



US 20060154591A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Everhart et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2006/0154591 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jul. 13, 2006**

(54) **APPARATUS FOR CONTROLLING THE ENVIRONMENT OF A PARKED VEHICLE**

No. 10/241,208, filed on Sep. 11, 2002, now Pat. No. 6,705,938.

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/375,038, filed on Apr. 22, 2002.

Publication Classification

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
B60H 1/00 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** 454/119

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

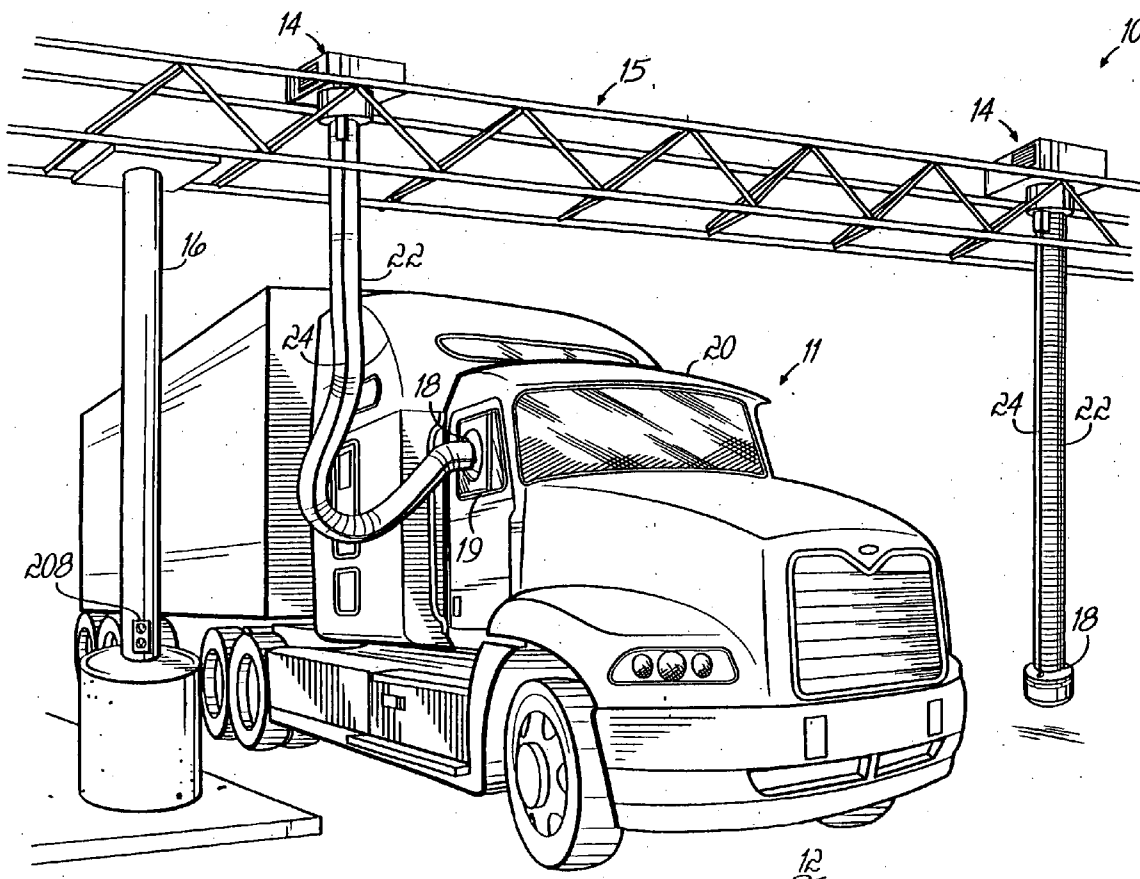
(21) Appl. No.: **11/355,865**

An apparatus for controlling the inside of a parked vehicle particularly a parked truck includes a HVAC unit and electric switching apparatus supported in a parking area with cabling and hosing which connects to the parked vehicle via a head unit. The head unit includes a cover which opens to expose controls housed in said unit utilizing a central processor which in turn communicate for example via the Internet to a server providing for activation of the unit and payment for the services.

(22) Filed: **Feb. 16, 2006**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/700,108, filed on Nov. 3, 2003, which is a continuation of application



