



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2011/123343 A1

(43) International Publication Date
6 October 2011 (06.10.2011)

PCT

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| <p>(51) International Patent Classification:
 G02B 6/38 (2006.01)</p> <p>(21) International Application Number:
 PCT/US2011/029920</p> <p>(22) International Filing Date:
 25 March 2011 (25.03.2011)</p> <p>(25) Filing Language:
 English</p> <p>(26) Publication Language:
 English</p> <p>(30) Priority Data:
 61/318,539 29 March 2010 (29.03.2010) US</p> <p>(71) Applicant <i>(for all designated States except US):</i> AFL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LLC [US/US]; P.O. Box 3127, Spartanburg, South Carolina 29304-3127 (US).</p> <p>(72) Inventors; and</p> <p>(75) Inventors/Applicants <i>(for US only):</i> KIMBRELL, Eddie [US/US]; 929 Autumn Glen Way, Dacula, Georgia 30019 (US). DONALDSON, Chris [US/US]; 321 Crestmont Way, Greenville, South Carolina 29615 (US). LICHOULAS, Ted [US/US]; 505 Spring Lake Loop, Simpsonville, South Carolina 29681 (US).</p> | <p>(74) Agents: PELLEGRINI, Carl, J. et al.; Sughrue Mion, PLLC, 2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, District of Columbia 20037-3213 (US).</p> <p>(81) Designated States <i>(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available):</i> AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, 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, KG, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.</p> <p>(84) Designated States <i>(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available):</i> ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).</p> |
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Declarations under Rule 4.17:

[Continued on next page]

- (54) Title:** HIGH FIBER COUNT PACKAGE INNER MODULE

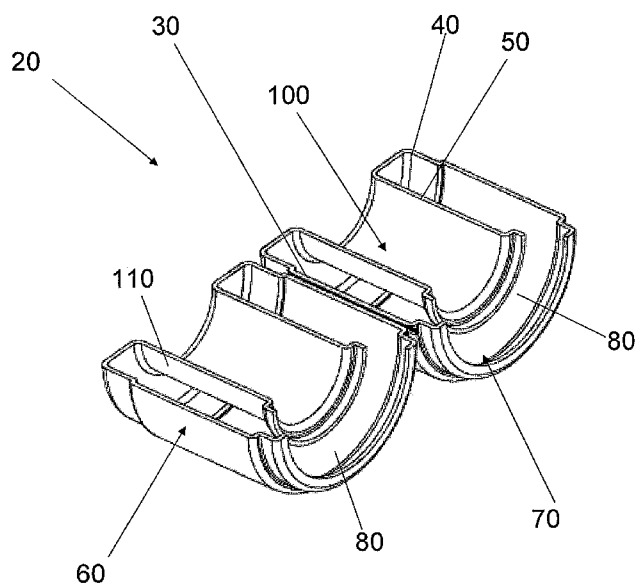


FIG. 1

- (57) Abstract:** Provided is an inner module for holding a plurality of connectors. The inner module includes a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume and a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume. The inner module also includes a connecting portion to connect the first cylindrical portion to the second cylindrical portion. Each of the first and second cylindrical portions have an opening in an axial direction having a width that is narrower than a distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall.



— *as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted
a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))*

Published:

— *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*

HIGH FIBER COUNT PACKAGE INNER MODULE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[01] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/318,539 filed on March 29, 2010 in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[02] Methods and apparatuses consistent with aspects of the present invention relate to an inner module for use with a high fiber count package.

2. Background of the Invention

[03] As telecommunications and enterprise service providers upgrade their systems from copper trunks to fiber optic trunks to improve data transmissions rates, it is necessary to replace the copper backbones with fiber optic backbones in central offices and data centers or install fiber optic backbones in new central offices and data centers. As part of this upgrade process, High Fiber Count (HFC) fiber optic cable assemblies (fiber optic cable trunks with more than 12 optic fibers which are broken out into individual connectors on one or both ends) are used to build this fiber optic backbone. The break-out end of these High Fiber Count (HFC) fiber optic

cables consist of numerous individual fibers terminated with fiber optic connectors which are bulky and difficult to package efficiently and compactly. In the related art, a flexible tube may be fitted over the bundled connectors by heat shrinking the tube or by utilizing cable ties. This methodology makes it difficult to route the cable in ducts, wireways, and in panels due to its size. As a result, installers often will remove this packaging before attempting to install the High Fiber Count (HFC) cable. This creates a risk of damaging the product. Additionally, this packaging methodology makes it difficult to open and reseal this packaging when inspecting and testing fiber optic connectors prior to installation in order to prevent the installation of damaged cables and project delays.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[04] This invention is related to U.S. Patent Application No. 61/147,265 and PCT/US2010/022037 [High fiber count packaging capsule](the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference) in which fiber optic connectors are held in the packaging case in a pocket and retained with a snap-in C-clip. It is also related to U.S. Patent Application No. 61/227,223 and PCT/US2010/042735 (the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference) in which fiber optic connectors are held in the resealable packaging case using an interior snap feature.

