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(54) Title: RETICULATED THERMOPLASTIC FILM AND METHOD OF MAKING THE SAME

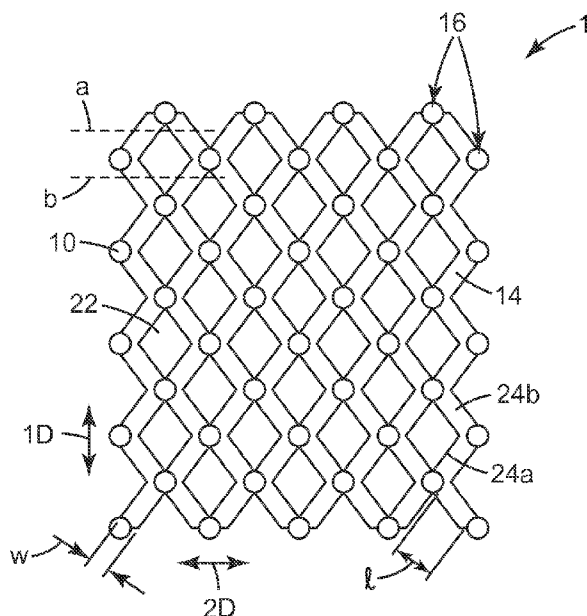


Fig. 1C

(57) Abstract: A reticulated thermoplastic film includes a backing with openings and discrete elements protruding from the first major surface. There are two discrete elements aligned in a first direction abutting opposite ends of any given opening. In a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, there is one discrete element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in the second direction. Each portion of the backing around the given opening is plastically deformed in its lengthwise direction and typically has higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the given opening than at its midpoint. The openings are often retractable. A method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film is also disclosed. The method includes stretching a thermoplastic backing with a plurality of discrete elements in the first direction. Subsequently stretching the backing in the second direction forms a tear in the backing between two adjacent discrete elements.



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RETICULATED THERMOPLASTIC FILM AND METHOD OF MAKING THE SAME**BACKGROUND**

Articles with one or more structured surfaces are useful in a variety of applications (e.g., abrasive discs, assembly of automobile parts, and disposable absorbent articles). The articles may be provided as films that exhibit, for example, increased surface area, mechanical fastening structures, or optical properties.

Mechanical fasteners, which are also called hook and loop fasteners, typically include a plurality of closely spaced upstanding projections with loop-engaging heads useful as hook members, and loop members typically include a plurality of woven, nonwoven, or knitted loops. Mechanical fasteners are useful for providing releasable attachment in numerous applications. For example, mechanical fasteners are widely used in wearable disposable absorbent articles to fasten such articles around the body of a person. In typical configurations, a hook strip or patch on a fastening tab attached to the rear waist portion of a diaper or incontinence garment, for example, can fasten to a landing zone of loop material on the front waist region, or the hook strip or patch can fasten to the backsheet (e.g., nonwoven backsheet) of the diaper or incontinence garment in the front waist region. Mechanical fasteners are also useful for disposable articles such as sanitary napkins. A sanitary napkin typically includes a back sheet that is intended to be placed adjacent to the wearer's undergarment. The back sheet may comprise hook fastener elements to securely attach the sanitary napkin to the undergarment, which mechanically engages with the hook fastener elements.

Some mechanical fasteners have been made with openings in the backing from which male fastening elements project. See, e.g., U. S. Pat. Nos. 4,001,366 (Brumlik) and 7,407,496 (Peterson), U.S. Pat. Appl. Pub. No. 2012/0204383 (Wood et al.), and Int. Pat. Appl. Pub. Nos. WO 2005/122818 (Ausen et al.) and WO 1994/02091 (Hamilton).

SUMMARY

The present disclosure provides a reticulated film made simply by stretching the film in a first direction and then a second direction perpendicular to the first direction. No slitting or aperturing of the film is needed before stretching. The method of making the reticulated film takes advantage of the lower tear strength associated with stretch-induced molecular orientation in a film.

In one aspect, the present disclosure provides a reticulated thermoplastic film having a thermoplastic backing with first and second major surfaces, a plurality of retractable openings in the thermoplastic backing, and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. There are two discrete elements, aligned in a first direction, abutting opposite ends of any given retractable opening. In a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, there is one discrete element between the given retractable opening and an adjacent retractable opening aligned in the second direction. Each portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given retractable opening is plastically deformed in its lengthwise direction.

In another aspect, the present disclosure provides a reticulated thermoplastic film having a thermoplastic backing with first and second major surfaces, a plurality of openings in the thermoplastic backing, and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. There are two discrete elements, aligned in a first direction, abutting opposite ends of any given opening. In a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, there is one discrete element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in the second direction. At least one (in some embodiments, each) portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given opening has a profile across its width of higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the given opening than at its midpoint.

In another aspect, the present disclosure provides a method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film. The method includes providing a thermoplastic backing having first and second major surfaces and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. At least some of the discrete elements are aligned in a row in a first direction. The method further includes stretching the thermoplastic backing in the first direction and subsequently stretching the thermoplastic backing in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction. Stretching in the first direction plastically deforms the thermoplastic backing and increases a distance between the at least some of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, but the thermoplastic backing remains intact between the plurality of discrete elements after stretching it in the first direction. Stretching in the second direction forms a tear in the thermoplastic backing between two adjacent of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, and the tear is interrupted by the two adjacent discrete elements.

The method disclosed herein may be useful, in some embodiments, for making a reticulated mechanical fastening web, laminate, strip, or patch that has a unique and attractive appearance. The method according to the present disclosure allows openings to be provided in the mechanical fastener without wasteful material loss. The openings can provide breathability and flexibility to the mechanical fastener, which may enhance the comfort of the wearer, for example, of an absorbent article comprising the mechanical fastener made by the method disclosed herein. The mechanical fastener also is typically able to cover a relatively large area with a relatively small amount of material, which may lower its cost. Also, because of the large area that may be covered by the mechanical fastener in an absorbent article, the mechanical fastener may provide performance enhancement, for example, by resisting shifting forces such as torsional or rotational forces caused by movement of the wearer of the absorbent article. For example, in use, fitting an absorbent article such as a diaper about the wearer usually requires the front and back waist portions of the diaper to overlap each other. As the diaper is worn the movements of the wearer tend to cause the overlapping front and back waist portions to shift position relative to each other. Unless such shifting is limited, the fit and containment characteristics of the diaper may be degraded as the diaper is worn. The mechanical fastener made according to the present disclosure may provide improved fit and closure stability by resisting such shifting because of its relatively larger area and flexibility.

In this application, terms such as "a", "an" and "the" are not intended to refer to only a singular entity, but include the general class of which a specific example may be used for illustration. The terms "a", "an", and "the" are used interchangeably with the term "at least one". The phrases "at least one of" and "comprises at least one of" followed by a list refers to any one of the items in the list and any combination of two or more items in the list. All numerical ranges are inclusive of their endpoints and non-integral values between the endpoints unless otherwise stated.

The terms "first" and "second" are used in this disclosure. It will be understood that, unless otherwise noted, those terms are used in their relative sense only. The designation of "first" and "second" may be applied to the major surfaces of the thermoplastic backing merely as a matter of convenience in the description of one or more of the embodiments.

The terms "multiple" and "a plurality" refer to more than one.

The term "opening" should be understood to be a void space that is surrounded by the thermoplastic backing. The opening may or may not enclose fibrils of the thermoplastic backing, which typically have a width that is less than 10 percent or less than 5 percent of the width of each portion of the thermoplastic backing around the opening.

In some embodiments, the reticulated film according to the present disclosure is a continuous or running web, sometimes having an indefinite length. A web can typically be handled in a roll-to-roll process. In some embodiments, the method according to the present disclosure is carried out on a continuous web. The term "machine direction" (MD) as used herein denotes the direction of a running web of material during a manufacturing process. When a strip is cut from a continuous web, the machine direction corresponds to the length "L" of the strip. The terms "machine direction" and "longitudinal direction" may be used interchangeably. The term "cross-machine direction" (CD) as used herein denotes the direction which is essentially perpendicular to the machine direction. When a strip is cut from a continuous web, the cross-machine direction corresponds to the width "W" of the strip. In some embodiments of the method disclosed herein, the first direction is the machine direction, and the second direction is the cross-machine direction, but this is not a requirement.

The above summary of the present disclosure is not intended to describe each disclosed embodiment or every implementation of the present disclosure. The description that follows more particularly exemplifies illustrative embodiments. It is to be understood, therefore, that the drawings and following description are for illustration purposes only and should not be read in a manner that would unduly limit the scope of this disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The disclosure may be more completely understood in consideration of the following detailed description of various embodiments of the disclosure in connection with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1A is a top view of one embodiment of film useful for the method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film according to the present disclosure;

FIG. 1B is a top view of the film shown in FIG. 1A after it has been stretched in a first direction;

FIG. 1C is a top view of an embodiment of a reticulated film according to the present disclosure, which, according to some embodiments of the method according to the present disclosure, is prepared by stretching the film shown in FIG. 1B in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction;

5 FIG. 2 is a scanning electron micrograph showing a perspective view of a portion of a reticulated film similar to that shown in FIG. 1C;

FIG. 3A is a photograph taken with a polarization microscope equipped with cross polars of a film such as that shown in FIG. 1B after it has been stretched in a first direction;

10 FIG. 3B is a photograph taken with a polarization microscope equipped with cross polars of the film shown in FIG. 3A after it has been stretched in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction;

FIGS. 3C and 3D are micrographs showing optical retardance maps of two portions of the thermoplastic backing between openings in a reticulated film according to the present disclosure;

FIG. 4 is a top view of another embodiment of a reticulated film according to the present disclosure;

15 FIG. 5A is a picture of an embodiment of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure in which the thermoplastic backing was not heated while stretching in the second direction;

FIG. 5B is a picture of an embodiment of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure in which the thermoplastic backing was heated while stretching in the second direction; and

FIG. 6 is a top view of a reticulated film similar to that shown in FIG. 1C joined to a carrier.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference will now be made in detail to embodiments of the disclosure, one or more examples of which are illustrated in the drawings. Features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment can be used with other embodiments to yield still a third embodiment. It is intended that the present disclosure include these and other modifications and variations.

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FIG. 1A shows a top view of an embodiment of a thermoplastic backing 14 with discrete elements 10 protruding from the first major surface of the backing, which is the major surface visible in the drawing. In some embodiments, at least some of the discrete elements comprise one upstanding post. In some embodiments, at least some of the discrete elements are upstanding posts on the thermoplastic backing 14, which typically have proximal ends and distal ends, with the proximal end including the base that is attached to the thermoplastic backing, and the distal end extending away from the thermoplastic backing.

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FIG. 1B illustrates the result of stretching the thermoplastic backing 14 in the first direction 1D, which is a feature of the method according to the present disclosure. FIG. 1B illustrates that the discrete elements 10 are spaced further apart in first direction 1D after stretching. Although not shown in the drawing, the thermoplastic backing 14 becomes thinner, is plastically deformed, and has stretch-induced molecular orientation in the first direction 1D. However, the thermoplastic backing 14 remains intact

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between the discrete elements 10 after stretching. In other words, the thermoplastic backing 14 does not

have a plurality of any of cuts, slits, tears, or apertures after stretching in the first direction; instead the backing remains a continuous film. During the stretching in the first direction, the discrete elements 10 formed in the thermoplastic backing 14 resist stretching. At their bases, the areas of the discrete elements 10 do not stretch to the same extent as the thermoplastic backing 14 on either side. To compensate for this resistance to stretching of the bases, at least a portion of the area 20 of the thermoplastic backing between the discrete elements 10 is believed to stretch to a greater extent than the thermoplastic backing 14 on either side. The regions of the thermoplastic backing 14 with the highest stretch-induced molecular orientation in the first direction 1D are therefore found within areas 20 between the discrete elements 10.

FIG. 1C illustrates the result of stretching the thermoplastic backing 14 in the second direction 2D, which is a feature of the method according to the present disclosure. Second direction 2D is perpendicular to first direction 1D. Since the areas 20 shown in FIG. 1B have the highest stretch-induced molecular orientation in the thermoplastic backing 14 in the first direction, they have the lowest tear resistance. Stretching in the second direction 2D causes the thermoplastic backing 14 to tear in areas 20 to provide the openings 22 in the thermoplastic backing 14 as shown in FIG. 1C. The tears in areas 20 are interrupted by the discrete elements 10 on either end of areas 20. A discrete element according to some embodiments of the method according to the present disclosure that interrupts tear propagation is shown in the scanning electron micrograph of FIG. 2. In some embodiments, including the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, the discrete elements protrude only from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. It should be understood that the thermoplastic backing 14 shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B is not slit or apertured. Instead, openings 22 are formed in the thermoplastic backing 14 simply by stretching the thermoplastic backing 14 in the first direction 1D and then the second direction 2D.

FIG. 1C also illustrates an embodiment of the reticulated film 1 according to the present disclosure. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1C, the reticulated film 1 has a staggered array of discrete elements 10 protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing when viewed in either the first direction or the second direction. A staggered array may appear to be a square array depending on the angle of viewing; therefore, the angle of viewing is specified. In some embodiments, a staggered array is an array that appears staggered when viewed from the first direction. Referring again to the embodiment of the method illustrated in FIGS. 1A-1C, discrete elements 10 are aligned in rows in the first direction 1D but are staggered in the second direction 2D.

