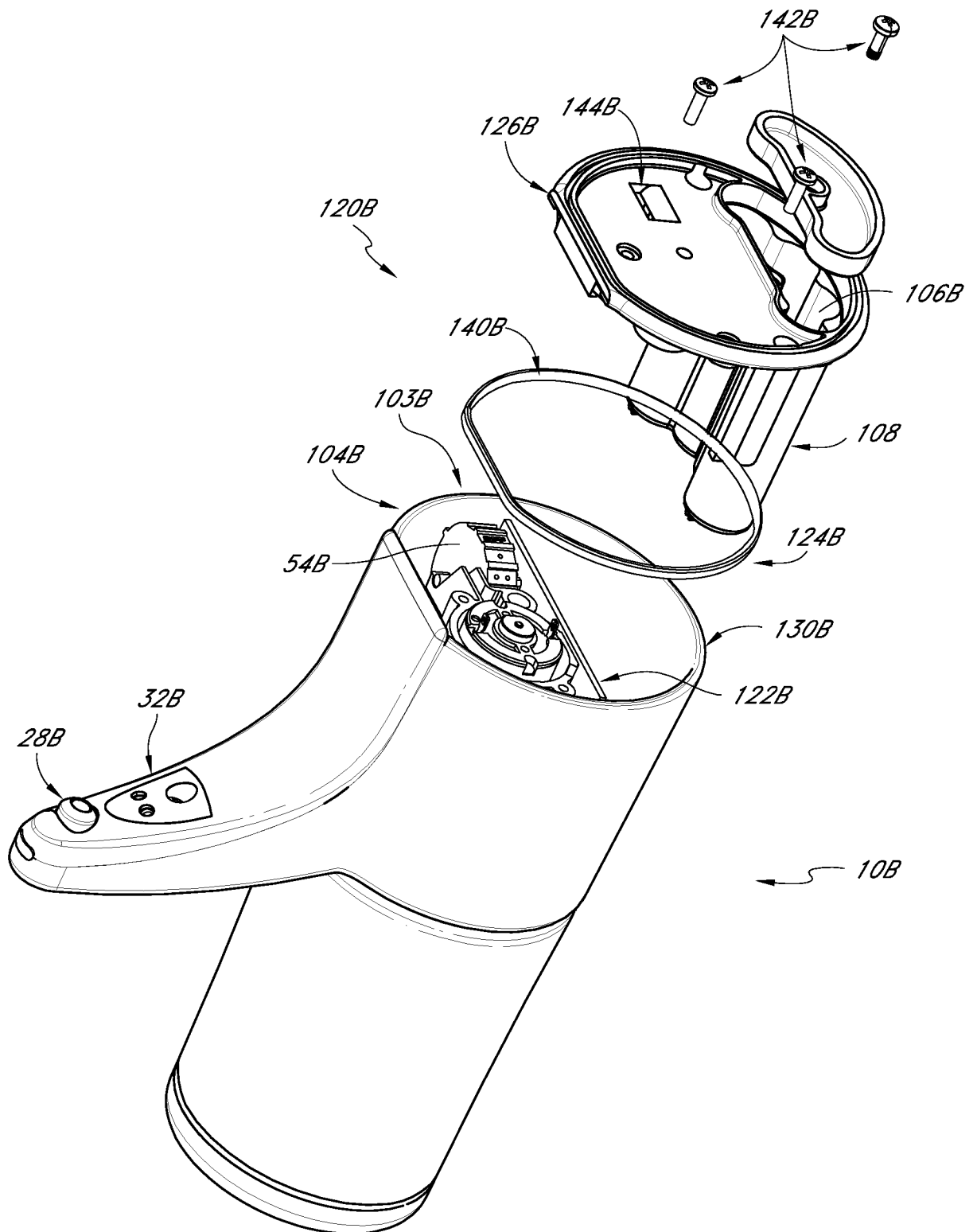


FIG. 18

