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Declarations under Rule 4.17:

— *of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv))*

(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, ST, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE,

Published:

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

Method of forming a container packaging with ambient fill and diaphragm inversion

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

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The invention generally relates to the packaging of containers made of plastics, wherein containers are filled with contents at a temperature lower than or equal to ambient temperature, and then capped.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Containers are usually manufactured by blow molding, which generally comprises:

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- heating a blank (a term which designates either a raw injected preform or an intermediate container obtained by pre-blow molding a preform) made of a plastic material such as PET (polyethylene terephthalate) at a temperature above the glass transition temperature of the material (about 80°C for PET),
- inserting the such heated blank into a mold including a sidewall defining a counter print of the container,
- injecting a gas (such as air) under pressure (equal to or more than 15 bars) into the blank.

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The blowing may be supplemented by stretching the blank by means of a sliding rod (named "stretching rod").

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During blow molding or stretch blow molding, the material undergoes a dual molecular orientation (axial and radial, i.e. respectively parallel and perpendicular to the general axis of the container). This dual molecular orientation gives the container a certain structural rigidity.

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However, recent years have witnessed a decrease in the quantity of material allowed for the manufacturing of containers. In other words, containers and, hence, preforms (or blanks) are always lighter, responding to requests for energy consumption – and pollution – reductions.

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One well-known method of increasing the rigidity of a container is heat setting, which consists of increasing the cristallinity rate of the material by means of heat, and more precisely by heating the sidewall of the mold against which the material is applied at the end of blowing, see

e.g. French patent No. FR 2 649 035 (Sidel Participations) or its American equivalent U.S. Pat. No. 5,145,632. However, due to its cost and its reduced production rates, heat setting is generally restricted to hot-fill containers, i.e. containers filled with a content at a temperature well above ambient temperature (generally above 80°C).

For ambient fill applications (such as still water, flavored water, fruit juices), manufacturers usually resort to shape tricks to cheaply increase the mechanical strength of the containers. As an example, the container depicted in European and American patent applications No. EP 2 580 132 and US 2013/175236 (Sidel Participations) is provided with stiffeners which extend radially on the bottom of the container.

However, such stiffeners may prove insufficient in severe load conditions, e.g. if the container is located in the lower row of a pallet and/or if the allowed quantity of material further decreases.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention to increase the mechanical resistance of an ambient (or cold) fill container packaging.

It is another object of the invention to allow for further lightening of containers intended for ambient (or cold) fill.

It is therefore provided a method of forming a packaging, said method including the steps of:

- providing an empty container comprising a sidewall, an open neck and a base, wherein said container includes an invertible diaphragm in an outwardly-protruding position;
- a filling step of pouring, within the container through the neck, a product at a temperature lower than or equal to ambient temperature;
- a capping step of sealingly closing the filled container by means of a cap mounted onto the neck;
- an inversion step of displacing the diaphragm to an inwardly-protruding position, said inversion step being conducted within seconds after sealingly closing the container.

In various embodiments, taken either separately or in combination:

- the base includes a high standing ring, and the diaphragm is centrally

provided on the base;

- the temperature of the poured product is lower than or equal to 40°C, and possibly lower than 20°C;
- the product is water;
- 5 – the inversion step is conducted by means of a mechanical pusher;
- the inversion step is initiated before completion of the capping step.

The above and other objects and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the detailed description of preferred embodiments, considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG.1 is a cut view of an empty container provided with a high standing ring and a diaphragm shown in an outwardly-protruding position.

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FIG.2 is a cut view of the container of **FIG.1**, during a filling step.

FIG.3 is a cut view of the container of **FIG.1** and **FIG.2**, after completion of the filling step and capping step.

FIG.4 is a cut view of the container of **FIG.3**, after completion of the inversion step.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shown on **FIG.1** is a container **1** manufactured by blow molding or stretch blow molding from a blank (e.g. a preform) made of plastic such as PET. As will be discussed hereinafter, the container **1** is suitable for being filled with a content at a temperature lower than or equal to ambient (or room) temperature. In one embodiment, the content is water (such as still water or flavored water). In another embodiment, the content is a fruit juice.