In reticulated film 1 shown in FIG. 1C, for any given single opening 22 in the reticulated film 1, there are four discrete elements 10 around the single opening 22. Two discrete elements 10 abut the opening on opposite ends, which are the discrete elements that serve to interrupt the tears formed in the thermoplastic backing upon stretching in the second direction 2D in the method disclosed herein. The remaining two discrete elements of the four discrete elements around the opening have a portion of thermoplastic backing 14 between them and the opening 22. There is one discrete element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in the second direction. In some embodiments, when two openings are said to be aligned, they are aligned along an axis of symmetry. No portion of the

thermoplastic backing 14 connects either of the two pairs of opposing discrete elements 10 in the group of four discrete elements.

Furthermore, between any two adjacent openings, there is generally up to one discrete element protruding from the thermoplastic backing. That is, there may be zero or one discrete element between any two adjacent openings. For the purposes of the present disclosure, to determine whether a discrete element is between two adjacent openings, the discrete element must be located somewhere on the portion of the thermoplastic backing that separates the two adjacent openings. When viewed down rows 16, the reticulated film 1 clearly has one discrete element 10 between any two adjacent openings 22. Also, when viewed in direction 2D, which is perpendicular to rows 16, the reticulated film 1 clearly has one discrete element 10 between any two adjacent openings 22. Thus, when viewed along an axis of symmetry along which a plurality of openings is aligned, there is one discrete element 10 between any two adjacent openings. However, when viewed at a 45 degree angle to rows 16, the reticulated film 1 may be considered to have no discrete element 10 between any two adjacent openings 22 since the discrete elements 10 are not located in the portion of the thermoplastic backing 14 that separates the two openings 22. In some embodiments, including the embodiment shown in FIG. 1C, there appears to be exactly one discrete element 10 at every intersection in the reticulated film 1. An opening and the associated portions of thermoplastic backing that surround it can be referred to as the unit cell of the reticulated film. In some embodiments, including the embodiment shown in FIG. 1C, the unit cell has four sides and four angles, and there appears to be exactly one discrete element 10 associated with each angle in the unit cell.

In some embodiments of the reticulated films according to the present disclosure and/or made according to the method of the present disclosure, the openings 22 are retractable. As used herein, the term “retractable” can be understood to mean that applying tension to the reticulated film in the first direction can at least partially close the plurality of openings to decrease the film’s width in the second direction. Applying this tension to at least partially close the plurality of openings can be done without further plastically deforming in the first direction and/or buckling the thermoplastic backing. Alternatively or additionally, the term “retractable”, in particular with reference to retraction in the second direction, can be understood to mean that the thermoplastic backing is not macroscopically plastically deformed in the second direction. Alternatively or additionally, the term “retractable” can be understood to mean that the openings in the reticulated film are not formed by molding or hole-punching. It is understood by a person skilled in the art that an opening that is molded or punched into a reticulated film is fixed in dimension by the molding or hole-punching process, and the lack of material in the opening is not recoverable. In order to make the openings narrower in one direction, for example, the reticulated film would need to be plastically deformed in the perpendicular direction. Similarly, a reticulated film in which the openings are made by plastic deformation of the film in a particular direction by definition does not retract in that direction. Again, in order to make the openings narrower in the direction that the film was plastically deformed, for example, the reticulated film would need to be plastically deformed in the perpendicular direction, and buckling of the film between openings could occur.

The reticulated films according to the present disclosure typically can recover to at least to some extent from a deformation in the second direction. After the openings are formed, the openings provide regions in the reticulated film where means for transmission of force in the second direction is substantially absent. However, the locations where the thermoplastic backing is joined together can still develop stress in the second direction when the reticulated film is strained in the second direction. The balance of the openings and the locations where the thermoplastic backing is joined together provides the reticulated film with elastic behavior, even though the thermoplastic itself is typically not an elastomer. Thus, there is a tendency for the reticulated film to retract after being extended in the second direction if the thermoplastic backing is not plastically deformed upon stretching in the second direction. This retraction can be amplified by applying tension in the first direction. This recovery from stretching would not be possible for reticulated films that are plastically deformed (providing stretch-induced molecular orientation) in the second direction. With respect to the stretched film shown in FIG. 1B, in some embodiments of the method according to the present disclosure, the reticulated film can recover at least 70 or 75 and up to about 80 to 85 percent of its elongation after stretching in 2D upon release of the stretching force and application of tension in 1D without plastically deforming the film in 1D.

Reticulated films according to the present disclosure and/or made according to the method of the present disclosure typically have other unique features. Because the thermoplastic backing is first stretched in the first direction 1D, each portion of the thermoplastic backing 14 defined by a width dimension "w" and a length dimension "l" is plastically deformed in its lengthwise direction. As used herein the terms "length" or "lengthwise" typically refer to the longest dimension of the portion of the thermoplastic backing between openings although the original density and dimensions of the discrete elements and the degree of stretching in the first direction can alter the dimensions of the thermoplastic backing portions, which may also be referred to as strands in some embodiments disclosed herein. The lengthwise direction may also be considered the first direction when the openings are retracted or closed. As used herein the term "width" typically refers to the shortest dimension in the plane of the thermoplastic backing of the portion of the backing between openings. The width dimension may also be considered parallel to the second direction when the openings are retracted or closed. Each portion of the thermoplastic backing typically has a greater stretch-induced molecular orientation in the length dimension than in the width dimension. There may be no stretch-induced molecular orientation in the width dimension "w" because the thermoplastic backing tears instead of stretching when extended in the second direction, or there may be some localized stretch-induced molecular orientation in the width dimension at connection points. Also, the thickness of the thermoplastic backing 14 can be substantially uniform in the reticulated film 1. The thickness of the thermoplastic backing 14 after stretching in the first direction 1D as shown in FIG. 1B is the same as the thickness of the thermoplastic backing 14 after stretching in the second direction 2D as shown in FIG. 1C again because the thermoplastic backing tears instead of stretching when extended in the second direction.

Stretch-induced molecular orientation in the reticulated film according to the present disclosure can be determined by standard spectrographic analysis of the birefringent properties of the thermoplastic backing in the reticulated film. Each portion of the thermoplastic backing between the openings in the reticulated film may also be understood to be birefringent, which means that the polymer in the thermoplastic backing has different effective indexes of refraction in different directions. As described above in connection with FIG. 1B, stretch-induced molecular orientation in the thermoplastic backing is believed to be highest within areas 20. A photograph taken with a polarization microscope equipped with cross polars, shown in FIG. 3A, illustrates this point. In the gray scale image shown in FIG. 3A, the darker, triangular area above and below the round upstanding elements reveals that the highest birefringence in the film is between the discrete elements. FIG. 3B is a photograph taken of the film shown in FIG. 3A after it has been stretched in the second direction. FIG. 3B illustrates that the birefringence that results from the stretch-induced molecular orientation in the thermoplastic backing of the reticulated film is highest where it abuts an opening. The lighter color on the edges of each portion of the thermoplastic backing shown in FIG. 3B reveals higher birefringence at or near the edges than in the center portion of the thermoplastic backing. Referring again to FIG. 1C, birefringence from stretch-induced molecular orientation is typically higher at the position 24a at the edge of an opening than in a portion of the thermoplastic backing that does not abut an opening, for example, at 24b or at a midpoint of the width of the portion of the thermoplastic backing. Although not visible in the gray scale image of FIG. 3B, the highest birefringence is located in the thermoplastic backing on the edge of the opening near the location of the discrete element.

The higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at a location at the edge of a given opening would not be observed in a backing that is slit, apertured, or molded to have openings. In cases where stretching follows slitting, aperturing, or molding an opening, for example, stretching would not preferentially occur at the slit, aperture, or opening to provide increased birefringence at that location. At a slit, aperture, or molded opening, there is an interruption in material and therefore no material to transmit the stretching force. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that a higher level of stretch-induced molecular orientation would be observed at the edge of an opening than toward the center of a portion of a thermoplastic backing between openings.

In some embodiments, including the embodiment that is shown in FIG. 3B, each portion of the thermoplastic backing that surrounds a given opening has a similar profile across its width of higher birefringence toward the opening and lower birefringence toward the center of each portion of the thermoplastic backing.

To determine whether a reticulated film has generally higher stretch-induced molecular orientation in a portion of the thermoplastic backing near the edge of a given opening than in the center of the portion and/or to determine whether at least one (in some embodiments, each) portion of the thermoplastic backing that surrounds a given opening has a similar profile across its width of higher birefringence toward the opening, a polarization microscope such as a "LEICA DM2700P", obtained

from Microsystems GmbH, Wetzlar, Germany, equipped with cross polars is used in transmission mode. The polarizer and analyzer are placed at 90 degrees to each other such that the field of view is dark. The sample is placed between the polarizer and analyzer, and the image is recorded using an image capturing device.

5 Also, higher birefringence at the edges of each portion of the thermoplastic backing in some embodiments of reticulated films disclosed herein is shown by cross sectioning the portions of the thermoplastic backing and measuring birefringence. Referring again to FIG. 1C, a unit cell in reticulated film 1 was cut in 2D in two places "a" and "b" to cut through each portion of the thermoplastic backing in the cell. A cross-section of each cut portion was photographed to show the optical retardance map of
10 each sample. Two of the photographs are shown in FIGS. 3C and 3D. Areas of lighter color indicate areas of higher birefringence. In the photographs shown in FIGS. 3C and 3D, the highest birefringence is observed at one edge of each cross-section. The birefringence in these samples was measured with a retardance imaging system available from Lot-Oriel GmbH & Co., Darmstadt, Germany, under the trade designation "LC-PolScope" on a microscope available from Leica Microsystems GmbH, under the trade
15 designation "DMRXE" and a digital CCD color camera available from QImaging, Surrey, BC, Canada, under the trade designation "RETIGA EXi FAST 1394". The microscope was equipped with a 546.5 nm interference filter obtained from Cambridge Research & Instrumentation, Inc., Hopkinton, Mass., and a 10x/0.25 objective.

For some embodiments of the reticulated film disclosed herein, the openings formed in the
20 thermoplastic backing are in the form of a repeating pattern of quadrilaterals. The quadrilaterals generally have two axes of symmetry, one in 1D and one in 2D. In some embodiments, the openings are in the shape of rhombuses. Again, no portion of the thermoplastic backing bridges between opposing angles of the quadrilaterals. There may be more than one repeating pattern of quadrilateral-shaped opening, for example, if the discrete elements are not evenly spaced on the thermoplastic backing. There may be
25 zones in the thermoplastic backing having different spacings of the discrete elements, giving rise to different sizes of the discrete openings. For discrete elements that are evenly spaced, the spacing (e.g., distance in the CD) between the discrete openings may differ by up to 10, 5, 2.5, or 1 percent.

The thermoplastic backing in the reticulated film according to the present disclosure and in its precursor in the method according to the present disclosure is substantially planar. A substantially
30 "planar" reticulated film refers to the portions of thermoplastic backing or strands occupying substantially the same plane when placed on a flat surface. The term "substantially" in this regard can mean that a portion of the thermoplastic backing may be out of plane by up to 15, 10, or 5 degrees. A thermoplastic backing that is substantially planar is not corrugated and not profile-extruded to have multiple peaks and valleys. The various portions of the thermoplastic backing also do not cross over each other, for example,
35 at intersections of the reticulated film.

Although FIGS. 1A through 1C illustrate an embodiment of the method according to the present disclosure in which the discrete elements 10 are aligned in rows 16 in the first direction 1D, which is the

direction of the first stretch, other relationships between the discrete elements and the first direction may be useful. For example, for a thermoplastic backing having a square array of discrete elements, the first direction may be at a 45 degree angle to a given row of discrete elements. A second stretch in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction will provide openings in the thermoplastic backing.

5 FIG. 4 illustrates another embodiment of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure. The reticulated film 100 illustrated in FIG. 4 has a staggered array of discrete elements 110 protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. In the illustrated embodiment, the discrete elements 110 comprise multiple upstanding posts on a surface protrusion. The upstanding posts each have proximal ends and distal ends, with the proximal end including the base that is attached to the
10 surface protrusion, and the distal end extending away from the thermoplastic backing. As in the reticulated film shown in the embodiment of FIG. 1C, between any two adjacent openings 122, there is up to one discrete element 110 protruding from the thermoplastic backing; there is exactly one discrete element 110 at every intersection in the reticulated film 100. Also, in the illustrated embodiment, for any given single opening 122 in the reticulated film 100, there are four discrete elements 110 around the
15 single opening 122, with two discrete elements 110 abutting the opening 122 on opposite ends, and the remaining two discrete elements of the four discrete elements around the opening having a portion of thermoplastic backing 114 between them and the opening 122. There is one discrete element between the given opening 122 and an adjacent opening aligned in the second direction. The stretch-induced molecular orientation in the thermoplastic backing 114 of reticulated film 100 is typically highest where it
20 abuts an opening, for example, at 124a. In other words, the stretch-induced molecular orientation is typically higher at the position 124a than in a portion of the thermoplastic backing that does not abut an opening, for example, at 124b. Moreover, each portion of the thermoplastic backing that surrounds a given opening has a similar profile across its width of higher birefringence toward the opening and lower birefringence toward the center.