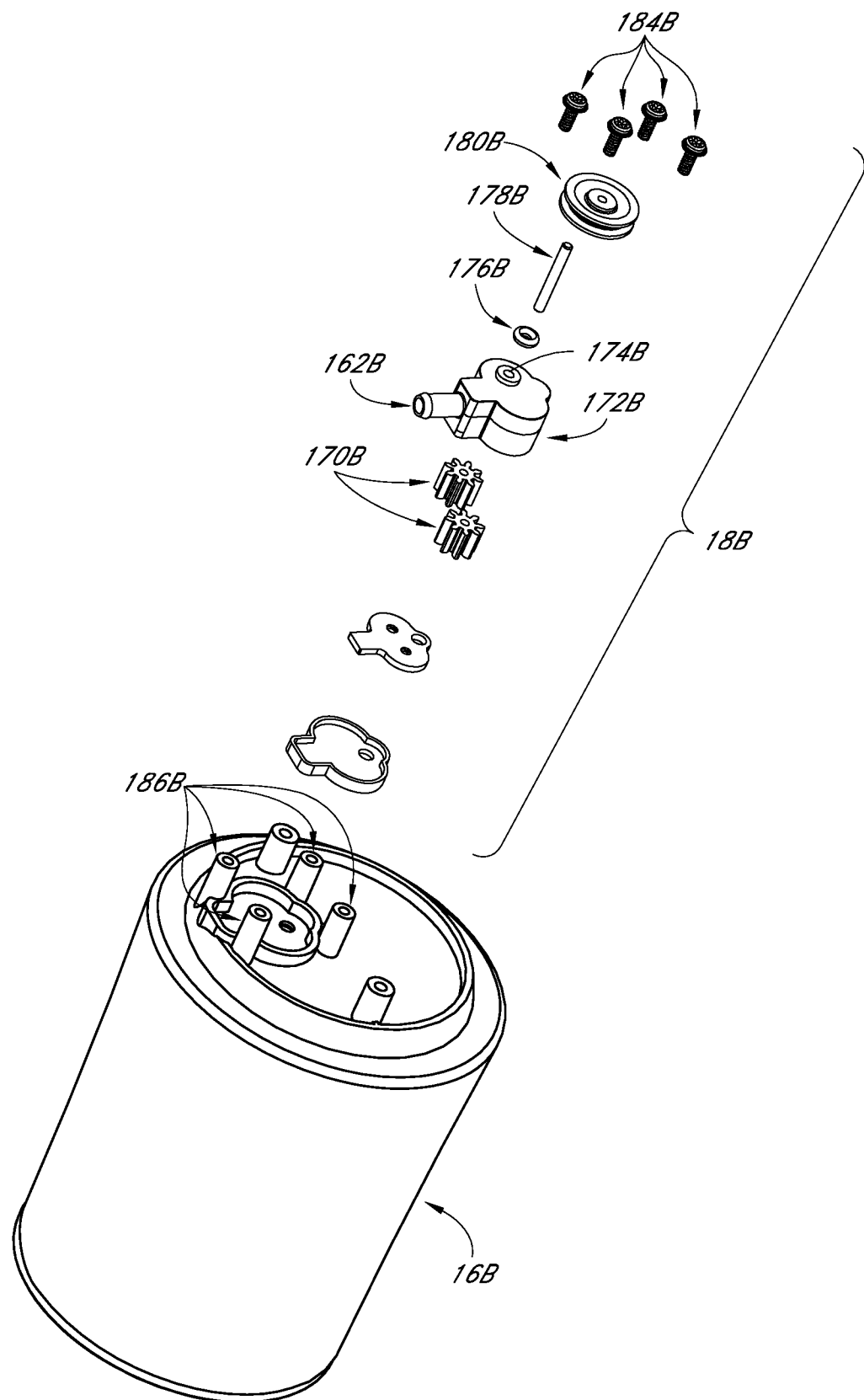
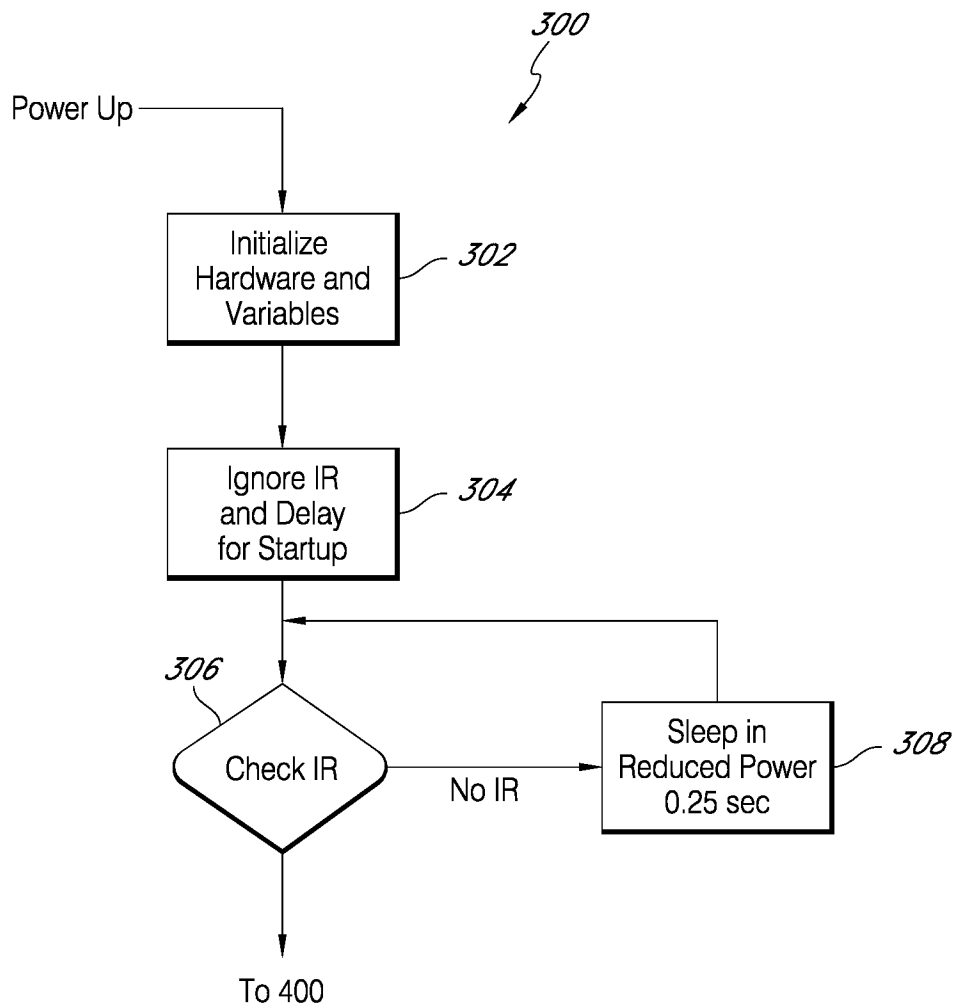