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The container **1** includes an open cylindrical threaded upper portion or neck **2**, which terminates, at an upper end thereof, by an opening or mouth **3** by which the container **1** is capable of being filled and subsequently emptied. Below the neck **2**, the container **1** includes a shoulder **4** of increasing diameter in a direction opposite to the neck **2**.

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Below the shoulder **4**, the container **1** has a sidewall **5**, which is substantially cylindrical around a container main axis **X**. The sidewall **5**

may, as depicted in **FIG.1**, include annular stiffening ribs **6** designed to increase mechanical resistance of the sidewall **5** to stresses undergone by the container **1** during filling, capping and subsequent handling.

At a lower end of the sidewall **5**, the container **1** has a base **7** (also
5 called bottom), which closes the container **1** and allows it to be normally put on a planar surface (such as a table when used by a final customer, or such as an upper surface of a conveyor during automatic handling of the container **1**).

The container base **7** includes a standing ring **8**, which is a high
10 standing ring as it will be explained later, and a central invertible diaphragm **9**, which has symmetry of revolution around the main axis **X** and is deformable with respect to the sidewall **5** between an outwardly-protruding (or lower) position shown on **FIG.1-FIG.3**, wherein the diaphragm **9** projects outwardly with respect to the container **1**, and an
15 inwardly-protruding (or upper) position, shown on **FIG.4**, wherein the diaphragm **9** projects inwardly with respect to the container **1**.

The container **1** is blow molded with the diaphragm **9** in its lower position. As will be explained in further details below, the diaphragm **9** is capable of being mechanically forced upwards (i.e. inwards with respect to
20 the container **1**) after the container **1** has been filled with a pourable product, in order to increase the overall rigidity of the filled container **1**, for the benefits of mechanical performances of the container **1** during handling and storage, and also for the benefits of customer quality perception.

The standing ring **8** connects to the sidewall **5** of the container **1** at a
25 lower end portion **10** thereof. The standing ring **8** has a support flange **11** adjacent and substantially perpendicular to the lower end portion **10** of the sidewall **5**, and a cylindrical or frustoconical inner portion **12** which connects the support flange **11** to the diaphragm **9**. The support flange **11** is also substantially perpendicular to the container main axis **X**.

30 In a preferred embodiment, the lower end portion **10** of the sidewall **5** has, when viewed in transversal section as shown on **FIG.1**, the shape of an arch with a concavity turned inward with respect to the container **1**, whereby the outer diameter of the support flange **11** is smaller than the overall diameter of the sidewall **5**.

35 As depicted, the inner portion **12** preferably has the shape of a frustum of a cone and, when viewed in transversal section as shown on

FIG.1 and **FIG.2**, inclines inwardly with respect to the container **1**, with a draft angle.

The cone shape of the inner portion **12** provides a vault stiffening and locking function to the diaphragm **9** in its inverted position (shown in **FIG.4**), whereby the restriction of diameter of the inner portion **12** at its junction with the diaphragm **9** prevents the latter to articulate back from its inverted position with respect to the inner portion **12**. As a result, the risk of the diaphragm **9** inverting back from its inwardly-protruding position to its initial outwardly-protruding position under the pressure of the content is suppressed or, at least, lowered.

The surface of the diaphragm **9** is preferably smooth and has no corrugations. This may increase the force required for inverting the diaphragm **9** from its lower position to its upper position, but it however increases stability of the diaphragm **9** in the upper position and reduces the risk of inversion back to the lower position.

The inner portion **12** has an axial extension which is important with respect to the outer diameter of the support flange **11**, hence the expression "high standing ring" to name the standing ring **8**. More specifically, the axial extension (or height) of the inner portion **12** is greater than 1/10 of the outer diameter of the support flange **11**, and preferably comprised between 1/10 and 1/5 of the outer diameter of the support flange **11**.

In the blown configuration of the container **1** depicted on **FIG.1**, the invertible diaphragm **9** extends outwards in a frusto-conical shape from an outer edge **13** where the diaphragm **9** connects to an upper end of the inner portion **12**, to an inner edge **14** where the diaphragm **9** connects to a central upwardly protruding recess **15**.

