

[19]	INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PHILIPPINES			
[12]	INVENTION PUBLICATION			
[11]	Publication Number:	12014502234	Document Code:	B1
[22]	Publication Date:	15/12/2014		
[21]	Application Number:	12014502234	Document Code:	A
[22]	Date Filed:	3/10/2014		
[54]	Title:	UNITARY ABSORBENT STRUCTURES COMPRISING AN ABSORBENT CORE AND/OR AN ACQUISITION AND DISPERSION LAYER FOR ABSORBENT ARTICLES		
[71]	Applicant(s):	LIBELTEX		
[72]	Inventor(s):	MICHIELS DANY DEGRANDE TANIKA		
[30]	Priority Data:	13/4/2012 WO2012EP56859		
[51]	International Class 8:	A61F 13/15 20060101AFI20170615BHPH; A61F 13/53 20060101ALI20170615BHPH; A61F 13/534 20060101ALI20170615BHPH; A61F 13/537 20060101ALI20170615BHPH;		
[57]	Abstract:	The present invention relates to a unitary absorbent structure and method thereof wherein said unitary absorbent structure comprises an absorbent core (5) and/or an acquisition (2) and dispersion (3) layer, said absorbent core (5) and/or an acquisition (2) and dispersion (3) layer comprising at least one non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) having a void volume suitable to be penetrated by super absorbent particles, characterized in that said super absorbent particles are dispersed in the substrate layer (23) according to a size distribution gradient along the depth direction or z-direction of said absorbent core (5) and/or acquisition (2) and dispersion (3) layers.		

from top to bottom a triple layer acquisition (14), distribution (16) and rewet (15) layers with the third layer partly hydrophobic.

Figure 7: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising 5 from top to bottom a triple layer acquisition (14), distribution (16) and absorption (17) layers.

Figure 8: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising from top to bottom a triple layer blend of polyester and polyolefin defining a void volume gradient (18a, 18b, 18c).

10 Figure 9: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising from top to bottom an acquisition and dispersion top layer (19), an rewet layer of smaller void volume space structure preventing the loss of SAP particles (21) and a bottom layer having very large void volume space comprising SAP particles 15 (21) and a covering layer coating the bottom section of the absorbent core.

Figure 10: is a cross-sectional view of a triple layer substrate wherein the fibers defining a void volume distribution gradient (18a, 18b, 18c) partly filled with SAP 20 particles (21), and the bottom of the structure is covered by an additional layer.

Figure 11: is a cross-sectional view of SAP particles (21) a 25 fully penetrated in a substrate having a void volume distribution gradient (18a, 18b, 18c). The core is covered by non-woven layers on top and bottom part (22).

Figure 12: is a cross sectional image of SAP particles (21) partially penetrated in a substrate having a void volume distribution gradient (18a, 18b, 18c).

Figure 13: Is a scheme of a method of a structure production 30 according to the invention.

Figure 14: is a scheme of a dosing system for the SAP particles (21), illustrating the deposit of the SAP particles (21) along the y-direction, or lateral dimension, of the non-

woven substrate.

Figure 15: is a cross sectional view of a discontinuous application of SAP particles (21) on a substrate for the production of multiple absorbent cores. The core is covered 5 by a hot melt adhesive and a core covering layer (11). The cutting line for the formation of individual core is also indicated.

Figure 16: is a cross sectional image of 3 individual profiled absorbent cores.

10 Figure 17: is a detail view of the supply roll used for the powder scattering of SAP particles (21) to create a profiled core.

Figure 18: is a cross sectional image of a profiled absorbent core along the x-direction or longitudinal dimension.

15 Figure 19: is a top view of a patterned absorbent core layer in the x-y plan.

Figure 20: illustrates the deposit of SAP particles (21) on a non-woven substrate prior to the application of the Fibroline process and the dispersion profile of said particles along 20 the z-direction after the application of the Fibroline process

Figure 21: illustrates an ADL comprising SAP particles (21) dispersed according to the invention, said ADL is positioned on top of a conventional absorbent core.

25 Figure 22: illustrates an absorbent structure according to the invention coated by a covering by layers (22).

Figure 23: illustrates a conventional ADL (19) positioned on top of an absorbent core according to the invention.

Figure 24: is a top view of a body shaped absorbent article.

30 Figure 25: is a view of the SAP particles (21) deposited on a non-woven substrate with an x and y directional profile after the dispersion by the Fibroline method.

Figure 26: illustrates the sealing (24) process of individual core by a core wrap material (25).

Detailed description of the invention

5 A liquid according to the invention comprises, but not limited to, any body fluid such as urine or blood. The inventors have developed a fluffless absorbent structure comprising an absorbent core and/or ADL. Said absorbent structure comprising SAP particles (21) having a size 10 distribution and a fibrous non-woven hydrophilic or hydrophobic substrate (23), said SAP particles (21) being dispersed within the fibrous substrate (23) based on their size distribution. The absorbent structure obtained is further coated by a covering layer (22) such as a spunbond, 15 PE film, PET film, polyolefin, multilayer films, coextruded films, carded non-woven or any suitable material and maintained to the core with adhesive.

20 In addition to the high body fluid holding capacity and the slimness of the absorbent article, there are some other advantages to use the absorbent structure of the invention such as a better conversion, improve performance and reliability due to the dispersion of SAP particles (21) on specific part of the absorbent structure and the absence of 25 fluff. It is also economical advantageous to use such core and/or ADL as fluff is no longer required and extra method steps such as hammer milling to prepare the fluff is unnecessary, additionally, warehousing and packaging cost is reduced as well as the transport cost.

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Advantageously, an absorbent structure according to the invention is a multilayers structure comprising a top layer ensuring a good acquisition and distribution of the liquid;

an intermediate layer suitable to prevent the liquid to return to the surface, said intermediate layer is non-porous, wherein non-porous is defined by a void volume value ranging from about 10 to about 600 cm³ of void volume per m² of substrate (23). The absorbent structure also comprises a porous fibrous bottom layer, wherein porous according to the invention is defined by a void volume ranging from about 0.1 to 20000 cm³ of void space/m² of substrate (23), preferably from about 600 to about 6000 cm³ of void space/m² of substrate (23). Said fibrous bottom layer comprising coated or uncoated SAP particles (21) thus forming a SAP stratum beneath the intermediate layer. SAP particles (21) composing the SAP stratum are dispersed within the bottom layer, based on the SAP particle (21) size distribution gradient, wherein the smaller SAP particles (21) are incorporated deeper into the bottom layer and the larger particles remain on the external part of the bottom layer. A suitable non-porous core covering layer (22) having a void volume value ranging from about 10 to about 600 cm³ of void volume per m² of substrate (23) is used to prevent the release of the SAP particles (21), said core covering layer material (22) is maintained to the absorbent structure by adhesive means, ultrasonic welding and/or any suitable method (Figure 26).

Absorbent structures of the invention comprise SAP particles (21) wherein at least 90%, preferably 95%, or 98 % of the SAP particles (21) have a particle size diameter ranging from about 45 to about 850 µm, preferably from about 100 to about 800 µm. Smaller size SAP particles (21) are able to penetrate deeply, i.e. along the z direction, into the bottom part of the substrate (23) while the larger size SAP particles (21) remain on the outer part of the substrate (23) or remain on the surface of said substrate (23), thus forming an absorbent stratum based on the SAP particle (21) size gradient.

Absorbent structure of the invention comprising a SAP particles (21) stratum fully integrated within the absorbent core and/or ADL, allows the preparation of thinner absorbent articles than conventional absorbent cores known by the 5 inventors as said cores generally require a fluff absorption distribution layer or other cellulose based fiber system, for instance curly fibers or a standard ADL system (19) in combination with a fluff holding core.

It has been found that absorbent cores according to the 10 invention have an excellent liquid uptake property and low rewettability. It is supposed that the SAP particles (21) dispersed in the substrate (23) with a size distribution gradient are able to prevent the gel formation when the SAP particles (21) are in a swollen state.

15

Super absorbent particles

According to the invention, SAP particles (21) are either uncoated, partially or totally coated.

Commercial available uncoated SAP particles (21) suitable for 20 the invention are Ecotec EK-X EN 67 polymer grade, which is generally used in absorbent cores comprising SAP and fluff in a ratio up to 80 wt.% SAP loadings; Evonik: Favor SXM 10000.

SAP particles (21) can either be incorporated in the 25 absorbent layer or in the ADL or in both the absorbent layers and the ADL.

