United States Patent

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[54] **COMMODE, STORAGE APPARATUS OR THE LIKE**
26 Claims, 5 Drawing Figs.

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **4/142,** 4/110, 4/116, 4/144
[51] **Int. Cl.** **A47k 11/00,** A47k 13/24
[50] **Field of Search** 4/142, 134, 135, 141, 144, 116, 111, 137, 138, 110

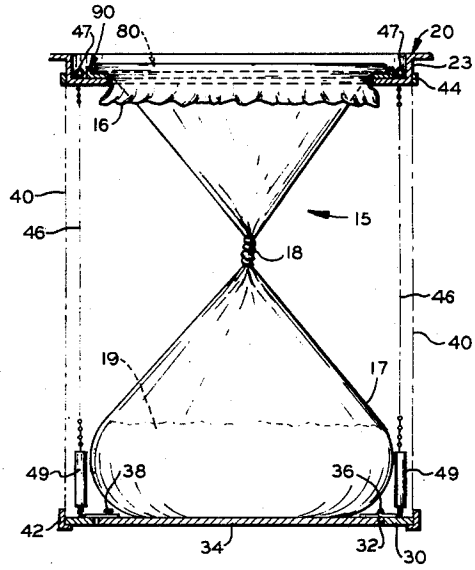
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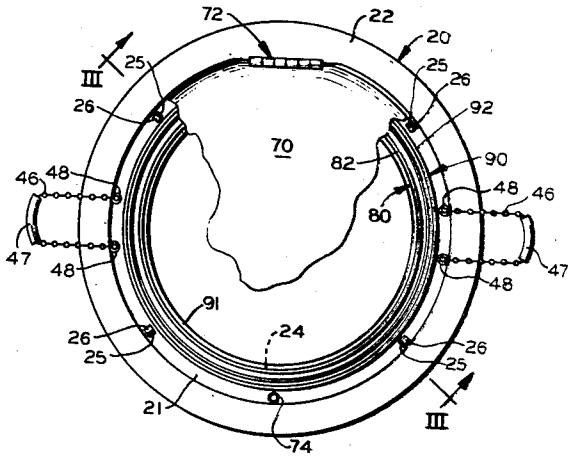
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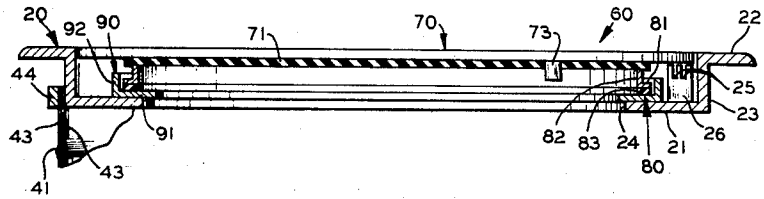
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ABSTRACT: Apparatus suitable for use as a storage unit, commode, or the like which includes a support means having an inwardly extending flange defining an opening through the support, a retainer component having an opening formed therethrough and a width sufficient to permit the retainer component to rest on and be supported by the support flange with the respective openings thereof in registration, and a sacklike container disposed through the flange and retainer openings. A top portion of the flexible container extends overly, outwardly, downwardly and under said retainer component between the retainer component and the flange thus removably securing the container to the support means. The weight of material in the container causes the container to pull down on the top of the retainer component thereby placing a greater securing force on the top portion of the container that is between the retainer component and the flange.