Also in the blown configuration of the container **1**, the axial extension, or height, of the diaphragm **9**, is such that the inner edge **14** of the diaphragm **9** extends slightly above a support plane defined at the junction between the support flange **11** and the lower end portion **10** of the sidewall **5**. In other words, the height of the diaphragm **9** is slightly lower than the height of the standing ring **8**.

After the container **1** has been blow molded, it undergoes, within a filling unit, a filling step of pouring a product **16** (such as a liquid, e.g. a beverage, for example water) through its neck **2** (and more precisely

through its mouth **3**). The product **16** is poured at a temperature, denoted T , lower than or equal to ambient temperature (denoted T_0), which corresponds to the average temperature which may be measured outside the container **1**, not necessarily in the vicinity thereof. The filling step is depicted on **FIG.2**. The filling step is conducted with the diaphragm **9** in the lower position.

When $T < T_0$, the filling is referred to as a cold filling.

When $T = T_0$ (or $T \geq T_0$), the filling is referred to as an ambient filling.

If the ambient temperature T_0 is of about 40°C , then the temperature T of the product **16** is equal to or less than 40°C . This corresponds to ambient temperature in warm countries (such as tropical countries).

If the ambient temperature T_0 is of about 20°C , then the temperature T of the product **16** is equal to or less than 20°C (temperature T of the product may be even lower, such as in the case of spring water, which may be as fresh as 10°C). Those examples are normal ambient temperature in western countries.

The container **1** is normally not fully filled, so there remains an empty volume (also called headspace) **17** above the product **16** within the neck **2**. The volume of poured product **16** may vary from one container **1** to another. As a consequence, the headspace **17** may also vary from one container **1** to another, although the headspace **17** should always be substantially equal in volume to a reference headspace corresponding to the correct volume of dispensed product.

The filled container **1** then undergoes a capping step of sealingly closing the mouth **3** (and hence the container **1**) by means of a cap **18** mounted onto the neck **2**. In a preferred embodiment, neck **2** and cap **18** are both correspondingly threaded and the cap **18** is screwed onto the neck **2** to provide sealing closure of the container **1**.

The container **1** also undergoes an inversion step of displacing the diaphragm **9** to its inwardly-protruding position.

As depicted on **FIG.3** and **FIG.4**, the inversion step may be conducted within a processing unit **19** comprising a container support ring **20** suitable for engaging the container base **7**. More precisely, the support ring **20** forms a counter print of at least the support flange **11** and the lower end portion **10** of the container sidewall **5**.

The processing unit **19** further includes a container retaining member **21** for rigidly retaining the container **1** in vertical position with its base located within the support ring **20** while the diaphragm **9** is being inverted.

In the depicted example, the retaining member **21** is provided with a
5 conical head suitable for vertically coming into abutment with the cap **18** along the container axis **X**.

The processing unit **19** further includes a mechanical pusher **22** movable with respect to the support ring **20** and capable of coming into abutment with the container base **7** through the support ring **20** for
10 inverting the diaphragm **9** from its outwardly-protruding position (**FIG.3**) to its inwardly-protruding position (**FIG.4**).

More precisely, the pusher **22** is slidingly displaceable along the axis **X** for coming into abutment within the central recess **15**. In the depicted example, the pusher **22** has a tip **23** which is complementary in shape to
15 the central recess **15**, but the tip **23** may be of a simpler shape, such as a cylinder.

The processing unit **19** further includes an actuator **24** for slidingly moving the pusher **22** frontwards (i.e. upwards) towards the container base **7** through the support ring **20** in order to achieve inversion of the
20 diaphragm **9**, and backwards (i.e. downwards) thereafter, to be ready for the inversion cycle of another container.

More precisely, in the depicted example, it can be seen that the actuator **24** is a hydraulic or pneumatic cylinder, preferably of the two-way type.

25 The actuator **24** has a cylinder housing **25**, a piston **26** and a rod **27** fixed to the piston **26**, with the pusher **22** mounted onto the rod **27** or integral therewith.

In a known manner, the actuator **24** has a closure head **28** and a closure bottom **29** connected through the housing **25**. The piston **26**
30 defines within the housing **25** a front chamber **30** around the rod **27** and a back chamber **31** opposite to the rod **27**, whereby the front chamber **30** is mainly defined between the piston **26** and the closure head **28** whereas the back chamber **31** is mainly defined between the piston **26** and the closure bottom **29**.