Absorbent core

An absorbent core according to the invention can be obtained 30 by fully penetrating a non-woven substrate (23) with SAP particles (21), thus an additional conventional ADL (19) should be used, as illustrated in Figure 23.

A substrate (23) fully penetrated with SAP particles (21) according to the invention comprises up to 1000 g/m² of SAP, preferably about 300 to about 500 g/m² of SAP particles (21) depending on the body fluid holding capacity.

5 To avoid gel blocking, the swollen SAP particles (21) have to be sufficiently distant to be permeable enough to allow liquids, such as body fluids, to go through the absorbent layer. This was obtained by the inventors by distributing the SAP particles (21) within the substrate (23) based on the SAP
10 particles size gradient. Without being bond to any theory, it is believed that only smaller SAP particles (21) penetrate deeply in the substrate (23), along the z-direction, while larger SAP particles (21) remain on the outer part of the substrate (23). As smaller SAP particles (21) are
15 sufficiently distant from one another, it does prevent gel blocking issue, while larger SAP particles (21) are able to progressively absorb the excess of body fluids.

Preferably, the absorbent structure of the invention can be combined with a conventional ADL (19).

20 Figure 23 illustrates an absorbent core according to the invention comprising a non-woven substrate (23) and a dispersion of SAP particles (21) within the substrate (23), depending on the SAP particles (21) size gradient. The absorbent core is further combined with a conventional ADL
25 (19) on top of the absorbent core.

Figure 12 also illustrates an absorbent article according to the invention using a 3 layers ADL structure with SAP particles (21) in a swollen state after liquid uptake.

30 **Acquisition, dispersion, layers (ADL)**

In a second embodiment a specific amount and size of SAP particles (21) is dispersed, based on their size dispersion gradient, in a substrate (23) comprising an ADL structure,

such as the substrate (23) is partly penetrated with the SAP particles (21), Figures 9 and 10 illustrate this second embodiment.

According to the invention, an ADL comprising a sufficient amount of SAP particles (21) to absorb liquids or body fluids can be directly used as a unitary absorbent structure (Figures 9 and 22), said structure comprising an ADL section and an absorbent section comprising the dispersed SAP particles (21). Generally up to 1000 g/m², preferably from about 300 to about 500 g/m² of SAP particles (21) is sufficient to combine in one element an ADL and an absorbent core.

The ADL can also comprise low amount of SAP particles (21) which serve as a temporary storage or surge layer (20) (Figure 21). Generally between 0.1 to 300 g/m², preferably from about 100 to about 200 g/m² is considered as a low amount of SAP particles (21). In the latter case, an additional absorbent core has to be combined with an ADL. Suitable ADL should absorb water or liquids and slowly releasing it to the absorbent core.

Typically, ADL are multi-layer structures comprising an acquisition layer (2) and dispersion layers (3, 4). In a preferred mode, the ADL comprising a dispersion of SAP particles (21) is a 3 layers structure composed of one acquisition layer (2) and 2 diffusion (3) layers.

In a particular embodiment, a triple layers ADL according to the invention can comprise an acquisition layer (14), a rewet layer (15) and a distribution layer (16) are illustrated in Figure 3.

The top layer is a very porous acquisition layer (14) allowing fluids to easily penetrate the structure.

The intermediate layer is a non-porous diffusion layer preventing the fluid from going back to the top surface. By

non-porous according to the invention is defined by a void volume ranging from about 10-600 cm³ of void space / m² of substrate (23). The diffusion layer is also very hydrophilic, so that the liquid is spread over the core.

- 5 The bottom layer comprises profiled, or multilobal, fibers to improve the liquid distribution over the absorbent core. Non limiting examples of commercially available multilobal fibers are 4DG 6dn, 4T 3dn, trilobal 6dn, pentalobal 6dn, quadfill 7dt, preferably, the fiber is a trilobal 6dn or pentalobal
- 10 6dn fiber and other shapes.

In another embodiment according to the invention, a triple layers ADL comprising an acquisition (14), distribution (16) and rewet (15) layers, as illustrated in Figure 4.

- 15 The top layer is a very porous acquisition layer (14) thus allowing fluid to penetrate into the absorbent core.
The intermediate layer is a dispersion layer comprising profiled fibers, thus improving the distribution of the liquid to the bottom layer.
- 20 The bottom layer is a non-porous layer comprising very fine fibers, preventing liquid from going back to the surface. It is also very hydrophilic, so that the liquid is spread over the core.
- 25 In another embodiment according to the invention, a triple layers ADL comprising 2 acquisitions layers (14) and a rewet layer (15) is illustrated in Figure 5.
The top layer is a very porous acquisition layer (14) allowing fluid to penetrate into the absorbent structure.
- 30 The intermediate layer is also an acquisition layer (14) that is semi porous, wherein semi porous according the invention is defined by a void volume ranging from about 300 to about 500 cm³ of void volume / m² of substrate (23), however said

intermediate layer is characterized by a void volume distribution gradient (18a, 18b, 18c) thus creating a funnel for the liquid transport towards the core.

The bottom layer is non-porous, and composed of very fine 5 fibers preventing liquid from going back to the surface. Preferably, the bottom layer is calendered, to even more reduce the void volume on the surface, preventing the liquid of the core returning to the surface. Said bottom layer is preferably hydrophilic, allowing the liquid to spread over 10 the core.

In another embodiment according to the invention, the absorbent structure comprises a triple layers ADL also comprising an acquisition (14), distribution (16) and rewet 15 (15) layers, as illustrated in Figure 6.

The top layer is a very porous acquisition layer (14) suitable to allow body fluids to penetrate into the absorbent structure.

The intermediate layer is a layer suitable for the 20 distribution and spreading of the liquid to the bottom layer and to the core.

The bottom layer is a non-porous layer composed of a blend of fine hydrophilic and hydrophobic fibers, blocking the liquid from going back to the surface.

25 In another embodiment according to the invention, the absorbent structure comprises a triple layer, acquisition (14), distribution (16) and absorption (17) layers as illustrated in Figure 7.

30 The top layer is a very porous acquisition layer (14) allowing body fluids to penetrate into the absorbent core.

The intermediate layer is a distribution layer (16) comprising fibers to ensure the whole surface of the distribution layer (16) is used.

5 The bottom layer comprises a blend of fibers including viscose absorbing fibers, to temporarily store the liquid in said bottom layer, thus creating a buffer before the liquid is transferred to the absorbent core.

10 In another embodiment illustrated in Figure 8 the triple layer ADL comprises a blend of polyester and polyolefins fibres defining a triple layer system defining a void volume gradient (18a, 18b, 18c) of 3000, 1000 and 300 cm³ of void volume / m² of substrate surface (23), said void volume gradient (18a, 18b, 18c), creating a funnel for the liquid.

15 This results in a higher liquid uptake speed.

The fibers used give a good resiliency and resistancy to pressure, creating a distance between core and top of the diaper, resulting in a dry surface.

20 ADL suitable for the invention are fluffless and ensure a fast liquid uptake, and good rewet properties, so that liquid is prevented from going back to the surface and maintain the top surface dry. It also makes sure the liquid is well spread and distributed, so that the total core is used to its maximum.

Absorbent structures

An absorbent structure according to the invention can combine an absorbent section and an acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) section. In these specific embodiments, illustrated in Figure 22, the absorbent structure is composed of a mono or multi layered non-woven fibrous substrate (23) such as polyester or poly polyethylene terephthalate (PET),

Unitary absorbent structures comprising an absorbent core
and/or an acquisition and dispersion layer for absorbent
articles

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Field of the invention

The present invention relates to absorbent structures comprising absorbent cores and/or acquisition and dispersion systems, said absorbent core and/or acquisition and dispersion system comprising a dispersion of super absorbent particles. The invention also relates to absorbent articles comprising said absorbent structures, the absorbent article is preferably a disposable absorbent article such as sanitary napkins, panty liners, baby diapers, incontinence pads, training pants, sweat pads, medical wound bandage and the like.

Background of the invention

Conventional absorbent articles are manufactured by combining a liquid permeable or pervious, hydrophilic or semi hydrophilic topsheet (1), a fibrous material, an absorbent core (5) and a liquid impermeable or impervious material backsheet (6). Topsheet (1) and backsheet (6) referring to the relative position of said sheets with respect to the absorbent core (5).

Absorbent cores are generally composed of fluff and super absorbent polymer (SAP) particles (21).