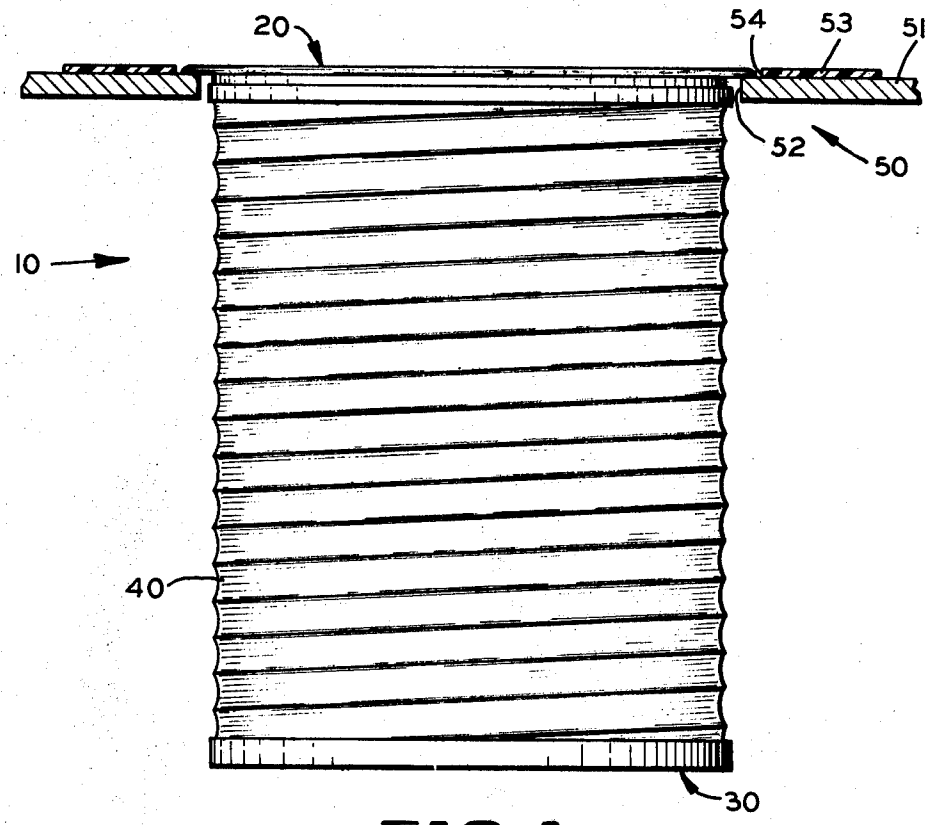


FIG. 1

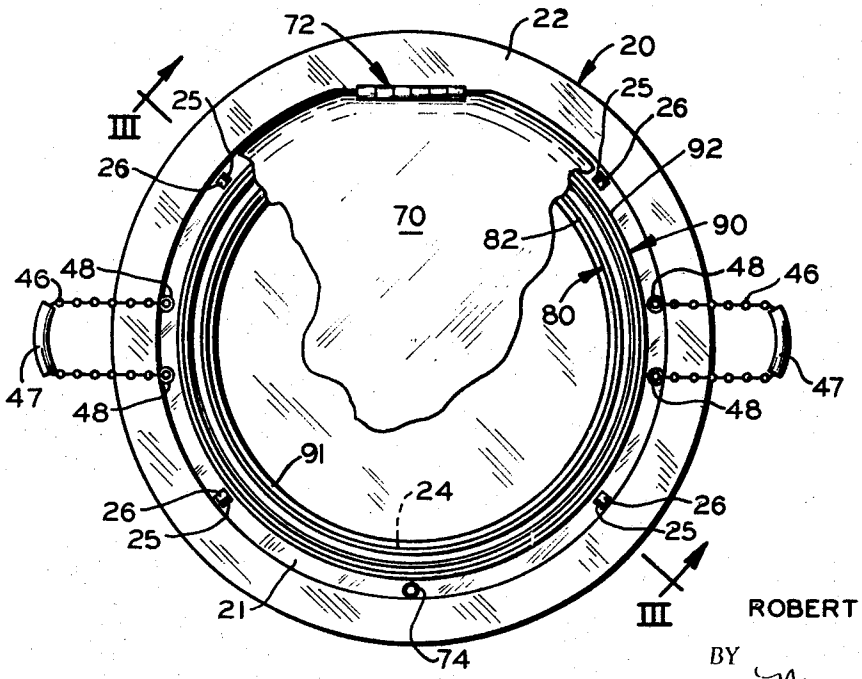


FIG. 2

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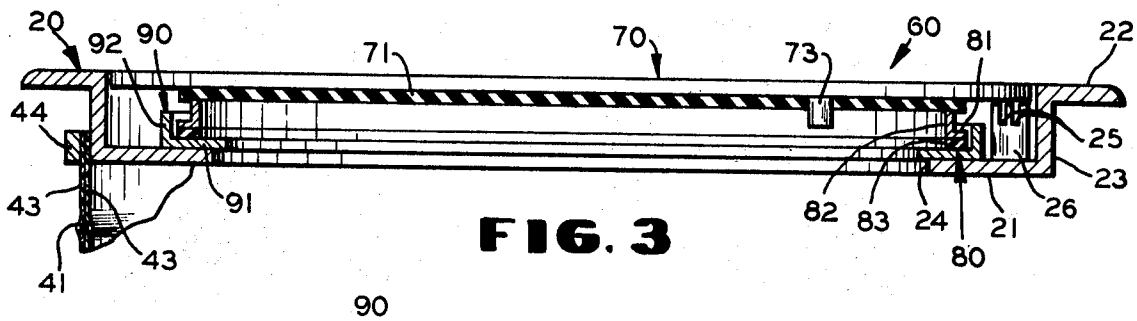


