United States Patent

Kwake

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[45] **July 18, 1972**

[54] INFLATABLE ENCLOSURE FOR SWIMMING POOLS AND THE LIKE

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** **4/172.12,** 52/2

[51] **Int. Cl.** **E04h 3/18,** E04h 3/16

[58] **Field of Search** 4/172.12, 172.11, 172.14; 52/2; 220/26

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Primary Examiner—Henry K. Artis

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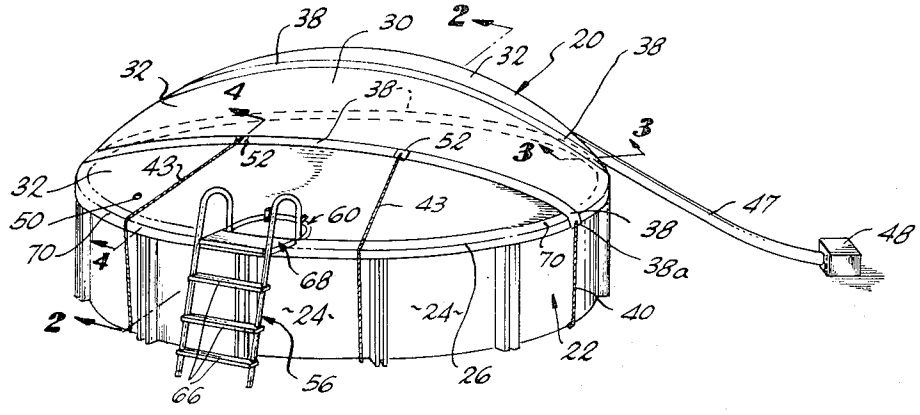
[57] **ABSTRACT**

A vinyl, or other plastic, enclosure for swimming pools (both in-ground and above-ground), storage tanks, or other liquid carrying containers which can be inflated by blower means, to a domed position. When inflated, a simplified non-zipper entry into the enclosed space is provided. The enclosure can also be used as a slightly domed or crowned cover to shed rain and dirt.