35 The back chamber **31** is in fluidic connection, through a bottom fluid port **32** formed in the closure bottom **29**, with a control valve linked to a

source of fluid (such as air or oil) under pressure and to a vent. Likewise, the front chamber **30** is also in fluidic connection, through an upper fluid port **33** formed in the closure head **28**, with a control valve linked to a source of fluid under pressure and to a vent. The back chamber **31** and front chamber **30** are alternately fluidly connected to the source of fluid and to the vent, so as to move the pusher **22** forth (or up) and back (or down) between a lower position in which the piston **26** is in the vicinity of the closure bottom **29** (**FIG.3**), and an upper position in which the piston **26** is in the vicinity of the closure head **28** (**FIG.4**).

10 Inversion of the diaphragm **9** is conducted as described hereinafter.

Starting from the lower position of the piston **26**, the back chamber **31** is connected to the source of fluid whereas the front chamber **30** is connected to the vent, so that the piston **26**, together with the whole mechanical pusher **22**, begins to move forward (or up), away from its lower position. The pusher **22** moves forward in a linear manner with respect to time as long as it encounters no resistance.

About one tenth of a second to few tenths of a second after the back chamber **31** has been connected to the source of fluid, the pusher **22** comes in contact with the container base **7**, and more precisely with the central recess **15**, and begins to push the same inwards with respect to the container **1**. As the pusher **22** continues to move upwards to its upper position, the diaphragm **9** is inverted to its inwardly-protruding position (**FIG.3**).

During inversion of the diaphragm **9**, the product **16**, which is virtually incompressible, is displaced upwardly, whereby the gas (generally air) enclosed in the headspace **17** is compressed by a volume substantially equal to the volume (so-called extraction volume) swept by the diaphragm **9** during its inversion, between its outwardly-protruding and outwardly-protruding positions.

30 After the pusher **22** has reached its upper position, it is preferably held in position for a period of time of several tenths of seconds to about one second or few seconds to ensure stabilization (and dampen vibrations) of the diaphragm **9** in its inwardly-protruding position and prevent its re-inversion back to its outwardly-protruding position.

35 The pusher **22** is then moved back to its lower position which it holds until the next cycle is initiated with another container **1**. To do so, the front

chamber **30** is connected to the source of fluid whereas the back chamber **31** is connected to the vent, so that the piston **26**, together with the whole mechanical pusher **22**, moves backwards to the lower position.

5 The inversion step is conducted within seconds after sealingly closing the container **1**. The expression "sealingly closing" does not necessarily mean that the cap **18** is completely screwed onto the neck **2**. It rather means that the cap **18** provides sealing closure of the container **1**, which may be achieved after only few degrees of rotation of the cap **18** onto the neck **2**.

10 The inversion step may therefore be initiated before completion of the capping step, provided that sealing closure of the container **1** is achieved. As the cap **18** is screwed onto the neck **2**, the volume of headspace **17** decreases, and air pressure inside it therefore increases.

15 As the effort needed to invert the diaphragm **9** depends upon the pressure inside the headspace **17**, the sooner the inversion step is initiated, the smaller the effort required to initiate inversion of the diaphragm **9** is. As the capping step generally lasts about one second, the inversion step may be initiated less than one second (e.g. few tenths of seconds) after initiation of the capping step, which may be achieved during
20 inversion of the diaphragm **9**.

Of course, the inversion step may also be initiated after completion of the capping step but the effort required to initiate inversion of the diaphragm **9** would then be greater. In that case, the inversion may be conducted immediately after completion of the capping step, i.e. less than
25 one second (e.g. few tenths of seconds) after the cap **18** is completely screwed onto the neck **2**.

As the content is at ambient (or cold) temperature, the filled container **1** undergoes no volume decrease after filling and capping. Therefore, inversion of the diaphragm **9** does not compensate any volume loss
30 (vacuum) inside the container **1**. In other words, the whole extraction volume is used to add extra pressure inside the filled container **1**, and more precisely in the headspace **17** (as the product **16** is incompressible or deemed so). This extra pressure results in great rigidity of the sidewall **5**, whereby the container **1** may undergo high compression efforts when
35 stacked or palletized.

