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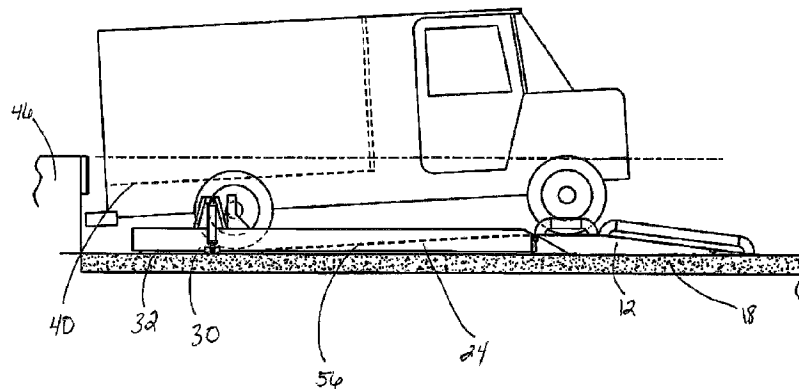
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(54) **Title: VEHICLE LEVELER**



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

A first embodiment of the device includes a first portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge, the trailing edge is disposed further from the driveway than the leading edge. The embodiment also includes a second portion which has a leading edge and a trailing edge, the leading edge of the second portion is removably attached to the trailing edge of the first portion and the leading edge of the second portion is disposed further from the driveway than the trailing edge of the second portion. The second portion also includes an extension portion which extends from the trailing edge of the second portion toward a rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway. The first portion and second portion are separate from each other until they are removably attached by a connection apparatus.

ABSTRACT

A first embodiment of the device includes a first portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge, the trailing edge is disposed further from the driveway than the leading edge. The embodiment also includes a second portion which has a leading edge and a trailing edge, the leading edge of the second portion is removably attached to the trailing edge of the first portion and the leading edge of the second portion is disposed further from the driveway than the trailing edge of the second portion. The second portion also includes an extension portion which extends from the trailing edge of the second portion toward a rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway. The first portion and second portion are separate from each other until they are removably attached by a connection apparatus.

VEHICLE LEVELER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to vehicle levelers and more particularly to a vehicle leveler having multiple surface angles as well as multiple sections.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A variety of truck levelers have been devised to adjust the height of different trailers to properly match the deck of the trailer to the height of the dock. By aligning the height of the trailer and the dock the loading and unloading of cargo is facilitated.

One such device is seen in U.S. Patent No. 4,624,446 to *Gould* which discloses a reinforced platform pivotally mounted to the ground at one end and includes a support assembly having hydraulic cylinders. In operation the rear wheels of a truck trailer are backed onto the platform and then the non-mounted end of the platform is lifted by the hydraulic cylinders until the deck of the trailer is equal to the height of the dock.

A similar device is shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,765,792 to *Cherry, et al.* which also discloses a pivotally-mounted and hydraulically-raised platform. In addition to the disclosure of *Gould*, the device includes mounting the hydraulics inwardly from the non-mounted end of the platform and an aperture in the non-mounted end of the platform to accommodate a truck restraining device.

Another design is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,368,043 to *Leum, et al.* which teaches a low-profile truck leveler. In this design a low-profile leveler is enabled through the use of a raised rear beam and two lateral beams that extend above the upper surface of the platform. In addition, a central beam adds further to the strength and rigidity of the leveler.

Vehicle levelers of the prior art typically have certain disadvantages. The majority of vehicle levelers have ramp surfaces which are not highly adjustable; this is a distinct disadvantage when vehicles are being loaded or unloaded with cargo. Levelers of the prior art are also not able to accommodate all types of vehicles. This is yet another disadvantage.

Some levelers of the prior art have certain shortcomings and disadvantages to which this device is drawn. Specifically, it would be advantageous to have a vehicle leveler which is highly adjustable and can elevate both the rear and front axles of a vehicle at the same time so as to minimize the slope of the internal floor of the vehicle and thereby allow safer loading and unloading of cargo.