19 Claims, 10 Drawing Figures



Patented July 18, 1972 3,676,880

2 Sheets-Sheet 1

Fig. 1

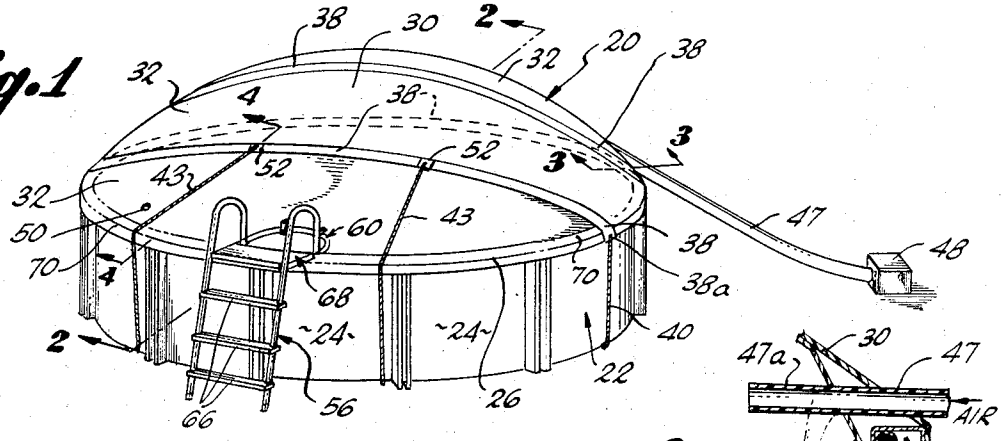


Fig. 3

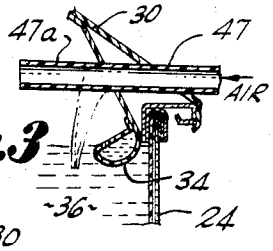


Fig. 2

Fig. 4

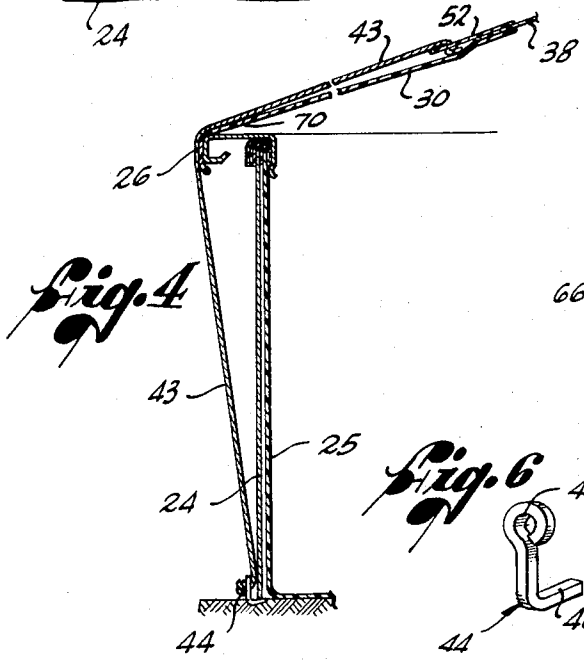


Fig. 6

Fig. 5

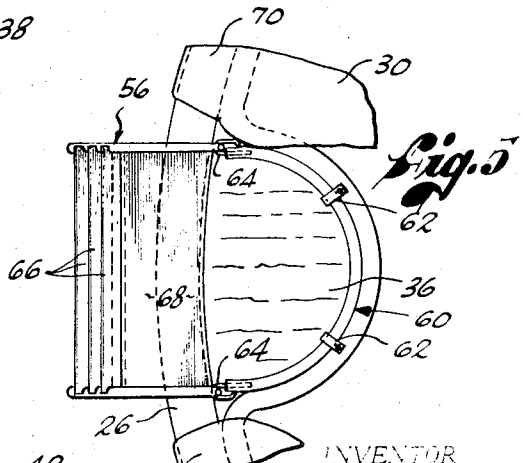


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Fig. 7

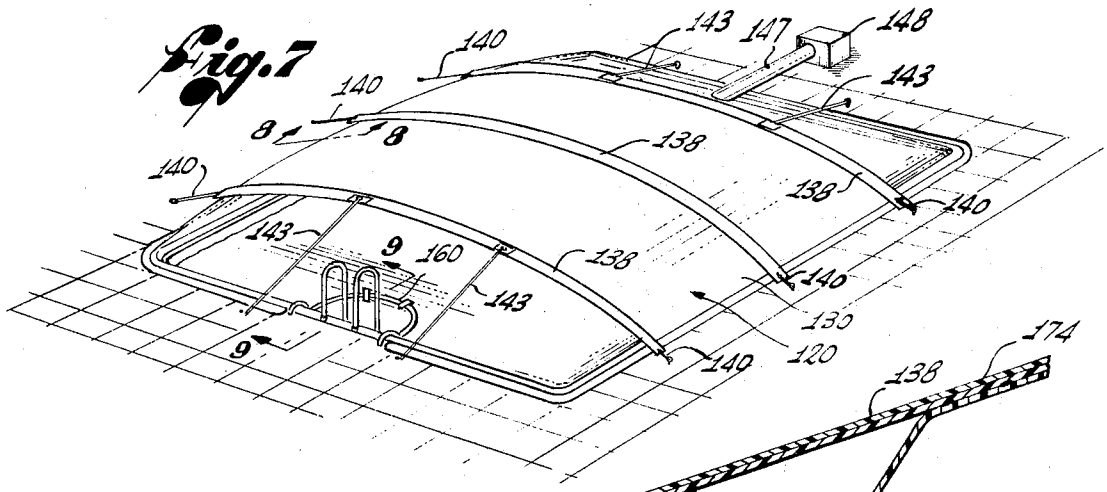


Fig. 8

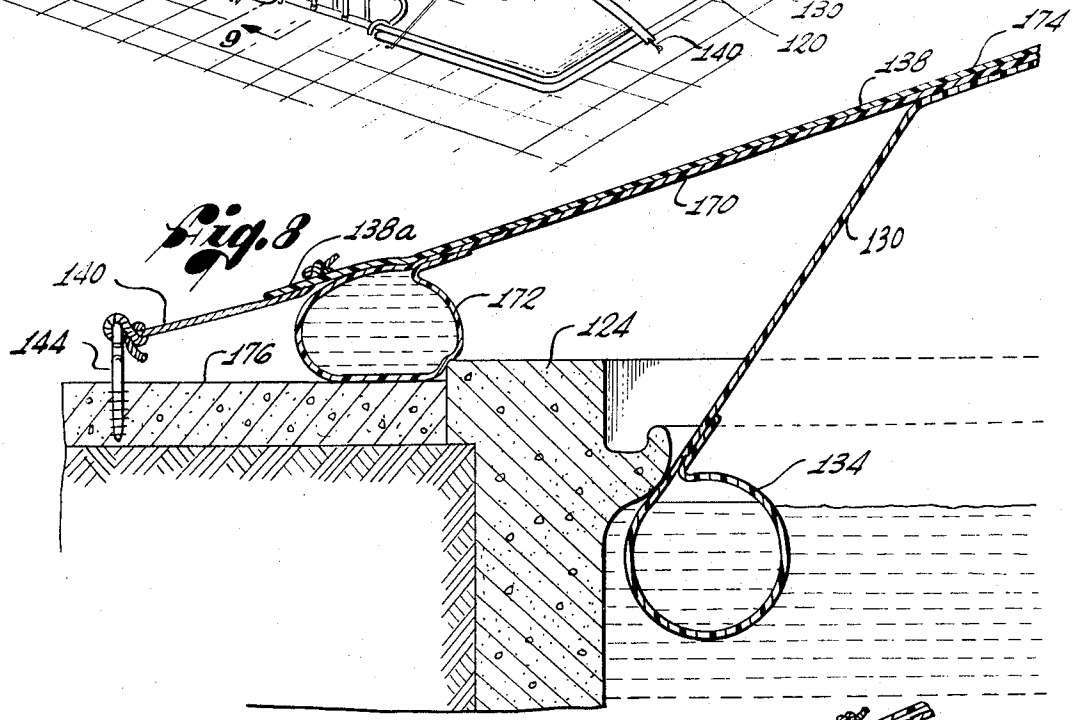


Fig. 9

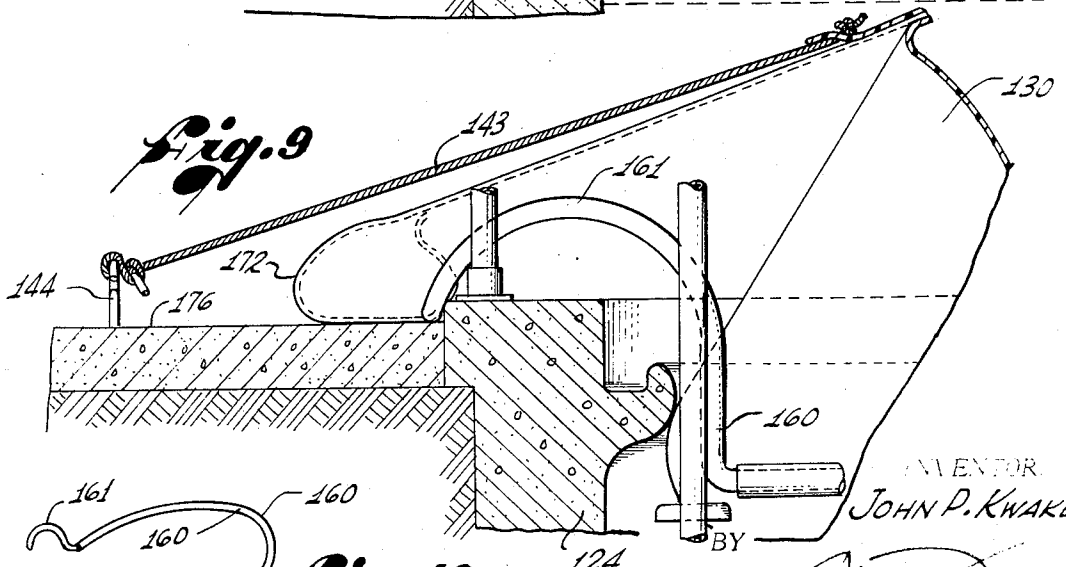
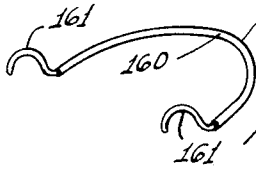


Fig. 10



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INFLATABLE ENCLOSURE FOR SWIMMING POOLS AND THE LIKE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Flexible plastic inflatable enclosures and covers are well known for the purpose of enclosing and/or covering swimming pools, and other liquid-carrying containers. However, so far as I am aware, no inflatable enclosure has been provided for an above-ground swimming pool (one in which the pool walls sit wholly or partially above the ground rather than being wholly below ground level) or for an in-the-ground pool which (a) has reinforcing means to resist high winds and to enable maximum pressurization of the enclosure, (b) acts as an efficient solar heater, (c) is provided with a simple and novel entry, (d) is air-tight, (e) is provided with means to prevent entry of dirt and dust and to keep chemical additions to a minimum and (f) can be utilized as a cover, which remains crowned thereby shedding rain and dirt — all at a low cost and with simplicity of installation.