Multi-layered absorbent articles may comprise an additional acquisition (2) and dispersion layers (3, 4), or conventional ADL (19), having at least 3 functions. The top layer is an acquisition layer (2), which is suitable to rapidly acquire the liquid and transmit it to the distribution layers (3, 4) placed underneath the acquisition layer (2). Said

polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), coPP, PET/PE, PET/PP, PET/cop, PP/PE, PLA, PLA/PP, PVA, viscose, cotton, wool, PET/coPET, acetate, PTE, PVC, Bamboo, PBT, PA, Acryl, Modacryl, and/or regenerated fibers forming an interpenetrating network and SAP particles (21) and from about 0.1 to 50 g/m², preferably from 0.7 to 25 g/m² and more preferably from about 2 to 7 g/m² of adhesive. Preferably the absorbent structure does not comprise fluff at all. It is possible to incorporate a high quantity of SAP particles (21) within the absorbent layer because of the fibrous nature which allows the absorption of liquids without being subject to gel blocking due to swelling of the SAP particles (21). In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the absorbent structure comprises from about 25-300g/m², but preferably from about 60 to 150g/m² of ADL and/or substrate (23); from about 0.1 to 1000 g/m² of SAP particles (21), a preferred quantity of SAP particles (21) for baby diapers or adults incontinence ranges from 100 to 500 g/m², from 10 to 200 g/m² in feminine care products and from about 200-400g/m² for wound dressing. Generally, the absorbent structure comprises from about 10 to 60 g/m² of a core covering layer (22).

Examples of commercially available fibers suitable to make the non-woven substrate (23) are Acryl Amicor 3.0n; Asota 25 L10D; Eastlon SN-3450CMP1 4.0dn; Fibervisions ES-C Cure 2.2dt; Fibervisions ES-DELTA REPEAT II 5.7 dt 40mm; Grisuten 22 3.3 dt 60mm; Huvis LMF U16 6dn 51mm; Huvis LMF V16 4dn 51mm; Huvis OEPO1 N215 2.0dn; Ingeo PLA SLN2660E2 6.0dn; Invista 295 6.0dn; Meraklon PP Blend PH/HW 4.4dt; PES 30 Greenfiber 6.7dt; Tesil 84M 6.7dt; Trevira 200 6.0dt; Viscocel 3.3 dt 40mm; Wellman H1295 7dt; Wellman T0745 17dt 60mm; Wellman H7112 12dt; Wellman H8015 7dt 60mm.

An absorbent structure according to the invention has a lateral dimension ranging from 0.1 to 800 mm but not limited to these dimensions. Depending on the different application, said absorbent structure typically has a lateral dimension of

5 50 to 180 mm for baby diaper products; from 30 to 250 mm for adult incontinence products; from 30 to 90 mm for feminine care products and from 100 by 100 mm² or 200 by 300 mm² for wound dressing.

10 Preferably, the non-woven fibrous substrate (23) is a triple layer substrate (23) comprising a top layer, which has an acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) functions for a fast liquid acquisition and a good distribution of the liquid over the total surface of the intermediate layer.

15 The intermediate layer is preferably very hydrophilic so that the liquid is able to spread over the core. Said intermediate layer is also non-porous, to prevent the fluid to return to the top surface and to maintain the SAP particles (21) within the bottom layer during application, but also during the use

20 of the absorbent article, once the SAP particles (21) are swollen by liquid.

The bottom layer is a very porous structure suitable for being penetrated with SAP particles (21), said bottom layer serves as a storage layer (20) (Figure 9).

25

In another embodiment, SAP particles (21) penetrate the void volume gradient (18a, 18b, 18c) of fibers network. Smaller particles will penetrate deeper than bigger particles due to the void volume gradient of fibres (18a, 18b, 18c). The top

30 side of the fibrous structure will be substantially free of SAP particles (21) and can further serve as acquisition (14), distribution (16) and rewet (15) layer.

In a further embodiment, SAP particles (21) can completely penetrated a monolayer or multilayers, preferably dual or triple layer structure. The top and bottom part of the structure being covered by a covering layer (22) such as a 5 spunbond, non-woven, spunlace or a film of polypropylene, polyethylene or PET, to prevent said SAP particles (21) from transferring to the outside of the absorbent.

In a preferred embodiment, the multilayers substrate (23) has 10 a porous top layer suitable to allow the penetration of the SAP particles (21) within the substrate (23) while the bottom layer, or one of the intermediate layer, is non-porous to prevent the loss of SAP particles (21) by transfer through the substrate (23). Advantageously, at least one additional 15 covering layer (22) is used to prevent any loss of SAP particles (21). In order to have more coverage additional 2 layers can be used.

If 2 layers are used, the edges of said covering layers (22) are glued to seal the structure. If one structure covering 20 layer (22) is used, said layer is fold to wrap the structure and the edges are glued to seal the structure (Figure 26).

Method to prepare an absorbent structure

A method to prepare an absorbent structure suitable for the 25 invention is illustrated in Figure 13 and comprises the step of:

- Unwinding (11) the fibrous substrate (7). Covering the substrate (7) with the SAP particles (21) by powder scattering (8) or by drum formation, through vacuum 30 technology of a standard diaper line.
- Applying an alternative electrical field to ensure a homogeneous distribution of the SAP particles (21), this method is also known as the Fibroline method (9)

described in EP 1 526 214 or EP 2 165 015 each incorporated herein by reference.

The SAP particles (21) are then dispersed in the substrate (7) and the SAP particles (21) are maintained in the fibrous substrate (7) by entrapment or entanglement and/or after an optional binding step wherein the SAP particles (21) are bonded to the non-woven fibres by the addition of glue.

- Unwinding (11) a core covering layer material (22).
- Applying an adhesive (10) on the inner face of the core covering layer (22) and/or the substrate surface (7).
- Covering the substrate (7) with said core covering layer material (22).
- Ensuring the adhesion by pressure (12).
- Winding the absorbent structure (13).
- Optionally, calendering the product to create a channel structure in the longitudinal direction.

A suitable device for the Fibroline method comprises a system of 2 face to face electrodes protected by a dielectric material and connected to an alternative high tension generator (10 to 50 kV) wherein:

The mixture of SAP particles (21) and adhesive is placed between the two dielectrics material and a strong alternative electric field is applied.

The devices (Figure 13) suitable to perform the method of preparation of an absorbent structure can be employed either in line or off line of an ADL and/or core production line or of a diaper or feminine care production line.

Preferably, the coated or uncoated SAP particles (21) are glued to the fibers of the ADL layers. None limitative

bonding method include powder coating and thermo bonding, heat treatment, spray coating, powder scattering, reactive glue (activation and curing) or any combination thereof.

5 SAP particles (21) of diameter ranging from about 45 μ m to about 850 μ m, preferably from about 100 to about 800 μ m and having an average diameter size of about 300 to 600 μ m are preferred as the small particles effectively penetrate the ADL while larger size particles remain on the outer side of
10 the diffusion layer thus forming a storage stratum (20).

Adhesive

Suitable glue according to the invention has to provide a
15 good adhesion, has to be permeable to liquids in order to allow the liquids to reach the absorbent layer and has to have an elongation at break of at least 100%, preferably of 600 to 1800 % in order to prevent gel blocking issue when the SAP particles (21) are swollen by body fluids. Preferred glue
20 are water based glue and solid powder glue, which are pulverized to bond the SAP particles (21). Suitable commercially available adhesives are, but not limited to, Bostik H4245; Bostik H20028; Bostik H4322 or Füller Full-Care 8400A.

25

Method to produce multiple absorbent cores and/or ADL

A method to produce an absorbent structure comprising an absorbent core and/or an ADL according to the invention is described in Figures 13 and 26.

30 Advantageously, said method can be adapted to produce profiled absorbent core and/or an ADL.

The unwinding substrate layer (7) has to be sufficiently wide to process several absorbent structures in parallel. It is therefore possible to scatter and supply SAP particles (21) in a discontinuous manner over the width or lateral 5 dimension or y direction of the substrate (7), as illustrated in Figure 14.

The method comprises the step of:

- Unwinding the fibrous substrate (7). Depending on the void volume distribution of the substrate (7), the substrate (7) can be maintained upwards during the process in order to prevent the loss of SAP particles (21).
- Partially deposit an amount of SAP particles (21) on the substrate (7) over the lateral, or y-direction, of the substrate (7) by powder scattering (8).
- Applying an alternative electrical field (9) to ensure a homogeneous distribution of the SAP particles (21), Said SAP particles (21) penetrate the substrate (7) and are maintained in the fibrous substrate (7) by entrapment or entanglement and/or after an optional binding step wherein the SAP particles (21) are bonded to the non-woven fibres by the addition of glue.
- Applying a hotmelt adhesive (10) on the substrate (7) surface and/or on the core covering layer (22).
- Unwinding (11) a core covering layer material.
- Covering the substrate (7) with said core covering layer (22). Where the SAP particles (21) are present, the hotmelt adhesive will bond the covering layer (22) to the substrate (7), binding the SAP particles in the totality (21). Where the substrate (7) is free of particles the adhesive will bond the core covering layer

(22) material to the substrate layer (7) on part of the substrate (7) essentially free of SAP particles (21) thus sealing the absorbent core. The sealing prevents SAP particles (21) from falling out when this cutting occurs and prevents the SAP particles (21) from moving to the sides.