[05] It is an aspect of the present invention to provide an improved apparatus and the method to secure individual fiber optic connectors in a housing, such as the fiber packaging modules described in the two patent

applications cited above. More specifically, it is an aspect of the present invention to provide an inner module that is installed into the housings. The inner module is configured to capture a plurality of connectors in a annular volume defined by the inner module.

[06] According one aspect of the present invention, an inner module for holding a plurality of connectors is provided. The inner module comprises a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume and a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume. The inner module also includes a connecting portion to connect the first cylindrical portion to the second cylindrical portion.

[07] The connecting portion of the inner module may comprise a hinge.

[08] The inner module may be configured such that each of the first and second cylindrical portions have an opening in an axial direction having a width that is narrower than a distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall. The inner module may also comprise a plurality of connectors positioned within the annular volume.

[09] The inner module is sized such that the distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall is greater than a cross-sectional width of each of the plurality of connectors. Also, the inner module includes an opening in the axial direction has a width that is less than each of the plurality of connectors.

[10] Further, each of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion may comprise an inner member and an outer member, at least one of the inner member and the outer member comprising an overlapping portion to form a snap fit connection between the inner member and the outer member.

[11] According to another aspect of the present invention, a fiber packaging module is provided that contains a plurality of fiber optic connectors. The packaging module comprises an outer shell containing a plurality of fiber optic connectors connected to respective fiber optic cables; and an inner module. The inner module comprises a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume; a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume; and a connecting portion to connect the first cylindrical portion to the second cylindrical portion.

[12] The fiber packaging module may also be configured such that the plurality of fiber optic connectors are disposed within the annular volume of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion. The inner module may be sized such that the distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall is greater than a cross-sectional width of each of the plurality of connectors. Also, the opening in the axial direction has a width that is less than each of the plurality of connectors.

[13] According to another aspect, the fiber packaging module comprises two inner modules disposed adjacent to each other in an axial direction of the fiber packing module.

[14] According to another aspect of the present invention, a method for packaging a plurality of fiber optic cable connectors is provided. the method comprises providing an inner module comprising a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume and a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume; placing a plurality of connectors into the receiving portions of the an annular volume of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion; and connecting the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion by brining the first outer all and the second outer wall together.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[15] The above and/or other aspects of the invention will become apparent and more readily appreciated from the following description of the exemplary embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

[16] FIG. 1 is a perspective view showing an inner module according to a first exemplary embodiment;

[17] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the inner module of FIG. 1 having a plurality of fiber optic connectors inserted therein;

[18] FIG. 3 is perspective view of a fiber packing module;

[19] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the fiber packing module having a plurality of inner modules installed therein;

[20] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the fiber packing module of FIG. 4 wherein the inner modules are closed;

[21] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of an inner portion of an inner module in accord with a second exemplary embodiment;

[22] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of an outer portion of an inner module in accord with the second exemplary embodiment; and

[23] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of an inner module in accord with the second exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

[24] Hereinafter the non-limiting exemplary embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[25] The first exemplary embodiment is shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. FIG. 1 shows an inner module 20 made of a plastic or resin material. While the material in this embodiment is described as a plastic or a resin, other materials may be used.

[26] The inner module 20 of this embodiment has a first part 60 and a second part 70 connected by a hinge portion 30. In FIG. 1, the inner module is in an open configuration. In the open configuration, an annular volume 110 is exposed. This annular volume is defined by an inner wall 50 and an outer

wall 40. This volume is sized to receive fiber optic connectors of various sizes.

[27] On one axial end of the inner module 20 is an axial opening 80 that extends annularly around the inner module 20. This axial opening 80 has a smaller width in the radial direction than a width of the annular volume 110. The width of the axial opening 80 is sized to be smaller than the largest cross-sectional dimension of the fiber optic connectors to be inserted into the inner module to prevent the fiber optic connector from passing through the opening. On the other hand, the width of the annular volume 110 in the radial direction is set to be wider than the largest cross-sectional dimension of the fiber optic connectors to be positioned inside the annular volume. As a result of the sizing configuration set forth above, the inner module 20 can hold fiber optic connectors of different sizes at the same time.

[28] FIG. 2 shows the inner module 20 after multiple fiber optic connectors 120 have been inserted into the annular volume. After the fiber optic connectors 120 are loaded into the inner module 20, the first part 60 and the second part 70 are rotated about the hinge 30 to close the opening into the annular volume 110. When closed, the fiber optic connectors 120 are secured together within the annular volume 110. Additionally, when in the closed position, the inner wall 50 forms a center opening 100 through the center of the inner module.

[29] The inner module 100 is sized to be fitted into and received by a fiber packing module 10 (see FIG. 3). The shape of the outer side surface of

the inner module 20 formed by the outer wall 40 is generally configured to fit the inside surface of the fiber packaging module 10 into which it is placed. The inner surface of the fiber packaging module 10 may be formed with grooves or other holding members to prevent the inner module 20 from sliding along its inner surface. Alternatively, the inner module 20 may be adhered to the inner surface using adhesives, tapes or velcro members. The inner module 20 may be held in a closed position by an elastic member, which may also prevent sliding of the inner module 20 with respect to the fiber packaging module 10.