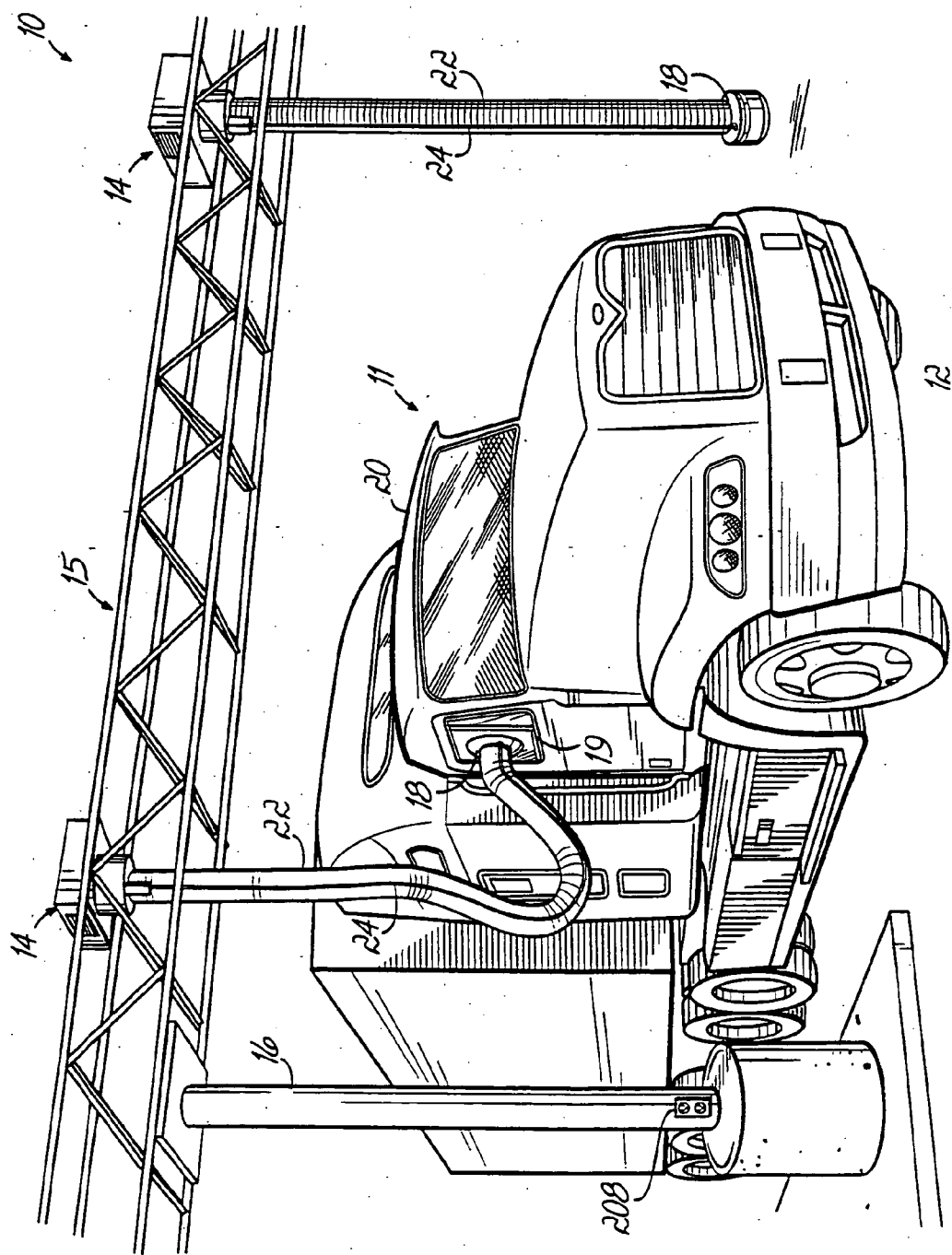


FIG. 1

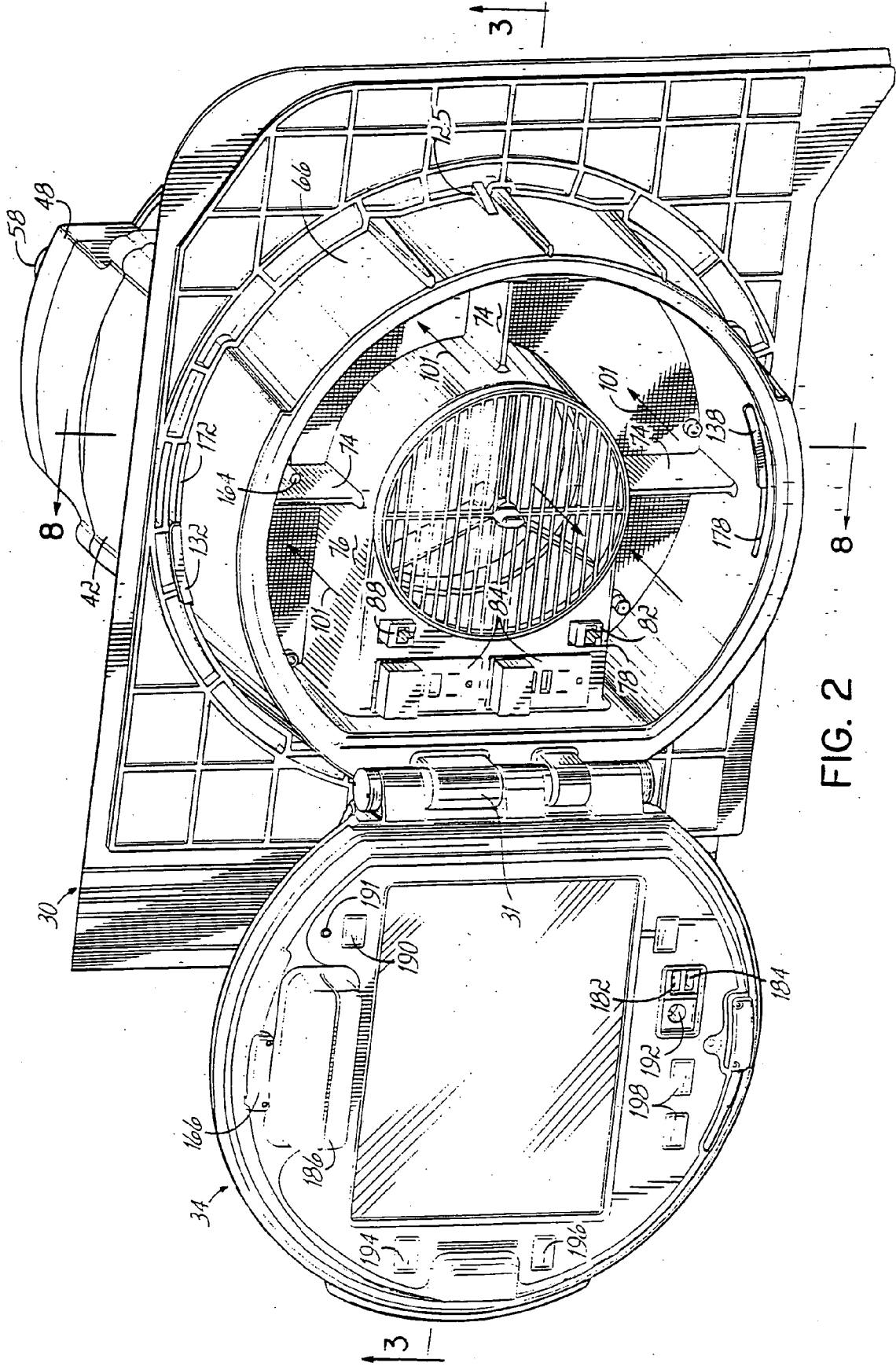


FIG. 2

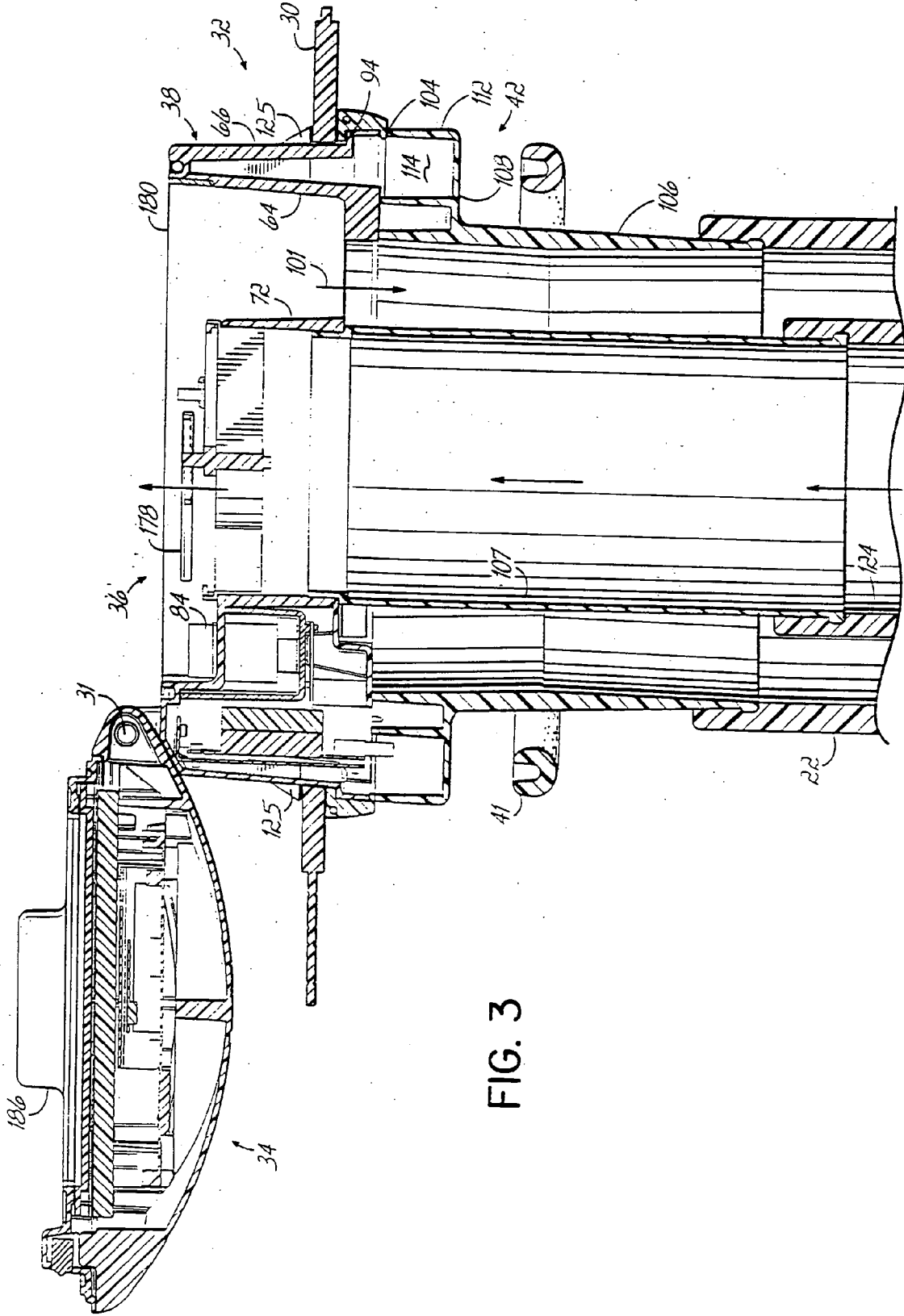