Presence of the high standing ring **8** has several advantages.

Firstly, as the diaphragm **9** extends above the support flange **11** in the outwardly-protruding position, the container **1** may be transported with ordinary conveyors, i.e. the container **1** may rest onto a flat surface of a conveyor by its support flange **11**.

5 Secondly, as already stated, the conical shape (or draft angle) of the inner portion **12** provides a locking function to the diaphragm **9** in its inwardly-protruding position. The sharp outer edge **13** also helps preventing the diaphragm **9** to articulate back to its outwardly-protruding position.

10 In addition, smoothness and symmetry of revolution (around axis **X**) of the diaphragm **9** helps the same to maintain its inwardly-protruding position.

In other embodiments, the invertible diaphragm **9** may be provided on the container in another area than the base **7**. For example, in one
15 embodiment, the diaphragm is provided on the container sidewall **5**. In such a case, the pusher used to invert the diaphragm moves radially with respect to the container instead of moving axially.

CLAIMS

1. Method of forming a packaging, said method including the steps of:

- 5 – providing an empty container (1) comprising a sidewall (5), an open neck (2) and a base (7);
- a filling step of pouring, within the container (1) through the neck (2), a product (16) at a temperature lower than or equal to ambient temperature;
- 10 – a capping step of sealingly closing the filled container (1) by means of a cap (18) mounted onto the neck (2);

characterized in that:

- the container (1) includes an invertible diaphragm (9), said diaphragm (9) being in an outwardly-protruding position;
- 15 – the method further includes an inversion step of displacing the diaphragm (9) to an inwardly-protruding position, said inversion step being conducted after sealingly closing the container (1), the inversion step being initiated before completion of the capping step.

2. Method according to claim 1, wherein the base (7) of the container (1) includes a high standing ring (8) and the invertible diaphragm (9) is centrally provided on the base (7).

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3. Method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the temperature of the poured product is lower than or equal to 40°C.

4. Method according to claim 3, wherein the temperature of the poured product (16) is lower than or equal to 20°C.

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5. Method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the product (16) is water.

6. Method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the inversion step is conducted by means of a mechanical pusher (22).