[30] FIG. 4 shows a fiber packaging module 10 having an inner module 20 in a closed position and an inner module 20 in an open position. This figure exemplifies how multiple inner modules 20 may be placed into a single fiber packaging module 10. The inner modules 20 may be fitted with multiple fiber optic connectors 120, each connected to a corresponding optical fiber 130. The optical fiber connectors 120 can be placed into the inner modules 20 either before or after the inner modules 20 are placed into the fiber packaging module 10. After the first inner module 20 is placed into the fiber packaging module 10, it is opened to expose the center opening 100. This enables a user to fit a second inner module 20 into the fiber packaging module by providing an avenue for the optical fibers 130 of the second inner module 20 to extend and exit the fiber packaging module 10. After the optical fibers 130 are positioned within the center opening 100, the first inner module may be closed as shown in FIG. 5.

[31] By using the inner modules 20 as described above, connectors of different sizes may be housed together in a single module. This prevents the tangling of optical fibers while providing the flexibility to route different fiber optic connectors simultaneously within a single fiber packaging module.

[32] FIGS. 6-8 illustrate the features of a second embodiment of the present invention. The inner module of this embodiment incorporates the features of the first embodiment describe above. This embodiment comprises an inner member 200 that includes an outer wall 50 as well as other corresponding features of the first embodiment and a separate outer portion 210 that includes an inner wall 40. The outer member 210 may also include a hinge 30, or alternatively, the hinge 30 may be eliminated and the outer member 210 may comprise two separate halves.

[33] The inner member 200 and the outer member 210 are configured to be fitted together by joining overlapping portions 220 on each of the corresponding portions. As shown in FIG. 6, the inner member 200 comprises an overlapping portion 220 that is configured to wrap around the outside of the outer member 210. Additionally, the outer member 210 may be configured with an overlapping portion 210 that is configured to abut the inner wall 40 of the inner member 200. These portions may be either adhered to one another or snap fitted as shown in FIG. 8.

[34] Although a few exemplary embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it would be appreciated by those skilled in the art that changes may be made in this embodiment without

departing from the principles and spirit of the invention, the scope of which is defined in the claims and their equivalents. Additionally, while the inner modules are described above in combination with optical fiber connectors, the invention is not so limited. Rather, the inner modules may be used with wires or any other type of connector, such as an electrical connector.

[35] What is claimed is:

1. An inner module for holding a plurality of connectors, the inner module comprising:

 a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume;

 a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume; and

 a connecting portion to connect the first cylindrical portion to the second cylindrical portion.

2. The inner module according to claim 1, wherein connecting portion is a hinge.

3. The inner module according to claim 1, wherein each of the first and second cylindrical portions have an opening in an axial direction having a width that is narrower than a distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall.

4. The inner module according to claim 1, further comprising a plurality of connectors positioned within the annular volume.

5. The inner module according to claim 3, further comprising a plurality of connectors positioned within the annular volume.

6. The inner module according to claim 5, wherein the distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall is greater than a cross-sectional width of each of the plurality of connectors.

7. The inner module according to claim 5, wherein the opening in the axial direction has a width that is less than each of the plurality of connectors.

8. The inner module according to claim 1, wherein each of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion comprise an inner member and an outer member, at least one of the inner member and the outer member comprises an overlapping portion to form a snap fit connection between the inner member and the outer member.

9. A fiber packaging module that contains a plurality fiber optic connectors, the module comprising:

an outer shell containing a plurality of fiber optic connectors connected to respective fiber optic cables; and

an inner module comprising:

a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular volume;

a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume; and

a connecting portion to connect the first cylindrical portion to the second cylindrical portion.

10. The fiber packaging module according to claim 8, wherein plurality of fiber optic connectors are disposed with the annular volume of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion.

11. The fiber packaging module according to claim 8, wherein the distance between the first inner wall and the first outer wall is greater than a cross-sectional width of each of the plurality of connectors.

12. The fiber packaging module according to claim 8, wherein the opening in the axial direction has a width that is less than each of the plurality of connectors.

13. The fiber packaging module according to claim 8, wherein the fiber packaging module comprises two inner modules disposed adjacent to each other in an axial direction of the fiber packing module.

14. A method for packaging a plurality of fiber optic cable connectors, the method comprising:

providing an inner module comprising a first cylindrical portion having a first outer wall spaced radially from a first inner wall to form an annular

volume and a second cylindrical portion having a second outer wall spaced radially from a second inner wall to form an annular volume;

placing a plurality of connectors into the receiving portions of the annular volume of the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion;

connecting the first cylindrical portion and the second cylindrical portion by joining the first outer wall and the second outer wall together; and

placing the inner module into a fiber packaging module.