FIG. 3

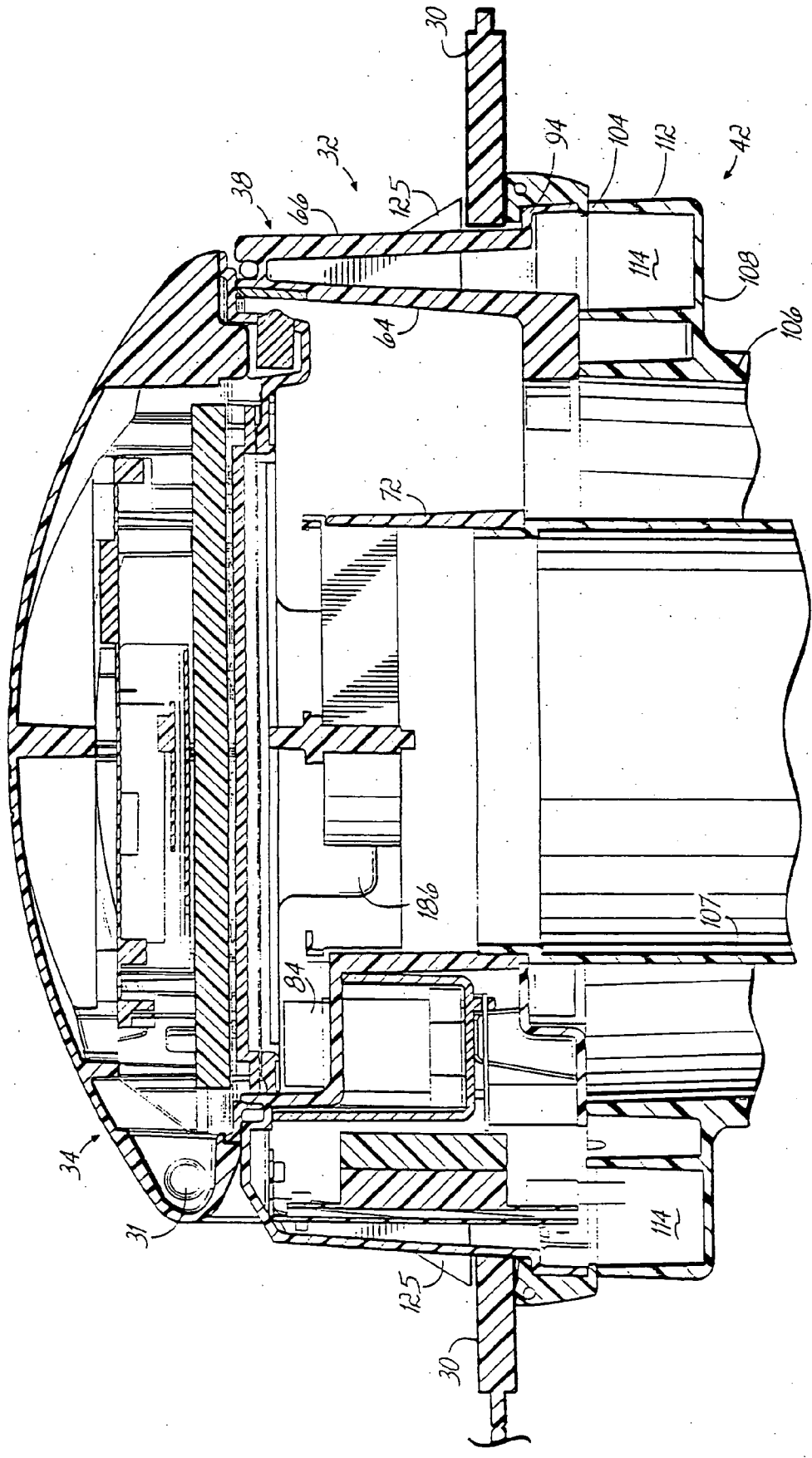


FIG. 4

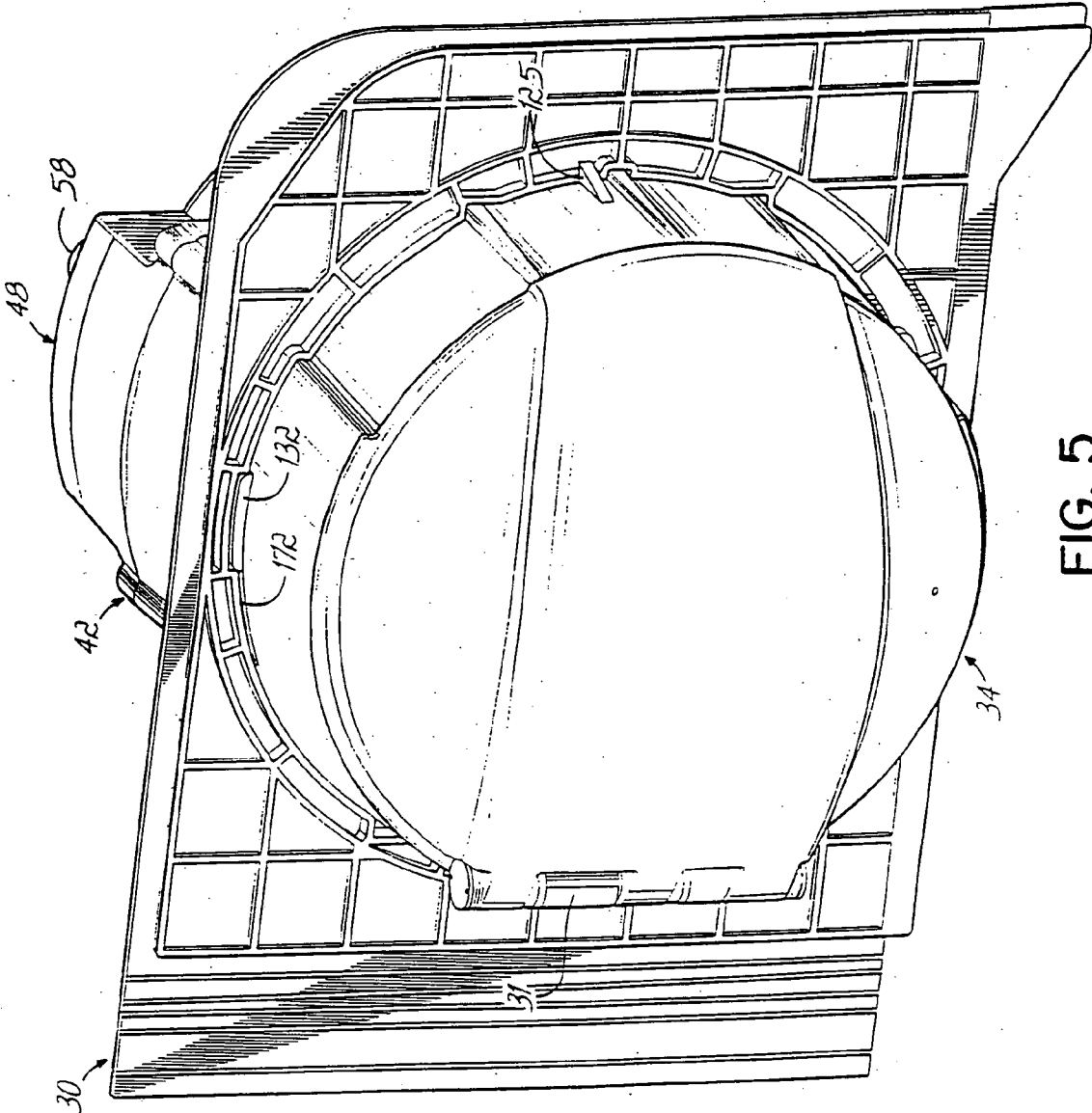


FIG. 5