FIG. 3

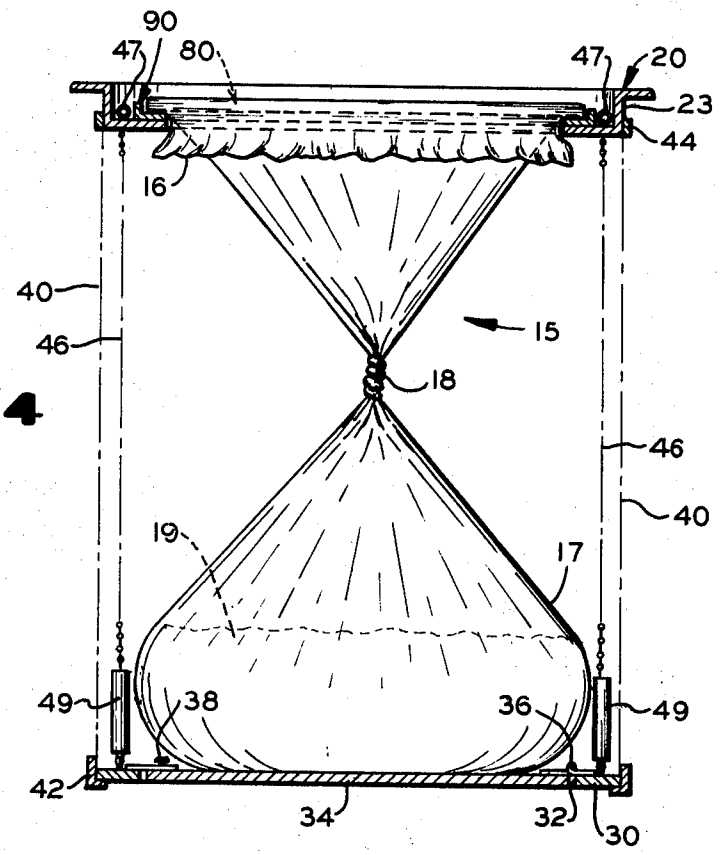


FIG. 4

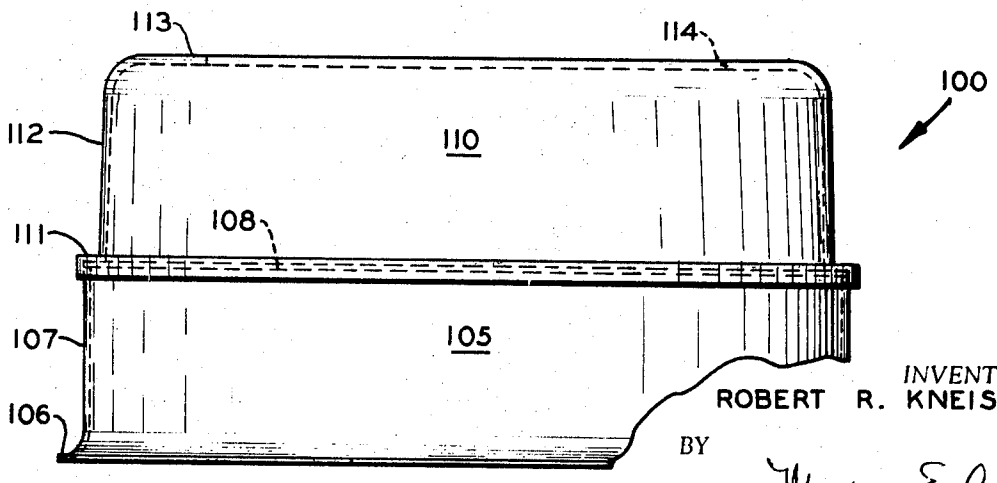


FIG. 5

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COMMODE, STORAGE APPARATUS OR THE LIKE

This invention relates to storage units in general and particularly storage units which may be retracted to a smaller size when not in use and to units which may also be utilized as a commode or the like.

An ever-increasing use in recent years of recreational vehicles, boats, trailer homes, etc. has created a need for portable and/or permanently mounted installations which can serve multi purposes for storage, as a commode, temporary cooling, and the like, but which may be conveniently retracted and extended to utilize space not otherwise available in the general construction of the boats, recreational vehicles, trailer homes.

In response to this demand improvements have been provided in the art, such as the disposable bag toilet disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 3,495,278 issued Feb. 17, 1970, and a trailer with a telescopic floor portion disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 2,855,240, issued Oct. 7, 1958. While the prior art contributions have given additional advantages there is still a need for units which may be multipurpose in nature to serve a plurality of different functions.