5 Cutting the layer where substrate (7) essentially free of SAP particles (21) to obtain individual cores as illustrated in Figure 15.

10

Further, as, some migration will occur to the sides during the Fibroline process (Figure 20), it is possible to create a dispersion profile of the SAP particles (21) over the lateral dimension of the absorbent structure (Figure 16), creating a 15 higher SAP particles (21) concentration zone in the middle part of the absorbent structure, and a lower SAP particles (21) concentration zone on the sides, thus providing a higher body fluid storage capacity in the center of the absorbent structure preventing the possibility of leakage.

20

Advantageously a SAP particles (21) distribution profile can be obtained along the length or longitudinal dimension or x-direction of the absorbent structure. Said distribution profile is done by creating a profile in the supply roll used 25 to deposit the SAP particles (21) on the substrate (7) by a powder scattering step. Figure 17 illustrates a supply roll according to the invention wherein the front, middle and back sections of the substrate (7) will receive a specific amount of SAP particles (21).

30 The transition between the sections of different concentrations will be homogenized upon applying the Fibroline process.

As illustrated in Figure 18, a profiled absorbent structure along the longitudinal dimension (x-direction) can be obtained, using said supply roll, said structure comprising a higher amount of SAP particles (21) at the front and the 5 middle, and a lower amount of SAP at the back of the diaper.

The profiled absorbent structure obtained accordingly comprises an absorbent part comprising SAP particles (21) partially penetrated in a nonwoven substrate (23) and an 10 upper part serving as an ADL covered with a covering layer (22) and maintained by a hot melt adhesive. Thus the profiled absorbent structure can be directly used in absorbent articles.

15 Preferably, the deposit of SAP particles (21) on the non-woven substrate (23) has a lateral and a longitudinal profile as illustrated in Figure 25. As after the dispersion of the SAP particles (21) by the Fibroline process, the absorbent structure obtained will have an optimized absorbing ability 20 due to the amount of SAP particles (21) dispersed within the substrate (23).

In a preferred embodiment, the SAP particles (21) are also dispersed in discrete zones along the x-direction and/or y- 25 direction of the substrate (23), each discrete zone being separated from one another (Figure 19). Following the Fibroline process, the resulting absorbent core and/or ADL comprises, different motifs such as bands, or channels free of SAP particles (21) thereby facilitating the flow and 30 wicking of the fluid (Figures 19 and 20).

The absorbent structure can be used as a ready to use absorbent structure for absorbent articles (Figure 26) and

can easily fitted in body shaped absorbent articles (Figure 24).

Examples

5 Examples of SAP particles (21) suitable for the invention are FAVOR SXM 10000 and FAVOR SXM 9155 from Evonik.

FAVOR SXM 10000 is a partially neutralized cross-linked sodium polyacrylate polymer having a size dispersion of 10 approximately:

Particles size (μm)	%
SAP > 850 μm	< 1%
600 μm < SAP < 850 μm	20- 45%
300 μm < SAP < 600 μm	30-60%
150 μm < SAP < 300 μm	5-25%
45 μm < SAP < 150 μm	< 3%
SAP < 45 μm	< 1%

FAVOR SXM 9155 is a cross-linked sodium polyacrylate polymer having a size dispersion of approximately:

15

Particles size (μm)	%
SAP > 850 μm	< 1%
600 μm < SAP < 850 μm	~ 35%
300 μm < SAP < 600 μm	~ 44%
150 μm < SAP < 300 μm	~ 16%
45 μm < SAP < 150 μm	~ 3%
SAP < 45 μm	< 1%

distribution layers allow the liquid to migrate away from the user. A third function is to prevent rewetting by the liquid.

A multilayered ADL is disclosed in Belgian patent BE 1 018 5 052 which relates to an improved multilayered ADL system comprising a 3 layers acquisition (2) and distribution layers (3, 4) improving the distribution of the liquid (Figure 2). Acquisition layers (2) are generally composed of coarse hydrophilic or hydrophobic fibers that quickly transmit the 10 liquid by capillarity to the dispersion layers. Said dispersion layers generally comprise hydrophilic material and fibers suitable in hygiene articles such as profiled or shaped multilobal fibers ranging from 0.7 to 30 dtex and preferably from 1.5 to 7 dtex.

15

SAP particles

Typical SAP particles (21) are composed of crosslinked hydrophilic polymers chains capable of absorbing about a 10 time water uptake based on the weight of the dried particles. 20 Hydrophilic polymers are either natural or synthetic polymers or a mixture of both types. Common natural polymers include cellulose-based polymer such as cellulose or starch eventually modified by additional hydrophilic functions for example carboxylates, phosphonate or sulfoxylate. Synthetic 25 hydrophilic polymers are generally a polyether or a polyacrylate based polymer.

SAP particles (21) can advantageously be coated or partially coated. The additional coating improves or provides additional properties to the SAP particles (21) such as a 30 better body fluid absorbing capacity, a better adhesion of the particles to the surrounding, an improved capacity for transportation of liquids or better mechanical properties.

Absorbent cores

Absorbent cores generally comprise a mixture of SAP particles (21) and a substrate (23) such as fibers, layers, fluff or any combination thereof.

5 When the absorbent core is wetted, the SAP particles (21) are able to absorb a large amount of liquid; however wet SAP particles (21) are subject to swelling thus forming a gel with the adjacent swollen SAP particles (21). Said gel formation can block the liquid transmission into the interior
10 of the absorbent core.

As consequence, gel blocking leads to potential leakage and/or rewettability issues. To prevent gel blocking and to improve the fluid absorbent capacity of the absorbent core, individual SAP particle (21) have to be sufficiently distant
15 from one another. This is generally obtained by mixing the SAP particles (21) with cellulose-based fluff.

Thinner absorbent core can also be obtained by reducing the amount of fluff used in the composition of the absorbent core.

20 For examples, US 5,763,331 discloses a fluffless absorbent core comprising SAP granular material such as acrylate or a biodegradable material firmly bonded to a support layer such as paper or non-woven fabric. The adhesive used to glue the superabsorbent granular component to the main support layer
25 is applied by spraying.

It is known from US 2003/175418 and US 2002/0090453 a method to prevent particle loss and agglomeration. These patents disclose a process for stably affixing SAP powder onto
30 substrates such as a sheet, film, foam or fiber treated with a curable liquid resin or solution of curable resin such as a thermoplastic resinous powder. SAP powder is applied to the surface of a polymeric material and coated with a curable

liquid resin and then cured, by heating. The absorbent film obtained has reduced particle agglomeration and particle loss. Alternatively, the SAP powder is coated with a resinous material and applied to the surface of a polymeric material 5 and cured. Absorbent film obtained accordingly can be interposed between sheets to form an absorbent core.

WO 03/092757 also discloses a method to prepare a fluffless absorbent core composed of sheets of SAP particles and 10 plasticizer. The plasticizer is sprayed onto the SAP particles followed by a thermal pressing. The plasticizer improving the flexibility and structural integrity to the sheet without imparting the rewettability and the acquisition rates of the absorbent core. The method disclosed also 15 facilitates the manufacturing of absorbent articles.

It is also known from US 4,232,674 a liquid absorbent device wherein superabsorbent polymer particles are deposit in predetermined patterns, such as parallel stripes to leave 20 uncovered areas for capillary flow of liquid from saturated to unsaturated areas of the layer.

To improve the liquid retention of absorbent articles, it is also known to prepare a multilayered absorbent core. For 25 example, US 2003/135178 discloses an absorbent laminate core comprising an upper and a lower layer and inner layers wherein one of the inner layers is a central fibrous layer such as tow fibers containing SAP. The other inner layer is a layer selected from an acquisition layer, a distribution 30 layer, an additional fibrous layer optionally containing SAP, a wicking layer, a storage layer, or combinations and fragments thereof.