In summary, there are problems and shortcomings in the prior art vehicle levelers and it is to these needs that this device is drawn.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a first embodiment of the present invention a vehicle leveler for use with a driveway includes a first portion which has a leading edge and a trailing edge, the trailing edge is disposed further from the driveway than the leading edge and forms a ramp section. The first portion has a flat section adjacent the trailing edge and the flat section is disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway. The embodiment further includes a second portion which has a leading edge and a trailing edge, the leading edge of the second portion is removably attached to the trailing edge of the incline portion and the leading edge of the second portion is disposed further from the driveway than the trailing edge of the second portion. The second portion also includes an extension portion which extends from the trailing edge of the second portion toward the rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway. The first portion and second portion are each unitary structures which are separate from each other until they are removably attached together by a connection apparatus.

A second embodiment of the present invention includes a vehicle leveler for use with a driveway. The leveler in the second embodiment includes multiple extension portions which are removably attached to each other.

In both embodiments, it is highly preferable that the second portion including the extension portion can be moved between a lowered position and a raised position to accommodate varying dock heights for loading and unloading of cargo from vehicles. Preferably, the extension portion can be multiple extension portions (as in the second embodiment) which are identical and removably attached together so as to

accommodate a vehicle which has a longer length. Highly-preferred embodiments include the connection apparatus being on the leading edge of the second portion.

Preferably, the ramp section can be of varying lengths and heights to accommodate a single, rear axle vehicle as well as a large trailer. Both the front and rear axle of a vehicle can be elevated to minimize the incline or decline of an inside floor surface of a trailer or vehicle making loading and unloading of cargo safer in preferred embodiments. It is also preferred that the first and second portions include metal grading over a steel plate for contact with wheels of a vehicle as the vehicle moves onto and off of the leveler. Some preferred embodiments also include opposed sidewalls which have a light-mounting channel therealong with at least one light integrated into the light-mounting channel.

Preferably, the leveler in the lowered position includes a first portion having a leading edge at a front of the leveler and a substantially flat section, the substantially flat section is inclined from the substantially flat driveway at between about 1 and 15 degrees from parallel with the substantially flat driveway. A second portion preferably extends from the incline portion toward a rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section, the substantially flat section is declined toward the substantially flat driveway at between about 1 and 15 degrees from parallel with the substantially flat driveway. It is also preferable that the extension portion extends from the second portion toward a rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of this invention to provide a vehicle leveler which is highly adjustable and can elevate both the rear and front axles of a vehicle at the same time so as to minimize the slope of the internal floor of the vehicle or trailer.

Another object of this invention is to provide a vehicle leveler which has improved safety during loading and unloading of cargo from a vehicle which is on the leveler.

These and other objects of the invention will be apparent from the following descriptions and from the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The drawings illustrate preferred embodiments including the above-noted characteristics and features of the device. The device will be readily understood from the descriptions and drawings. In the drawings:

FIGURE 1 is a perspective view of the vehicle leveler;

FIGURE 2 is a top view of the vehicle leveler in FIGURE 1;

FIGURE 3 is a perspective view of the vehicle leveler of FIGURE 1 with a truck on the leveler and the leveler in the lowered position;

FIGURE 4 is a perspective view of the vehicle leveler of FIGURE 1 with a truck on the leveler and the leveler in the raised position;

FIGURES 5-6 are perspective views of the vehicle leveler in the raised position; and

FIGURE 7 is a perspective view of the vehicle leveler of FIGURE 1 in the lowered position with a trailer on the leveler.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown in FIGURES 1-7. The vehicle leveler 10, as shown in FIGURE 1, includes three primary portions, a first portion 12, a second portion 24 and an extension portion 30 and is designed to be utilized in conjunction with a substantially flat driveway 18 near a loading dock wall 46. Furthermore, the leveler 10 can be moved between a lowered position 36, shown in FIGURES 1 and 3 and a raised position 38, shown in FIGURES 4-6.

First portion 12 has a ramp section 20 which is inclined upwards and a flat section 22 adjacent ramp section 20. First portion 12 includes a leading edge 14 and a trailing edge 16. Trailing edge 16 is disposed further from driveway 18 than leading edge 14. Trailing edge 16 is part of flat section 22. Flat section 22 is disposed about parallel with substantially flat driveway 18.

FIGURE 1 illustrates that second portion 24 has a leading edge 26 and a trailing edge 28. Leading edge 26 of second portion 24 is removably attached to trailing edge 16 of first portion 12 as seen in FIGURES 1, 3-4. FIGURE 5 illustrates that first portion 12 and second portion 24 are removable attached as it shows first and

second portions 12, 24 separated. Leading edge 26 of second portion 24 is disposed further from driveway 18 than trailing edge 28 of second portion 24.