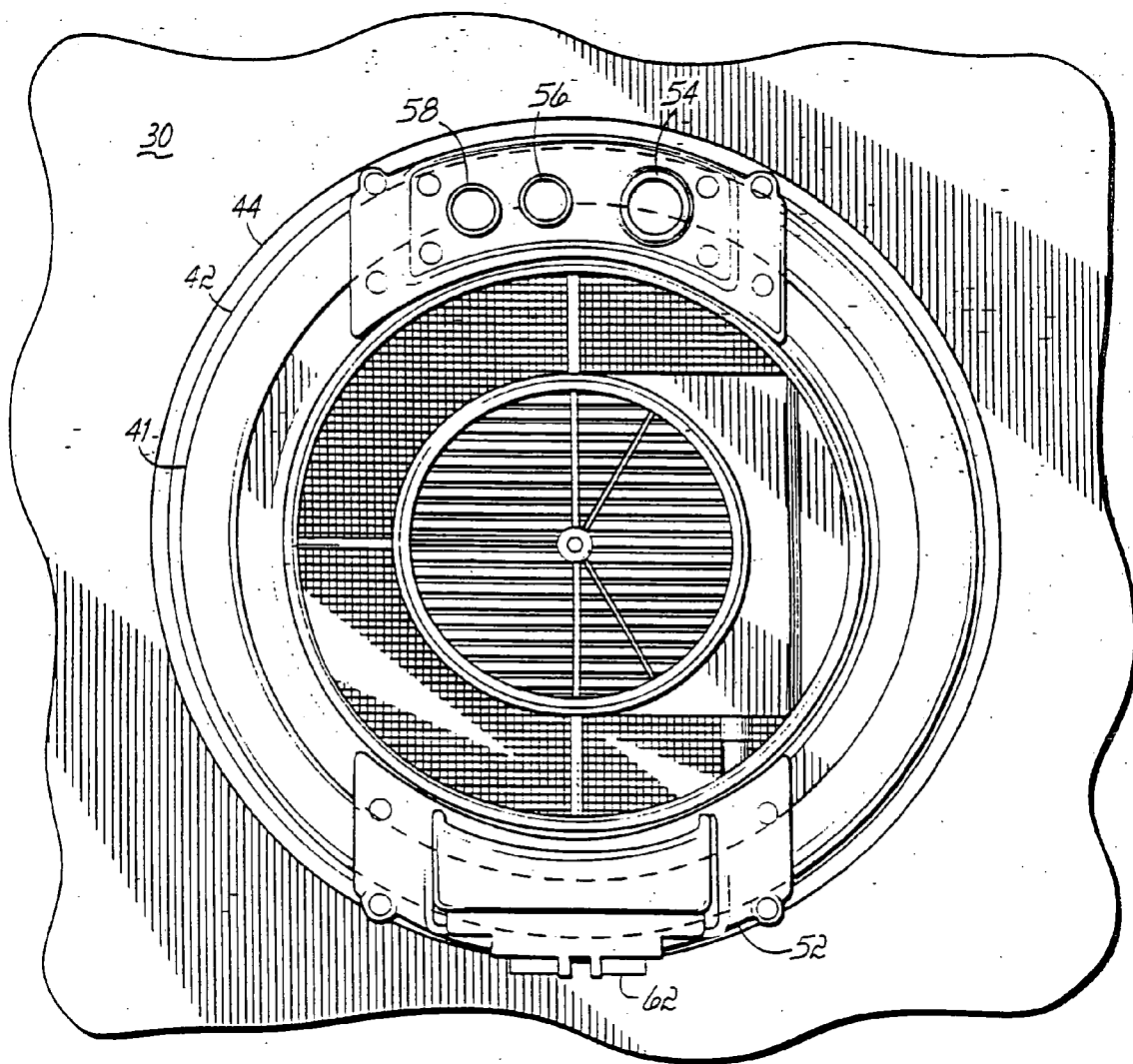


FIG. 6

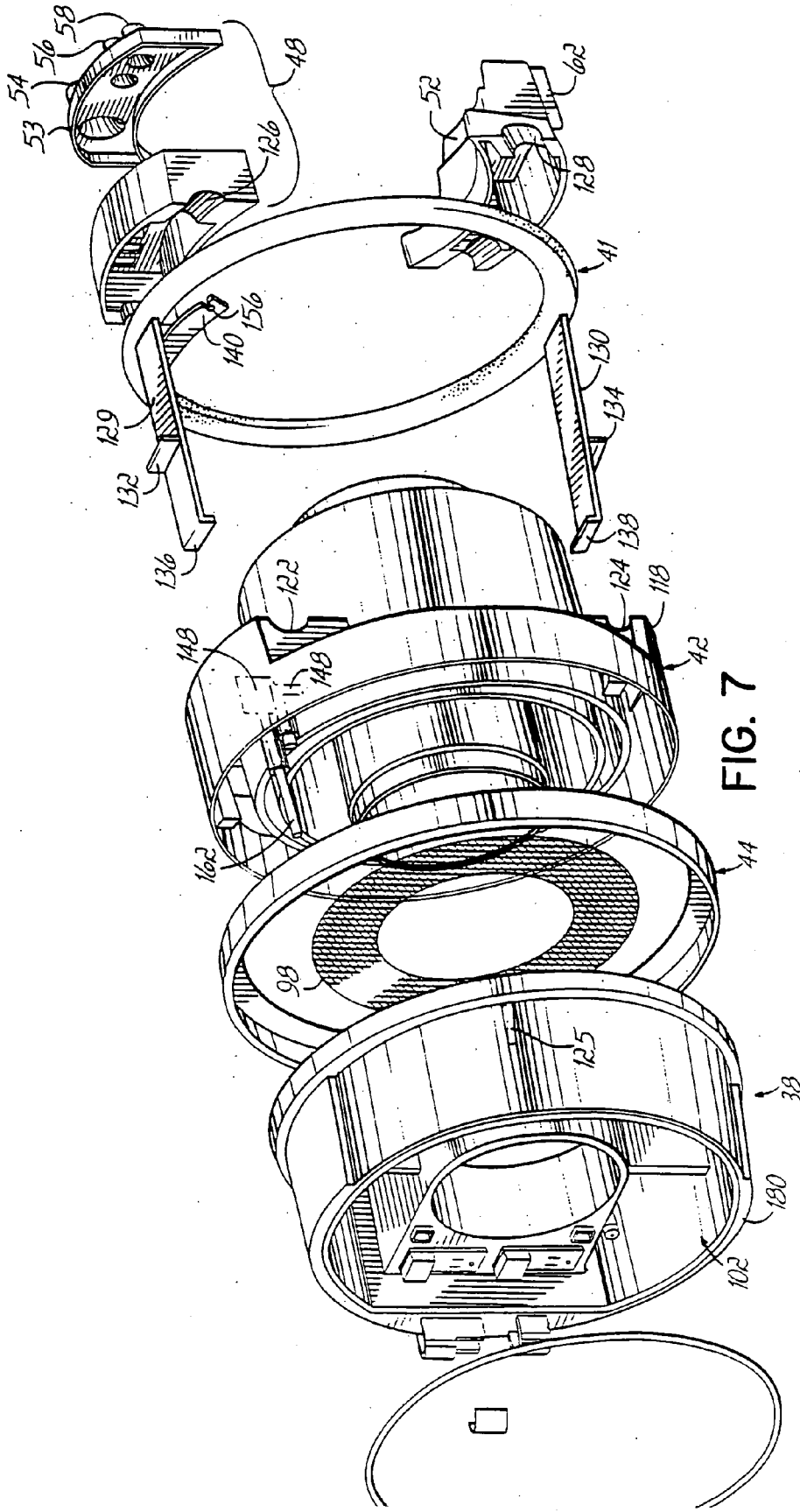


FIG. 7

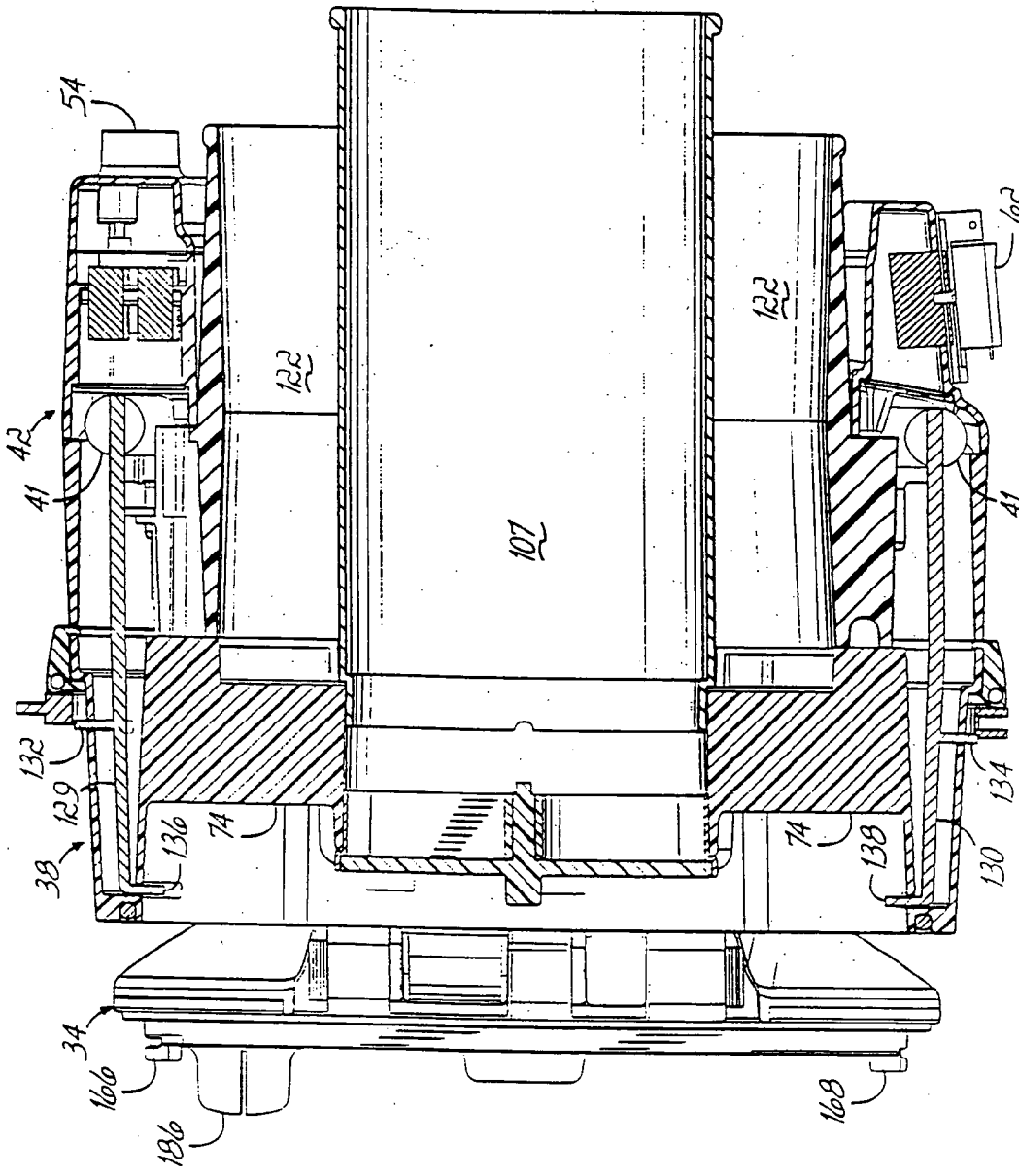


FIG. 8