Multilayered absorbent core may also be obtained from the combination of an absorbent layer or storage layer with a conventional ADL (19) in a unitary structure to form an absorbent core. Unitary absorbent core also generally have a 5 reduced thickness and facilitate the processing of absorbent articles.

Some examples of unitary absorbent cores are disclosed in WO 92/11831. It is known from this document an absorbent article 10 comprising a liquid pervious topsheet, a liquid impervious backsheet and a multi-layered absorbent core positioned between the topsheet and the backsheet. Said absorbent core comprising a multi-layered absorbent body comprising acquisition/distribution layers and a storage layers 15 positioned subjacent each acquisition layer and comprising an absorbent gelling material. A wrapped multi-layered absorbent body is obtained by wrapping the multi-layered absorbent with fluid transporting wrapping.

WO 91/11163 discloses an absorbent structure having an ADL 20 comprising binding means and chemically stiffened cellulosic fibers, preferably curled and a fluid storage layer positioned beneath each ADL comprising SAP particles with an average diameter of 400 to 700 microns and carrier means for 25 the SAP particles.

WO 00/41882 discloses a 2 plies absorbent structure, each ply 30 comprises SAP particles in different concentration and dispersed either homogeneously within a matrix of fibers and binder or placed in discrete locations or zones such as lanes within the structure.

Each ply is composed of several strata in liquid communication. The different density of the 2 plies creating a capillary tension gradient between the plies.

5 US 2008/312625, US 2008/312632 and US 2008/3126621 disclose a substantially cellulose free absorbent core comprising 2 absorbent layers each having a substrate comprising SAP particles and thermoplastic adhesive covering the SAP particles. The 2 absorbent layers are jointed together such
10 that a portion of the thermoplastic adhesive of the 2 absorbent layers is in contact. The 2 absorbent layers being combined together such the respective patterns of absorbent particulate polymer material are offset from one another.

15 It is known from US 2007/027436 a thin, conformable and flexible absorbent article comprising a fluid permeable topsheet, a backsheet joined to said topsheet about a periphery of said absorbent article and a core disposed between said topsheet and said backsheet, said core comprising a storage layer containing superabsorbent material and an acquisition/storage layer containing superabsorbent material.

20

With regard to the cited prior art there is a need to improve
25 unitary absorbent structures which provide comfort to the users, a higher absorption ability, mechanical stability, thinness, low rewettability and which are easy to process in an absorbent article.

30 **Summary of the invention**

The present invention is related to an improved unitary absorbent structure comprising an absorbent core (5) having a permanent liquid holding capacity and/or an acquisition (14)

and dispersion layer (16) having a temporary holding liquid capacity, said absorbent core (5) and/or acquisition (14) and dispersion layer (16) comprising at least one non-woven material such as a fibrous substrate (23) layer having a void 5 volume suitable to be penetrated with super absorbent particles (SAP particles) (21), and adhesives, and said super absorbent particles are dispersed in the substrate layer (23) according to a size distribution gradient along the depth direction or z-direction of said absorbent core (5) and/or 10 acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) unitary layer. Figures 9, 10, 11, 21, 22 and 23 illustrate different embodiments comprising a distribution of SAP particles (21) in a substrate (23).

In a second aspect, the invention relates to a method for 15 producing said absorbent core and/or ADL.

It is an object of the invention to reduce the thickness of absorbent articles by reducing the amount of fluff generally used in absorbent core, generally comprised in the range of 20 40 to 60 wt.%, without imparting the body fluid absorbing capacity, uptake speed and rewettability of the absorbent core. Further, the absorbent structures according to the invention is fluffless; wherein by fluffless it should be understood that the layer comprises less than 4 wt. % fluff, 25 advantageously the absorbent structures does not comprise any fluff at all and wherein fluff refers to a cellulose fluff.

In a further aspect, the invention relates to an absorbent structure having a high body fluid absorbent capacity without 30 being subject to gel blocking issue.

In a further aspect, the invention relates to an absorbent structure that includes an ADL to form an improved

multilayered absorbent core wherein the ADL and the absorbent layer are unitary and integrated.

In a further aspect the invention relates to absorbent
5 structures or multilayered absorbent structures combined with
an additional conventional ADL (19) with or without a fluid
holding capacity.

It is a further object of the invention to provide an
10 integrated ready to use absorbent structure able to be
directly incorporated in absorbent articles.

Description of the drawings

Figure 1: is a cross-sectional view of a typical absorbent
15 article comprising from top to bottom a liquid pervious
topsheet (1) and a liquid impervious backsheet (6), an
acquisition and distribution system (2, 3 and 4), an
absorbent core (5) generally composed of a mix of fluff and
SAP; typically, the amount of SAP range from between 0 to 60
20 wt.%.

Figure 2: is a cross-sectional view of a 3 layered
conventional ADL (19) comprising from top to bottom an
acquisition layer (2) and 2 distribution layers (3) and (4).

Figure 3: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising
25 from top to bottom a triple layer acquisition (14), rewet
(15) and distribution (16) layers.

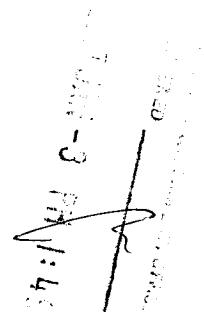
Figure 4: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising
triple layer acquisition (14), distribution (16), rewet (15)
layers.

30 Figure 5: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising
from top to bottom a triple layer acquisition (14) and rewet
(15) layers.

Figure 6: is a cross-sectional view of a substrate comprising

CLAIMS

1. A unitary absorbent structure comprising an absorbent core (5) having a permanent liquid holding capacity and an acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) layer having a temporary liquid holding capacity, said absorbent core (5) or said acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) layer comprising at least one non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) having a void volume suitable to be penetrated by super absorbent particles (21), said super absorbent particles (21) having a size distribution and being dispersed within the non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) according to their particle size distribution gradient along the depth direction or z-direction of said absorbent core (5) or acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) layers, characterized in that at least 90% of the super absorbent particles have a particle size diameter ranging from 45 to 850 μm , said absorbent structure comprises less than 4 wt.% fluff and is further coated by a covering layer (22), and wherein smaller size super absorbent particles (21) are able to penetrate, along the z direction, into the bottom part of the substrate (23) while the larger size super absorbent particles (21) remain on the outer part or on the surface of the substrate (23).



2. An absorbent structure according to claim 1 **characterized in that**
super absorbent particles (21) size distribution is ranging from 45 to 850
5 μm .

3. An absorbent structure according to any one of the previous claims
characterized in that said non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) has a
void volume ranging from 0.1 to 20000 cm^3/m^2 of substrate (23) surface.

10

4. An absorbent structure according to claim 3 **characterized in that**
said non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) is a multi layer substrate (23).

15

5. An absorbent structure according to claim 4, **characterized in that**
said non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) is a triple layer comprising: - a
top acquisition (14) and dispersion (16) layer; - an intermediate layer, said
intermediate layer having a void volume value ranging from 10 to 600 cm^3
per m^2 of substrate (23); and - a bottom layer having a void volume
ranging from 10 to 600 cm^3 per m^2 of substrate (23).

20

6. An absorbent structure according to claim 5 **characterized in that**
(i) the super absorbent particles (21) are distributed depending on a

profile along the longitudinal dimension or x-direction of said absorbent structure; and/or (ii) the super absorbent particles (21) are distributed depending on a profile along the lateral direction or y-direction of said absorbent structure.

5

7. An absorbent structure according to claim 6, **characterized in that** the super absorbent particles (21) are dispersed in discrete zones on the non-woven fibrous substrate layer (23) separated from one another, thereby facilitating the flow and wicking of the liquid along the x-direction and/or y-direction of said absorbent structure.

10

8. A method to prepare an absorbent structure as defined in .claim 1 comprising the steps of: unwinding the non-woven fibrous substrate (23); covering, at least partially, the non-woven fibrous substrate (23) with the super absorbent particles (21); applying an alternative electrical field to ensure a homogeneous distribution of the super absorbent particles 21), unwinding a core covering layer material (22); applying an adhesive on the inner face of the core covering layer material (22) and/or the non-woven fibrous substrate (23) surface; covering the non-woven fibrous substrate (23) with said core covering layer material (22); ensuring the adhesion by pressure.

15

20

9. A method according to claim 8 **characterized by** the use of powder scattering or drum formation through vacuum technology in the step of covering the non-woven fibrous substrate (23) surface with the super absorbent particles (21).

10. An absorbent article comprising at least one absorbent structure as defined in claim 1.

10 11. An absorbent article according to claim 10 comprising: (a) a liquid pervious top sheet; (b) a liquid impervious back sheet; (c) an absorbent structure as defined in claim 1, positioned between (a) and (b).