25 Various features of thermoplastic backing having discrete elements protruding therefrom (such as that shown in FIG. 1A) can influence the method according to the present disclosure and also can affect the appearance and properties of the resultant reticulated film. For example, the thickness of the thermoplastic backing is related to the degree of stretching (that is, draw ratio) in the first direction that is required to cause area 20 (shown in FIG. 1B) to tear upon stretching in the second direction. The term
30 "draw ratio" refers to ratio of a linear dimension of a given portion of the thermoplastic backing after stretching to the linear dimension of the same portion before stretching. The method according to the present disclosure can be useful with thermoplastic backings having a variety of thicknesses. In some embodiments, the thickness of the thermoplastic backing suitable for the method disclosed herein may be up to about 400 micrometers, 300 micrometers, or 250 micrometers and at least about 30 micrometers or
35 50 micrometers before stretching in the first direction, depending on the desired reticulated film. This thickness does not include the height of the discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing. In some embodiments, the thickness of the thermoplastic backing is in a range

from 30 to about 225 micrometers, from about 50 to about 200 micrometers, or from about 50 to about 150 micrometers before stretching in the first direction. Thin films will require a lower draw ratio in the first direction than thicker films to provide the desired amount of stretch-induced molecular orientation in area 20. The selection of material for the thermoplastic backing also impacts the draw ratio. For a
5 polypropylene or polyethylene backing, the draw ratio in the first direction sufficient to provide the desired amount of stretch-induced molecular orientation in area 20 can be 1.25, 1.5, 2.0, 2.25, 2.5, 2.75, or 3, depending on the thickness of the backing and the temperature of the backing when it is stretched. For example, the draw ratio in the first direction for a backing 70 micrometers thick may be about 2, the draw ratio in the first direction for a backing 100 micrometers thick may be in a range from about 2.2 to
10 2.5, and the draw ratio in the first direction for a backing 130 micrometers thick may be in a range from about 2.5 to 2.75 when stretching any of these backings is carried out at a temperature in a range from 85 °C to 130 °C, for example. The maximum draw ratio is limited by the tensile strength of the selected material. Draw ratios of up to 5, 7.5, or 10 may be useful, depending on material selection and the temperature of the thermoplastic backing when it is stretched.

15 The width of the discrete element 10 or 110 at its base (that is, the point where it begins to protrude from the thermoplastic backing) also can influence the method according to the present disclosure. The term "width dimension" should be understood to include the diameter of a discrete element 10 with a circular cross-section. The discrete element 10 may have more than one width dimension (e.g., in a rectangular or elliptical cross-section shaped post). Furthermore, the discrete
20 element 10 may taper, for example, from the proximal end at the base toward the distal end, as shown in FIG. 2. In these cases, the width of the discrete element is considered to be its greatest width at its base. The width of discrete elements affects their resistance to stretching in the first direction and therefore affects the amount of increased stretching in area 20 of the thermoplastic backing between the discrete elements 10 relative to the thermoplastic backing 14 on either side. In some embodiments, the discrete
25 element has a width that is at least as big as the thickness of the film as described in any of the embodiments listed above. The discrete elements 10 may have a cross-section with a maximum width dimension "w" of at least 30 micrometers, 50 micrometers, 70 micrometers, 100 micrometers, or 125 micrometers. The width of the discrete element 10 may be up to 1 millimeter in some embodiments. In some embodiments, the discrete elements 10 have a cross-section with a width dimension "w" in a range
30 from 70 micrometers to 500 micrometers or 100 micrometers to 400 micrometers.

The draw ratio and the width of the discrete elements 10 or 110 at the base also influence the appearance and/or properties of the resultant reticulated film, for example, width "w" of the portions (or strands) of the thermoplastic backing 14 or 114 and basis weight of the reticulated film. For a given film,
35 a higher draw ratio provides lower strand widths and lower basis weight nets. Wider discrete elements also provide lower strand widths.

The density of the discrete elements 10 or 110 on the thermoplastic backing 14 or 114 also influences the appearance and/or properties of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure. A

variety of densities of the discrete elements may be useful, and for a given film, a higher density of discrete elements provides lower strand widths in the reticulated film. In some embodiments, the density of discrete elements on the thermoplastic backing is in a range from 20 per cm² to 1000 per cm² (in some embodiments, in a range from 20 per cm² to 500 per cm², 50 per cm² to 500 per cm², 60 per cm² to 400 per cm², 75 per cm² to 350 per cm², 100 per cm² to 300 per cm², or 200 per cm² to 1000 per cm²).

The discrete element protruding from the thermoplastic backing in the method and reticulated film according to the present disclosure may have a variety of heights. The discrete element useful for providing resistance to stretching in the method according to the present disclosure may have a height above the thermoplastic backing of at least 30 micrometers. In some embodiments, the discrete elements have a maximum height (above the backing) of up to 3mm, 1.5 mm, 1 mm, or 0.5 mm and, in some embodiments a minimum height of at least 50 micrometers, 100 micrometers, or 200 micrometers. In some embodiments, the discrete elements have an aspect ratio (that is, a ratio of height to width at the widest point) of at least about 0.25:1, 1:1, 2:1, 3:1, or 4:1.

It should be understood from the present disclosure that the discrete elements refer to elements that are separate and distinct from each other. They are not part of a continuous ridge or rib in thermoplastic backing, either before or after stretching. Furthermore, the discrete elements are separate and distinct from the thermoplastic backing. In some embodiments, the thermoplastic backing, excluding the discrete elements, is substantially uniform in thickness. For a thermoplastic backing that is substantially uniform in thickness, a difference in thickness between any two points in the thermoplastic backing may be up 5, 2.5, or 1 percent.

The thermoplastic backing useful for practicing the method disclosed and useful for the resulting reticulated film may be made from a variety of suitable materials. Suitable thermoplastic materials include polyolefin homopolymers such as polyethylene and polypropylene, copolymers of ethylene, propylene and/or butylene; copolymers containing ethylene such as ethylene vinyl acetate and ethylene acrylic acid; polyesters such as poly(ethylene terephthalate), polyethylene butyrate and polyethylene naphthalate; polyamides such as poly(hexamethylene adipamide); polyurethanes; polycarbonates; poly(vinyl alcohol); ketones such as polyetheretherketone; polyphenylene sulfide; and mixtures thereof. In some embodiments, the thermoplastic is a polyolefin (e.g., polyethylene, polypropylene, polybutylene, ethylene copolymers, propylene copolymers, butylene copolymers, and copolymers and blends of these materials). For any of the embodiments in which the thermoplastic backing includes polypropylene, the polypropylene may include alpha and/or beta phase polypropylene. In some cases, a thermoplastic backing such as that shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B that includes beta-phase polypropylene before stretching in 1D may include alpha-phase polypropylene after stretching.

Since the reticulated film according to the present disclosure and/or made according to the present disclosure has a thermoplastic backing that is plastically deformed, it should be understood that the thermoplastic backing is generally non-elastic. The term "non-elastic" refers to any material (such as a film that is 0.002 mm to 0.5 mm thick) that does not exhibit recovery from stretching or deformation to a

large extent. For example, a non-elastic material that is stretched to a length that is at least about 50 percent greater than its initial length will recover less than about 40, 25, 20, 10, or 5 percent of its elongation upon release of its stretching force. In some embodiments, a non-elastic material may be considered to be a flexible plastic that is capable of undergoing permanent plastic deformation if it is stretched past its reversible stretching region.

In some embodiments, the thermoplastic backing 14 or 114 with discrete elements 10 or 110 can be made from a multilayer or multi-component melt stream of thermoplastic materials. This can result in discrete elements formed at least partially from a different thermoplastic material than the one predominately forming the backing. Various configurations of upstanding posts made from a multilayer melt stream are shown in U. S. Pat. No. 6,106,922 (Cejka et al.), for example. A multilayer or multi-component melt stream can be formed by any conventional method. A multilayer melt stream can be formed by a multilayer feedblock, such as that shown in U.S. Pat. No. 4,839,131 (Cloeren). A multicomponent melt stream having domains or regions with different components could also be used. Useful multicomponent melt streams could be formed by use of inclusion co-extrusion die or other known methods (e.g., that shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,767,492 (Norquist et al.)).

For the method and reticulated film according to the present disclosure, the thermoplastic backing and the discrete elements are integral (that is, generally formed at the same time as a unit, unitary). Discrete elements such as upstanding posts on a backing can be made, for example, by feeding a thermoplastic material onto a continuously moving mold surface with cavities having the inverse shape of the discrete elements. The thermoplastic material can be passed between a nip formed by two rolls or a nip between a die face and roll surface, with at least one of the rolls having the cavities. Pressure provided by the nip forces the resin into the cavities. In some embodiments, a vacuum can be used to evacuate the cavities for easier filling of the cavities. The nip has a large enough gap such that a coherent thermoplastic backing is formed over the cavities. The mold surface and cavities can optionally be air or water cooled before stripping the integrally formed backing and upstanding posts from the mold surface such as by a stripper roll.

Suitable mold surfaces for forming discrete elements that include one upstanding post include tool rolls such as those formed from a series of plates defining a plurality of cavities about its periphery including those described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 4,775,310 (Fischer). Cavities may be formed in the plates by drilling or photoresist technology, for example. Other suitable tool rolls may include wire-wrapped rolls, which are disclosed along with their method of manufacturing, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 6,190,594 (Gorman et al.). Another example of a method for forming a thermoplastic backing with upstanding posts includes using a flexible mold belt defining an array of upstanding post-shaped cavities as described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,214,334 (Jens et al.). Yet other useful methods for forming a thermoplastic backing with upstanding posts can be found in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,287,665 (Hammer), 7,198,743 (Tuma), and 6,627,133 (Tuma).

While in some embodiments, at least some of the discrete elements on the thermoplastic backing comprise one upstanding post, in other embodiments, at least some of the discrete elements comprise multiple upstanding posts on a surface protrusion. In these embodiments, the discrete elements can be made by a modification of the mold surface described above, in which the cavity includes a main cavity
5 with multiple smaller cavities within the main cavity.

In any of the mold surfaces mentioned above, the cavities and the resultant discrete elements may have a variety of cross-sectional shapes. For example, the cross-sectional shape of the cavity and discrete element may be a polygon (e.g., square, rectangle, rhombus, hexagon, pentagon, or dodecagon), which may be a regular polygon or not, or the cross-sectional shape of the post may be curved (e.g., round or
10 elliptical). The discrete element may taper from its base to its distal tip, for example, for easier removal from the cavity, but this is not a requirement. The cavity may have the inverse shape of a post having a loop-engaging head (e.g., a male fastening element) or may have the inverse shape of an upstanding post without loop-engaging heads that can be formed into loop-engaging heads, if desired.

If upstanding posts formed upon exiting the cavities do not have loop-engaging heads, loop-
15 engaging heads could be subsequently formed by a capping method as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,077,870 (Melbye et al.). Typically, the capping method includes deforming the tip portions of the upstanding posts using heat and/or pressure. The heat and pressure, if both are used, could be applied sequentially or simultaneously. The formation of male fastening elements can also include a step in which the shape of the cap is changed, for example, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,132,660 (Kampfer).
20 Such capping and cap modification steps can be carried out before or after stretching in the first direction or before or after stretching in the second direction in the method of making a reticulated film disclosed herein.

For any of the embodiments described above in which the discrete elements are upstanding posts with loop-engaging overhangs, the term "loop-engaging" relates to the ability of a male fastening element
25 to be mechanically attached to a loop material. Generally, male fastening elements with loop-engaging heads have a head shape that is different from the shape of the post. For example, the male fastening element may be in the shape of a mushroom (e.g., with a circular or oval head enlarged with respect to the stem), a hook, a palm-tree, a nail, a T, or a J. In some embodiments, each discrete element includes an upstanding post and a cap with loop engaging overhangs extending in multiple (i.e., at least two)
30 directions, in some embodiments, at least two orthogonal directions. For example, the upstanding post may be in the shape of a mushroom, a nail, a palm tree, or a T. In some embodiments, the upstanding posts are provided with a mushroom head (e.g., with an oval or round cap distal from the thermoplastic backing). The loop-engageability of male fastening elements may be determined and defined by using standard woven, nonwoven, or knit materials. A region of male fastening elements with loop-engaging
35 heads generally will provide, in combination with a loop material, at least one of a higher peel strength, higher dynamic shear strength, or higher dynamic friction than a region of posts without loop-engaging heads. Male fastening elements that have "loop-engaging overhangs" or "loop-engaging heads" do not

include ribs that are precursors to fastening elements (e.g., elongate ribs that are profile extruded and subsequently cut to form male fastening elements upon stretching in the direction of the ribs). Such ribs would not be able to engage loops before they are cut and stretched. Such ribs would also not be considered upstanding posts or discrete elements. Typically, male fastening elements that have loop-engaging heads have a maximum width dimension (in either dimension normal to the height) of up to about 1 (in some embodiments, 0.9, 0.8, 0.7, 0.6, 0.5, or 0.45) millimeter (mm). In some embodiments, the male fastening elements have a maximum height (above the backing) of up to 3mm, 1.5 mm, 1 mm, or 0.5 mm and, in some embodiments a minimum height of at least 0.03 mm, 0.05 mm, 0.1 mm, or 0.2 mm. In some embodiments, the upstanding posts have aspect ratio (that is, a ratio of height to width at the widest point) of at least about 0.25:1, 1:1, 2:1, 3:1, or 4:1.

Stretching in the first direction and subsequently the second direction can be carried out using a variety of methods. Stretching in the machine direction of a continuous web of indefinite length, monoaxial spreading in the machine direction can be performed by propelling the web over rolls of increasing speed, with the downweb roll speed faster than the upweb roll speed. Stretching in a cross-machine direction can be carried out on a continuous web using, for example, diverging rails, diverging disks, a series of bowed rollers, or a crown surface. Methods using diverging disks or a crown surface described, for example, in International Application Publication Nos. WO 2013/172957 (Gilbert et al.) and WO 2013/172960 (Gilbert et al.), respectively, may be useful for cross-direction stretching of the thermoplastic backing in the method according to the present disclosure. In some embodiments, the first direction is either the machine direction or cross-direction, and the discrete elements are positioned in a staggered array when viewed in the machine direction or cross-direction, respectively.