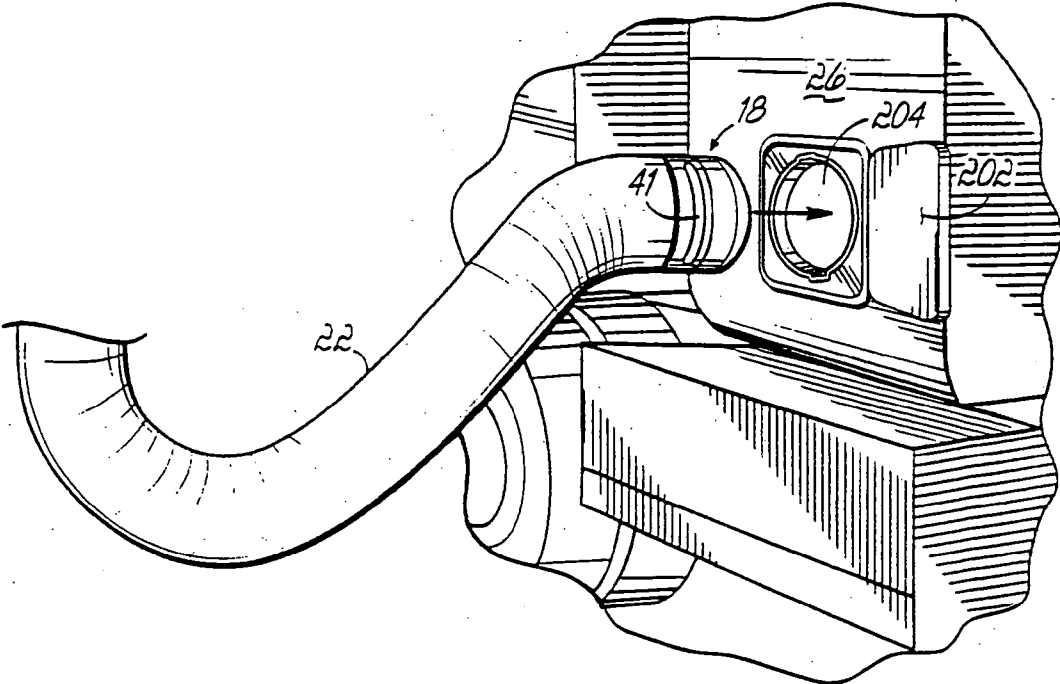


FIG. 9

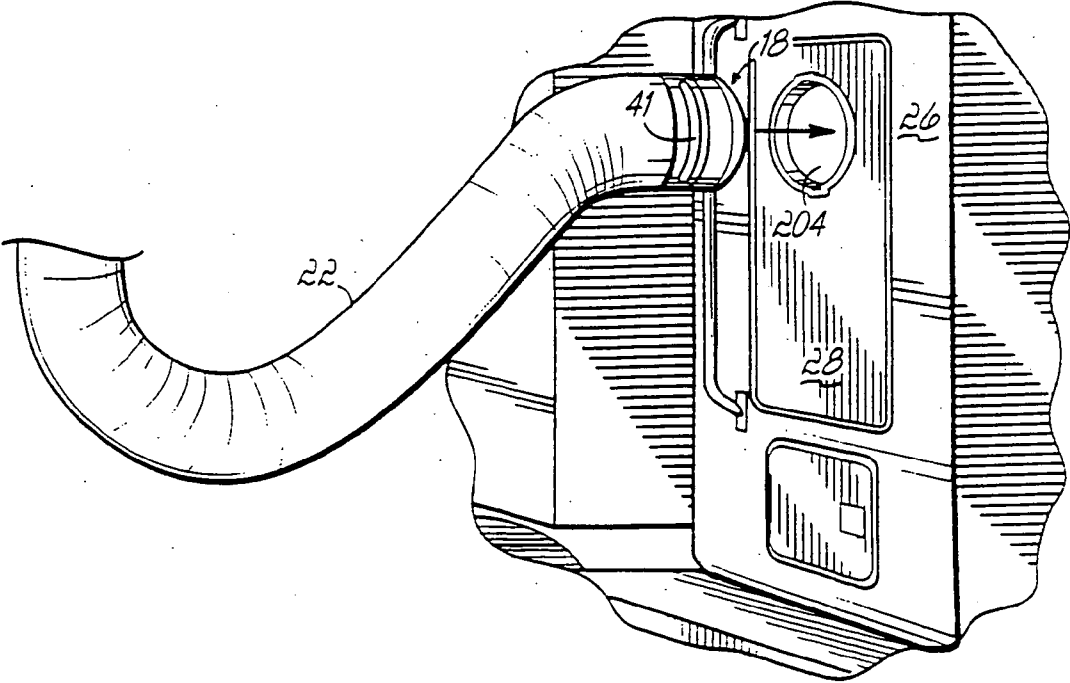


FIG. 10

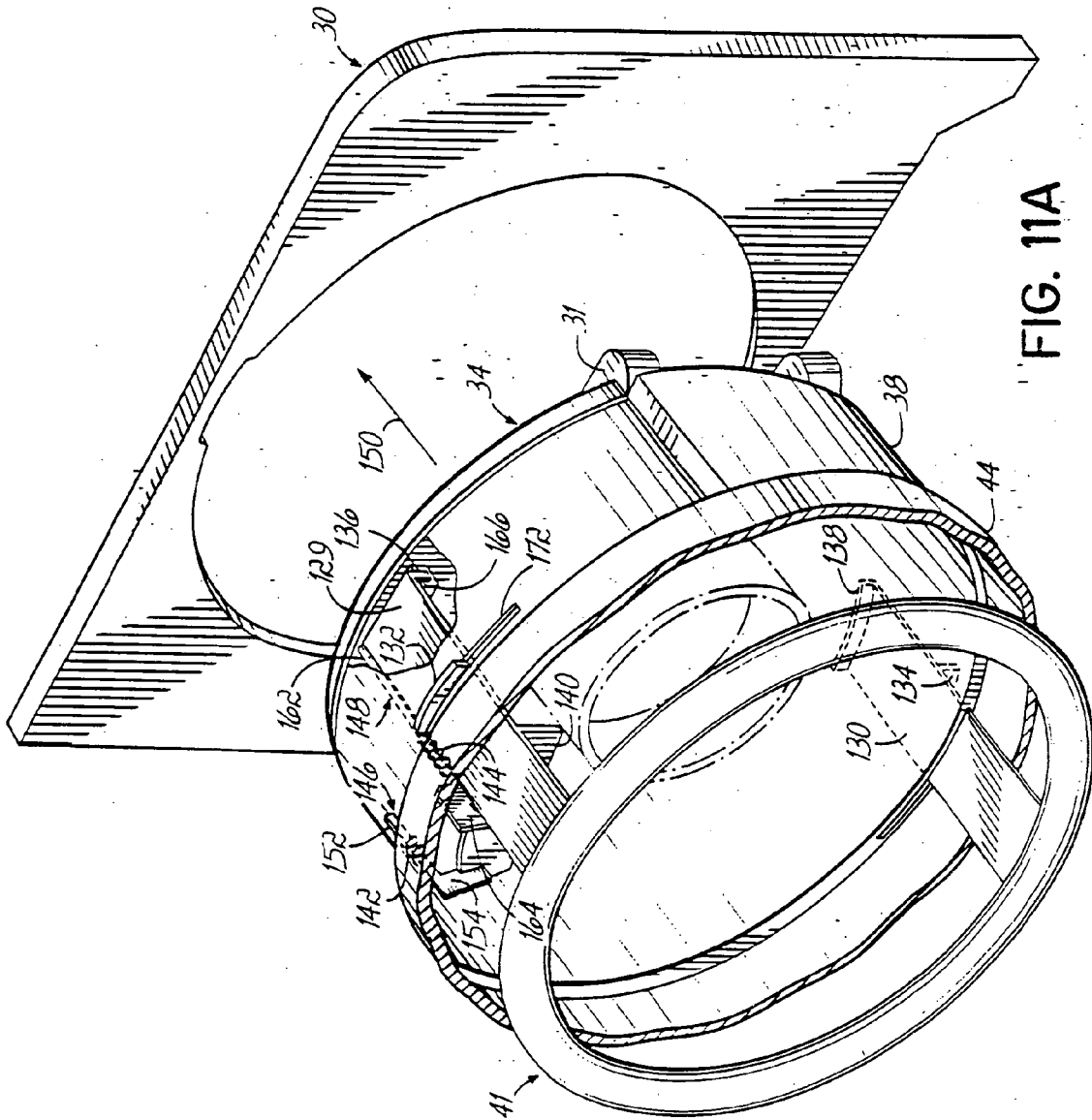