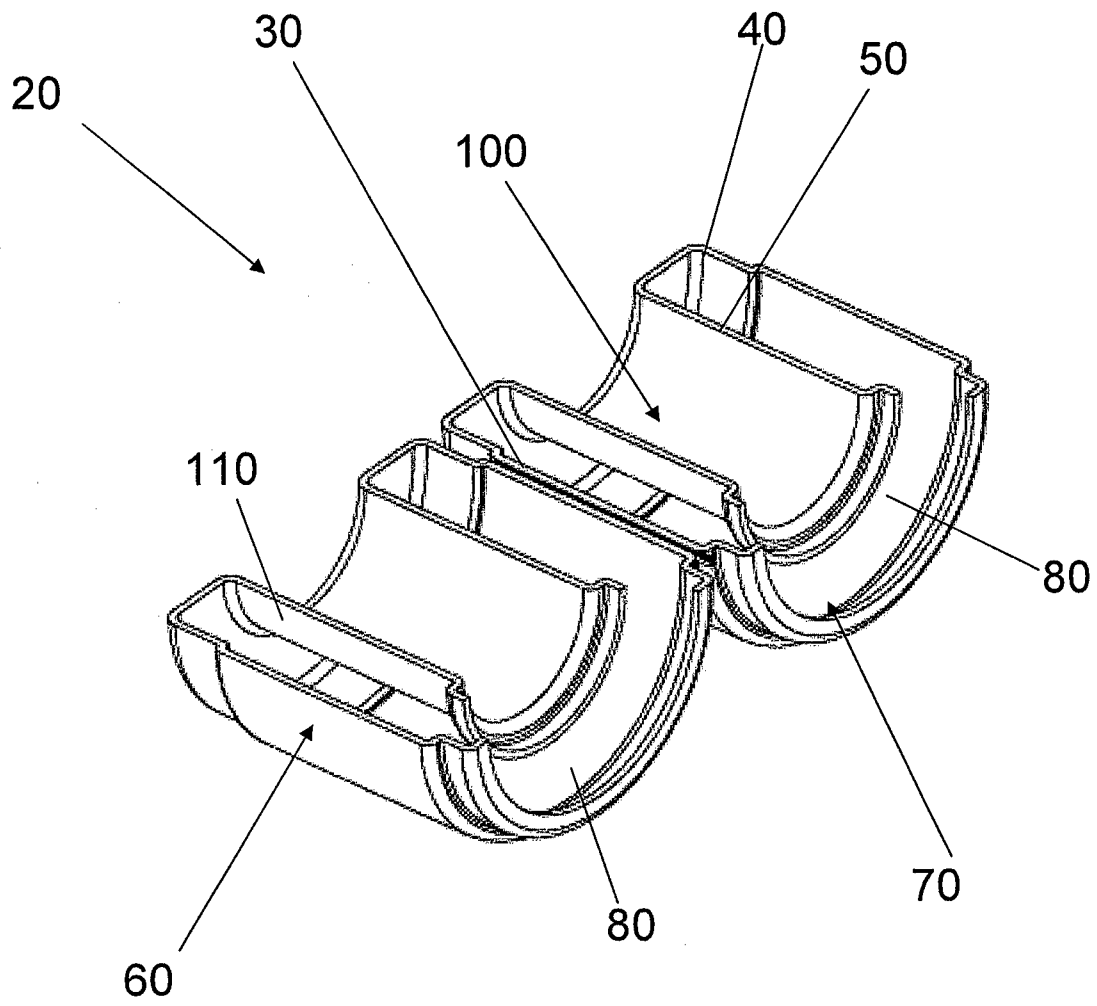


FIG. 1

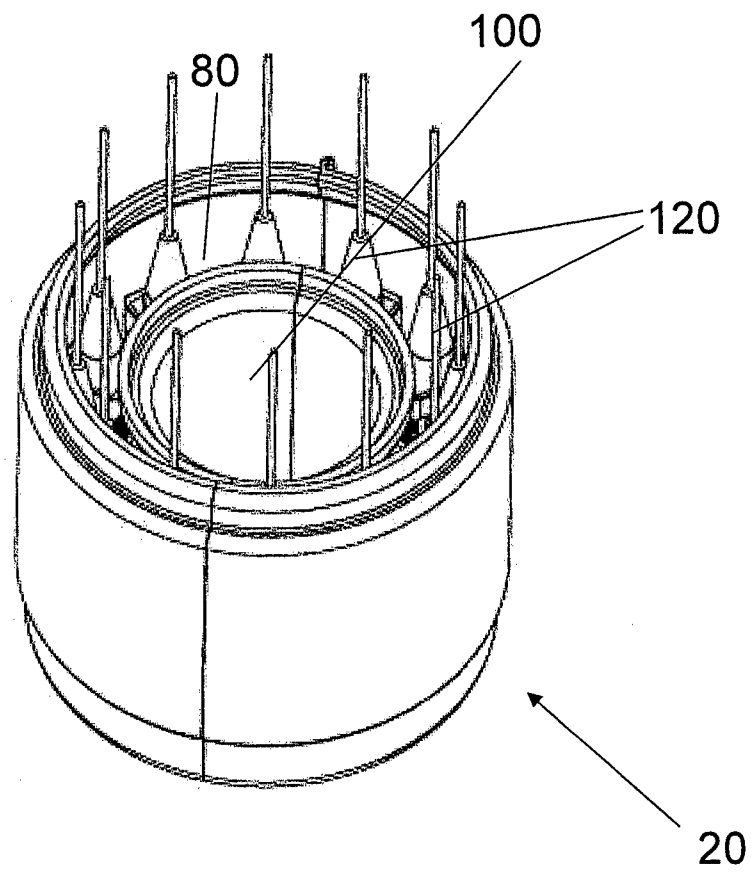