The machine direction and cross-direction stretching methods described above can be used sequentially for stretching in the first direction and subsequently the second direction in the method according to the present disclosure. A versatile stretching method that allows for monoaxial and sequential biaxial stretching of a thermoplastic web employs a flat film tenter apparatus. Such an apparatus grasps the thermoplastic web using a plurality of clips, grippers, or other film edge-grasping means along opposing edges of the thermoplastic web in such a way that monoaxial and biaxial stretching in the desired direction is obtained by propelling the grasping means at varying speeds along divergent rails. Increasing clip speed in the machine direction generally results in machine-direction stretching. Stretching at angles to the machine direction and cross-direction are also possible with a flat film tenter apparatus. Monoaxial and biaxial stretching can also be accomplished, for example, by the methods and apparatus disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 7,897,078 (Petersen et al.) and the references cited therein. Flat film tenter stretching apparatuses are commercially available, for example, from Brückner Maschinenbau GmbH, Siegsdorf, Germany. For certain portions of reticulated films, stretching the thermoplastic backing, particularly in the second direction, may also be carried out by hand, for example. In some embodiments, it is useful to stretch in the second direction at a speed of up to 10 centimeters per minute, up to 5 centimeters per minute, up to 3 centimeters per minute, or about 2.54 centimeters per minute.

In some embodiments, the method according to the present disclosure further comprises heating the thermoplastic backing. Heating may be useful, for example, before or during the stretching in the first direction. This may allow the thermoplastic backing to be more flexible for stretching. The temperature to which the thermoplastic backing is heated while stretching in the first direction may also affect the uniformity achieved when the backing is stretched in the second direction. In some embodiments in which the thermoplastic backing is a polypropylene backing, stretching in the first direction is carried out in a temperature range from 80 °C to 110 °C, 85 °C to 100 °C, or 90 °C to 95 °C.

Heating may also be useful, for example, before, during, or after stretching in the second direction. The force that is needed to tear and spread the film in the second direction decreases when the film is gently heated during this step. Also, the appearance of the reticulated film is changed when the film is heated while stretching in the second direction as shown in pictures shown in FIGS. 5A and 5B. FIG. 5A is a picture of an embodiment of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure in which the thermoplastic backing was not heated while stretching in the second direction. FIG. 5B is a picture of an embodiment of the reticulated film according to the present disclosure in which the same thermoplastic backing was heated to maintain a constant load while stretching in the second direction. The strand width in the reticulated film is typically larger when the backing is heated than when it is not heated. Also, the openings have sides that are more curved and corners that are more rounded when the backing is heated than when it is not heated. In some of these embodiments, the openings may have an approximately vesica piscis shape, which may also be considered an almond shape. Like the quadrilateral shape described above, the shape of the openings observed when the film is heated in the second direction still has two axis of symmetry, one in 1D and one in 2D. As can be observed in FIG. 5B, there are two discrete elements abutting opposite ends of any given opening (the more rounded extremes of the vesica piscis or almond shape), and there is one discrete element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in the second direction (beyond the more pointed ends of the vesica piscis or almond shape).

In some embodiments, the reticulated film according to and/or made according to the present disclosure can be heated, for example, after stretching in the second direction. Heating at such a time may be useful for annealing the reticulated film, for example, to maintain the openings and to maintain the planarity of the thermoplastic backing. In some embodiments, annealing comprises heating and then cooling (e.g., rapidly cooling) the reticulated film to maintain its configuration. After annealing and/or heating during or after stretching in the second direction, the openings in the reticulated film are usually less retractable but may still be retractable to some extent by applying tension in the machine direction.

For any of these purposes, heating can be provided, for example, by IR irradiation, hot air treatment or by performing the stretching or annealing in a heat chamber. Rollers that may be used for stretching the thermoplastic backing in at least one of the first or second directions may be heated. Heated rollers may also be useful, for example, for annealing the reticulated film. For annealing, a continuous reticulated film can also be directed onto a chilled roller for rapid cooling. In some

embodiments, heating is only applied to the second surface of the thermoplastic backing (i.e., the surface opposite the first surface from which the discrete elements protrude) to minimize any damage to the discrete elements that may result from heating. For example, in these embodiments, only rollers that are in contact with the second surface of the thermoplastic backing are heated. Heating is typically only carried out below the melting temperature of the thermoplastic backing.

Other web handling techniques may be useful for the reticulated film according to and/or made according to the method of the present disclosure after it is stretched in the second direction. For example, it may be useful to direct the reticulated film onto a high-friction roller or other high-friction surface to maintain the openings. In other embodiments, the high-friction surface is an adhesive tape (that is, an adhesive disposed on a carrier). In these embodiments, the adhesive may be a pressure-sensitive adhesive, and the carrier may be any of those described below. It may be useful to laminate the reticulated film to a carrier (e.g., even a sacrificial carrier) for ease of handling, to maintain the openings in the reticulated film, or for making a laminate for a selected application (e.g., a mechanical fastening laminate). When the reticulated film is laminated soon after the thermoplastic film is stretched in the second direction, annealing may not be necessary to maintain the openings.

While in a laminate according to the present disclosure, the reticulated film may be joined to the carrier in a way that maintains the openings or prevents the openings from retracting, the reticulated film itself may still have retractable openings. This can be determined by removing the reticulated film from the laminate, for example, peeling apart the carrier and the reticulated film. In some cases, removing the reticulated film from the laminate can be facilitated by submerging the laminate in liquid nitrogen.

The reticulated film may be joined to a carrier, for example, by lamination (e.g., extrusion lamination, thermal bonding, or adhesive bonding such as with pressure sensitive adhesives), or other bonding methods (e.g., ultrasonic bonding, compression bonding, or surface bonding). The reticulated film may be joined to a carrier in a nip, or the laminate can be nipped downweb from where the reticulated film is joined to the carrier.

FIG. 6 illustrates an embodiment of a laminate according to the present disclosure, in which the reticulated film shown in FIG. 1C is joined to a carrier 30. Typically, the second surface of the thermoplastic backing (i.e., the surface that is not visible in FIG. 6 and the surface opposite the first surface having the discrete elements 10) is joined to the carrier 30. The carrier 30 may be continuous (i.e., without any through-penetrating holes) or discontinuous (e.g. comprising through-penetrating perforations or pores). The carrier may comprise a variety of suitable materials including woven webs, non-woven webs, textiles, plastic films (e.g., single- or multilayered films, coextruded films, laterally laminated films, or films comprising foam layers), and combinations thereof. The term “non-woven” refers to a material having a structure of individual fibers or threads that are interlaid but not in an identifiable manner such as in a knitted fabric. Examples of non-woven webs include spunbond webs, spunlaced webs, airlaid webs, meltblown web, and bonded carded webs. In some embodiments, including embodiments in which the laminate is a mechanical fastening laminate, the carrier is a fibrous

material (e.g., a woven, nonwoven, or knit material). Useful fibrous materials may be made of natural fibers (e.g., wood or cotton fibers), synthetic fibers (e.g., thermoplastic fibers), or a combination of natural and synthetic fibers. Examples of suitable materials for forming thermoplastic fibers include polyolefins (e.g., polyethylene, polypropylene, polybutylene, ethylene copolymers, propylene copolymers, butylene copolymers, and copolymers and blends of these polymers), polyesters, and polyamides. The fibers may also be multi-component fibers, for example, having a core of one thermoplastic material and a sheath of another thermoplastic material. In some embodiments, the carrier 30 comprises multiple layers of nonwoven materials with, for example, at least one layer of a meltblown nonwoven and at least one layer of a spunbonded nonwoven, or any other suitable combination of nonwoven materials. For example, the carrier 30 may be a spunbond-meltbond-spunbond, spunbond-spunbond, or spunbond-spunbond-spunbond multilayer material. Or, the carrier 30 may be a composite web comprising a nonwoven layer and a dense film layer. A variety of combinations of film and nonwoven layers may be useful. Useful carriers 30 may have any suitable basis weight or thickness that is desired for a particular application. For a fibrous carrier, the basis weight may range, e.g., from at least about 5, 8, 10, 20, 30, or 40 grams per square meter, up to about 400, 200, or 100 grams per square meter. The carrier 30 may be up to about 5 mm, about 2 mm, or about 1 mm in thickness and/or at least about 0.1, about 0.2, or about 0.5 mm in thickness.

In some embodiments wherein the reticulated film is joined to a carrier, including the embodiment shown in FIG. 6, the carrier is provided with a layer of adhesive 40. In some of these embodiments, the reticulated film is bonded to the carrier 30 with the adhesive 40 to form a laminate, and the adhesive 40 is exposed in at least some of the openings in the reticulated film. This may be useful, for example, when the reticulated film is a mechanical fastener. In such cases, the adhesive 40 may provide a secondary loop engagement mechanism to increase the peel or shear force of the engagement.

In a laminate including the reticulated film disclosed herein joined to a carrier, the thermoplastic backing and the carrier may be substantially continuously bonded or intermittently bonded. “Substantially continuously bonded” refers to being bonded without interruption in space or pattern. Substantially continuously bonded laminates can be formed by passing the thermoplastic backing and the carrier between a heated smooth surfaced roll nip if at least one of them is thermally bondable or applying a substantially continuous adhesive coating or spray to one of the thermoplastic backing or carrier before bringing it in contact with the other of the thermoplastic backing or carrier. “Intermittently bonded” can mean not continuously bonded and refers to the thermoplastic backing and carrier being bonded to one another at discrete spaced apart points or being substantially unbonded to one another in discrete, spaced apart areas. Intermittently bonded laminates can be formed, for example, by ultrasonic point bonding, by passing the thermoplastic backing and the carrier through a heated patterned embossing roll nip if at least one of them is thermally bondable, or by applying discrete, spaced apart areas of adhesive to one of the thermoplastic backing or carrier before bringing it into contact with the other of the thermoplastic backing

or carrier. An intermittently bonded laminate can also be made by feeding an adhesively coated apertured ply or scrim between the thermoplastic backing and the carrier.

In some embodiments, the thermoplastic backing of the reticulated film disclosed herein can be joined to a fibrous carrier using surface bonding or loft-retaining bonding techniques. The term "surface-bonded" when referring to the bonding of fibrous materials means that parts of fiber surfaces of at least portions of fibers are melt-bonded to the second surface of the backing, in such a manner as to substantially preserve the original (pre-bonded) shape of the second surface of the backing, and to substantially preserve at least some portions of the second surface of the backing in an exposed condition, in the surface-bonded area. Quantitatively, surface-bonded fibers may be distinguished from embedded fibers in that at least about 65% of the surface area of the surface-bonded fiber is visible above the second surface of the backing in the bonded portion of the fiber. Inspection from more than one angle may be necessary to visualize the entirety of the surface area of the fiber. The term "loft-retaining bond" when referring to the bonding of fibrous materials means a bonded fibrous material comprises a loft that is at least 80% of the loft exhibited by the material prior to, or in the absence of, the bonding process. The loft of a fibrous material as used herein is the ratio of the total volume occupied by the web (including fibers as well as interstitial spaces of the material that are not occupied by fibers) to the volume occupied by the material of the fibers alone. If only a portion of a fibrous web has the second surface of the thermoplastic backing bonded thereto, the retained loft can be easily ascertained by comparing the loft of the fibrous web in the bonded area to that of the web in an unbonded area. It may be convenient in some circumstances to compare the loft of the bonded web to that of a sample of the same web before being bonded, for example, if the entirety of fibrous web has the second surface of the thermoplastic backing bonded thereto. In some of these embodiments, the joining comprises impinging heated gaseous fluid (e.g., ambient air, dehumidified air, nitrogen, an inert gas, or other gas mixture) onto a first surface of the fibrous web carrier while it is moving; impinging heated fluid onto the second surface of the thermoplastic backing while the continuous web is moving, wherein the second surface is opposite the discrete elements on the thermoplastic backing; and contacting the first surface of the fibrous web with the second surface of the thermoplastic backing so that the first surface of the fibrous web is melt-bonded (e.g., surface-bonded or bonded with a loft-retaining bond) to the second surface of the thermoplastic backing. Impinging heated gaseous fluid onto the first surface of the fibrous web and impinging heated gaseous fluid on the second surface of the backing may be carried out sequentially or simultaneously. Further methods and apparatus for joining a continuous web to a fibrous carrier web using heated gaseous fluid may be found in U.S. Pat. Appl. Pub. Nos. 2011/0151171 (Biegler et al.) and 2011/0147475 (Biegler et al.).

In some embodiments, at least the portion of the carrier joined to the reticulated film is not extensible. In some embodiments, the portion of carrier joined to the reticulated film will have up to a 10 (in some embodiments, up to 9, 8, 7, 6, or 5) percent elongation in the CD. In some embodiments, the carrier is not pleated. In other embodiments of the laminate of the reticulated film joined to a carrier, one

or more zones of the carrier may comprise one or more elastically extensible materials extending in at least one direction when a force is applied and returning to approximately their original dimension after the force is removed. In some embodiments, the carrier may be extensible but non-elastic. In other words, the carrier may have an elongation of at least 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, or 50 percent but substantially no recovery from the elongation (e.g., up to 40, 25, 20, 10, or 5 percent recovery).

In some embodiments, the thermoplastic backing is laminated to an extensible carrier before it is stretched in the second direction. The term "extensible" refers to a material that can be extended or elongated in the direction of an applied stretching force without destroying the structure of the material or material fibers. In some embodiments, an extensible material may be stretched to a length that is at least about 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, or 50 percent greater than its relaxed length without destroying the structure of the material or material fibers. Referring again to FIG. 6, in some embodiments, the extensible carrier 30 is extensible at least in the second direction 2D and is generally selected such that it has a lower yield point than that of the thermoplastic backing 14 with discrete elements 10 (shown in FIG. 1B). Stretching a laminate made by joining the thermoplastic backing shown in FIG. 1B to an extensible carrier in the second direction can be carried out more quickly than stretching the thermoplastic backing alone. When stretching the film shown in FIG. 1B in the second direction, each tear induces a weak point in the thermoplastic backing, and the stretching forces become exerted only on the portions of the thermoplastic backing between the openings, with high stress exerted on the thermoplastic backing at the positions of the discrete elements 10. In an embodiment of laminate 5 shown in FIG. 6, in which the carrier 30 is extensible, the stretching forces are exerted mainly on the extensible carrier 30. As a result, stretching a laminate in the second direction can typically be carried out at least ten times faster than stretching the thermoplastic film itself.