Accordingly, it is an object of this invention to provide an improved storage unit, commode, or the like.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a unit which will afford additional space in mobile recreation equipment, which is useful in a portable structure, and which may serve a plurality of functions.

In carrying out the above objects there is disclosed herein in a preferred embodiment apparatus including an upper support member having an inwardly extending annular flange terminating in an inner periphery which defines a substantially circular opening formed through the upper support member. An annular retainer component, having an outer diameter smaller than the outer diameter of the annular flange and an inside diameter defining an opening therethrough, rests on the annular flange with the openings formed through each in registration. A sacklike container is disposed through the openings of the annular flange and the retainer component and has its top removably secured to the retainer component. A lower support floor is spaced below the upper support member for supporting a lower portion of the container. Collapsible outer wall means extend from the lower floor to the upper support means. Means are provided for lowering and raising the lower floor while extending and retracting the collapsible outer wall. Lid means are provided for covering the openings in the annular flange and the retainer component when the lid is in a closed position.

The collapsible outer wall preferably comprises a flexible tubing including a helical coil skeleton of glass-fiber-reinforced plastic wire, although other suitable helical coil wire materials may be substituted, which is sandwiched between two layers of flexible material, at least one of the layers being substantially water impervious. The annular retainer component may include container-engaging means on an under face thereof. The top of the flexible container is removably secured to the retainer component by wrapping the top of the container overly, outwardly, downwardly, and under said retainer component so that the top portion of the container is engaged by the under surface of the retainer component. There is also advantageously provided an annular tray means, disposed between the portions of the top of the container under the annular retainer component and the annular flange of the upper support means, to act as a bearing means to enable and aid rotation of the retainer component with respect to the annular flange.

The lowering and raising means for the lower support floor advantageously comprise first and second pairs of chain-type means having lower ends secured to opposite sides of an outer portion of the lower floor. The lower ends of each chain means of each pair are secured to the lower floor in spaced relationship. The annular flange has spaced openings formed therein through which the chain means extend upwardly from the lower floor. The upper ends of the pairs of the chains are connected and a handle means encloses the connected upper end to facilitate grasping the upper ends of the chains. There is also advantageously provided means secured to the upper support member which have slots formed therein for receiving and retaining the pairs of chains after lower floor is raised by pulling upwardly on the chains, to maintain the lower floor in the raised position.

Other objects, advantages and features of this invention will become apparent from the following description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a unit embodying the teachings of this invention;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of the unit illustrated in FIG. 1, with a closure lid being partially sectioned to illustrate the relative positions of the components beneath the lid;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional, enlarged view of the upper portion of the apparatus illustrated in FIG. 1, taken along lines III—III;

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the entire apparatus illustrated in FIG. 1 to show the relative positioning of the components thereof; and

FIG. 5 is a side elevational view of a latrine seat which may be utilized with the apparatus illustrated in FIGS. 1 through 4.

Referring to the drawings it will be noted that the complete assembly is generally designated by the reference character 10. As best seen in FIG. 3 there is shown an upper support member generally designated at 20 which includes an inwardly extending flange 21, an outwardly extending flange 22, and a substantially vertical connecting wall means 23.

A secondary upper support means is generally indicated at 50 (best seen in FIG. 1) and may be a portion of a cabinet, a floor, a trailer, a portable structure, or the like. In the present embodiment the invention is illustrated in use with a floor of a trailer which is indicated at 51. An opening 52 has been formed in the floor 51 to permit the unit to be dropped through and rest on the floor 51. If a floor covering such as a rug or tile 53 is used on the floor then a counterbore such as indicated at 54 in FIG. 1 will permit the unit to be flush with the floor-covering surface. If a tile or rug or the like is not utilized, then the counterbore 54 may be formed in the cabinet or floor surface 51 to provide a flush mounted unit.

A sacklike container 15 (best seen in FIG. 4) has the major portion thereof disposed through the opening 24 defined by the inner periphery of the flange 21. A lower support member 30 is spaced from and below the upper support member 20 and supports or holds a lower portion 17 of the container 15 against rotation when the container 15 is partially filled with material 19. In the case of use of the unit as a commode, the material 19 may be water and a chemical.

A collapsible outer wall 40 extends between the wall 23 of the upper support member where it is secured to wall 23 by an annular connection ring 44, to the lower support member 30, where it is secured by a lower connection ring 42. As best seen in FIGS. 1 and 3 the collapsible outer wall 40 comprises a flexible tubing which includes a helical coil skeleton 41, advantageously formed of glass-fiber-reinforced plastic wire which does not corrode, sandwiched between two layers of flexible material 43. At least one of the layers 43 is advantageously substantially impervious to moisture. The layers 43 may be made from plastic material, mesh material, combinations of plastic and mesh material, or any other suitable flexible, strong materials which will guard the contents of the unit against encroachment by the elements or animals.