15 12. An absorbent article according to claim 11 comprising an additional acquisition (2) and dispersion (3) layers positioned on top of said absorbent structure; or comprising an additional absorbent core positioned underneath said absorbent structure.

20 13. An absorbent article according to claim 12, **characterized in that** said article is selected from the group consisting of a diaper, a light or heavy incontinent pad, a feminine care sanitary napkin, a panty liner and a wound dressing.

14. An absorbent article according to claim 13 wherein (i) said
absorbent article is a diaper or light and/or heavy incontinent pad
5 comprising from 0.1 to 1000 g/m², of super absorbent particles; or (ii)said
absorbent article is a feminine care sanitary napkin or panty liner
comprising from 0.1 to 1000 g/m² of super absorbent particles; or (iii) said
absorbent article is a wound dressing comprising from 0.1 to 1000 g/m² of
super absorbent particles.

10

15

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1:50
Fig. 1

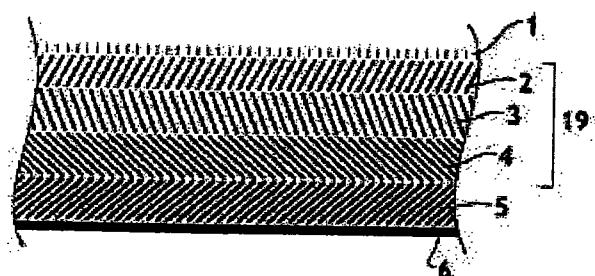


Fig. 2

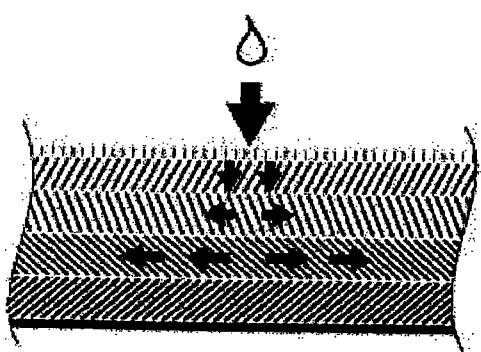
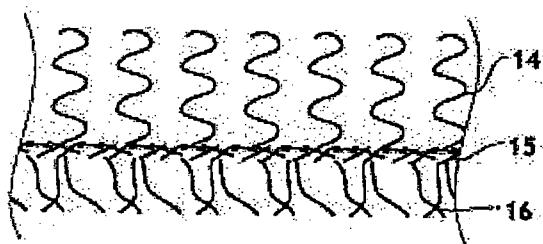


Fig. 3



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Fig 1

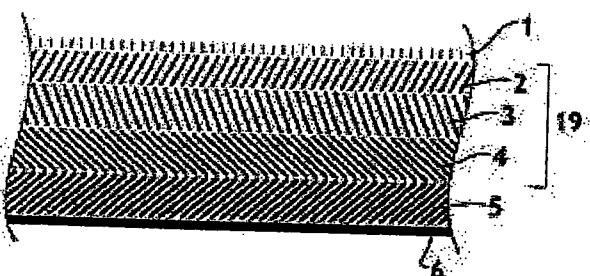


Fig 2

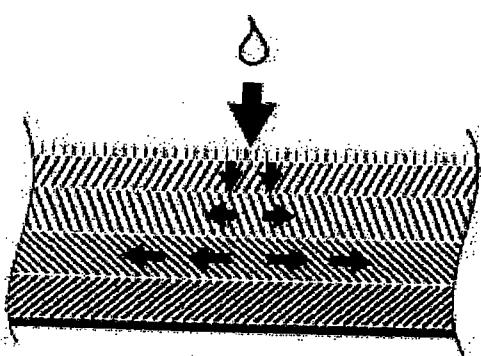
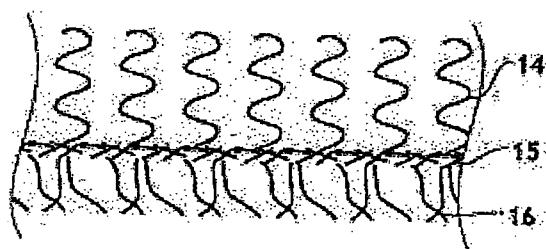


Fig 3



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Fig. 4

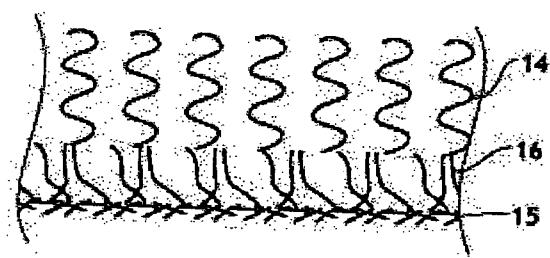


Fig. 5

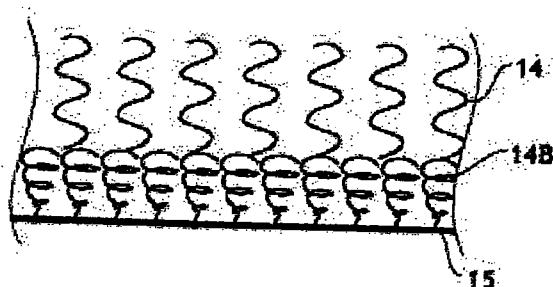


Fig. 6

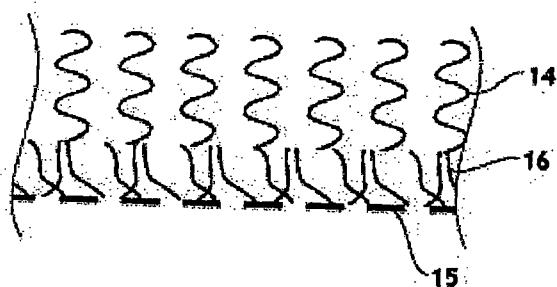
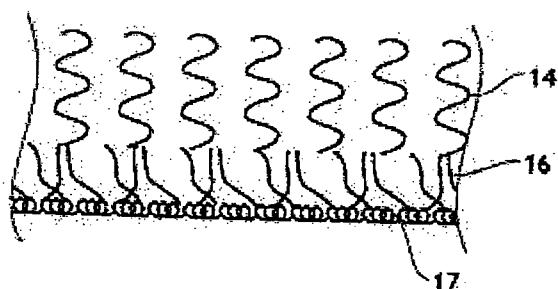


Fig. 7



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Fig 8

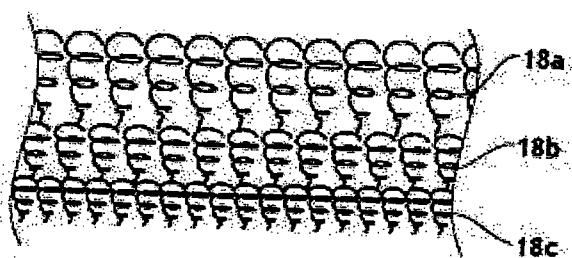


Fig 9

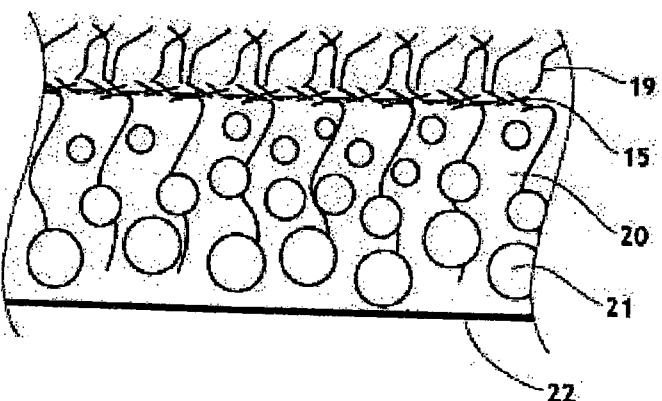
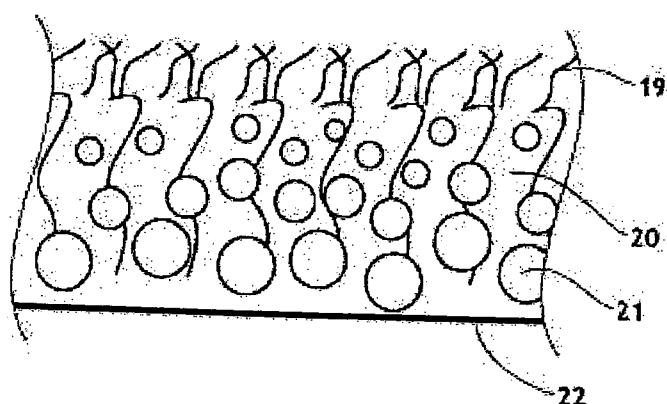