In some embodiments of the method according to the present disclosure in which the thermoplastic backing is laminated to an extensible carrier before stretching, the extensible carrier is elastic. The term "elastic" refers to any material (such as a film that is 0.002 mm to 0.5 mm thick) that exhibits recovery from stretching or deformation. An elastic material is an extensible material that has recovery properties. In some embodiments, a material may be considered to be elastic if, upon application of a stretching force, it can be stretched to a length that is at least about 25 (in some embodiments, 50) percent larger than its initial length and can recover at least 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, or 90 percent of its elongation upon release of the stretching force. An elastic carrier may be a film or fibrous. Examples of polymers for making elastic films or fibrous carriers include thermoplastic elastomers such as ABA block copolymers, polyurethane elastomers, polyolefin elastomers (e.g., metallocene polyolefin elastomers), olefin block copolymers, polyamide elastomers, ethylene vinyl acetate elastomers, and polyester elastomers. An ABA block copolymer elastomer generally is one where the A blocks are polystyrenic, and the B blocks are prepared from conjugated dienes (e.g., lower alkylene dienes). The A block is generally formed predominantly of substituted (e.g., alkylated) or unsubstituted styrenic moieties (e.g., polystyrene, poly(alpha-methylstyrene), or poly(t-butylstyrene)), having an average molecular

weight from about 4,000 to 50,000 grams per mole. The B block(s) is generally formed predominantly of conjugated dienes (e.g., isoprene, 1,3-butadiene, or ethylene-butylene monomers), which may be substituted or unsubstituted, and has an average molecular weight from about 5,000 to 500,000 grams per mole. The A and B blocks may be configured, for example, in linear, radial, or star configurations. An ABA block copolymer may contain multiple A and/or B blocks, which blocks may be made from the same or different monomers. A typical block copolymer is a linear ABA block copolymer, where the A blocks may be the same or different, or a block copolymer having more than three blocks, predominantly terminating with A blocks. Multi-block copolymers may contain, for example, a certain proportion of AB diblock copolymer, which tends to form a more tacky elastomeric film segment. Other elastic polymers can be blended with block copolymer elastomers, and various elastic polymers may be blended to have varying degrees of elastic properties.

Many types of thermoplastic elastomers are commercially available, including those from BASF, Florham Park, N.J., under the trade designation "STYROFLEX", from Kraton Polymers, Houston, Tex., under the trade designation "KRATON", from Dow Chemical, Midland, Mich., under the trade designation "PELLETHANE", "INFUSE", "VERSIFY", or "NORDEL", from DSM, Heerlen, Netherlands, under the trade designation "ARNITEL", from E. I. duPont de Nemours and Company, Wilmington, Del., under the trade designation "HYTREL", from ExxonMobil, Irving, Tex. under the trade designation "VISTAMAXX", and more.

An elastic film carrier may have a single layer of an elastomer, or the carrier may have a core made with an elastomer and at least one skin layer from a relatively non-elastic polymer, such as any of those described above for the thermoplastic backing. The materials and thicknesses of the multi-layer elastic carrier may be selected such that when the carrier is extended to a certain degree, the skin layers undergo plastic deformation. When the elastic layer recovers, the relatively non-elastic skin layer forms a textured surface on the elastic core. Such elastic films are described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 5,691,034 (Krueger et al.).

Referring again to FIG. 6, when the carrier 30 in the laminate 5 according to the present disclosure or used in the method of the present disclosure is elastic, when the stretching force is released, and the elastic is in its relaxed state, the openings may be very narrow and appear as slits. A stretching force in the second direction can increase the width of the openings in the second direction, and release of the stretching force can at least partially close the plurality of openings to decrease the width of the openings in the second direction.

In some embodiments, the carrier 30 is extensible but non-elastic. Suitable extensible carriers may include nonwovens (e.g., spunbond, spunbond meltblown spunbond, or carded nonwovens). Thus, in these embodiments, typically the extensible carrier is deformed upon stretching in the second direction. In some embodiments, the nonwoven may be a high elongation carded nonwoven (e.g., HEC). Other extensible, non-elastic carriers include thermoplastic films, including those made from any of the materials described above for the thermoplastic backing. The extensible, non-elastic film may be thinner

than the thermoplastic backing in some embodiments. In any of the embodiments in which the carrier 30 is extensible but non-elastic, stretching the laminate in the second direction generally both forms a tear in the thermoplastic backing between two of the discrete elements and maintains the openings in an open configuration. However, the reticulated film itself still generally has retractable openings. This can be determined, as described above, by removing the reticulated film from the laminate, for example, peeling apart the carrier and the reticulated film.

In any of the embodiments of the method according to the present disclosure in which the thermoplastic backing is laminated to an extensible carrier before stretching in the second direction, the extensible carrier may be sacrificial and removed from the reticulated film after stretching in the second direction.

Further details regarding laminates including reticulated thermoplastic films according to the present disclosure and/or methods of making such laminates are described in co-pending U.S. Pat. App. Serial No. 13/901, 043 (Chandrasekaran et al.), filed on May 23, 2013.

In some embodiments, the method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film according to the present disclosure includes coating the thermoplastic backing with an adhesive, in some embodiments, after stretching the thermoplastic backing in the first direction. Coating the thermoplastic backing with adhesive before stretching the thermoplastic backing in the second direction as shown in FIG. 1C provides the benefits of laminating the thermoplastic backing to an extensible carrier before stretching in the second direction, at least to some degree. The adhesive itself can serve as an extensible carrier that takes up some of the stress exerted upon stretching. The adhesive tends to open in the area of openings 22, providing a reticulated film according to the present disclosure in any of its embodiments with an adhesive coating on the second surface of the thermoplastic backing (i.e., the surface that is not visible in FIG. 1C and the surface opposite the first surface having the discrete elements 10).

In some embodiments, the method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film according to the present disclosure includes stretching the thermoplastic backing in the second direction while it is in contact with an extensible surface although not necessarily joined to the extensible surface. For example, the extensible surface may be a high-friction surface, and traction between the extensible surface and the thermoplastic backing can cause them to remain in contact while stretching in the second direction. In these embodiments, the stretching forces can be exerted on the extensible surface as well as the thermoplastic backing. An extensible surface, such as a rubber sheet, can be useful with a tentering apparatus as described above.

When the reticulated film and the laminate according to the present disclosure are in the form of a continuous web, the reticulated film or laminate can be cut in the cross-machine direction, for example, to provide a patch of any desired size for a given application. When the discrete elements are male fastening elements, the patch can be considered a fastening patch or fastening laminate.

Fastening laminates made by the methods disclosed herein are useful, for example, in absorbent articles. Absorbent articles may have at least a front waist region, a rear waist region, and a longitudinal

center line bisecting the front waist region and the rear waist region, wherein at least one of the front waist region or the rear waist region comprises the fastening laminate disclosed herein. The fastening laminate may be in the form of a fastening tab or landing zone that is bonded to at least one of the front waist region or the rear waist region. A fastening tab may extend outwardly from at least one of the left
5 longitudinal edge or the right longitudinal edge of the absorbent article. In other embodiments, the fastening laminate may be an integral ear portion of the absorbent article. The carrier at the user's end of a fastening tab may exceed the extension of the mechanical fastening patch thereby providing a fingerlift. When the laminate disclosed herein is used in a fastening tab, exposed adhesive that may be present in some embodiments in at least some of the openings in the reticulated film may be useful for "anti-
10 flagging" or for maintaining the disposable absorbent article in a rolled up state after use. The fastening laminate made by the methods disclosed herein may also be useful, for example, for disposable articles such as sanitary napkins. Mechanical fasteners and laminates made according to the present disclosure may also be useful in many other fastening applications, for example, assembly of automotive parts or any other application in which releasable attachment may be desirable.

15 Reticulated films according to the present disclosure and/or made according to the method of the present disclosure may also be useful as reflective surfaces for a variety of optical applications. For example, the discrete elements may be prisms (e.g., triangular, rectangular, rhombic, or hexagonal prisms), pyramids, or have a cross-section of a dodecahedral cross, any of which may be made according to the methods described above. A reticulated film as a prismatic reflective surface will tend to have a
20 lower material cost than prismatic reflective surfaces made with a continuous film backing.

Some Embodiments of the Disclosure

In a first embodiment, the present disclosure provides a reticulated thermoplastic film comprising a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces, a plurality of retractable openings in
25 the thermoplastic backing, and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing, wherein there are two discrete elements abutting opposite ends of any given retractable opening, wherein the two discrete elements are aligned in a first direction, wherein there is one discrete element between the given retractable opening and an adjacent retractable opening aligned in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, and wherein each portion of the thermoplastic
30 backing around the given retractable opening is plastically deformed in its lengthwise direction.

In a second embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of the first embodiment, wherein at least one portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given opening has a profile across its width of higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the given opening than at its midpoint.

35 In a third embodiment, the present disclosure provides a reticulated thermoplastic film comprising a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces, a plurality of openings in the thermoplastic backing, and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the

thermoplastic backing, wherein there are two discrete elements abutting opposite ends of any given opening, wherein the two discrete elements are aligned in a first direction, wherein there is one discrete element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, and wherein at least one portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given opening has a profile across its width of higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the given opening than at its midpoint.

In a fourth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to third embodiments, wherein at least some of the discrete elements each comprise one upstanding post.

In a fifth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to third embodiments, wherein at least some of the discrete elements comprise more than one upstanding post on a surface protrusion.

In a sixth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of the fourth or fifth embodiment, wherein the upstanding post is part of a male fastening element.

In a seventh embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of the sixth embodiment, wherein the male fastening element further comprises a cap distal from the thermoplastic backing.

In an eighth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to seventh embodiments, wherein the discrete elements protrude only from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing.

In a ninth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to eighth embodiments, wherein the discrete elements have a height above the thermoplastic backing of at least 30 micrometers.

In a tenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to ninth embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing is substantially uniform in thickness.

In an eleventh embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to tenth embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing is substantially planar.

In a twelfth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to eleventh embodiments, wherein the plurality of discrete elements are arranged in a staggered array when viewed in the first direction.

In a thirteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to twelfth embodiments, wherein the plurality of openings have a diamond or almond shape.

In a fourteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to thirteenth embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing comprises at least one of polypropylene or polyethylene.

In a fifteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to fourteenth embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing has an adhesive coating on its second major surface.

5 In a sixteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides a laminate comprising the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to fifteenth embodiments joined to a carrier.

In a seventeenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the laminate of the sixteenth embodiment, wherein the carrier is elastic.

In an eighteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the laminate of the sixteenth embodiment, wherein the carrier is non-elastic.

10 In a nineteenth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the laminate of the eighteenth embodiment, wherein the carrier is non-elastic but extensible.

In a twentieth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the laminate of the sixteenth or eighteenth embodiment, wherein the reticulated thermoplastic film is joined to the carrier with adhesive, and wherein the adhesive is exposed in at least some of the openings in the thermoplastic backing.

15 In a twenty-first embodiment, the present disclosure provides an absorbent article comprising the laminate of any one of the sixteenth to twentieth embodiments or the thermoplastic film of any one of the first to fifteenth embodiments.

In a twenty-second embodiment, the present disclosure provides a method of making the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of the first to fifteenth embodiments, the method comprising:

20 providing a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing, wherein at least some of the discrete elements are aligned in a row in a first direction;

25 stretching the thermoplastic backing in the first direction to plastically deform the thermoplastic backing and increase a distance between the at least some of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, wherein the thermoplastic backing remains intact between the plurality of discrete elements after stretching it in the first direction; and

30 subsequently stretching the thermoplastic backing in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, wherein stretching in the second direction forms a tear in the thermoplastic backing between two adjacent of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, wherein the tear is interrupted by the two adjacent of the discrete elements, and wherein the tear provides the given opening. A plurality of the tears provides the plurality of openings.

In a twenty-third embodiment, the present disclosure provides a method of making a reticulated thermoplastic film, the method comprising:

35 providing a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing, wherein at least some of the discrete elements are aligned in a row in a first direction;

stretching the thermoplastic backing in the first direction to plastically deform the thermoplastic backing and increase a distance between the at least some of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, wherein the thermoplastic backing remains intact between the plurality of discrete elements after stretching it in the first direction; and

5 subsequently stretching the thermoplastic backing in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, wherein stretching in the second direction forms a tear in the thermoplastic backing between two adjacent of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, and wherein the tear is interrupted by the two adjacent of the discrete elements.

10 In a twenty-fourth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the twenty-third embodiment, wherein at least some of the discrete elements each comprise one upstanding post.

In a twenty-fifth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the twenty-third embodiment, wherein at least some of the discrete elements comprise more than one upstanding post on a surface protrusion.

15 In a twenty-sixth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth embodiment, wherein the upstanding post is part of a male fastening element.

In a twenty-seventh embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the twenty-sixth embodiment, wherein the male fastening element further comprises a cap distal from the thermoplastic backing.

20 In a twenty-eighth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to twenty-seventh embodiments, wherein the discrete elements protrude only from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing.

In a twenty-ninth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to twenty-eighth embodiments, wherein the discrete elements have a height above the thermoplastic backing of at least 30 micrometers.

25 In a thirtieth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to twenty-ninth embodiments, wherein a density of the discrete elements is in a range from 20 per cm^2 to 1000 per cm^2 .