FIG. 19

*FIG. 20*

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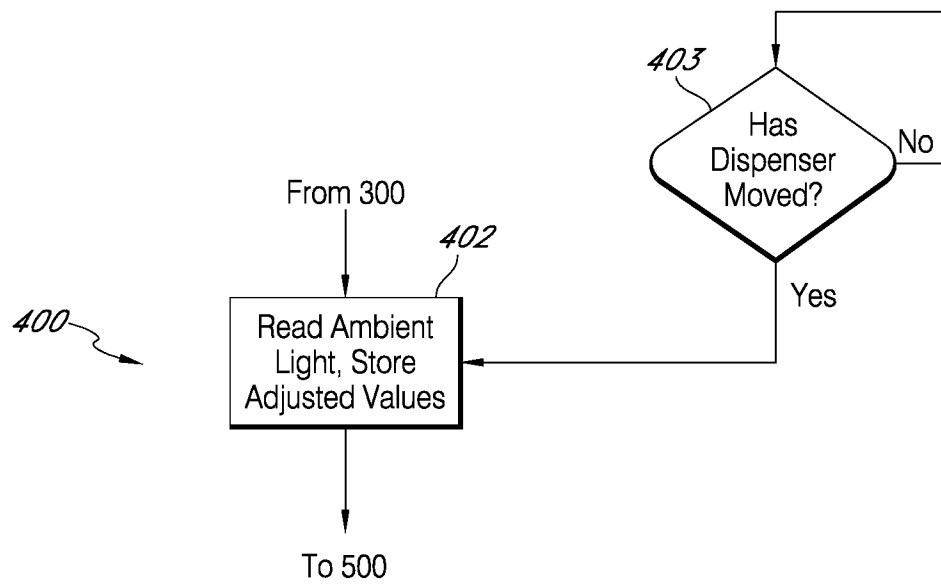
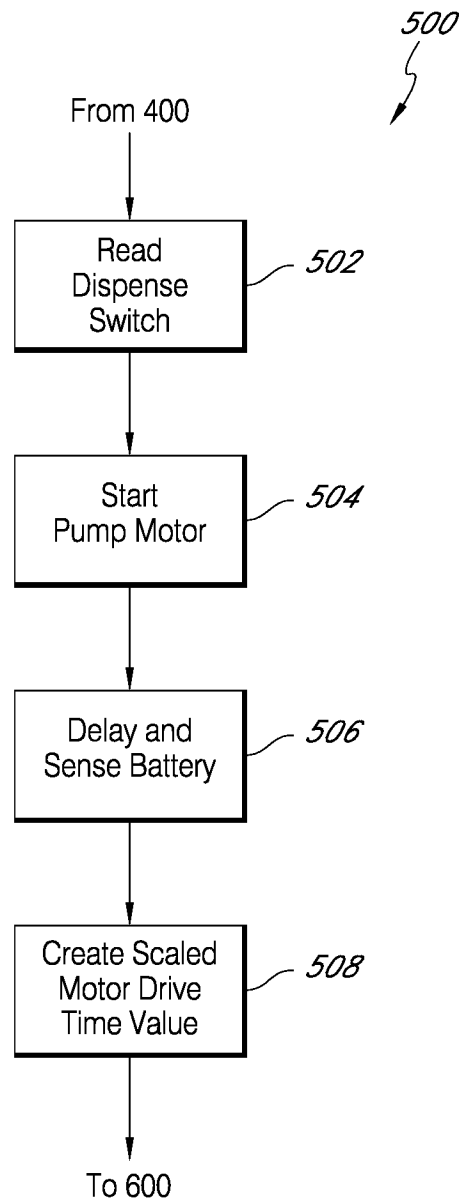