To my knowledge, all of the air-inflatable enclosures which utilize a sealing means comprising a water tube require that this sealing means be placed on the deck or ground adjacent the pool or container enclosed. In following this concept, however, the area that must be enclosed is at least 25 percent and usually closer to 60 percent greater than the pool area itself, and the cost of the enclosure is therefore large. It is an object of this invention to avoid this additional cost.

Pool covers of which I am aware, are generally flat or dished, and cannot shed water and/or debris readily as can a crowned or domed cover. I am not aware of a domed pool cover that can quickly and easily be converted to an enclosure within which one can readily enter. It is an object of this invention to provide such a combination.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The main objects of this invention are to provide a relatively low cost enclosure, enclosing a swimming pool or other liquid-carrying containers, whether it be above or below ground, which has the features enumerated in (a) through (f) above.

The enclosure comprises a unitary roof and sidewall member made, preferably, of a plurality of heat-welded 12–20 mil polyvinyl chloride flexible plastic sheets. At or near the periphery of the said roof and sidewall member is welded a tubular plastic member adapted to contain water or liquid equal to or lighter in density than the liquid in the container. The tubular plastic member generally follows the periphery of the walls of the container to be enclosed, and is of approximately the same length as the perimeter of the container to be enclosed. The unitary roof and sidewall member has a surface area somewhat larger than the area of the pool, or other item to be enclosed.

The roof and sidewall member of the enclosure is preferably supplied with non-stretchable, but flexible reinforcing means, e.g., made of nylon fused to the roof and sidewall member, the reinforcement means having attachment means to be tied down to decking or the ground adjacent the pool or other container to be enclosed.

The roof and sidewall member is provided with a blower sleeve or opening to which can be attached a blower for flowing air therethrough.

To install the enclosure, it is first simply floated across the water or other liquid in the container, e.g. an above-ground or below-ground pool. The tubular member is then filled with water to create an air-tight seal of the tube with the water in the pool, and the reinforcing means is tied down adjacent the pool.

The blower is then turned on and the air flows under the roof and sidewall member and inflates the enclosure. Upon inflation, the attached tubular member is forced outwardly against the pool wall and conforms thereto. The enclosure is thus provided with an air seal by means of the engagement of the tubular member with the water in the pool. Maximum internal pressurization of the enclosure is obtained because of the air seal in conjunction with the reinforcement means. In this way, high winds are resisted and the enclosure achieves great stability.

The enclosure, as described to this point, functions as an airtight reinforced cover which has a crowned shape, and can thus shed dirt and rain easily. After full inflation, the blower can be shut off. Because of the air seal, as well as means to prevent backflow of air through the blower, no leakage of air will occur to deflate the cover from its original crowned shape.

To convert the crowned cover to a swimming enclosure, or space which can be entered, a simple and novel entry is provided. The entry comprises, preferably, a semi-circular piece of aluminum or other rigid tubing, the ends of which are pivotally mounted or attached to the pool or container wall, while the remainder of the tubing is attached to a portion of the external surface of the sidewall of the enclosure, to force the sidewall of the enclosure away from the pool wall. In this way, space for easy entry into the pool is provided.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of an above-the-ground pool, with the inflated swimming pool enclosure of this invention positioned thereon;

FIG. **2** is a cross-sectional view, taken along the line **2—2** of FIG. **1**, showing the means for entry into the pool;

FIG. **3** is a cross-sectional view, taken along the line **3—3** of FIG. **1**, showing the air inlet into the pool;

FIG. **4** is a cross-sectional view, taken along the line **4—4** of FIG. **1**, showing one preferred means of attaching the reinforcement means of the enclosure to the underside of the pool wall itself;

FIG. **5** is a plan view of the entry into the swimming pool enclosure;

FIG. **6** is a perspective view of a combined hook and eye used in attaching the stabilizing means of the enclosure to the underside of the pool wall;

FIG. **7** is a perspective view of an inflated swimming pool enclosure of this invention positioned over an in-the-ground pool;

FIG. **8** is a view, in crows-section, taken along the line **8—8** of FIG. **7**;

FIG. **9** is a cross-sectional view taken along the line **9—9** of FIG. **7**; and

FIG. **10** is a perspective view of the frame member of the entry means.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The enclosure of this invention as shown in the embodiment of FIGS. **1–6**, is given the numeral **20**. It is shown enclosing an above-the-ground swimming pool **22** having sidewalls **24**. A narrow top deck or coping **26** constitutes the upper edge of the pool **22** and is attached to sidewalls **24**. It will be understood that any liquid-carrying container may be enclosed by the means of this invention but enclosure of the swimming pool will be described by way of example. Attached to the pool sidewall **24** is a waterproof liner **25**.