In a thirty-first embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to thirtieth embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing is substantially uniform in thickness.

30 In a thirty-second embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to thirty-first embodiments, wherein the thermoplastic backing is substantially planar.

In a thirty-third embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to thirty-second embodiments, wherein the tear provides an opening, and wherein at least one portion of the thermoplastic backing around the opening has a profile across its width of higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the opening than at its midpoint.

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In a thirty-fourth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to thirty-third embodiments, wherein the tear provides a diamond- or almond-shaped opening.

5 In a thirty-fifth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-third to thirty-fourth embodiments, further comprising coating the second surface of the thermoplastic backing with adhesive before stretching the thermoplastic backing in the second direction.

10 In a thirty-sixth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-fourth embodiments, wherein after stretching in the second direction, the thermoplastic backing has a thickness that is substantially the same as before stretching in the second direction.

In a thirty-seventh embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-sixth embodiments, further comprising heating the thermoplastic backing while stretching it in the first direction.

15 In a thirty-eighth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-seventh embodiments, further comprising heating the thermoplastic backing while stretching it in the second direction.

In a thirty-ninth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-eighth embodiments, further comprising annealing the thermoplastic backing after stretching it in the second direction.

20 In a fortieth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-ninth embodiments, further comprising laminating the reticulated thermoplastic film to a carrier.

25 In a forty-first embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of any one of the twenty-second to thirty-ninth embodiments, further comprising laminating the thermoplastic backing to an extensible carrier before stretching the thermoplastic backing in the second direction, wherein the extensible carrier is extensible in at least the second direction

In a forty-second embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the forty-first embodiment, wherein the extensible carrier is elastic.

30 In a forty-third embodiment, the present disclosure provides the method of the forty-first embodiment, wherein the extensible carrier is non-elastic.

In a forty-fourth embodiment, the present disclosure provides the reticulated film of any one of the twenty-third to forty-third embodiments, wherein the plurality of discrete elements are arranged in a staggered array when viewed in the first direction.

35 In order that this disclosure can be more fully understood, the following examples are set forth. It should be understood that these examples are for illustrative purposes only and are not to be construed as limiting this disclosure in any manner.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

A thermoplastic backing with upstanding capped posts was prepared by feeding a stream of a film grade polypropylene copolymer, a polypropylene impact copolymer obtained from Dow Chemical Company, Midland, MI, under the trade designation "DOW C700-35N POLYPROPYLENE RESIN" through a 2-inch (5.1-cm) single screw extruder. Barrel zones 1-7 were set at 176 °C, 170 °C, 180 °C, 190 °C, 200 °C, 218 °C, and 218 °C, respectively. The molten resin was then fed through a sheet die to a rotating cylindrical mold. The temperature of the die was set at 216 °C (420 °F), and the temperature of cylindrical mold was set at 71 °C (160 °F). The screw speed was set at 80 rpm. The mold was water-cooled to provide rapid quenching that maintained the orientation in the polymer. The post density was 1600 posts per square inch (248 posts per square centimeter) arranged in a staggered array when viewed in the machine direction, and the post shape was conical. The cross-sectional shape of the post at the base was circular with a diameter of 350 micrometers. The line speed was set such that the film thickness was 100 micrometers. The web was fed into a cap forming apparatus after slitting it to the width to fit the apparatus. The posts were capped with oval shaped caps using the procedure described in U.S. Patent No. 5,845,375 (Miller et al.). The caps were subsequently deformed using the procedure described in U.S. Patent No. 6,132,660 (Kampfer) to provide "hook heads with downwardly projecting fiber engaging portions".

Stretching in the first direction was carried out by passing the web through two sets of rolls in which one roll was rotating faster than the other one. For each set of rolls, the bottom roll was a chrome roll, and the top roll was a rubber roll. For stretching, the temperature of each bottom chrome roll was set at 127°C (260 °F) and that of each top rubber roll was set at 93°C (200 °F). The draw ratio was 3.2 in the machine direction. A 3.8-cm (1.5-inch) wide sample was subsequently stretched in the cross direction in the jaws of a tensile tester obtained from Instron, Norwood, Mass., under the trade designation "INSTRON 5500R" with 2.54 cm gauge length. The sample was stretched at rate of 2.54 cm (1 inch)/minute to a final width of 7.6 cm (3 inches). A reticulated film such as that shown in FIGS. 1C and 2 was formed.

Examples 2 to 7

Examples 2 to 7 were made according to the methods of Example 1, with the modification that various draw ratios were used for the machine direction stretching of various rolls. The draw ratios were varied from 1 to 4 in increments of 0.2. At draw ratios of 2.2 and less, stretching in the cross direction did not form a net but instead formed a biaxially stretched continuous film. After cross-direction stretching at 2.4 and higher, the film was reticulated.

The basis weight for each sample was measured before and after cross-direction stretching by punching out a 100-cm² sample from the reticulated film using a 25 cm by 4 cm punch. The sample was

weighed on an electronic, analytical balance obtained from Mettler-Toledo International, Inc., Columbus, Ohio. The weight was multiplied by 100 to calculate the basis weight in grams per square meter (gsm).

The strand width of the reticulated film was measured by optical microscope obtained from Keyence Corporation of America, Elmwood Park, NJ, under the trade designation "VHX-100". Ten measurements were taken and averaged.

The draw ratio used for each Example, the basis weight before and after cross-direction stretching, and the average strand width are shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1

Example	Draw Ratio	Basis Weight (gsm) before CD stretch	Basis Weight (gsm) after CD stretch	Strand Width (micrometers)
1	3.2	60.1	41.8	400
2	2.4	71.8	49.4	482
3	2.6	68.8	47.5	460.7
4	2.8	66.2	46	442.3
5	3.0	62.0	44.2	411.1
6	3.4	58.2	40.2	398.7
7	3.8	52.8	39.2	363.2

A reticulated film made according to the method of Example 1 was cut in the cross-direction across lines corresponding to "a" and "b" shown in FIG. 1C. Four small specimens were cut from the thermoplastic backing portions cut at line "a" and line "b". Each of the four specimens was dip-coated in epoxy. After curing for at least 24 hours, the epoxy-bound samples were microtomed to yield 10- μ m-thick sections of epoxy and net that transected the net legs. The microtomed sections were placed on glass slides with 1.515 refractive index oil and covered with a cover slip. A DMRXE microscope (Leica Microsystems GmbH, Wetzlar, Germany) with a 10x/0.25 objective was equipped with an LC-POLSCOPE retardance imaging system (Lot-Oriel GmbH & Company, Darmstadt, Germany); a RETIGA EXI FAST 1394 digital color camera (QIMAGING, Surrey BC, Canada); and a 546.5 nm interference filter (Cambridge Research and Instrumentation, Inc., Hopkinton, MA). For each specimen, the imaging system was set to record the average retardance of a 7336-pixel imaging, an azimuth map, a horizontal line scan, and a false-color retardance map. Retardance is proportional to birefringence. The color photographs were converted to grayscale. Areas of lighter color indicate areas of higher birefringence. Two of the photographs showed areas of higher birefringence at the edges (those corresponding to the right portion cut at line "a" and the left portion cut at line "b" in FIG. 1C. These are shown in FIGS. 3C and 3D. The other two photographs showed less difference across the thermoplastic backing portion.

Examples 8 to 13

Examples 8 to 13 were made according to the methods of Example 1, with the modifications that the post density was 6000 posts per square inch (930 posts per square centimeter) and that various draw ratios were used for the machine direction stretching of various rolls as described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios were varied from 1 to 4 in increments of 0.2. At draw ratios of 3.0 and less, stretching in the cross direction did not form a net but instead formed a biaxially stretched continuous film. The basis weight for each sample was measured before cross-direction stretching using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. After cross-direction stretching, the strand width of the reticulated film was measured by optical microscope using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratio used for each Example, the basis weight before stretching, and the average strand width after cross-direction stretching are shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2

Example	Draw Ratio	Basis Weight (gsm) before CD stretch	Strand Width (micrometers)
8	3.2	58.6	276.3
9	3.4	56.3	255.5
10	3.6	55.2	250.8
11	3.8	53.3	231.5
12	4.0	52.7	217.2
13	4.2	52.3	213.8

Examples 14 to 21

Examples 14 to 21 were made according to the methods of Example 1, with the modifications that the thickness of the thermoplastic backing was either 70 micrometers or 130 micrometers. The thickness of the thermoplastic backing was altered by using the same mass of material extruded from the die but increasing the line speed. Various draw ratios were used for the machine direction stretching of various rolls as described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios were varied from 1 to 4 in increments of 0.2. At draw ratios of 1.8 and less for a 70-micrometer film and 2.6 and less for a 130-micrometer film, stretching in the cross direction did not form a net but instead formed a biaxially stretched continuous film. The basis weight for each sample was measured after cross-direction stretching using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. After cross-direction stretching, the strand width of the reticulated film was measured by optical microscope using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios and thermoplastic backing thickness used for each Example, the basis weight after cross-direction stretching, and the average strand width after cross-direction stretching are shown in Table 3, below.

Table 3

Example	Thickness (micrometers)	Draw Ratio	Basis Weight (gsm) after CD stretch	Strand Width (micrometers)
14	70	2.0	58.8	526.6
15	70	2.2	45.0	480.3
16	70	2.4	44.2	448.8
17	130	2.8	50.0	470.0
18	130	3.2	35.6	404.8
19	130	3.4	33.7	404.0
20	130	3.6	32.0	388.5
21	130	4	31.1	367.2

Examples 22 to 27

Examples 22 to 27 were made according to the methods of Example 1, with the modifications that a different mold was used so that the diameter of the post at the base was 250 micrometers. Various draw ratios were used for the machine direction stretching of various rolls as described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios were varied from 1 to 4 in increments of 0.2. At draw ratios of 2.8 and less, stretching in the cross direction did not form a net but instead formed a biaxially stretched continuous film. The basis weight for each sample was measured before cross-direction stretching using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. After cross-direction stretching, the strand width of the reticulated film was measured by optical microscope using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios used for each Example, the basis weight before cross-direction stretching, and the average strand width after cross-direction stretching are shown in Table 4, below.

Table 4

Example	Draw Ratio	Basis Weight (gsm) before CD stretch	Strand Width (micrometers)
22	3.0	56.5	451.2
23	3.2	54.5	423.8
24	3.4	52.9	419.8
25	3.6	52.1	410.3
26	3.8	51.8	396.6
27	4.0	48.4	371.6

Examples 28 to 39

5 Examples 28 to 39 were made according to the methods of Example 1, with the modification that high density polyethylene (H6030) (PE) obtained from LyondellBasell Industries, Houston, Texas, was used instead of polypropylene (PP) for Examples 28 to 33. Various draw ratios were used for the machine direction stretching of various rolls as described in Examples 2 to 7 except the draw ratios were varied from 3 to 4 in increments of 0.2. The basis weight for each sample was measured before cross-direction stretching using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. After cross-direction stretching, the strand width of the reticulated film was measured by optical microscope using the method described in Examples 2 to 7. The draw ratios and thermoplastic used for each Example, the basis weight before cross-direction stretching, and the average strand width after cross-direction stretching are shown in Table 10 5, below.

Table 5

Example	Thermoplastic	Draw Ratio	Basis Weight (gsm) before CD stretch	Strand Width (micrometers)
28	PE	3	66.5	467.3
29	PE	3.2	62.6	454.8
30	PE	3.4	56.7	449.2
31	PE	3.6	54.4	437.6
32	PE	3.8	51.5	417.8
33	PE	4	51.2	409.5
34	PP	3	56.5	451.1
35	PP	3.2	54.5	423.8
36	PP	3.4	52.9	419.8
37	PP	3.6	52.1	410.3
38	PP	3.8	51.8	396.6
39	PP	4	48.4	371.6

Example 40

5 Example 40 was prepared from a film extruded, molded with posts that were subsequently capped, and stretched in the machine direction according to the method of Example 1. Two different punches were used to punch four samples from the film. The two punches were 37 mm by 25 mm and 30 mm by 20 mm, respectively. Two samples were prepared from the first punch with the 37-mm edges aligned in the machine direction, and one sample was prepared from the first punch with the 37-mm edges aligned in the cross-machine direction. One sample was prepared from the second punch with its 30-mm edges aligned in the machine direction. Each sample was stretched by hand in the cross-direction to two times its width, and a reticulated film was formed. The length and width of each sample were measured. Next each sample was pulled by hand in the machine direction to place some tension on the film. The length and width of each sample were measured again. The original length (L) and width (W) of each sample, the length and width of each sample after stretching in the width direction to make the reticulated film, and the length and width of each sample after tension was applied on the reticulated film in the machine direction are shown in Table 6, below.

Table 6

Original (1)		Stretched (2)		Stretched/Original		Tensioned (3)		Tensioned/ Original	
L(mm)	W(mm)	L(mm)	W(mm)	L2/L1	W2/W1	L(mm)	W(mm)	L3/L1	W3/W1
37	25	27	50	0.73	2	36	31	0.97	1.24
37	25	28	50	0.76	2	37	30	1.00	1.20
25	37	20	74	0.80	2	23	45	0.92	1.22
30	20	25	39	0.83	1.95	29	24	0.97	1.20

The recovery from stretching can be calculated from the equation $(W2-W1)-(W3-W1) / (W2-W1)$. The percent recoveries for the samples were 76%, 80%, 78%, and 79%, respectively.