FIG. 11A

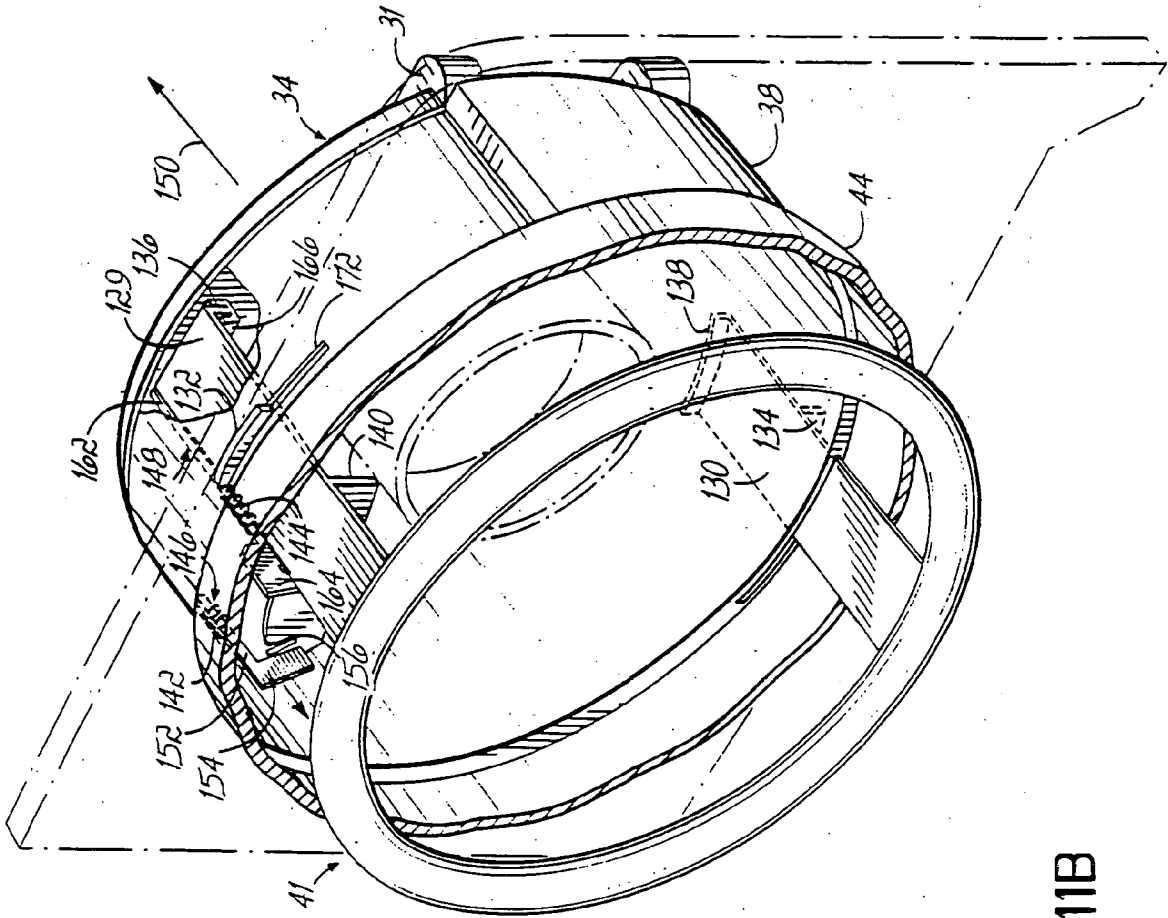
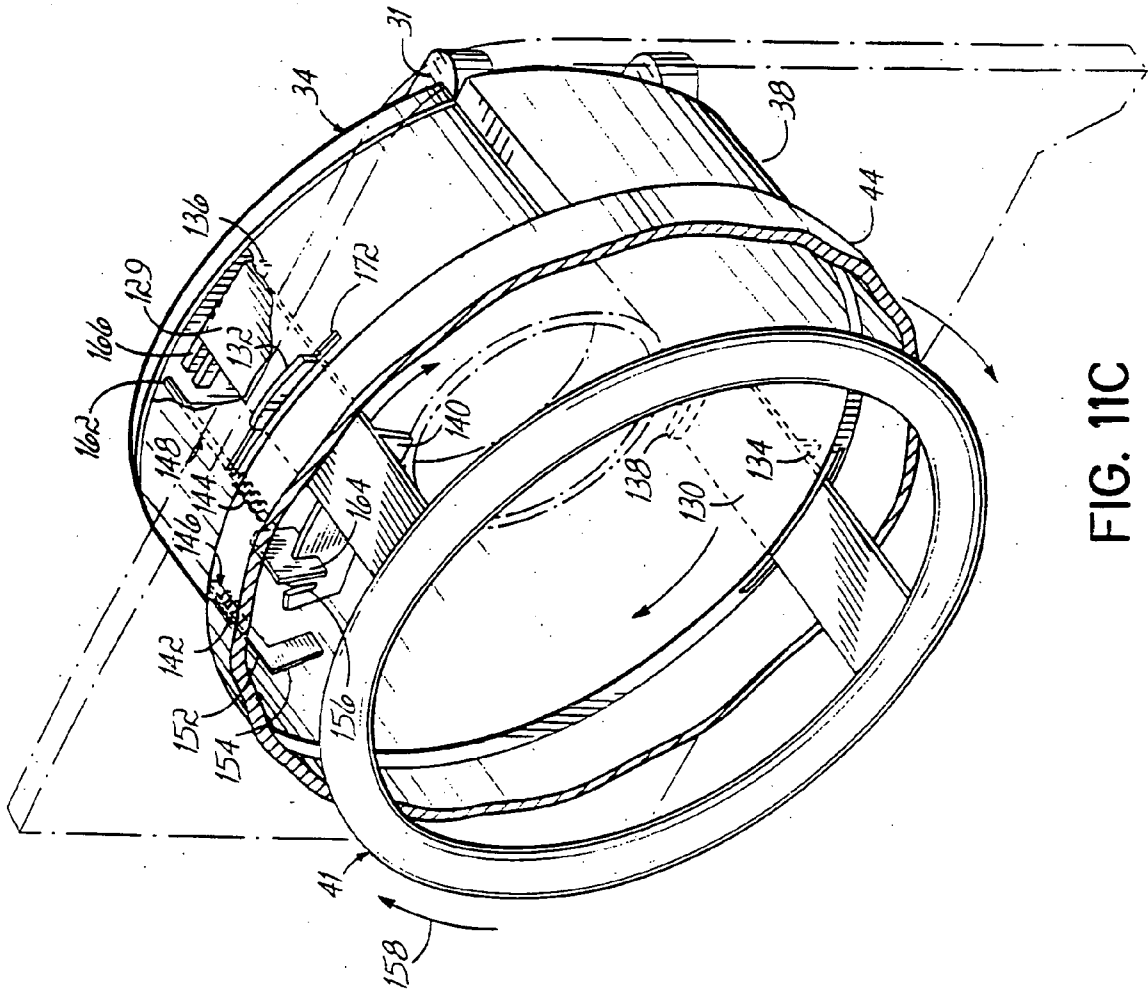
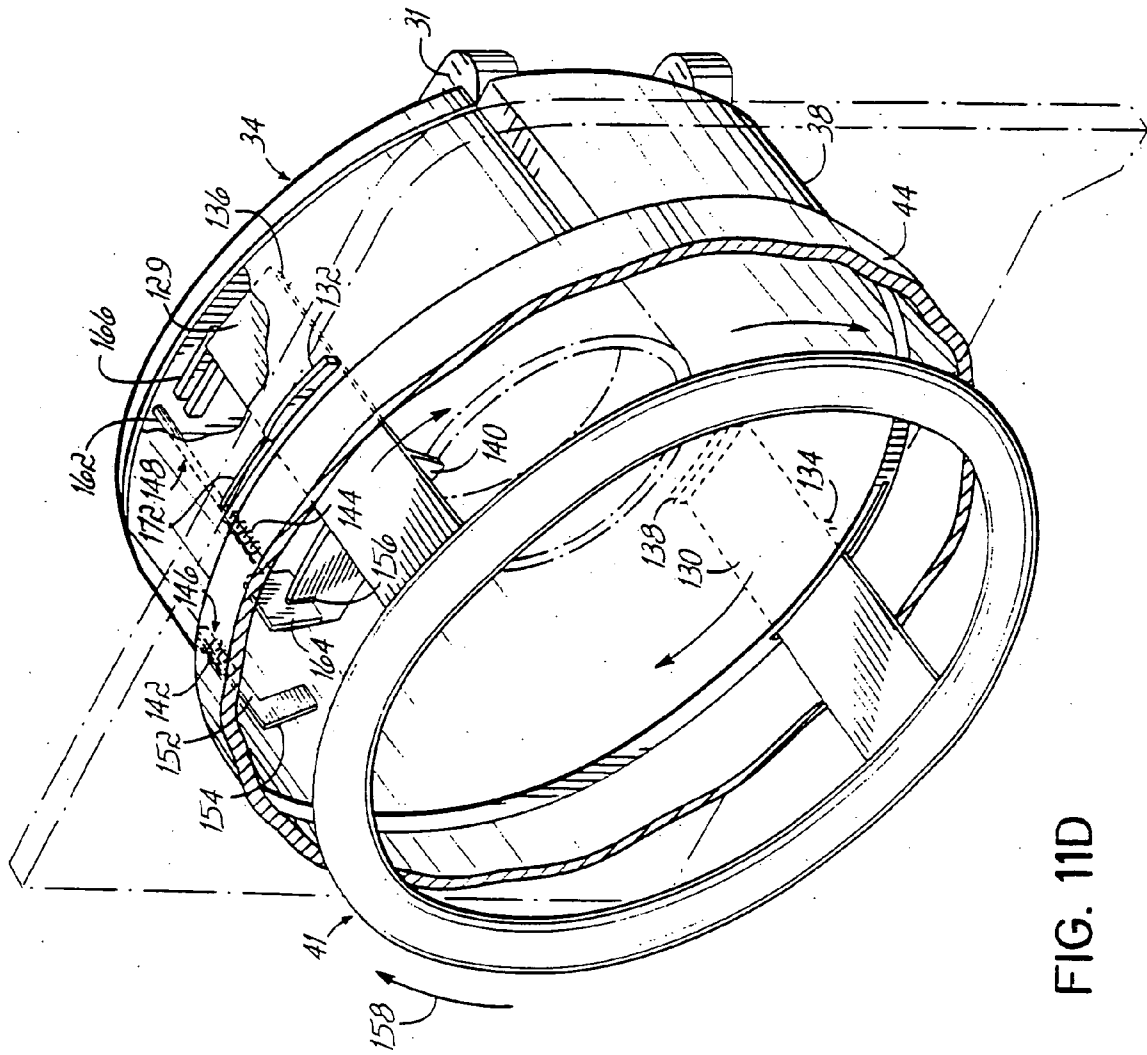