FIG. 2

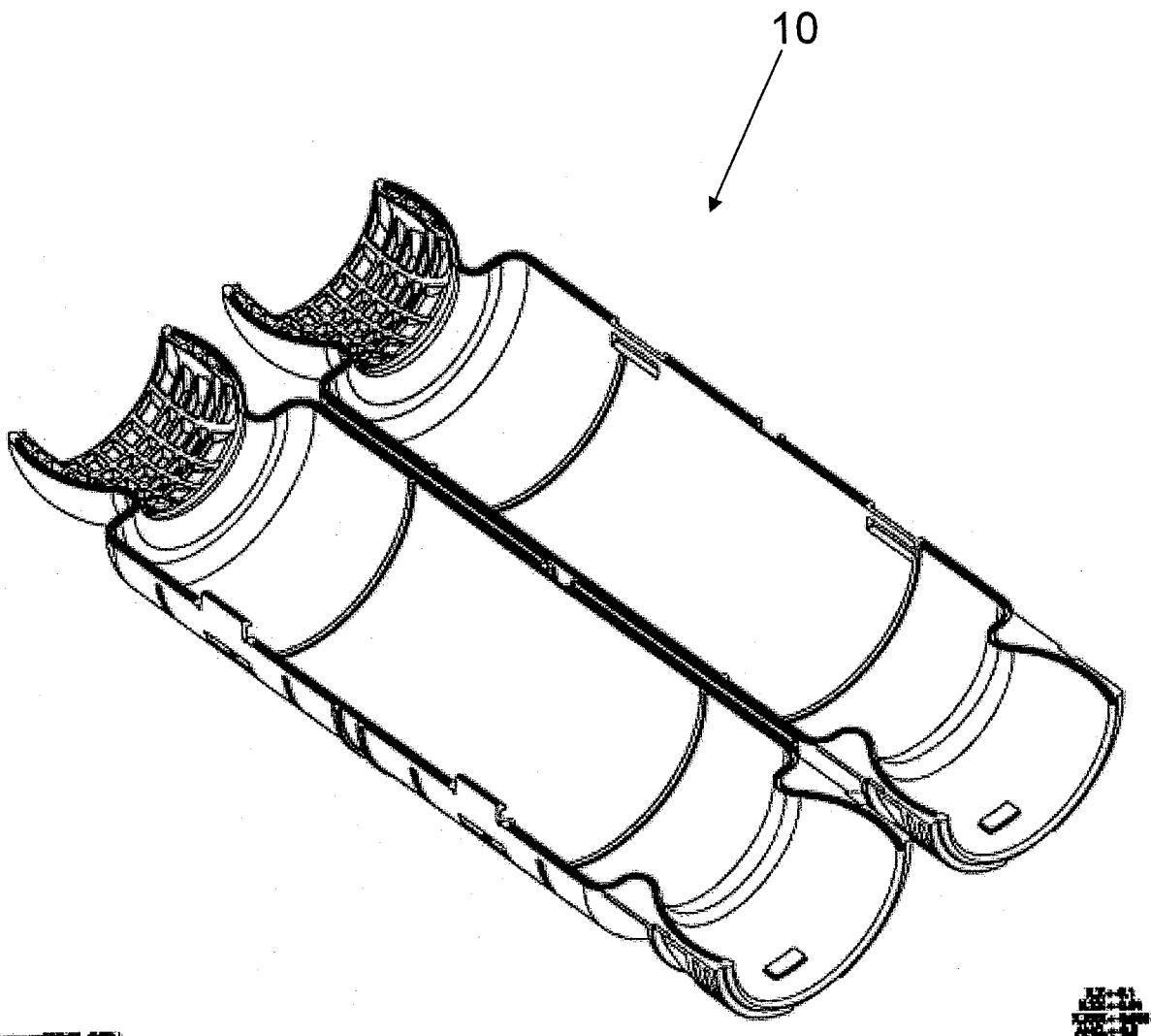