FIG. 21

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**FIG. 22**

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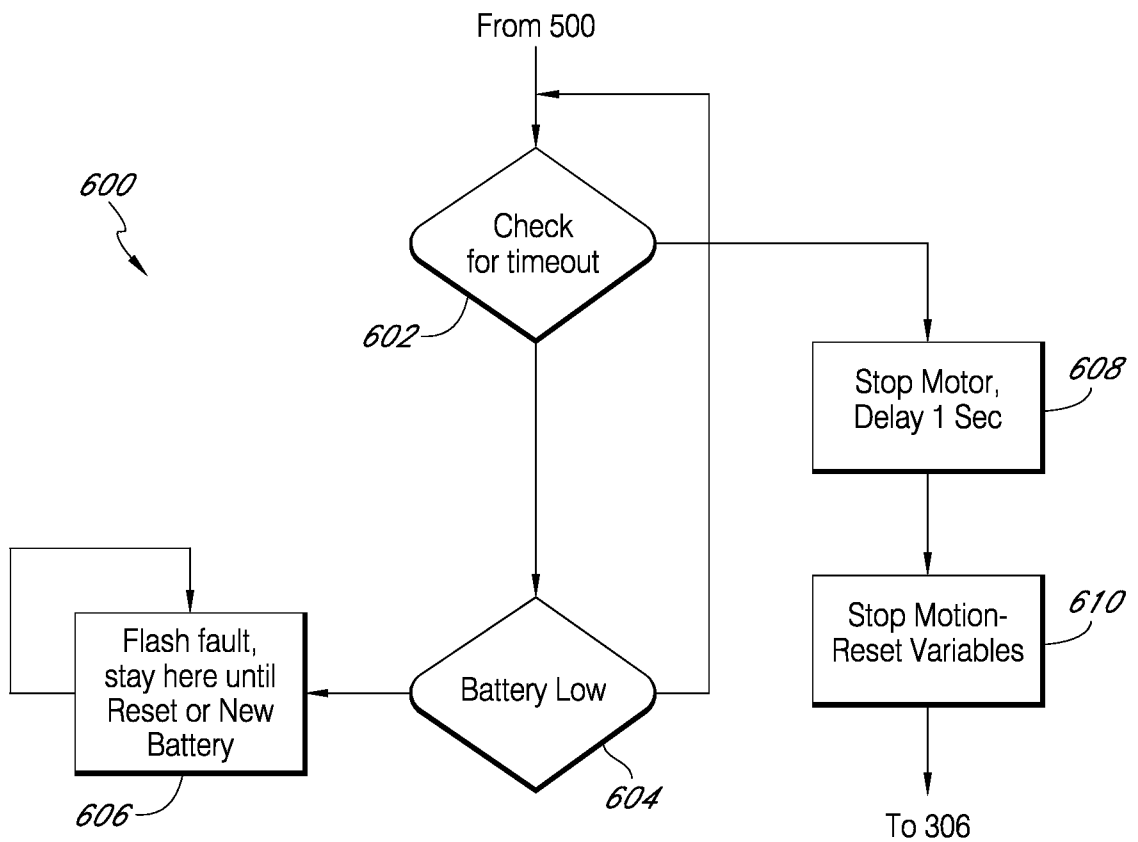


FIG. 23

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US2008/052854

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - G01F 11/00 (2008.04)

USPC - 222/1

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)

IPC(8) - G01F 11/00; G07F 11/00; H04R 1/02 (2008.04)

USPC - 222/1; 239/37; 381/124

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)

USPTO EAST System (US, USPG-PUB, EPO, DERWENT), PatBase, IP.com, DialogPro, Delphion, Google Scholar

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6,929,150 B2 (MUDERLAK et al) 16 August 2005 (16.08.2005) entire document	15, 17-20
--		
Y		2-14, 16, 21-35
Y	US 3,220,954 A (MALBE) 30 November 1965 (30.11.1965) cols. 1, 2 and figs. 1 and 2	2-14
Y	US 2006/0067546 A1 (LEWIS et al) 30 March 2006 (30.03.2006) abstract, paras. 0013, 0021, 0022, 0065	16, 21-35
Y	US 6,594,105 B1 (BRITTNER) 15 July 2003 (15.07.2003) abstract, cols. 1, 5, 10 and figs. 2 and 5	16, 21-35
Y	US 2004/0134924 A1 (HANSEN et al) 15 July 2004 (15.07.2004) paras. 0041, 0043, 0044, 0137, 0142, 0143 and figs. 1-23	16, 21-35

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"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

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

24 June 2008

Date of mailing of the international search report

07 JUL 2008

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