The lower floor member 30 is raised and lowered and thus the outer wall 40 is retracted and extended by pairs of flexible elements 46, shown in this embodiment as bead chain means, having the lower ends of each pair secured to opposite sides of the outer portion of the lower floor 30. The lower ends of each pair are secured to the lower floor 30 or the lower connection ring 42 in spaced relationship. The inwardly extending annular flange 21 has spaced openings 48 formed therein (best seen in FIG. 2) through which the pairs of chains 46 extend upwardly from the lower floor 30. The upper ends of the pairs of chains

46 are advantageously joined and passed through a hollow handle member 47 to facilitate the grasping of the pairs of chains to raise and lower the lower floor, thus extending and retracting the outer wall 40.

As illustrated in FIG. 4, hollow tubular guards 49 may be placed around the flexible elements in the storage unit to prevent the lower floor 30 from being pulled too tightly against the upper support means 20 to avoid damaging the unit. The guards 49 afford a positive stop which will be felt by the user as he pulls the lower floor upwardly, thus warning the user that the unit is sufficiently retracted. This also permits spacing the floor 30 from the lid 70 so that the seat 100 may be stored in an inverted position as will be described later. When the unit is completely retracted it may be retained in its retracted position by placing the bead elements of the chain in one or more slots 25 formed in chain engaging or retaining members 26 which extend upwardly from the inwardly extending flange 21. As can be seen by examining FIGS. 2, 3, and 4 the chains 46 may be stored around the edge of the support means 20 beneath the lid 70 when the unit is retracted, so that the entire unit maintains the flush mount appearance, even though the chains have been lifted.

A closure means for the unit is indicated generally at 60 and includes a lid member 70, a retainer component 80, and a bearing support 90.

The retainer component 80 acts to retain an upper portion 16 of the sacklike container 15 in an open position at the upper portion of the storage unit 10. As can be best seen in FIG. 4, the sacklike container 15 is removably secured to the upper support member 20 by passing the top portion 16 of the flexible container 15 overly, outwardly, downwardly, and under the retainer component 80 so that the top is engaged by the under face of the retainer component 80 and the upper face of the inwardly extending flange 21. Referring to FIG. 3 it will be noted that a container-top-engaging means 83, such as gasket material or rubber or other frictional engaging means, is applied or secured to the under face or surface of the retainer component 80. The retainer component 80 includes an annular ring 81 and an upstanding cylindrical wall 82 formed at the inner periphery of the annular ring 81.

The container 15 is thus removably secured to the support means since the weight of material placed in the container will cause the container 15 to pull down on the top of the retainer component 80, thereby placing a greater securing force on the top portion 16 of the container that is between the retainer component and the flange means 21.

When a significant amount of force is exerted, such as by placing a quantity of water and chemical in the container 15 when the unit is being used as a commode, the pull of the material 19 on the retainer component 80 is sufficient to make rotation of the annular component and the engaged portion 16 on the flange 21 very, very difficult. Thus, there is advantageously provided an annular bearing support 90 (best seen in FIG. 3) which comprises an annular ring 91 having an opening formed therethrough that may be as large as the opening defined by flange 21. Advantageously, in a preferred embodiment the opening in annular ring 91 may be made slightly smaller than the opening 24 in flange 21 so that the bag will not rub against inner periphery 24 when the bag is rotated. An upstanding wall 92 is formed at the outer periphery of the annular ring 91, the ring 91 and wall 92 cooperating to form a tray which receives the retainer component 80 and holds it in position. The upstanding wall 92 affords protection against abrasion for the bag on retainer component 80. It is to be noted that the chain-engaging means 26 may be advantageously placed on the flange 21 around the outer periphery thereof to act as guides for the centering of the tray-bearing support 90, or for the centering of the annular retainer component 80, if the tray 90 is not used. The chain-engaging means 26 may be extended upwardly to support the lid 70 to relieve excessive pressure on gaskets 71 and 83.

With the apparatus just described, the lower portion 17 of the sacklike container 15 is held against rotation when the container is partially filled with the material 19. Thus the retainer component 80 may be rotated on the flange means 21 to permit the sacklike container to selectively twist a portion 18 of the container 15 intermediate the top and lower portions thereof to closed and open positions in response to rotations of the container component in first and second directions. Thus an effective sealing of the container 15 may be effected at the portion 18 to enable use of the unit as a commode, the odors and material 19 being effectively sealed within the lower portion 17 of the container. This sealing is also useful when the unit is being utilized as storage for perishables such as vegetables, or the storage of ice or the like, since the space between the container 17 and the outer wall 40 will provide an effective dead-air space for temporary insulation of stored material in the lower portion 17 from the ambient atmosphere.