The enclosure **20** comprises a unitary roof and sidewall member **30**, made of a series of opaque, or a combination of opaque and transparent plastic sheets or panels **32**. The plastic panels **32** are preferably made of flexible polyvinyl chloride of between **12** and **20** mils in thickness. The panels **32** are heat-welded by conventional ultra high frequency heating techniques to form a sheet large enough to disclose a curved space above said predetermined pool area when fully inflated. The edges of the sheet of plastic forming the roof and sidewall member **30**, are then cut so as to conform generally to the diameter or shape of the pool to be enclosed.

A tubular flexible polyvinyl chloride member **34** (preferably of 15–30 mils in thickness) is then welded to the edge or periphery of the roof and sidewall member **30**. The tubular member **34** is, preferably, between 7 and 15 inches in diame-

ter, and is provided with a water filling valve. A second opening or valve is also formed therein for the purpose of venting air from the tube when it is being filled with water. These valves are conventional and are not shown in the drawings. The tubular member **34** is attached along the entire periphery of the roof and sidewall member **30** so that a complete seal will be formed between the tubular member **34** and the water **36** in the pool **22**, (when the tube **34** is filled with water and the enclosure **20** is inflated).

The roof and sidewall member **30** of the enclosure **20** is preferably supplied with reinforcing means, straps or stabilizers. These stabilizers may be of the type described in detail in my U.S. Pat. No. 3,353,309 and pending patent application, Ser. No. 60,038 filed July 31, 1970 and comprise, in general, a non-stretchable, but flexible, nylon webbing which is first laminated between non-porous polyvinyl chloride sheets and then welded to the roof and sidewall member **30**.

The nylon-PBC stabilizers, just described, are designated by the numeral **38** and are formed in strips of, preferably, between 4 – 8 inches in width. A plurality of stabilizers **38** are laminated along a major portion of the length of the roof and sidewall member **30**, in parallel, and spaced, preferably between 3 – 8 feet from each other.

Each end **38***a* of each of the stabilizer straps **38** are attached to nylon ropes **40**, or other suitable tying means, which trying means are, in turn, tautly affixed to the ground or decking adjacent the pool by any suitable means. Preferably, however, one end of each nylon rope **40** is tied to the eye portions **42** of hook and eye members **44** (See FIG. **5**) and the other ends of ropes **40** to stabilizer ends **38***a*. The hooks **46** of the members **44** are then set under the lower edge of the pool wall **24**, as shown in FIG. **4** and the ropes **40** tightly cinched before inflation of the enclosure **20** commences. Additional nylon ropes **43** are similarly attached to the outermost stabilizers **38**, between the ends thereof, and similarly tightly cinched by hook and eye members **44**. A web **52** of nylon-PVC is laminated to stabilizer **38**, and has a reinforced opening therein, through which one end of the rope **43** may be attached.

Turning now to the installation of the enclosure **20** thereof, the entire enclosure, i.e., the members **32, 34** and welded stabilizers **38** are floated across the water in the pool **22**, the pool **22** having previously been filled with water **36** to a level, preferably, within 4 inches to 8 inches below the top edge of the pool walls **24**. The water tube **34** is then filled with water **35**, and the air duct or sleeve **47** connected to blower **48**.

The blower **48** is turned on and inflation of the enclosure takes only a short period of time, perhaps 20 – 40 minutes, depending on the size of blower and air space enclosed. The tube **34** is forced outwardly against the pool walls **24**, and generally conforms to the periphery of the pool walls. Because the water tube **24** is initially made of dimensions and general shape so as to abut the pool walls **24**, when inflated, the enclosure **20** cannot readily be moved about under the influence of winds. Also, an air-tight seal is made by means of the water tube **34** laying on the water **36** in the pool **24**. The pressurization within the enclosure **20** is self-regulating because, if the pressure within the enclosure should become too high, a portion of the water tube will lift up from the water **36**, allowing air to escape to relieve the internal pressure.

A closeable opening **50** (FIG. **1**) is also provided in the roof and sidewall member **30** of the enclosure **20** which permits air to be vented, and also enables air to be circulated within the enclosure. To maximize the circulation of air, the vent **50** is preferably placed at a point in the enclosure diametrically across from the blower inlet. The vent **50** is provided with a conventional snap-in closure (not shown) to provide an air-tight seal when the blower **48** is not in operation and the enclosure **20** is to be utilized as a completely air-tight domed cover.