FIG. 11B





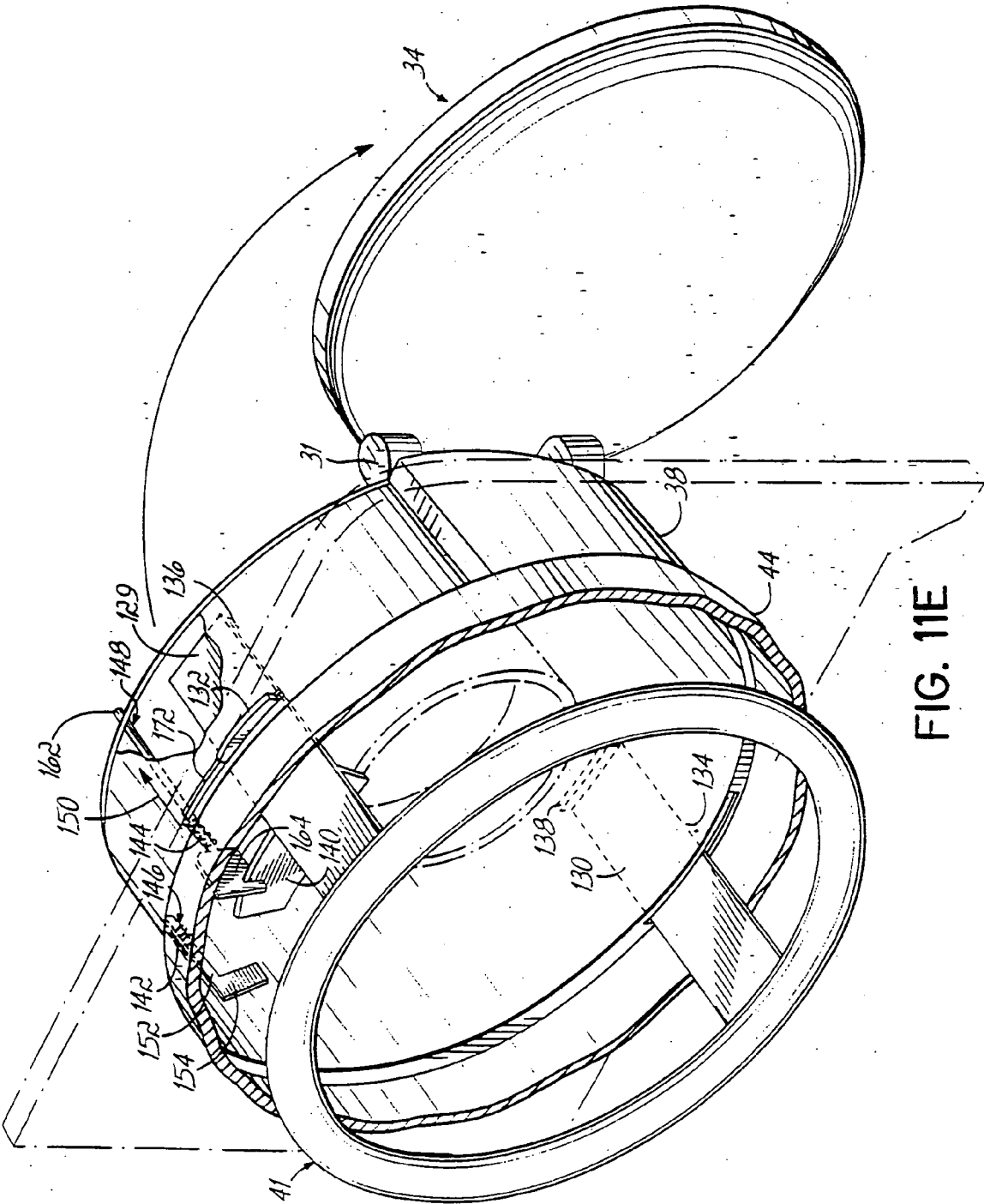


FIG. 11E

APPARATUS FOR CONTROLLING THE ENVIRONMENT OF A PARKED VEHICLE

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is related to Provisional Application 6/375,038 filed Apr. 22, 2002 entitled Apparatus for Controlling the Environment of a Parked Vehicle which is now pending.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Long haul truckers frequently spend the night in the cabs of their trucks. In fact, many trucks are designed with sleeping areas. This necessitates environmental control and specifically heating and cooling. In order to provide this heating or cooling, the truck drivers generally leave the trucks running overnight to utilize the truck's heating or air conditioning system. The cumulative pollution created by these vehicles running overnight is very significant.

[0003] Further, although such trucks are in a position to receive radio signals, they are frequently located in positions where television signals are unavailable or weak and certainly no telephone connections are available to the truck itself.

[0004] Providing these services to a parked truck involves overcoming many practical and physical problems. Payment for these services is a concern as well as physically fitting the equipment needed to provide these services in a small space is problematic. Protecting this equipment from the environment is also a concern.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] Thus, it is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and method for controlling the inside environment of a vehicle such as a truck, RV or other vehicle. More particularly, it is an object of the present invention to not only provide heating and air conditioning but other conveniences such as electricity, phone hookups, computer hookups, videos such as for continuing education instruction or entertainment and a variety of related services, providing such services within a limited access space, i.e., through the window of a truck or a small access door. Further, additional services may be provided for the vehicle, including the ability to watch television, the ability to communicate and even the ability to pay for the services. These additional services may be delivered through wires or with a wireless system.

[0006] Further, the present invention protects the equipment from the environment.

[0007] The objects and advantages of the present invention will be further appreciated in light of the following detailed description and drawings in which:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0008] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a truck with the apparatus of the present invention.

[0009] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the apparatus of the present invention attached to a window adapter.

[0010] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view taken at lines 3-3 of FIG. 2.

[0011] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the apparatus similar to FIG. 3 showing the cover of the device closed.

[0012] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the apparatus of the present invention attached to a window adapter with the cover closed.

[0013] FIG. 6 is a rear view of the device of the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 7 is a disassemble perspective view of the apparatus of the present invention without the cover.

[0015] FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view taken at lines 8-8 of FIG. 2.

[0016] FIG. 9 is a perspective view showing one alternative form of the invention.

[0017] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a second alternative form of the invention.

[0018] FIG. 11A-11E is are a series of perspective views depicting the installation of the environmental control unit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0019] As shown in FIG. 1, the present invention is an apparatus 10 for controlling the internal environment of a vehicle such as a truck 11 shown in a parking space 12. It includes an environmental control (HVAC) unit 14 which is suspended above the ground on a support 15 resting on posts 16. The apparatus further includes a ventilation head 18 which as shown is attached to the passenger side window 19 of the cab of a truck 20 using a template. The head 18 is connected to the HVAC unit 14 by coaxial conduit 22 which runs from the head 18 to the HVAC unit 14 and by an electrical cable 24 which again runs from the support alongside the coaxial conduit 22 to the head and can be held in a sleeve connected to conduit 22. This is attached to a breakaway connector 21 near support 15.

[0020] The head 18 as shown in FIG. 1 is attached to the window 19 of a truck cab 20. However, it can also be attached at any location to the truck provided there is a receptacle within the truck adapted to support the ventilation head. FIGS. 9 and 10 show embodiments in which the ventilation head 18 is attached to a side wall 26 of the truck cab at the door 28 of the sleeper compartment 30 as is disclosed in more detail below.

[0021] Head 18 includes a body portion 32 and a cover 34 which closes and seals the face 36 of the body portion 32. These are attached by a hinge 31 which preferably can be adjusted to vary the tension. As shown in FIG. 7, the body portion 32 includes an inner housing portion 38 attached to an outer housing portion 42 with a gasket 44 between the two. Attached to the outer housing 42 is a circular handle 41 which is held onto the outer housing by first and second bracket members 48, 52. The first bracket member 48 includes one low voltage connection 54 and two high voltage connectors 56, 58 connectors. These are all preferably water tight connectors. The bracket 48 includes a removable service cover 53. The second bracket 52 includes an exterior GFI A/C outlet 62.

[0022] As shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, the inner housing 38 has an inner wall 64 and an outer wall 66 with an annular passageway 68 there between. An inner circular conduit 72 is supported by first, second and third support members 74

which extend to the inner wall **64** of the upper housing. Extended from this circular conduit **72** are upper and lower walls **76, 78** and face **82** which supports first and second A/C electrical outlets **84, 86**. Fan **82** is a removable service cover. Also as shown on face **82** are a phone connector **88** and an ethernet connection **92**.

[0023] Outer wall **66** has a lower stepped annular portion **94** which is covered by gasket **44**. An annular screen **98** is positioned to cover the area **102** between the inner conduit **72** and the inner wall **64** of the inner housing. Area **102** is the return air flow passage for the system as indicated by arrow **101**.

[0024] Abutting the gasket **44** is the upper edge **104** of the outer housing **42**. The outer housing **32** includes circular wall **106** which forms a conduit. Inside the conduit **106** of the lower housing is a lesser diameter conduit **107** which attaches to the inner circular wall **72** of the upper housing.