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Example 41

Example 41 was prepared from a film extruded, molded with posts that were subsequently capped, and stretched in the machine direction according to the method of Example 1. A piece 2.54 cm long and 12.5 cm wide was cut from the film and placed between the jaws of a tensile tester obtained from Instron, Norwood, Mass., under the trade designation "INSTRON 5500R" with a 2.54 cm gauge length. The sample was stretched at a speed of about 2.54 cm (1 inch) per minute to a length of 13.5 cm. A heat gun was used to intermittently heat the sample to keep the load on the sample approximately constant at 6 pounds (8.9 N). A picture of the reticulated film was taken with the optical microscope obtained from Keyence Corporation of America under the trade designation "VHX-100" and is shown in FIG. 5B. For comparison, a sample stretched at room temperature as in Example 1 is shown in FIG. 5A.

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Example 42

Example 42 was prepared from a film extruded, molded with posts that were subsequently capped, and stretched in the machine direction according to the method of Example 1. A 2 cm by 2 cm sample of the film was examined with a polarization microscope "LEICA DM2700P", obtained from Microsystems GmbH, Wetzlar, Germany. The microscope was equipped with cross polars and was used in transmission mode. The polarizer and analyzer were placed at 90 degrees to each other for dark field imaging. The sample was placed between the polarizer and analyzer, and a 50X image was recorded using a digital microscope camera "PROGRES C3", obtained from Jenoptik Optical Systems, GmbH, Jena, Germany, with the focus on the thermoplastic backing. The color photograph was converted to grayscale and is shown in FIG. 3A. In the color image, the areas with highest birefringence appeared orange, and in the grayscale photograph shown in FIG. 3A, these areas appear as the darker, triangular area above and below the round upstanding elements reveals. The sample was then stretched by hand in the cross-machine direction to form a reticulated film, and the sample was imaged using the polarization microscope under the same conditions as the sample before stretching in the second direction. The color

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5 photograph was converted to grayscale and is shown in FIG. 3B. Areas of lighter color, which are on the edges of the thermoplastic backing portions around the openings, indicate areas of higher birefringence. Although not visible in the gray scale image of FIG. 3B, the highest birefringence appeared orange and was located in the thermoplastic backing on the edge of the opening near the location of the discrete element.

10 For comparison, a portion of a film obtained from DelStar Technologies, Inc., Middletown, Del., under the trade designation "DELNET X-550 NAT" was also imaged under the polarization microscope described above. The apertured film had a hexagonal shaped unit cell including six triangular shaped subcells. It is believed that the aperture film is made by the method described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,207,962 (Hovis et al.). The film portion corresponding to one side of each triangle had a higher birefringence than the other two, with the highest birefringence centered widthwise and lengthwise. For the film portions corresponding to the other two sides, the birefringence appeared substantially the same across the width of the film portions.

15 This disclosure is not limited to the above-described embodiments but is to be controlled by the limitations set forth in the following claims and any equivalents thereof. This disclosure may be suitably practiced in the absence of any element not specifically disclosed herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A reticulated thermoplastic film comprising:
a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces, a plurality of openings in the
5 thermoplastic backing, and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the
thermoplastic backing, wherein there are two discrete elements abutting opposite ends of any given
opening, wherein the two discrete elements are aligned in a first direction, wherein there is one discrete
element between the given opening and an adjacent opening aligned in a second direction perpendicular
to the first direction, and wherein at least one of the following is true:
10 wherein each portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given opening is plastically
deformed in its lengthwise direction, and wherein the openings in the plurality of openings and the given
opening are retractable openings; or
wherein at least one portion of the thermoplastic backing around the given opening has a profile
across its width of higher stretch-induced molecular orientation at its edge adjacent the given opening
15 than at its midpoint.
2. The reticulated thermoplastic film of claim 1, wherein at least some of the discrete elements each
comprise one upstanding post, or wherein at least some of the discrete elements comprise more than one
upstanding post on a surface protrusion.
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3. The reticulated thermoplastic film of claim 2, wherein the upstanding post is part of a male
fastening element.
4. The reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the thermoplastic backing
25 is substantially planar.
5. The reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the plurality of discrete
elements are arranged in a staggered array when viewed in the first direction.
- 30 6. The reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the discrete elements have
a height above the thermoplastic backing of at least 30 micrometers.
7. The reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the thermoplastic backing
comprises at least one of polyethylene or polypropylene.
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8. A laminate comprising the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 7 joined to a
carrier.

9. The laminate of claim 8, wherein the reticulated thermoplastic film is joined to the carrier with adhesive, and wherein the adhesive is exposed in at least some of the openings in the thermoplastic backing.

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10. An absorbent article comprising the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 7 or the laminate of claim 8 or 9.

11. A method of making the reticulated thermoplastic film of any one of claims 1 to 7, the method comprising:

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providing a thermoplastic backing comprising first and second major surfaces and a plurality of discrete elements protruding from the first major surface of the thermoplastic backing, wherein at least some of the discrete elements are aligned in a row in a first direction;

stretching the thermoplastic backing in the first direction to plastically deform the thermoplastic backing and separate the at least some of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, wherein the thermoplastic backing remains intact between the plurality of discrete elements after stretching it in the first direction; and

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subsequently stretching the thermoplastic backing in a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, wherein stretching in the second direction forms a tear in the thermoplastic backing between two adjacent of the discrete elements aligned in the row in the first direction, and wherein the tear is interrupted by the two adjacent of the discrete elements.

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12. The method of claim 11, wherein after stretching in the second direction, the thermoplastic backing has a thickness that is substantially the same as before stretching in the second direction.

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13. The method of claim 11 or 12, further comprising heating the thermoplastic backing at least one of during or after stretching it in the second direction.

14. The method of claim 11, 12, or 13, further comprising coating the second surface of the thermoplastic backing with adhesive before stretching the thermoplastic backing in the second direction.

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15. The method of any one of claims 11 to 14, further comprising laminating the reticulated thermoplastic film to a carrier.

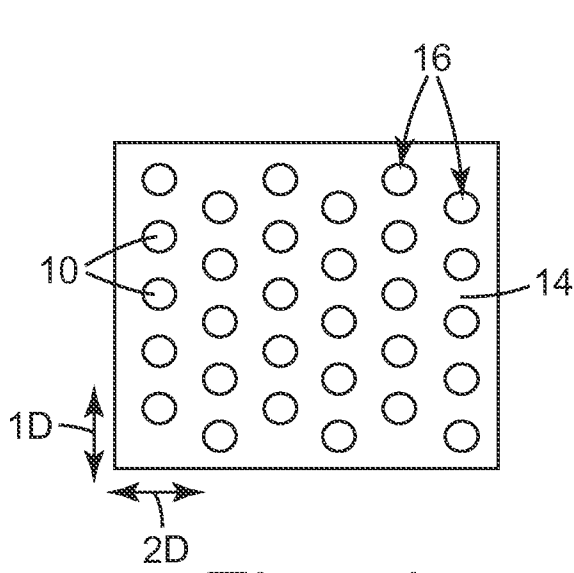


Fig. 1A

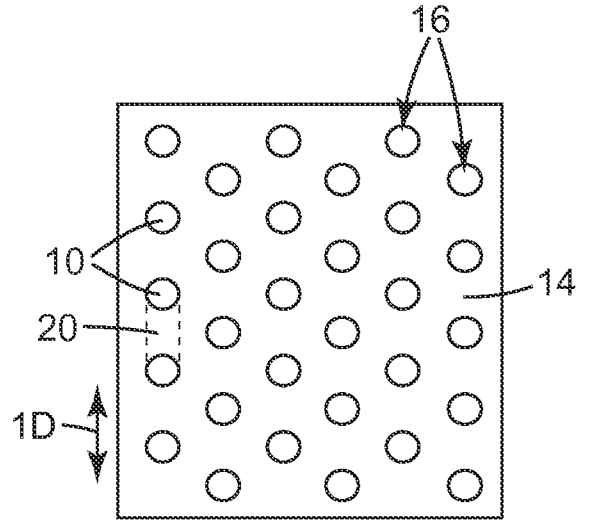


Fig. 1B

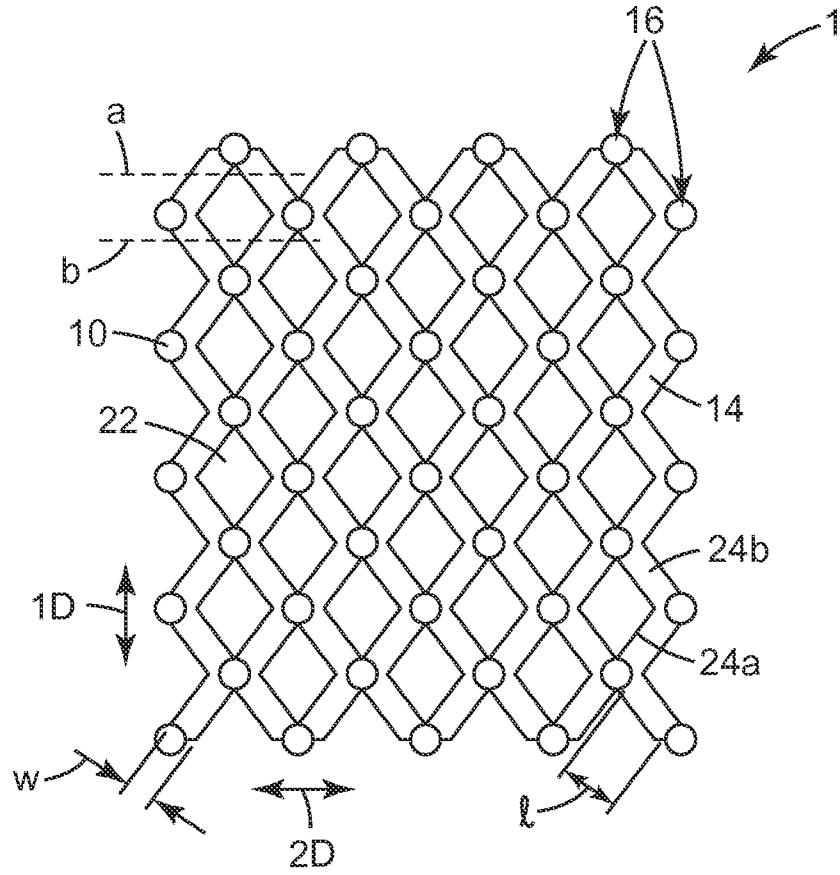
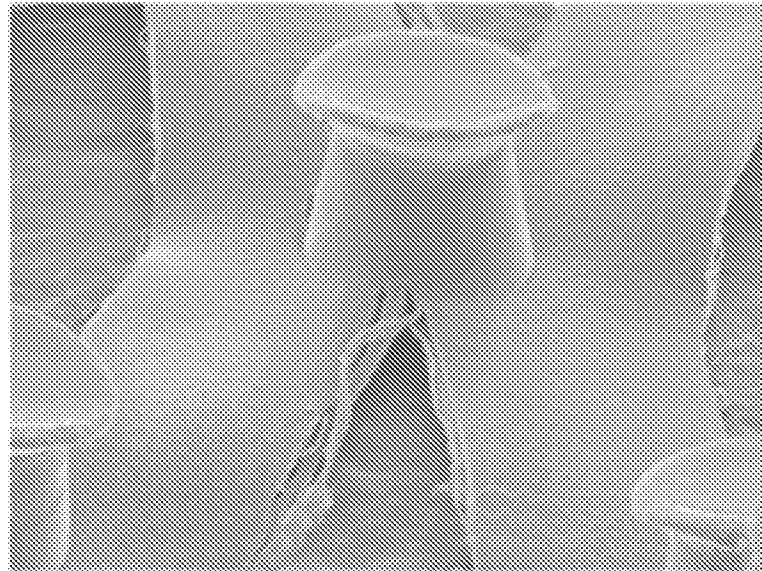