If a larger storage space for ice or other material is desired, the top portion 16 of the container 15 may be slipped far enough over the retainer component 80 so that the sides of the container 15 are substantially straight up and down, substantially parallel with the outer wall 40, providing a cylindrical storage space of substantial volume. A dead-air space is still provided in this instance between the container 15 and the spaced outer walls 40 to effect an insulation of the material in container 15.

Referring to FIGS. 2 and 3 there is shown a lid member 70 having a lid gasket 71 secured thereto and interposed between the upper portion of the annular component 80 and the lower side of the lid 70. The lid 70 is connected by hinge means 72 for flush mounting within the upper support means 20 and the gasket 71 is of sufficient thickness so that a closing of the lid 70, as illustrated in FIG. 3, compresses the gasket member 71 and also compresses the container-engaging means or gasket material 83 beneath or on the under surface of the retainer component 80. Thus a seal is effected by the means 71, 83 which keeps odors in or out of the unit and which assists in providing temporary insulation for perishable goods or for cooling purposes. It is to be noted that the gasket means 71 may be formed as an annular ring to effect a seal only with the retainer component 80, or the gasket means 71 may advantageously be formed in the circular disklike shape illustrated in FIG. 3 so that additional insulation is afforded between the contents and the exterior of the unit. In this connection it is to be noted that the lower floor member 30 may be formed of an insulation material to further provide additional cooling capacity for the unit.

The lid 70 is provided with a latch means 73 which is mounted in the lid 70 is registration with a latch catch means 74 (best seen in FIG. 2) to provide a means for removably securing the lid 70 in a closed position, and for locking the lid in a closed position if desired.

The hinge 72 preferably is constructed with a removable pintle, so that the hinge may be separated into two sections upon removal of the pintle. Thus the lid 70 is easily removable.

Referring again to the lower floor member 30 as illustrated in FIG. 4, it will be noted that a hatch opening 32 may be formed in the floor 30 and a hatch 34 removably secured therein by means of a hatch hinge 36. A pull knob 38 may be provided for opening the hatch. Thus, if the unit were mounted in a trailer or other portable vehicle which may be driven or otherwise maneuvered onto ice, the unit may be lowered and the lower latch opened over a hole formed in the ice to enable ice fishing from the comfort of the vehicle parked on the ice. Further, if the vehicle is comfortably heated and is left in position, the opening in the ice tends to remain unfrozen or to collect only a very thin coating of ice.

Referring to FIG. 5 there is illustrated a toilet seat means generally indicated at 100 which is particularly advantageously useful with the unit illustrated and described hereinbefore. If the opening formed through the retainer component 80 is formed to be larger than the opening formed through the support flange 21, then a shelf is left which may be engaged by a toilet seat means.

In this instance the toilet seat means **100** has a lower portion or member **105** which has an outwardly extending lower flange means **106** which is adapted to fit on the shelf portion of the flange **21** defined by the retainer component **80**. The lower member **105** has wall means **107** extending upwardly from the lower flange means **106** and terminating in an upper opening **108**. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. **5** an upper member **110** has a socket or female portion **111** formed at the lower area thereof to receive the upwardly extending walls **107** of the member **105** to permit member **110** to rest thereon. Wall means **112** extend upwardly from the socket means **111** and join with a substantially horizontal seat **113**, in which an opening **114** is formed.

The latrine seat just described is particularly useful with the unit described hereinbefore since the members **105** and **110** may be turned upside down and, since the wall means **112** of the component **110** are spaced inwardly with respect to the wall means **107** of the member **105**, the unit **110** may be nested within the member **105**. In turn, the two nested members **105**, **110** may be nested within the opening formed through the upper flange **21** with the flange means **106** resting on ring **91**, if used, and/or on the flange **21**. This permits the lid to be closed with the latrine seat in storage, and permits the latrine seat to be stored even though the wall **40** and lower floor **30** are completely retracted. It is obvious that the latrine seat generally designated at **100** may be formed in one or more sections, depending upon the height that the seat **113** is desired to be raised above the upper support means **20**.