[0025] Extended from the conduit **106** is an annular extension **108** which leads to the outermost or exterior wall portion **112** having edge **104**. This provides an annular passage **114** which communicates with the inner passage **68** of the inner housing **38**. The outer housing **42** further includes first and second handle receiving members **116, 118** which each include semi-circular arcuate channels **122, 124**. The ring shaped handle **41** is held within this groove by brackets **48** and **52**, each of which have handle recessive grooves **126, 128**.

[0026] Extending up from the handle are first and second prongs **129, 130**. Each prong includes an outwardly extended tab **132, 134** and an inwardly extended tab **136, 138**. The first prong **129** further includes a planar arcuate member **140** perpendicular to and welded to the inside surface of the prong **129**.

[0027] The first handle receiving member **116** further supports first and second spring biased switches **142, 144**. The first and second spring biased switches include first and second flag-shaped probe members **146, 148**. (See FIGS. **11A-11C**) These probe members are fixed within the spring biased switches and are both biased in the direction of arrow **150**. The first probe **146** includes an extended portion **152** and a lower enlarged portion **154**. When the first spring biased switch is extended, in other words in a non-compressed state, it is positioned in slot **156** in arcuate member **140**. This prevents the handle **41** from rotating. When this switch **142** is compressed, the enlarged portion **154** of the probe **146** will move below the arcuate plate member **140** and allow the handle **41** to rotate in the direction of arrow **158**.

[0028] The probe **148** of the second spring biased switch **144** has an extended portion **162** and an enlarged portion **164**. The enlarged portion **164** has a slot **166**. Slot **166** will allow enlarged portion **164** to ride on the arcuate plate member **140** when the switch is in a compressed state. When enlarged portion **164** is aligned with the slot **156** in the arcuate plate **140**, i.e., when the probe **148** moves in the direction of arrow **150**, the enlarged portion moves into slot **156** stopping further rotation of the handle **46**.

[0029] When assembled, the prongs **129, 130** extend upwardly through the outer housing into the inner housing with the tabs **132** and **134** extending through slots **172, 174** in the outer wall of the inner housing. Tabs **136** and **138** in

turn extend through slots **176, 178** in the inner wall of the inner housing near its upper edge **180**. These prongs latch and unlatch the cover **34** and prevent the unit from being removed when the cover **34** is open as is explained below.

[0030] The first handle cover **48** includes three electrical connections which are adapted to receive three separate sets of wires. The first set of wires connect through fitting **54** and are low voltage wiring such as telephone connections, ethernet connections, television or radio antenna for cable. The second and third set attach via fitting **56, 58** and provide high voltage electric. The electrical wires would run through the bracket **48** around the handle **41** into the annular passage **114** in the lower housing through the inner passage of the upper housing to the central shroud.

[0031] The head connects to the HVAC unit utilizing a coaxial flexible duct **22**. The outer wall **120** of the coaxial duct attaches to the exterior surface **122** of the large conduit **106** of the outer housing. The inner conduit **123** is attached to the lesser diameter conduit **107** which itself is attached to the inner housing. The ratio of the cross-sectional inner conduit to the outer conduit should be about 1 to about 3.

[0032] The head **18** includes the cover **34** which is attached by hinge **120** to the upper housing **38**. The head **18** is attached to the window of a vehicle using a template or adapter **126** as shown in FIG. **1**. The use of an adaptor allows one head design to attach to any vehicle window. This adaptor **126** has an opening **128** which mates with the head **18** and an exterior configuration which mates with the window opening providing a tight seal. Spring biased latches **125** hold the head in place.

[0033] The opening **128** through the adapter **126** includes upper and lower cut out portions **132, 134** adapted to permit tabs **132** and **134** to pass through the adaptor. When this occurs, the first spring biased switch **142** is compressed by the adapter, forcing the first probe **146** below the arcuate plate **140** permitting the handle to rotate. Rotation of the handle will cause the tabs **132, 134** to rotate out of alignment with cut out portions **133, 135** where they engage the adaptor holding it in position. The upper tabs rotate in slots **176** and **178** within the inner wall of the inner housing moving out of engagement with latch members **166** and **168** in the cover permitting the cover to open.

[0034] Rotating handle **41** will align the slot in arcuate member **140** with the enlarged portion of probe **148**. As the cover opens, the probe **148** of the second spring biased switch moves in the direction of arrow **150**. At this point, the enlarged portion of the second probe **148** rests in the slot **156** in the arcuate plate **140** member preventing further rotation. This prevents the head from being separated from the adaptor if the cover is opened. This protects the head from the environment.

[0035] Likewise to remove the head from the template, the cover must first be closed which will compress spring switch **144** allowing the handle to rotate which will hold the cover in a closed position as the head is removed from the template.

[0036] The cover includes a variety of different features including a USB-port **182**, a connector **184** for the truck computer, a credit card reader **186**, a touch pad display screen **188** and a plurality of different dedicated buttons or switches used to control the unit and to activate various features of the unit.

[0037] The controls on the cover activate and control the functioning of the unit. Head 18 has a central processing unit (not shown) which can be programmed to function as desired and to provide all desired Internet communication and functions. Although the particular configuration of the head can vary dramatically depending upon the desired functions, the device as shown has a variety of beneficial features.

[0038] For example, it includes a touch switch 190 which turns the screen light on and off so that the head can remain open during the night without illuminating the cab. It further includes an adjacent LED 191 which will help the occupant locate the light on/off switch in the dark. There is also a dedicated help button 194 which can initiate step by step procedures for the functioning of the head. There is also a menu button which basically takes one to the top level of the menu. A dedicated thermostat button 196 activates the screen to show the temperature and provide for increasing or decreasing the temperature within the cab as well as activating or deactivating the fan. Also switches 198 to active the web browser, messaging systems, catalog-type shopping, and the like can be included. Finally a checkout button can also be provided. Spring switch 144 can also act as a check out switch. Thus when the head is removed from the template, the unit is deactivated and the customer is billed.

[0039] Further, the connection 184 for the truck's onboard computer permits communication between the truck's computer and a central diagnostic unit via the Internet or through telephone lines.

[0040] The window adapter can be positioned into the window of the truck by simply lowering the window, placing the adapter in position and raising the window until it is held tight by the upper pressure of the window against the template. This is preferably done before the ventilation head is attached to the adapter. The ventilation head would then be placed in the opening in the adapter. Since the adapter rests against the gasket, a relatively air tight seal is formed.

[0041] The present invention includes many different optional features which improve the overall function of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 1, the device includes a breakaway system at the HVAC support. Thus, if a truck driver inadvertently drives away with the unit attached, the lines will break away at the upper area and thus no live electrical wires will be at ground level.

[0042] The electrical lines connect to a central switching unit. The electricity to the head particularly the 110V is only activated or provided once the unit is installed and activated (generally using a credit card). This would obviously prevent theft of electricity as well as providing an added safety feature. The unit also shows a 220 v. outlet 208 designed to run the reefer unit of a trailer. This also would be activated via the head unit.

[0043] Further, when the unit itself is disconnected and the head closed, air can be recirculated through the inner tube and return through the outer tube recirculating air within the

hose to maintain flexibility in extremely cold temperatures. It would also potentially prevent introducing very cold air into the cab of a truck initially. This can be activated either locally or through a central server.

[0044] As shown in FIGS. 9 and 10, instead of attaching the present unit to the window of a truck or vehicle, it can be attached to a wall of a vehicle using a semi-permanent adapter. This adapter 200 is a rectangular unit which is generally bolted or generally fixed to the side wall of the cab of the truck or cab of the vehicle. It can also be formed at the factory. Adapter 200 includes a door 202 covering a round opening 204 which corresponds in size to the exterior shape of the head 18. Thus, it acts just like an adapter 30. Instead of inserting the head 18 into the adapter which is in the window, one simply opens the door 202 and inserts the head 18 into this opening 204 and the unit is operated in the same manner as previously described.

[0045] The present invention has been described with respect to a separate head unit which is permanently attached to an HVAC unit. It is also within the scope of the present invention to permanently mount the head within the truck such as through a side wall and simply connect the head to the HVAC unit at the truck stop. Thus, the air handling hoses and electrical connections would simply plug into a permanently attached unit on the truck. Once the connections were made, the truck driver could then activate the HVAC unit and other options such as Internet connection, electricity to the reefer unit in the same manner as described with the preferred embodiment of the present invention. Further, with respect to all communication systems, the present invention has been described wherein the communication lines are hard wired into the head. Obviously this can be conducted using wireless communications if desired.

[0046] This has been a description of the present invention along with the preferred method of practicing the invention. However, the invention itself should only be defined by the appended claims wherein

We claim:

1-30. (canceled)

31. A system to provide a plurality of services to a parked vehicle comprising a head unit attached to a cab of said vehicle;

said head unit in communication with a central server;

at least one high voltage outlet associated with said head unit which is normally switched off;

wherein communication with said server activates said at least one high voltage outlet.

32. The system claimed in claim 31 comprising a 110V high voltage outlet and a 220V high voltage outlet.

33. The system claimed in claim 31 wherein said head unit is attached to an open window of said vehicle and forms a seal between said cab and said head unit.

* * * * *