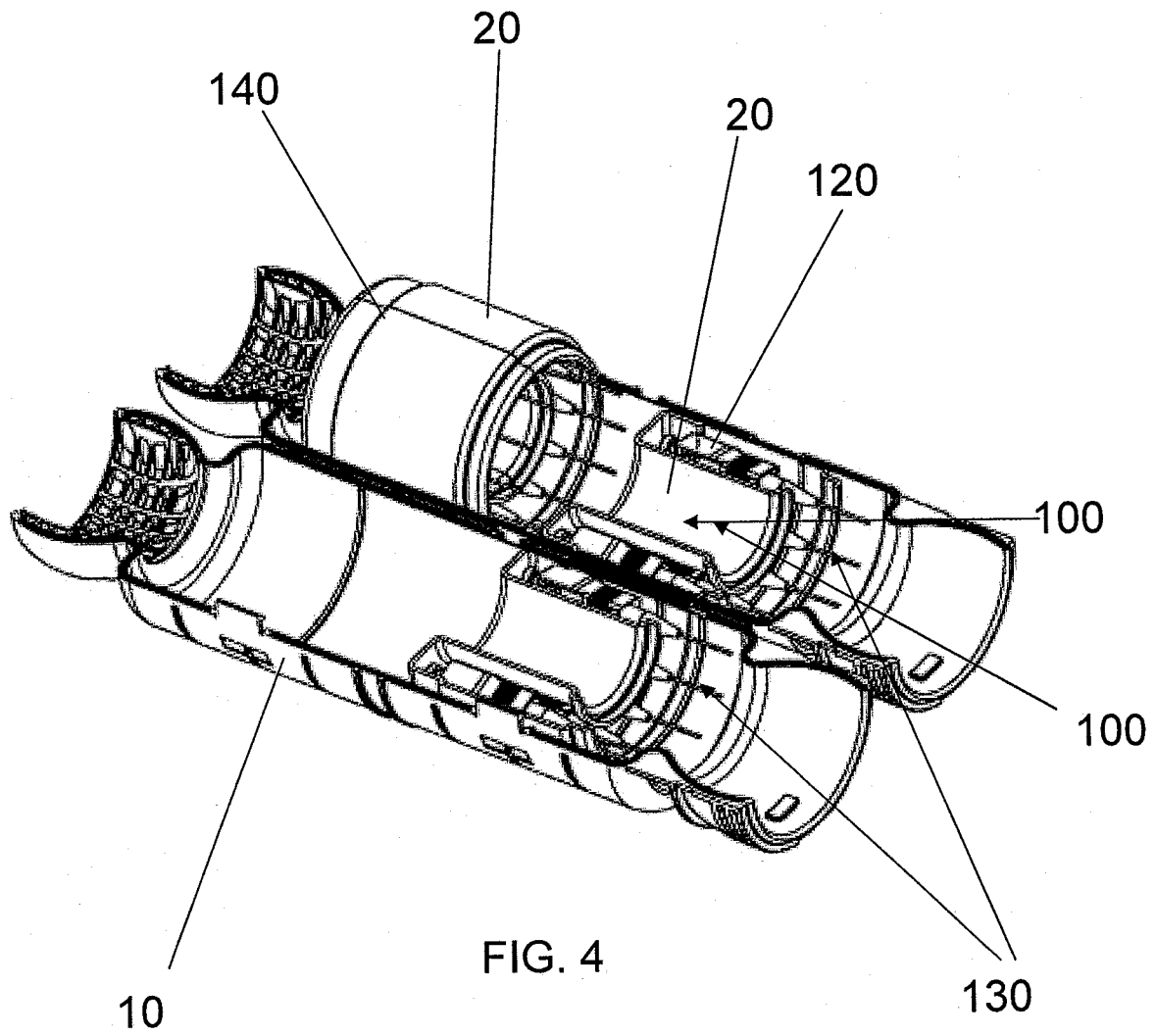
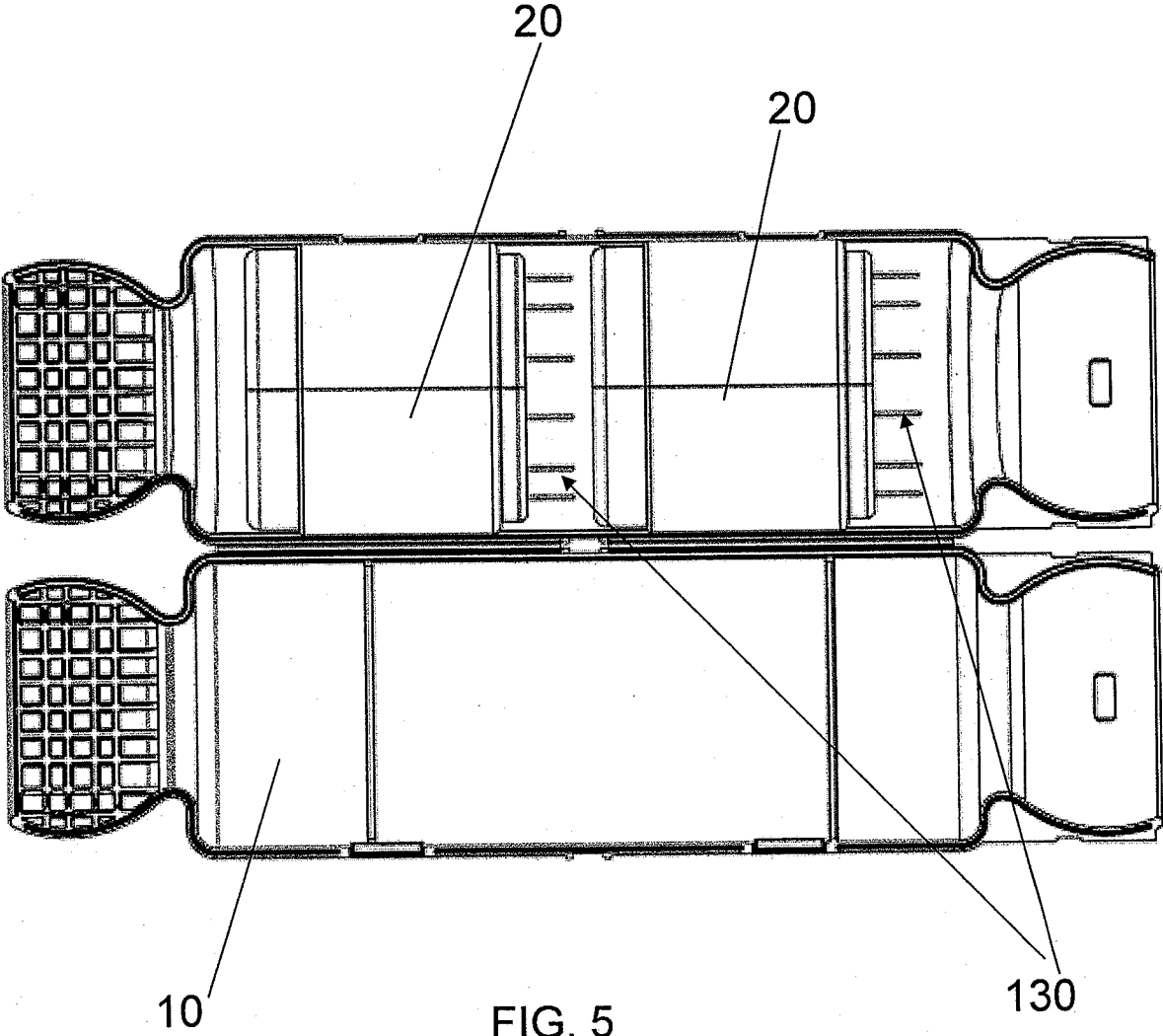