There has thus been described a storage or commode unit which has been designed to fill the need for additional space in mobile recreational equipment or in other portable equipment. The unit may be mounted flush with the floor and provide useful storage area below the trailer or other equipment by means of gravity extension of a retractable housing. The unit features a bellows or flexible tubing of circular form which may be extended from a very few inches to a maximum length below a trailer so that the lower floor of the unit can rest on the ground. The fiberglas or other helical coil superstructure of the flexible tubing provides protection from the elements and from pests for a disposable sacklike container which may be supported within the unit. The double-gasketed design provides a single closed cell when the lid of the unit is in a closed position, by effecting a positive gasket seal on top of and on the bottom of a circular retainer ring over which the bag is placed. The design thus provides a thermal "dead-air" insulation principle in the area between the disposable plastic inner bag and the outer collapsible wall, so that the device may serve as a cooler when required.

In conclusion, it is pointed out that while the illustrated example is shown in connection with installation in a floor or in a cabinet, it constitutes a practical embodiment of the invention. It is not intended to limit the invention to the exact details shown, since modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention disclosed. For example, the principles disclosed herein may be utilized with a portable unit which is not permanently installed in a vehicle, boat, or the like.

I claim:

1. A commode comprising an upper support member having an inwardly extending annular flange terminating in an inner periphery which defines a substantially circular opening formed through said upper support member; an annular retainer component having an outer diameter smaller than the outer diameter of said annular flange and an inside diameter defining an opening therethrough; said retainer component resting on said annular flange with the openings formed through each in registration; a sacklike container disposed through said openings of said annular flange and retainer component and having its top removably secured to said retainer component; a lower support floor spaced below said upper support member for supporting a lower portion of said container; collapsible outer wall means extending from said lower floor to said upper support means; means for lowering and raising said lower floor while extending and retracting said collapsible outer wall means; and lid means for covering the openings in said annular flange and said retainer component when in a closed position.

2. A commode as defined in claim **1** in which said collapsible outer wall means comprises a flexible tubing including a helical coil skeleton sandwiched between two layers of flexible material, at least one of said layers being substantially water impervious.

3. A commode as defined in claim **1** in which said annular retainer component includes container-engaging means on an under face thereof; and in which said top of said flexible container is removably secured to said retainer component by wrapping the top of said container overly, outwardly, downwardly, and under said retainer component so that the top is engaged by the under face of said retainer component.

4. A commode as defined in claim **3** which further includes annular tray means disposed between the portion of said top of said container under said annular retainer component and said annular flange of said upper support means to act as a bearing means to enable rotation of said retainer component with respect to said annular flange.

5. A commode as defined in claim **1** in which said lowering and raising means comprises first and second pairs of chain-type means having lower ends secured to opposite sides of an outer portion of said lower floor, the lower ends of each chain means of each pair being secured to said lower floor in spaced relationship; said annular flange having spaced openings formed therein through which said chain means extend upwardly from said lower floor; means for connecting the upper ends of each pair of chain means to form a handle means.

6. A commode as defined in claim **5** which further includes means secured to said upper support member having slot means formed therein for receiving and retaining said pairs of chain means after raising said lower floor by pulling upwardly on said chain means, to maintain said lower floor in said raised position.

7. A commode as defined in claim **6** in which the inside diameter of said retainer component is larger than the opening formed through said annular flange, thereby defining a shelf portion on said annular flange when the openings in said retainer component and annular flange are in registration; and which further includes toilet seat means having a plurality of sections; each toilet seat section having outwardly extending lower flange means and sidewall means extending upwardly from said lower flange means for mating with lower flange means of the next section above, the top toilet seat section having a seat means attached to the upper portion of the sidewall means of that section; the lower flange means of the lower toilet seat section being formed with a configuration enabling the lower flange means to fit through said retainer component opening and rest upon the shelf defined on said annular flange.

8. A commode as defined in claim **7** in which the sidewall means of each of said toilet seat sections are spaced inwardly from the perimeter of said lower flange means, thereby enabling the plurality of sections to be turned upside down and nested within each other, the bottom section storable by insertion upside down through the opening in said annular flange with the outwardly extending lower flange means resting on said defined shelf.

9. Apparatus comprising a support means having an inwardly extending flange means defining an opening through said support means; a retainer component having an opening formed therethrough and a width sufficient to permit the retainer component to rest on and be supported by said support flange means with the respective openings thereof in registration; and a sacklike container disposed through said flange and retainer openings and having a top portion thereof extending overly, outwardly, downwardly and under said retainer component between said retainer component and said flange means thus removably securing said container to said support means, the placing of material in the container causing the container to pull down on the top of said retainer

component thereby placing a greater securing force on the top portion of the container that is between said retainer component and said flange means.

10. Apparatus as defined in claim 9 in which said retainer component includes an under surface formed of material for engaging said top portion of said sacklike container.