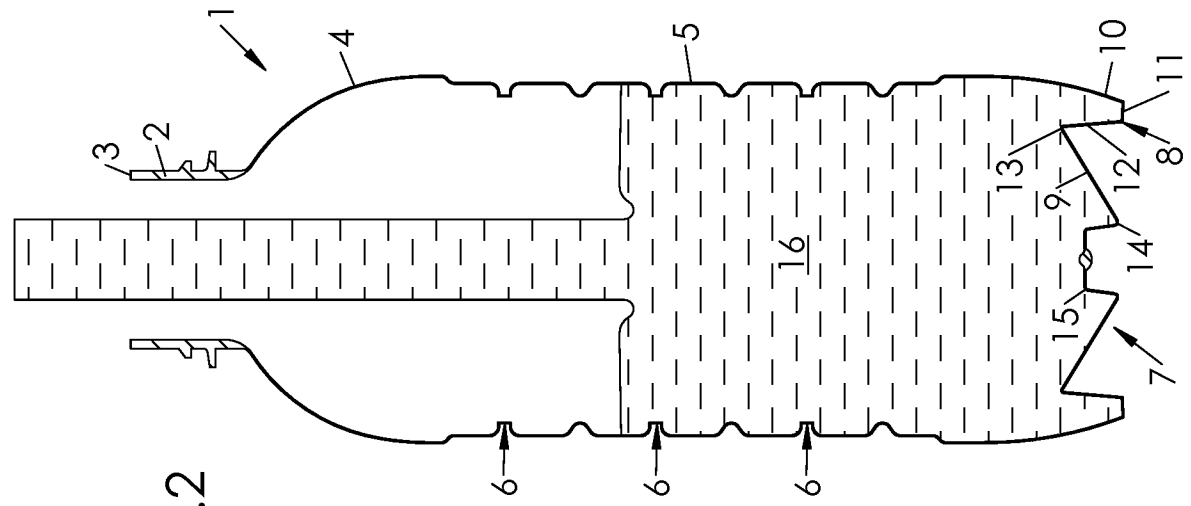


FIG. 2

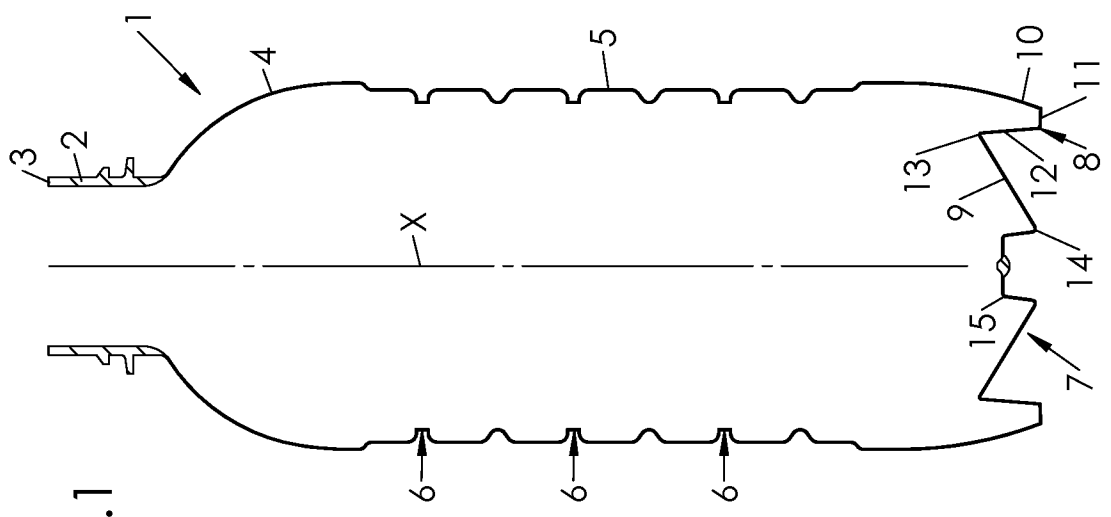
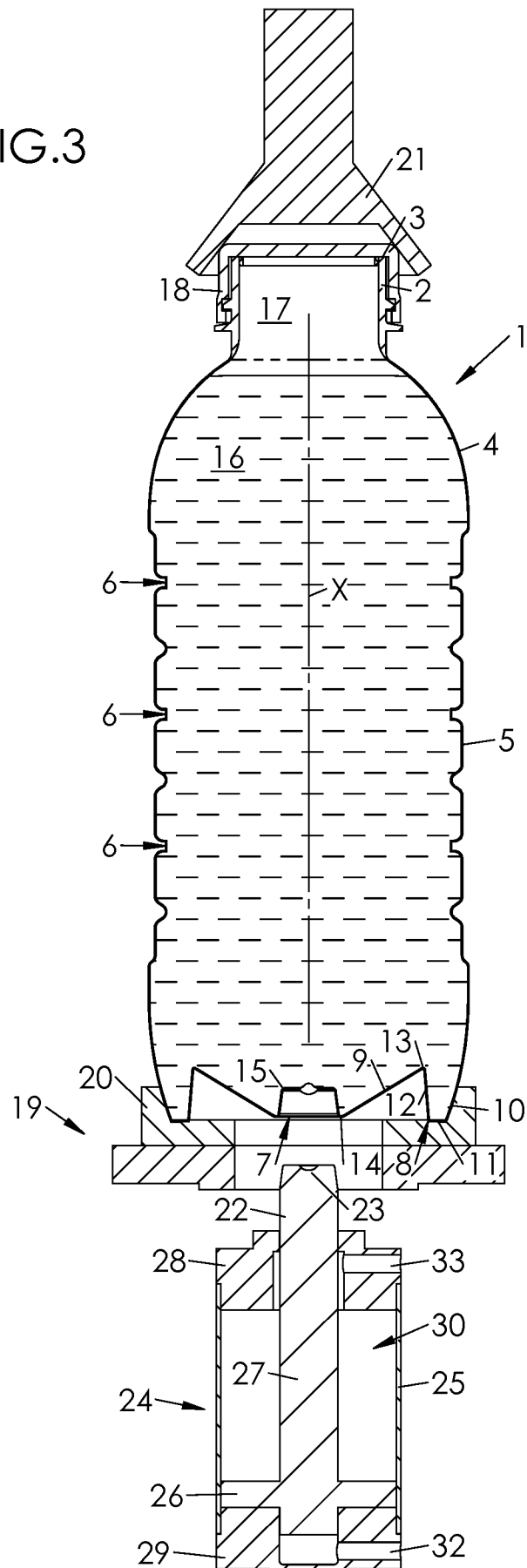