Fig. 1C



200 μm

Fig. 2

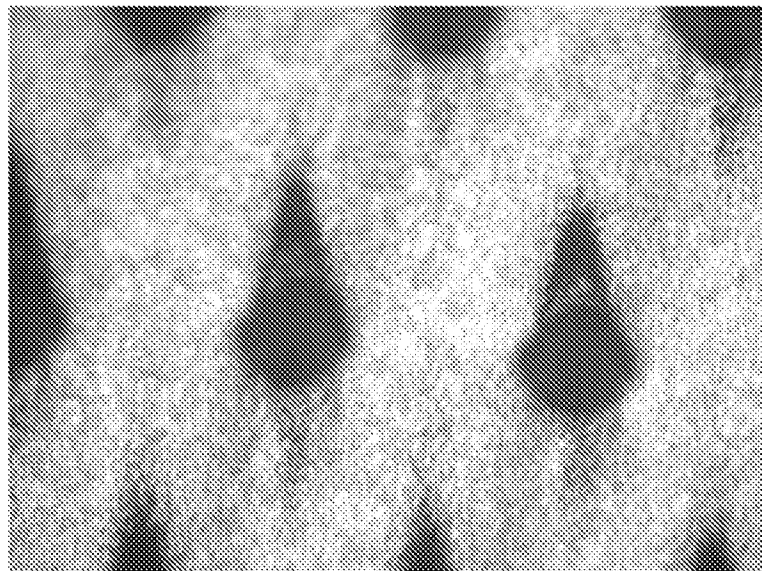


Fig. 3A

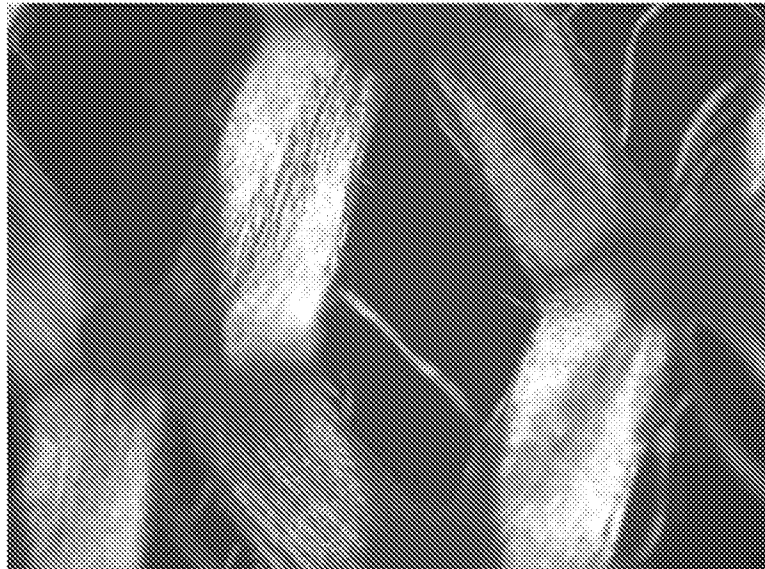


Fig. 3B

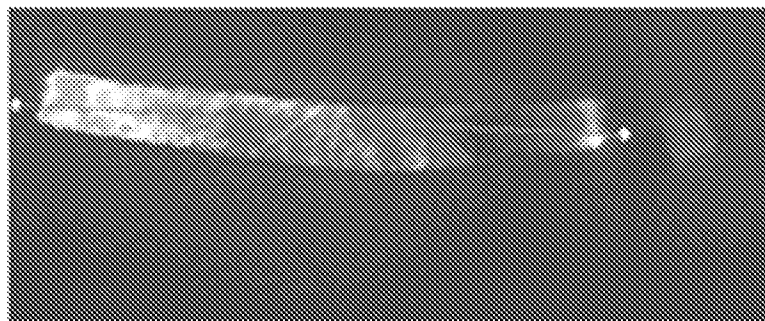


Fig. 3C

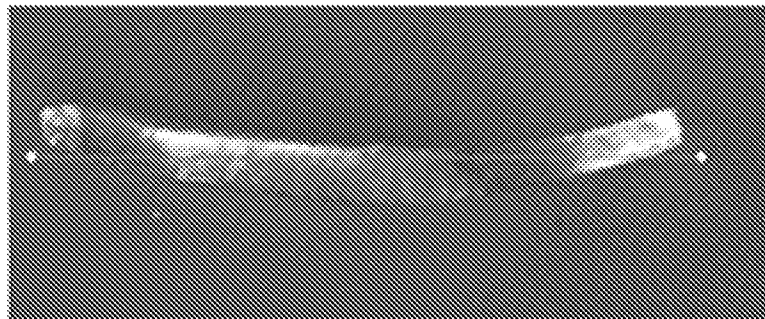


Fig. 3D

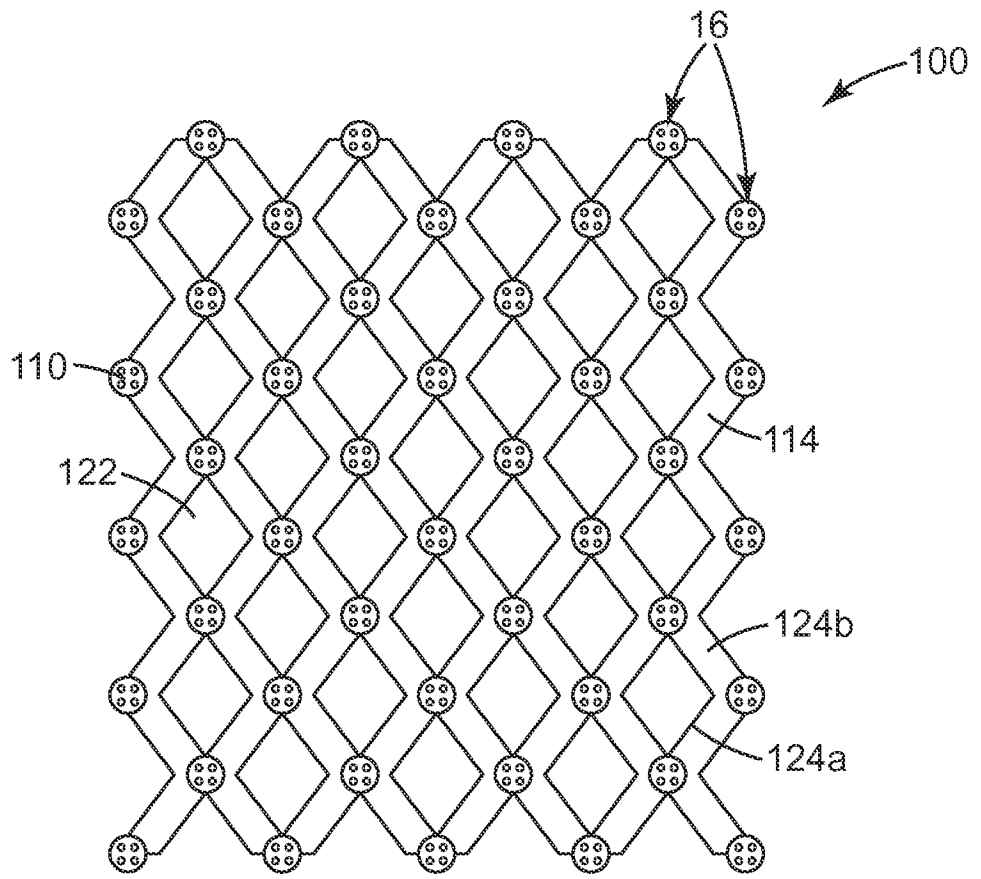


Fig. 4

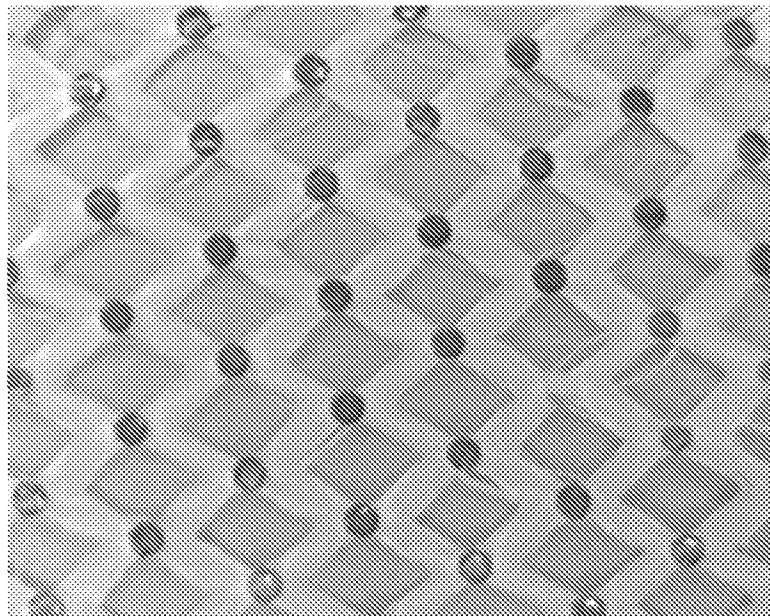


Fig. 5A

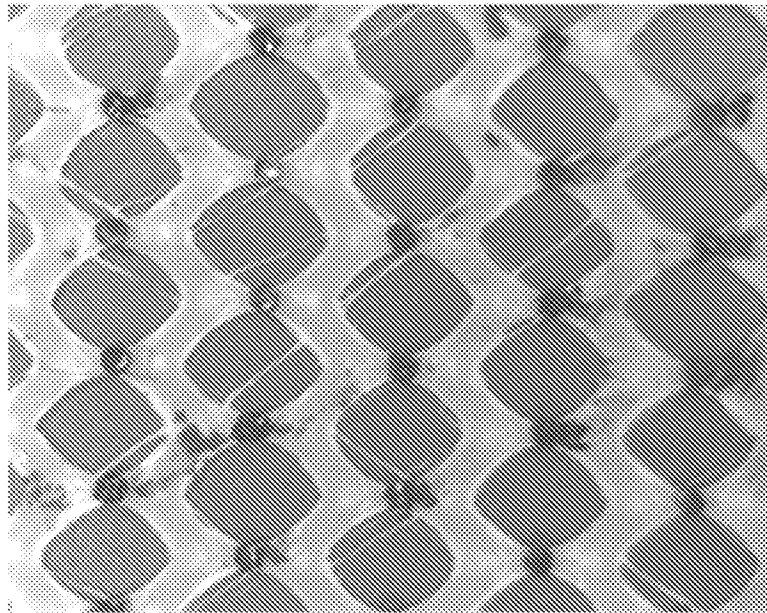


Fig. 5B

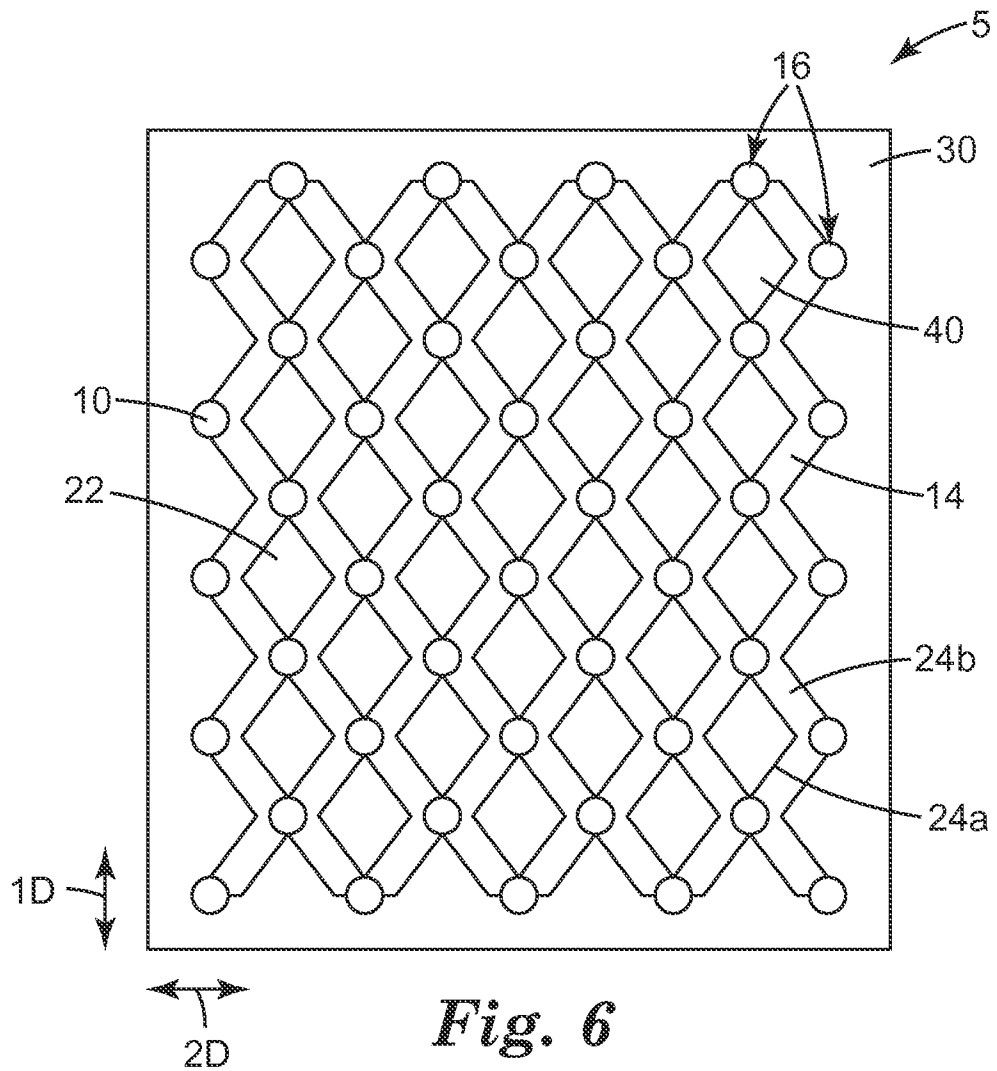


Fig. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2014/038950

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 INV. A44B18/00 A61F13/62 B29C55/14
 ADD. C08J5/18

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)
 A44B A61F B29C

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)
 EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X A	US 2012/204383 A1 (WOOD LEIGH E [US] ET AL) 16 August 2012 (2012-08-16) cited in the application claims 3,15-20 paragraph [0084] - paragraph [0086] paragraph [0093] - paragraph [0096] -----	1-4,6, 8-10 11-15
X A	US 2006/293635 A1 (PETERSEN JOHANN F [DE]) 28 December 2006 (2006-12-28) cited in the application paragraph [0011] - paragraph [0017] paragraph [0070] - paragraph [0073]; claims 1,12,13; figures 6a,6b,7b; examples 3,4 ----- -/--	1-3,6, 8-10 11-15

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"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	Date of mailing of the international search report
29 August 2014	08/09/2014

Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Lindner, Thomas
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2014/038950

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	paragraph [0012] - paragraph [0020]; claims	10-15
A	----- US 2005/271858 A1 (AUSEN RONALD W [US] ET AL) 8 December 2005 (2005-12-08) cited in the application paragraph [0045] - paragraph [0048]; claims; figures 1-9	1,8, 10-15
A	----- US 2005/202205 A1 (PETERSEN JOHANN F [DE] ET AL) 15 September 2005 (2005-09-15) cited in the application paragraph [0158] - paragraph [0190]; figures 3b,4b; examples	1-15
A	----- US 2004/068848 A1 (AUSEN RONALD W [US] ET AL) 15 April 2004 (2004-04-15) examples 13,14	1-15
A	----- WO 2004/077980 A1 (3M INNOVATIVE PROPERTIES CO [US]) 16 September 2004 (2004-09-16) example 1	1-15

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2014/038950

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US 2006293635	A1	28-12-2006	NONE
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