Fig 10



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Fig. 11

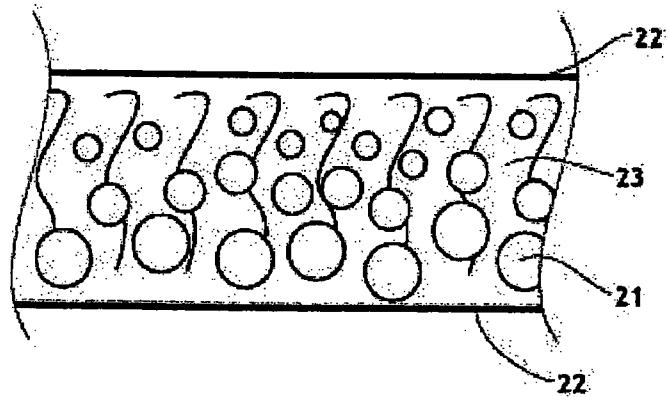
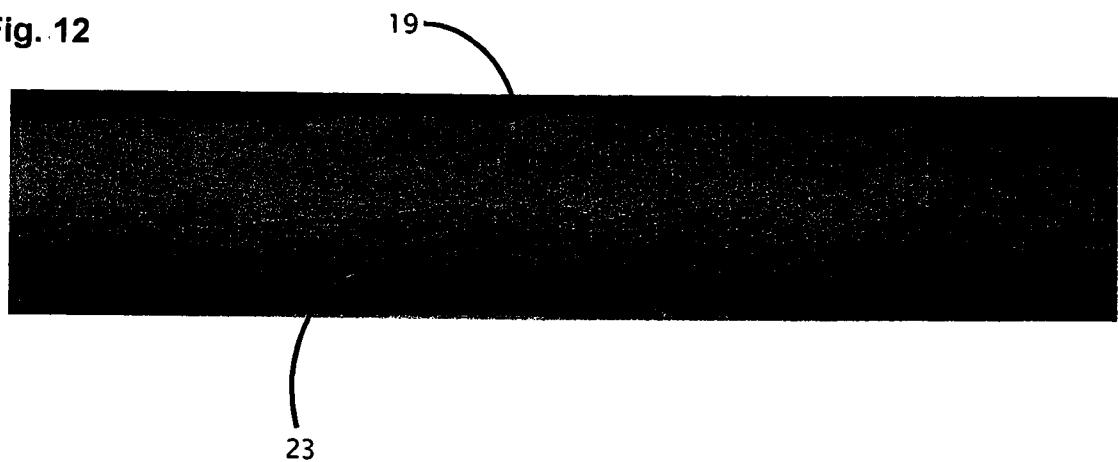


Fig. 12



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Fig 13

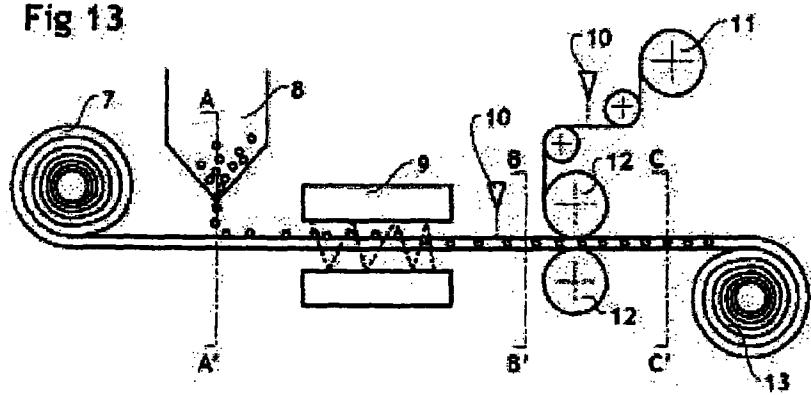


Fig 14

AA'Cut

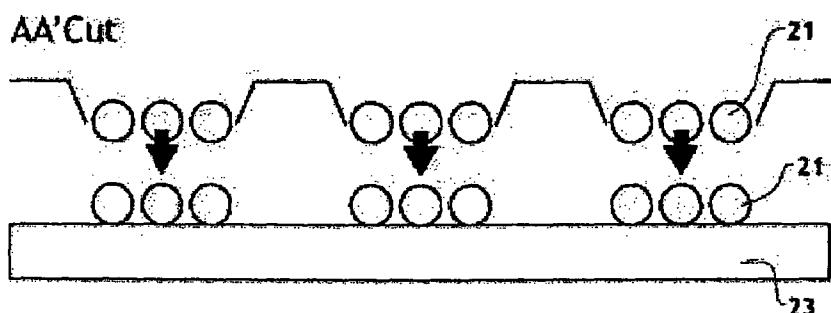


Fig 15

BB'Cut

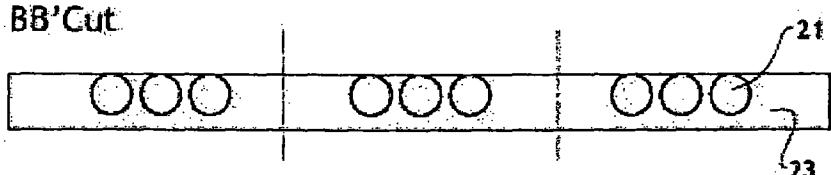
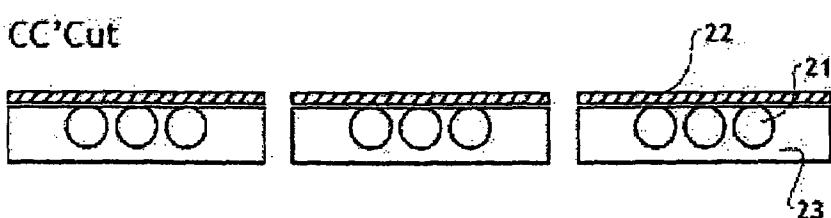


Fig 16

CC'Cut



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GIZELA M. GONZALEZ
Patent Attorney

Fig 17

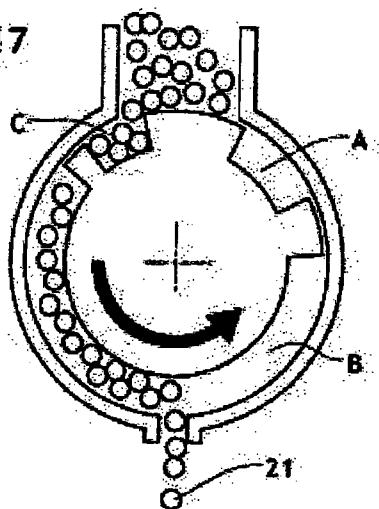
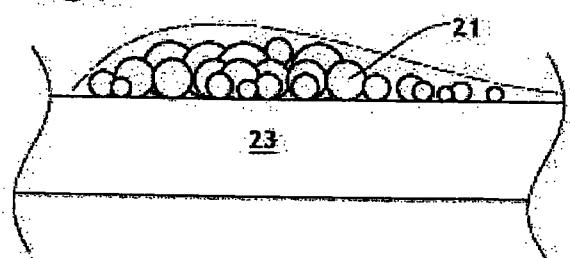