The enclosure **20**, as described to this point, is the most economical form of combined cover and enclosure. However, in the event of high winds, it is possible for this enclosure to be moved or whipped about by such winds, especially if it is not fully pressurized, and for this reason, it is preferable to stabilize the enclosure by means of the stabilizer straps **38** fused or otherwise affixed to the enclosure. Such stabilizing straps **38** and attachment means therefor were described in detail in my issued Pat. No. 3,353,309 issued November 21, 1967 and further described in Ser. No. 60,038, my pending patent application filed July 31, 1970.

The stabilizers **38** each comprise a lamination of two outer pieces of non-porous polyvinyl chloride sheet between which is placed a nylon webbing so that the stabilizer **38** becomes non-elastic and substantially non-stretchable while at the same time being flexible and readily fusible to the PVC sheet of the enclosure **20** by conventional techniques. Normally, the stabilizers **38** are preformed into strips of requisite width and length so that only welding of the lower PVC layer of the stabilizer **38** to the PVC member **30** of the enclosure **20** is required.

Both ends of each stabilizer **38** are then tied down as has been described by tie-ropes **40** to the pool walls **24**.

After full inflation, the tie lines can be adjusted so as to be taut. In this way, the air space within the enclosure **20** can be pressurized to a maximum extent so as to maximize resistance of the enclosure to high winds and prevent ballooning on hot days as well. Additional tie ropes **43** as previously described, may then be provided for further stabilization.

Because of the construction of the enclosure **20**, it is possible to enter the pool **22**, without the use of any additional entry means, by merely forcing a portion of the roof and sidewall member **30** of the enclosure **20** inwardly (away from the pool walls **24**). The swimmer may then step down into the pool **22** in the space manually provided by the swimmer himself.

Entry into the pool **22** may also be effected in a novel and simple manner. A rigid, semi-circular frame member **60**, preferably made of aluminum tubing, is first formed having a diameter of preferably between about 4 feet to 6 feet. Both ends of the frame member **60** are adapted to be pivotally mounted to the legs **58** of a ladder **56**, as by split-rings or collars **64**, as shown in FIGS. **2** and **5**, and a mid-portion of the frame member **60** is adapted to be attached to an exterior surface of the enclosure **20** by snaps **62**. Because of the air pressure within the enclosure, the enclosure **20** is forced outwardly towards the walls **24** of the pool **22** and the water tube conforms not only to the walls of the pool but to the external shape of the semi-circular frame member **60** as shown in FIG. **5**. An entry-way, into the pool **22**, is thus provided.

Referring now particularly to FIG. **2**, a swimmer will climb up the steps **66** of the ladder **56** to the top ledge **68** thereof, step down into the water **36** and into the space provided by the frame member **60**. Since the entry frame member **60** is pivotally attached to the legs **58** of the ladder and is attached to a portion of the enclosure **20**, a portion of the enclosure can be raised by the swimmer in the manner shown in FIG. **2**, in dotted line, and the swimmer can move into the major pool area. The frame member **60** in its normal resting position, lies on the water and is flush with, or closely adjacent the water level since it is weighed down by the water tube **34**. However, it is found that a portion of the tube **34**, can be readily pushed upwardly out of the water enabling the swimmer to move forwardly under the raised portion of the enclosure and into the swimming pool proper. To further facilitate entry, a portion of the water tube **34** can easily be made of smaller diameter (than the remainder of the tube) at the entry section, although this is not mandatory. Entry into the pool proper may also be gained by simply ducking into the water and under the water tube **34** without raising it, if one so desires.

When it is desired to use the swimming enclosure **20** as a cover, the rigid frame member **60** is easily removed by disengaging it from the legs **58** of the ladder **56** and from its engagement with the water tube **34**. The enclosure **20**, because of its internal pressure, moves outwardly so that water tube **34** rests against the pool walls **24**, as shown in dotted line in FIG. **2**.

The air vent **50** is closed and the blower **48** is then shut-off. Upon shutting off the blower **48**, that portion of the air duct or sleeve **47***a*, within the enclosure **20** immediately drops down into the water **36**, as shown in dotted line in FIG. **3**, thus providing a complete air seal and preventing any back flow of air through the air duct **47***a*, **47**. Since all flow paths of air away from the interior of enclosure **20** are thus prevented, the enclosure **20** stays in its crowned or dome shape. In this way, the enclosure **20** functions as a domed cover for an indefinite period of time, easily sheds rain or dirt and at the same time, it is stabilized against high winds by virtue of the stabilizer straps **38** and tie lines **42**, **43** described.