Second portion 24 also includes an extension portion 30 as can be seen in FIGURES 1-7. Extension portion 30 extends from trailing edge 28 of second portion 24 toward a rear of the leveler 10 (nearest the loading dock wall 46) and includes a substantially flat section 32 disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway 18.

FIGURE 2 illustrates that first 12 and second portions 24 include metal grading 42 over a steel plate for contact with wheels of a vehicle as the vehicle moves onto and off of leveler 10. Metal grating 42 over a steel plate is a material which is both durable and also provides increased traction for vehicles when moving onto or off of leveler 10.

FIGURES 1-7 illustrate that first portion 12 and second portion 24 are each unitary structures which are separate from each other as seen in FIGURE 5 until they are removably attached together by a connection apparatus 34 as seen best in FIGURES 1 and 3-4. Connection apparatus 34 is located on leading edge 26 of second portion 24 and connects to trailing edge 16 of first portion 12. Flat section 22 of first portion 12 is in front of connection apparatus 34 since connection apparatus 34 is located on leading edge 26 of second portion 24.

The drawings illustrate that second portion 24 including extension portion 30 can be moved between a lowered position 36 as seen in FIGURES 1, 3 and 7 and a raised position 38 as seen in FIGURES 4-6, to accommodate varying dock heights for loading and unloading of cargo from vehicles. FIGURES 4-7 show a variety of different types of vehicles which can utilize leveler 10.

Depending on the length of the vehicle, leveler 10 can be customized in a variety of ways including that extension portion 30 can consist of multiple extension portions which are identical and which are removably attached together so as to accommodate a vehicle which has a longer length. FIGURE 2 illustrates a leveler 10 with more than one extension portion 30. In an embodiment with multiple extension portions 30, each extension portion 30 is removably secured to another extension portion 30. In this type of embodiment, a first extension portion 30 would extend from the trailing edge 28 of second portion 24 toward a rear of leveler 10, the

extension portions 30 each would include a substantially flat section 32 disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway 18. In some embodiments, the multiple extension portions 30 can be of varying lengths and do not have to be identical in length.

Leveler 10 can be manufactured so that ramp section 20 can be of varying lengths and heights to accommodate a single, rear axle vehicle as well as a large trailer. FIGURES 1 and 6 each illustrate a ramp section 20 with a different length and height. Ramp section 20 and flat section 22 can be manufactured with different lengths and heights to accommodate single rear axle vans and trailers as well as 53-foot over the road tractor trailers. Therefore, leveler 10 can be manufactured so that any of the first portion 12, second portion 24 or extension portion 30, can be of varying lengths and heights so as to accommodate a variety of vehicles types and sizes. For example, FIGURES 3-4 show a box-type truck on leveler 10, FIGURES 5-6 show a larger vehicle on leveler 10 and FIGURE 7 illustrates a very large trailer on leveler 10. With leveler 10 it is possible that both the front and rear axles of a vehicle can be elevated to minimize the incline or decline of an inside floor surface 40 of a trailer or vehicle thereby making loading and unloading of cargo safer. FIGURES 3-7 illustrate a variety of vehicles on leveler 10 and the dotted line in FIGURES 3-4 illustrates inside floor surface 40 of the vehicle. FIGURES 4-6 illustrate vehicles on leveler 10 that have both a front and rear axle elevated.

FIGURE 6 illustrates that leveler 10 can include opposed sidewalls 52 (see FIGURE 2) with a light-mounting channel 44 having at least one light 50 (which could be a single light, multiple lights or a rope light) integrated into light-mounting channel 44. Light(s) 50 assist vehicles, such as trailers, when they are backing in or pulling away from leveler 10.

A lifting system is also incorporated into the leveler 10 in the form of hydraulic lifts 48 which contact driveway 18 as seen in FIGURE 1. The hydraulic lifts 48 lift the second portion 24 including extension portion 30 the leveler 10. However, any other lifting systems known in the art could be utilized as well.

Leveler 10 may also include wheel guides 54 shown in FIGURE 1 which can be on any or all of first portion 12, second portion 24 or extension portion 30. FIGURE 1 illustrates wheel guides 54 on first portion 12. Wheel guides 54 act to

guide the wheels of the trailer into the proper position for loading and unloading of cargo.