FIG. 3

4/8





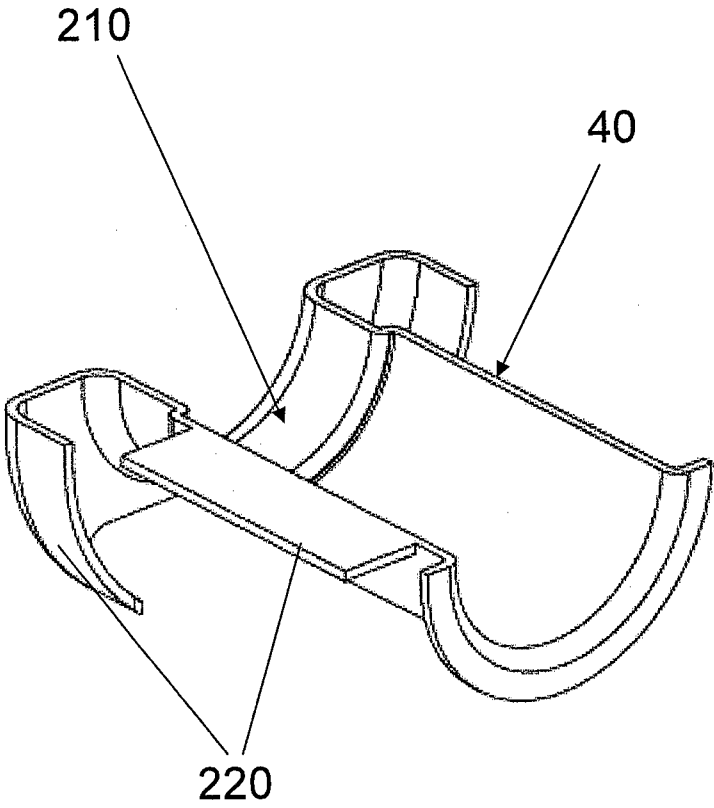


FIG. 6

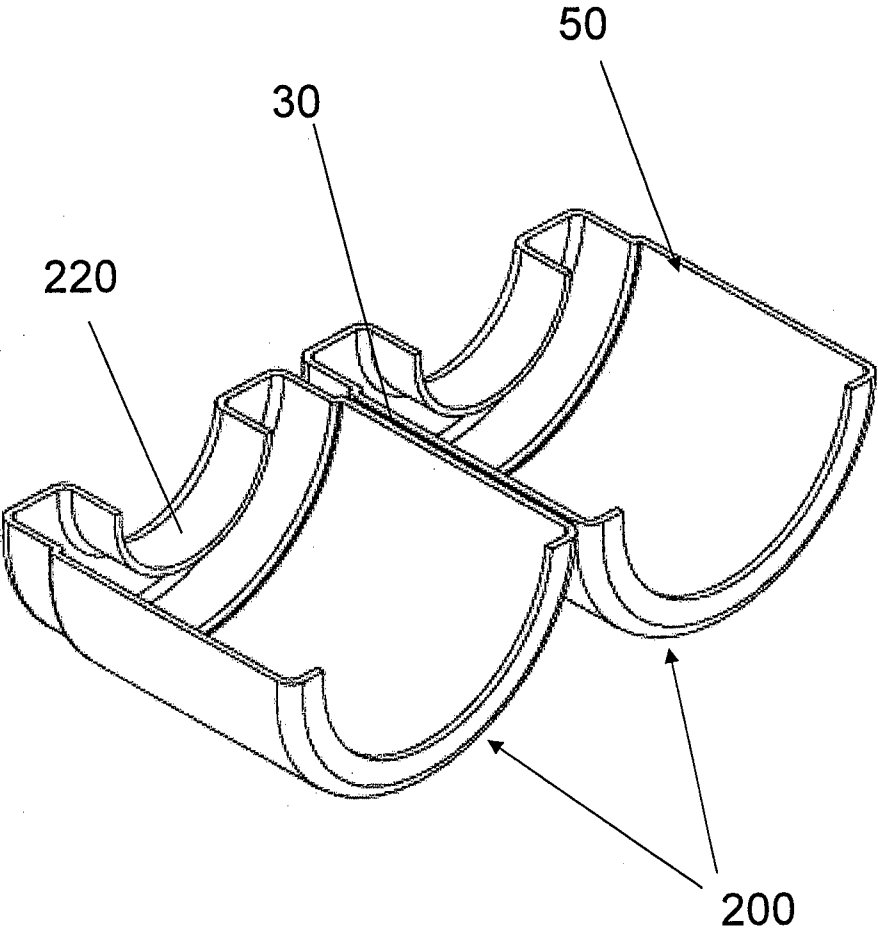
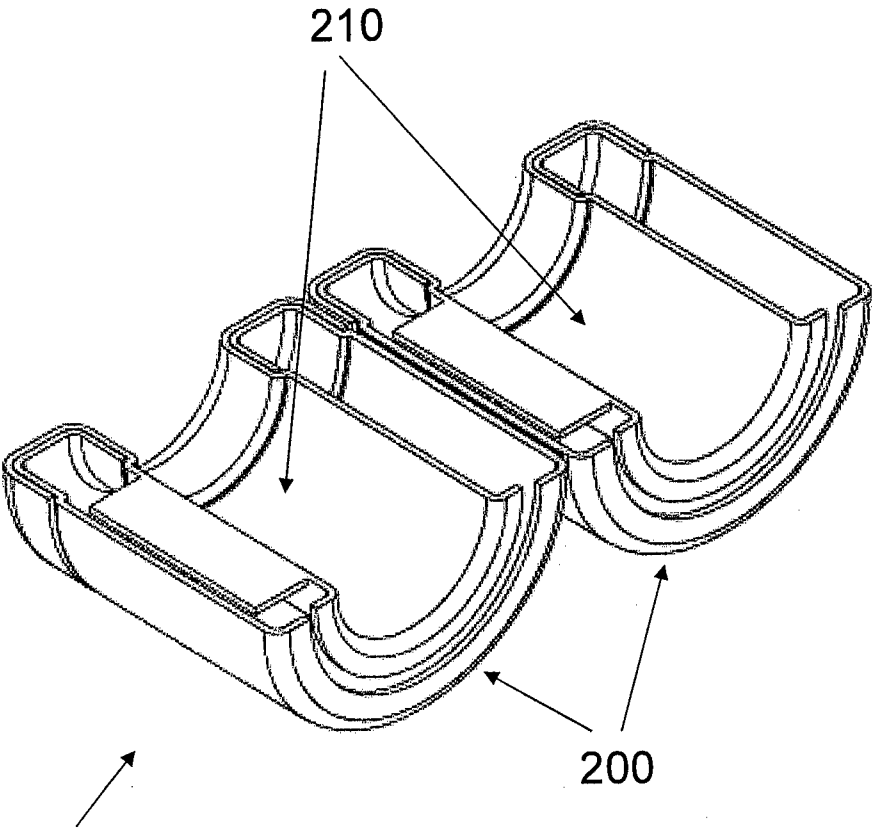


FIG. 7



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FIG. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US 11/29920

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - G02B 6/38 (2011.01)

USPC - 385/71

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)

USPC: 385/71

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

USPC: 385/53, 55, 56, 69-72, 75, 77, 78, 81, 84

(see search terms below)

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

PubWest (PGPB, USPT, USOC, EPAB, JPAB), Google Scholar, USPTO

Search Terms: fiber, packing, connect, annular, hinge, organize, arrange, packaging, around, annular, circular, container, case, organizer, cylindrical, snap fit.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 2009/0185782 A1 (Parikh et al.) 23 July 2009 (23.07.2009) entire document especially para [0053], para [0030], and para [0030].	1-14
Y	US 4,854,664 A (McCartney) 08 August 1989 (08.08.1989) entire document especially col 13, ln 9-21, col 12, ln 38-56, and col 9, ln 43 to col 10, ln 5.	1-14
Y	US 3,445,171 B1 (Seidler et al.) 20 May 1969 (20.05.1969) entire document especially col 3, ln 17-33.	8, and 10-13
A	US 4,993,800 A1 (SHIBATA) 19 February 1991 (19.02.1991), entire document especially Figs 1-3	1-14
A	US 2007/0286554 A1 (KUFFEL et al.) 13 December 2007 (13.12.2007) especially Figs 20-21; para [0077]	1-14

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

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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

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

22 May 2011 (22.05.2011)

Date of mailing of the international search report

07 JUN 2011

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents
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