Another feature of the pool enclosure **20** of this invention is the provision of a dust skirt **70**. The dust skirt **70** is preferably made of a PVC sheet of 10 – 20 mils in thickness, and has its upper edge welded along the entire roof and sidewall member **30**, adjacent the periphery of the enclosure **20** and above the water tube **34**. The lower edge of the skirt **70** hangs freely and is of sufficient length to extend tautly around the top edge or deck **26** of the pool wall **24** when stretched. While a dust skirt **70** is not mandatory, it is very helpful in preventing the entry of dust and dirt into the pool **22**. For while the water tube **34** acts as an air seal for the enclosure of air, it does not prevent entry of dust and dirt into the water **36** itself when the tube **34** is moved away from the pool sidewalls **24**. The provision of a peripherally attached dust skirt **70**, adapted to be stretched to the underside of the top deck **26**, normally found in above-ground pools, is of great advantage in keeping the pool clean.

The principles described with reference to my combined cover and enclosure for above-ground pools of FIGS. **1–6** may also be utilized for pools that are so-called in-ground pools.

An in-the-ground pool embodying the principles of this invention is shown in FIGS. **7** through **10**. In FIG. **7**, an enclosure **120** is shown comprising a roof and sidewall member **130**, welded together as described previously and having attached to the periphery thereof, as by heat-welding a continuous water tube **134** forming an air-tight seal with the water as earlier described. The roof and sidewall member **130** of the enclosure **120** is preferably stabilized by stabilizers **138** formed as described previously. Stabilizers **138** are preferably fused to the roof and sidewall member **130** and overlie a major portion of the roof and sidewall member of the enclosure **120**. The ends of each of the stabilizers **138** are affixed to the decking or other base adjacent the pool, by suitable anchoring means.

In this in-ground pool embodiment, a dust skirt **170** may also be provided which includes a continuous or substantially continuous water tube **172** adapted to be sealingly engaged with the decking **176** adjacent the pool. The water tube **172** is attached to the free end of the skirt **170**. The skirt **170** is laminated to the roof and sidewall **130** above the water tube **134** at **174** (see FIG. **8**).

In this embodiment, the stabilizers **138** extend over the skirt **170** and water tube **172**, and are welded thereto as shown in FIGS. **7** and **8**. The stabilizer ends **138***a* are then attached to screw-type anchoring bolts **144** by guy ropes **140**. The bolts **144** each have an eye through which the guy ropes may be attached.

The blower **148** and air venting means (not shown) are the same as described with reference to the FIGS. **1–6** embodiment. Also, additional guy ropes **143** may be attached as before, to further stabilize the enclosure **120**.

The air sleeve is formed within the enclosure **120** (not shown) in the same manner as described with reference to the above-the-ground pool embodiment and back flow of air is prevented in the same fashion as described previously.

Entry into the pool may be provided in a manner similar to that described with reference to the above-the-ground pool, i.e., by merely disengaging the dust skirt **170** (if any) and pushing the enclosure **120** inwardly away from the pool walls **124**. Also, a semi-circular rigid entry frame member **160** may be provided with hooked ends **161** for attachment to the upper edge of the pool walls **124** as shown in FIG. **9**. The portions of the frame member **160**, between the ends thereof are adapted to be attached to a portion of the water tube **124**, as previously described with reference to FIGS. **1** through **6**, and to push it inwardly away from the pool walls. The water tube **172**, laying on the deck **176**, may be terminated at either side of the entry area, to facilitate entry into the pool, as shown on FIGS. **7** and **9**.

The enclosure **120** comprises a unitary roof and sidewall member **130** made preferably of **12** to **20** mil polyvinyl chloride flexible air-impermeable plastic sheets. As in the above-the-ground embodiment of FIGS. **1–6**, the unitary roof and sidewall member **130** has an area somewhat larger than the area of the pool or other container to be enclosed and is preferably, but not mandatorily, supplied with stabilizer means.

To install the enclosure **120**, it is first simply floated across the water and the tubular member **134** is then filled with water to create an air seal of the tube **134** with the water in the pool. The stabilizers **138** are then tied down adjacent the pool. Next, the blower is turned on and the air flows under the roof and sidewall member **130** and inflates the enclosure **120**. Upon inflation, the attached water tube **124** is forced outwardly against the pool wall and conforms thereto to provide the enclosure with an air tight seal. Maximum pressurization is obtained because of the combination of the air seal with the reinforcing means, in the same manner as in the above-ground pool embodiment. High winds are thus easily resisted and the enclosure achieves great stability.