FIG. 1

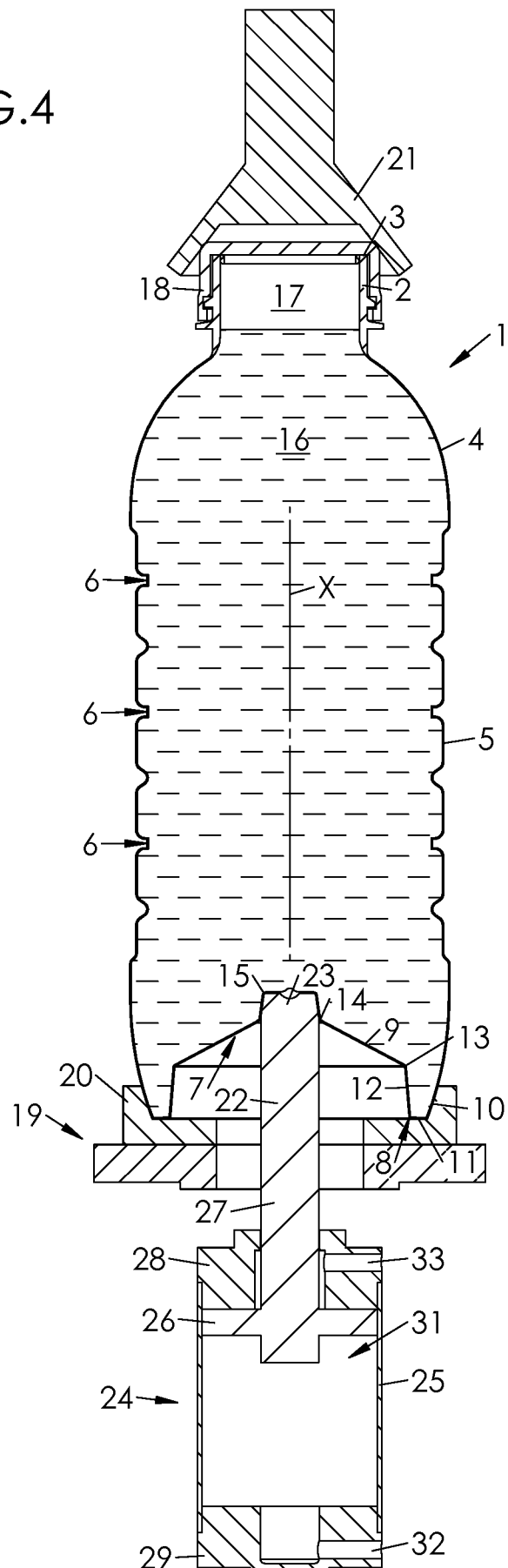
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FIG.3



3/3

FIG.4



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2016/057249

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. B67C3/02
ADD.

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)
B67C

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, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 2009/293436 A1 (MIYAZAKI SHUNZO [JP] ET AL) 3 December 2009 (2009-12-03) figures 1-21 paragraphs [0013], [0014], [0016], [0071], [0072], [0079], [0093], [0094], [0098], [0099] claim 3	1-6
A	WO 2015/039690 A1 (SIDEL PARTICIPATIONS [FR]) 26 March 2015 (2015-03-26) figures 1-5 page 5, lines 31,32 page 10, line 23 - page 15, line 14	1-6



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

26 May 2016

Date of mailing of the international search report

03/06/2016

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/EP2016/057249

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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		US 2009293436 A1	03-12-2009
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WO 2015039690 A1	26-03-2015	CN 105492369 A	13-04-2016
		WO 2015039690 A1	26-03-2015