Fig 18



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Fig. 19

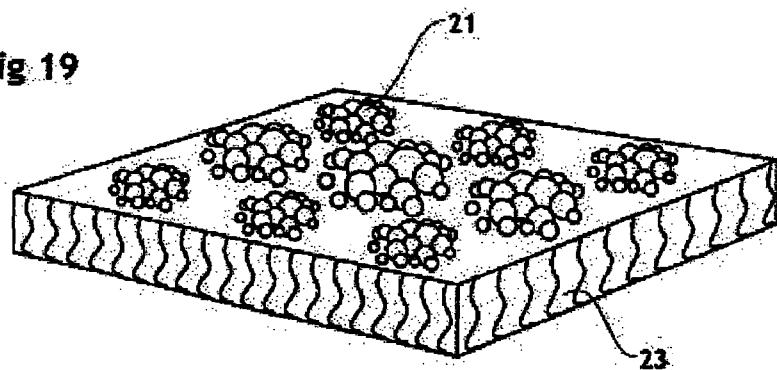
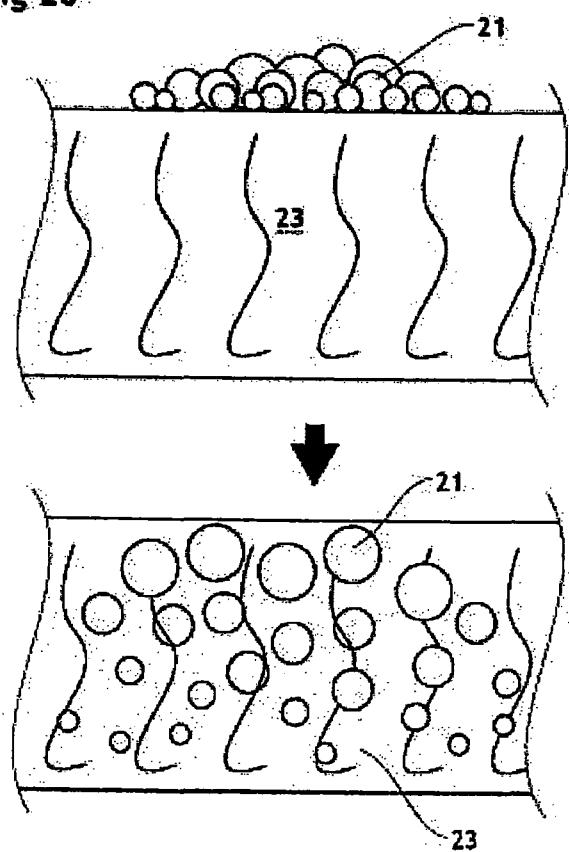


Fig. 20



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Fig. 21

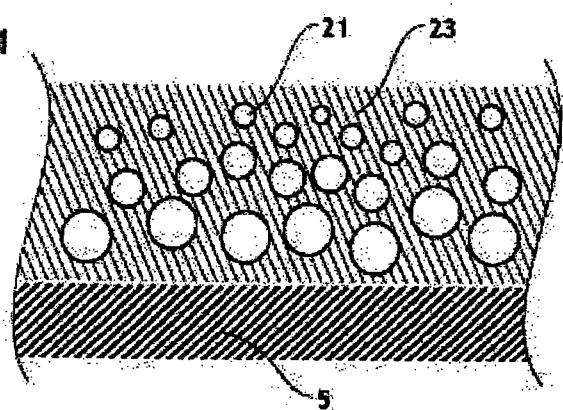


Fig. 22

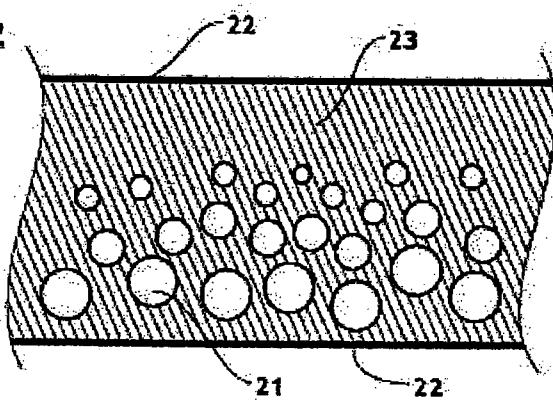
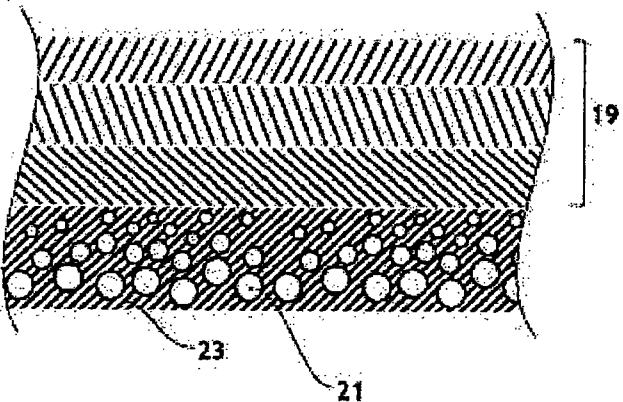


Fig. 23



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Fig. 24

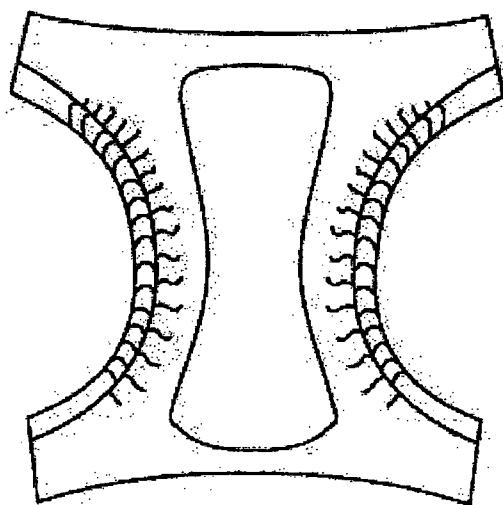
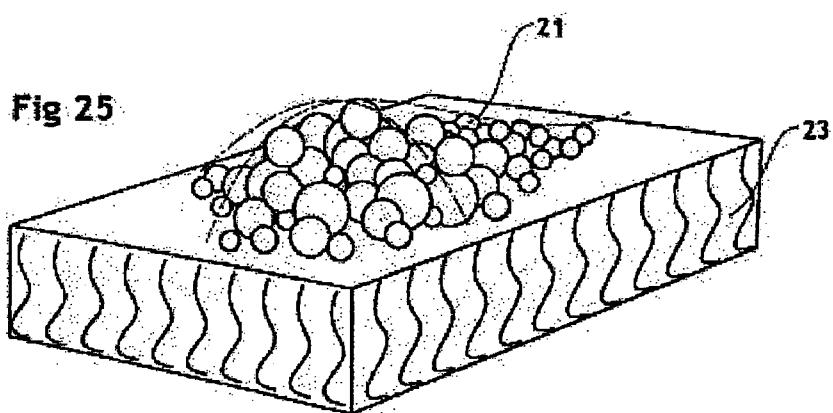


Fig. 25

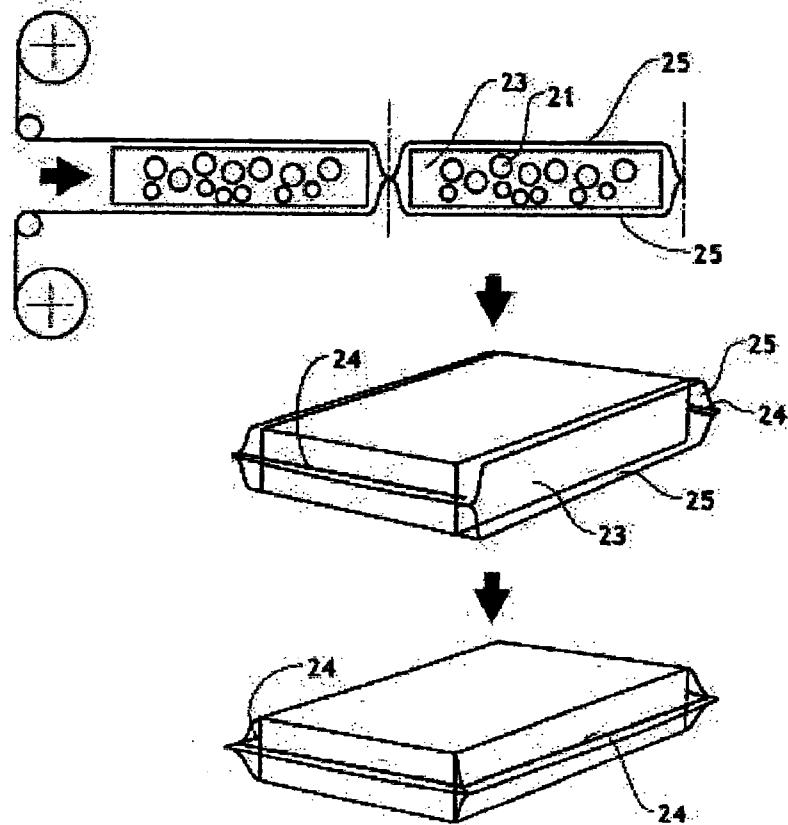


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Applicant
Romulo, Mabanta, Buenaventura
Sayoc & de los Angeles

By

GIZELA M. GONZALEZ
Patent Attorney

Fig 26



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Romulo, Mabanta, Buenaventura
Sayoc & de los Angeles

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GIZELA M. GONZALEZ
Patent Attorney