The enclosure **120** also functions as a stabilized air tight cover which has a crown or dome shape by simply detaching the entry frame member **160** and turning the blower off. No leakage can occur because there is no back-flow of air to the blower.

In particular, the enclosure of this invention functions as an excellent solar collector for both in-ground and above-ground liquid containers when the blower is turned off and the air venting means is closed. This is because the air is effectively trapped within the domed enclosure and is readily heated by the sun's rays. In turn, the water within the pool is raised in temperature.

While particular forms of the enclosure have been illustrated and described, various modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

I claim:

1. An air-supported enclosure for liquid-carrying containers comprising:

a roof and sidewall member composed of flexible air-impermeable plastic sheeting, said member having a surface area larger than the area to be enclosed;

an air-impermeable tubular plastic member, attached to the periphery of said roof and sidewall member, generally following the periphery of, and of dimensions such that said tubular member abuts, the walls of the container to be enclosed;

means for filling said tubular plastic member with liquid;

and blower means for blowing air into said enclosure to thereby inflate said roof and sidewall member and cause said tubular member, when filled with liquid equal to or lighter in density than the liquid to be enclosed, to be forced outwardly to abut the walls of the container while floating on the surface of the liquid to be contained.

2. The air-supported enclosure of claim **1** wherein the roof and sidewall member is composed, substantially, of flexible plastic sheeting of 12 – 20 mils in thickness.

3. The air-supported enclosure of claim **1** wherein the tubular plastic member is welded to the periphery of said roof and sidewall member.

4. The air-supported enclosure of claim **1** wherein the length of the tubular plastic member is approximately the same as the length of the perimeter defined by the walls of said container.

5. The air-supported enclosure of claim **1** wherein said liquid carrying container is a swimming pool, said liquid,

adapted to fill said tubular plastic member is water, and said liquid in said container is water.

6. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said liquid carrying container is an above-the-ground swimming pool.

7. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said liquid carrying container is an in-the-ground swimming pool.

8. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said roof and sidewall member carries a plurality of spaced, non-stretchable, reinforcing straps attached to at least a portion of said roof and sidewall member, and each of the ends of said straps being in turn attached to a base adjacent said container.

9. An air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said roof and sidewall member carries a plurality of spaced, non-stretchable, reinforcing straps, each of the ends of said straps being tied to the underside of the walls of said container.

10. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein a portion of said roof and sidewall member is light transparent.

11. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said roof and sidewall member carries a flexible skirt adjacent the periphery thereof.

12. The air-supported enclosure of claim 11 wherein said skirt has attached thereto an auxilliary water tube for sealing engagement with the surface adjacent to said container.

13. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein a rigid frame member is adapted to be pivotally mounted between a wall of said container and a portion of said roof and sidewall member.

14. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein a plurality of spaced, non-stretchable, reinforcing straps are affixed to at least a portion of said roof and sidewall member, each of said straps including nylon.

15. The air-supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said blower means includes an air sleeve within said enclosure and attached to said roof and sidewall member thereof, and of such length that when the blower is shut-off the free end thereof is adapted to drop below the normal liquid level carried in said liquid-carrying container.

16. An air-supported enclosure for use in combination with a liquid-carrying container, which comprises:

a roof and sidewall member composed of flexible air-impermeable plastic sheeting, said member having a surface area larger than the area to be enclosed;

an air-impermeable tubular plastic member, attached to the periphery of said roof and sidewall member, generally following the periphery of, and of dimensions such that said tubular member abuts, the walls of the container to be enclosed;

means for filling said tubular plastic member with liquid;

and blower means for blowing air into said enclosure to thereby inflate said roof and sidewall member and cause said tubular member, when filled with liquid equal to or lighter in density than the liquid to be enclosed, to be forced outwardly to abut the walls of the container while floating on the surface of the liquid to be contained.

17. The air supported enclosure of claim 1 wherein said roof and sidewall member is provided with a closeable vent.

18. The air supported enclosure of claim 17 wherein said closeable vent is placed diametrically across from said blower means.

19. The air supported enclosure of claim 13 wherein said rigid frame member is pivotally mounted to a ladder placed between said wall of said container and said portion of said roof and sidewall member.

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