11. Apparatus as defined in claim 9 which further includes a lower support means spaced from and below said first-mentioned support means for supporting and holding a lower portion of said sacklike container against rotation when the container is partially filled; said retainer component being rotatably mounted on said flange means of said first-mentioned support means to permit said sacklike container to selectively twist a portion of said container intermediate the top and lower portions thereof to closed and open positions in response to rotation of said retainer component in first and second directions.

12. Apparatus as defined in claim 11 which further includes collapsible outer wall means extending between said first-mentioned and said lower support means.

13. Apparatus as defined in claim 12 which further includes at least two flexible members secured to said lower support means on opposite sides thereof and extending upwardly to and through openings formed in said first-mentioned support flange means, and which further includes means for removably engaging said flexible members at spaced positions along said flexible members.

14. Apparatus as defined in claim 11 which further includes bearing support means interposed between said first-mentioned support flange means and the top portion of said sacklike container extending under said retainer component, to aid in the rotation of said retainer component and said top portion of said container with respect to said first-mentioned support flange means.

15. Apparatus as defined in claim 9 which further includes a lid member sized to cover the opening in said retainer component, and a gasket means interposed between the upper surface of said retainer component and said lid member.

16. Apparatus as defined in claim 15 which further includes means for removably securing said lid member over said retainer component in a gasket-compressing position.

17. Apparatus as defined in claim 9 in which said opening formed through said retainer component is larger than the opening formed through said support flange means; and which further includes toilet seat means having outwardly extending lower flange means, sidewall means extending upwardly from said lower flange means, and seat means attached to the upper portion of said sidewall means; said outwardly extending flange means having a configuration enabling the toilet flange to fit through said retainer component opening and rest upon said support flange means.

18. Apparatus as defined in claim 17 in which the sidewall means of said toilet seat are spaced sufficiently for inwardly from the perimeter of said lower flange means, so that the toilet seat may be turned upside down for storage and the sidewalls inserted down through the upper support flange opening until the outwardly extending flange means of said toilet seat rests upon said upper support flange means.

19. Apparatus comprising an upper socket member having inwardly extending flange means terminating in an inner periphery which defines an opening formed through said upper support member; a retainer component having an opening formed therethrough and a width sufficient to permit the retainer component to rest on and be supported by said upper support flange with the respective openings thereof in registration; a sacklike container disposed through said flange and retainer openings and having its top removably secured to said retainer component; a lower support member spaced from said upper support member for supporting a lower portion of said sacklike container; collapsible outer wall means extending between said upper and said lower support members; means for lifting said lower support member toward said upper support member while collapsing said outer wall means; and a lid member sized to cover the opening in said retainer component.

20. Apparatus as defined in claim 19 in which said outer wall means is spaced outwardly from said sacklike container means to provide an insulating air space therebetween.

21. Apparatus as defined in claim 20 which further includes first gasket means interposed between said retainer component and said upper flange support, and second gasket means interposed between said retainer component and said lid member, said two gasket means and said insulating air space providing temporary insulation for said sacklike container.

22. Apparatus as defined in claim 19 in which said sacklike container is removably secured to said retainer component between said retainer component and said upper support flange thereby holding the top of the container securely in place while readily permitting the substitution of a new sacklike container after an initial container has passed its useful stage.

23. Apparatus comprising an upper support means having inwardly extending flange means terminating in an inner periphery which defines an opening formed through said upper support member; a lower floor means spaced below said upper support member; a sacklike container means having a lower portion resting on said lower floor means and a top portion removably secured in an open position in said opening formed through said upper support means; extensible and retractible wall means extending between said lower floor means and said upper support means; means for raising and lowering said lower floor means while retracting and extending said wall means; and closure means for covering the opening in said upper support means.

24. Apparatus as defined in claim 23 in which said upper support means further includes outwardly extending flange means, spaced above said inwardly extending flange means, for flush mounting on a secondary support means; connecting wall means extending between said outwardly and inwardly extending flange means of said upper support means; said closure means having a configuration enabling it to fit within said outwardly extending flange means and on said inwardly extending flange means of said upper support means, and having a height sufficient to provide a flush mounting when in a closed position.

25. Apparatus as defined in claim 24 in which said lowering and raising means comprises at least two flexible members secured to and extending from said lower floor means through openings formed in said inwardly extending flange means; said flexible members adapted to fit beneath said closure means when said lower floor means is in the raised and lowered positions to maintain the flush mounting appearance of said apparatus.

26. Apparatus as defined in claim 23 in which a hatch opening is formed in said lower floor means, and which further includes hatch means removably secured in said hatch opening.