The relationship between the first portion 12 and the driveway 18 as well as the second portion 24 and the driveway 18 can also be defined in terms of angles as shown in FIGURES 1-7. Ramp section 20 of first portion 12 is inclined from driveway 18 about 1-15 degrees from parallel with driveway 18. Second portion 24 extends from first portion 12 toward a rear of leveler 10 includes a decline section 56 which declines toward the substantially flat driveway at between about 1-15 degrees from parallel with the substantially flat driveway 18.

In operation, a vehicle (including sometimes a large trailer) is backed up to leveler 10 to put the rear wheels onto the first portion 12, specifically ramp section 20. The wheels and trailer are therefore elevated from the driveway 18 as they are backed up onto ramp section 20. As the vehicle is further backed onto leveler 10 the rear wheels pass onto the second portion 24 or decline section 56 and begin to be lowered back toward the driveway 18. As the rear wheels continue to be backed up, they contact the extension portion 30 and at this point, depending on the length and size of the trailer or vehicle, the rear of the trailer or vehicle may now be in contact with the loading dock wall 46. Depending on the length of the vehicle or trailer, the front wheels may either be in contact with the first portion 12 as can be seen in FIGURES 3-4 or the trailer may be so large that only the back wheels are on leveler 10 as seen in FIGURE 7. Once though the rear wheels are backed up as far onto the leveler 10 as they can go, the lifting system can then be operated to lift the trailer to the proper height to safely load and unload cargo. Leveler 10 can elevate both the front and rear wheels of a vehicle to minimize the slope of the internal floor of the vehicle which allows for safer loading and unloading.

A wide variety of materials are available for the various parts discussed and illustrated herein. Although the device has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS

1. A vehicle leveler for use with a driveway comprising:

- a first portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge wherein the trailing edge is disposed further from the driveway than the leading edge and forms a ramp section, the first portion having a flat section adjacent the trailing edge, the flat section being disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway, and
- a second portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge wherein the leading edge of the second portion is removably attached to the trailing edge of the first portion and the leading edge of the second portion is disposed further from the driveway than the trailing edge of the second portion, the second portion also including an extension portion which extends from the trailing edge of the second portion toward a rear of the leveler and includes a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway;

wherein the first portion and second portion are each unitary structures which are separate from each other until they are removably attached together by a connection apparatus.

2. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein the second portion including the extension portion can be moved between a lowered position and a raised position to accommodate varying dock heights for loading and unloading of cargo from vehicles.

3. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein the extension portion can be multiple extension portions which are identical and removably attached together so as to accommodate a vehicle which has a longer length.

4. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein the connection apparatus is on the leading edge of the second portion.

5. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein the ramp section can be of varying lengths and heights to accommodate a single, rear axle vehicle as well as a large trailer.

6. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein both a front and a rear axle of a vehicle can be elevated to minimize the incline or decline of an inside floor surface of a trailer or vehicle making loading and unloading of cargo safer.

7. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 wherein the first and second portions include metal grading over a steel plate for contact with wheels of a vehicle as the vehicle moves onto and off of the leveler.

8. The vehicle leveler of claim 1 further including opposed sidewalls having a light-mounting channel therealong with at least one light integrated into the light-mounting channel.

9. A vehicle leveler for use with a driveway comprising:

- a first portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge wherein the trailing edge is disposed further from the driveway than the leading edge and forms a ramp section, the first portion having a flat section adjacent the trailing edge, the flat section being disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway, and
- a second portion having a leading edge and a trailing edge wherein the leading edge of the second portion is removably attached to the trailing edge of the incline portion and the leading edge of the second portion is disposed further from the driveway than the trailing edge of the second portion, the second portion also including two or more extension portions, each extension portion is secured to another extension portion, a first extension portion extends from the trailing edge of the second portion toward a rear of the leveler, the extension portions each include a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway;

wherein the first portion and second portion are each unitary structures which are separate from each other until they are removably attached together by a connection apparatus.

10. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the extension portions are of varying lengths and are removably attached together.

11. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the extension portions are identical and removably attached together.

12. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the second portion including the extension portions can be moved between a lowered position and a raised position to accommodate varying dock heights for loading and unloading of cargo from vehicles.

13. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the connection apparatus is on the leading edge of the second portion.

14. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the ramp section can be of varying lengths and heights to accommodate a single, rear axle vehicle as well as a large trailer.

15. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein both a front and a rear axle of a vehicle can be elevated to minimize the incline or decline of an inside floor surface of a trailer or vehicle making loading and unloading of cargo safer.

16. The vehicle leveler of claim 9 wherein the first and second portions include metal grading over a steel plate for contact with wheels of a vehicle as the vehicle moves onto and off of the leveler.

17. A vehicle leveler for use with a substantially flat driveway, the leveler capable of movement between a lowered position and a raised position, the leveler in the lowered position comprising:

- a first portion having a leading edge at a front of the leveler and a substantially flat section wherein the substantially flat section is inclined from the substantially flat driveway at between about 1 and 15 degrees from parallel with the substantially flat driveway;
- a second portion extending from the incline portion toward a rear of the leveler including a substantially flat section wherein the substantially flat section is declined toward the substantially flat driveway at between about 1 and 15 degrees from parallel with the substantially flat driveway; and

an extension portion extending from the second portion toward a rear of the leveler and including a substantially flat section disposed about parallel with the substantially flat driveway.

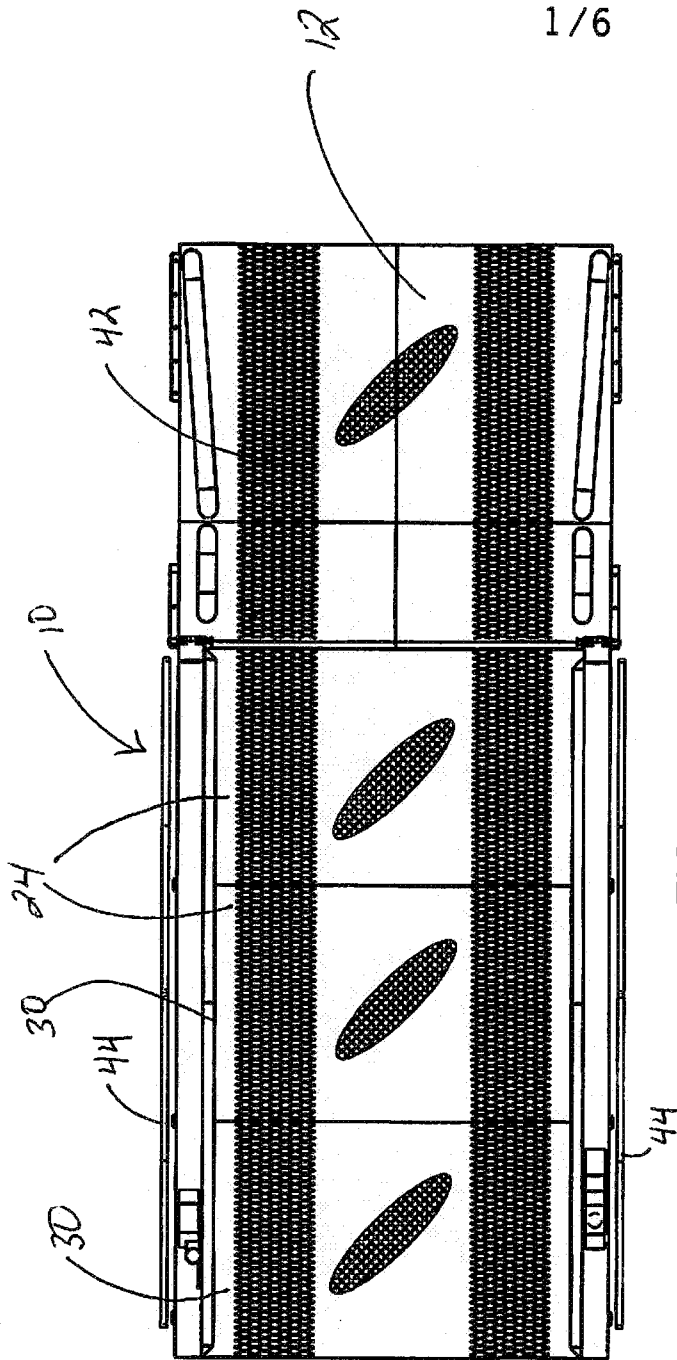


FIG. 2

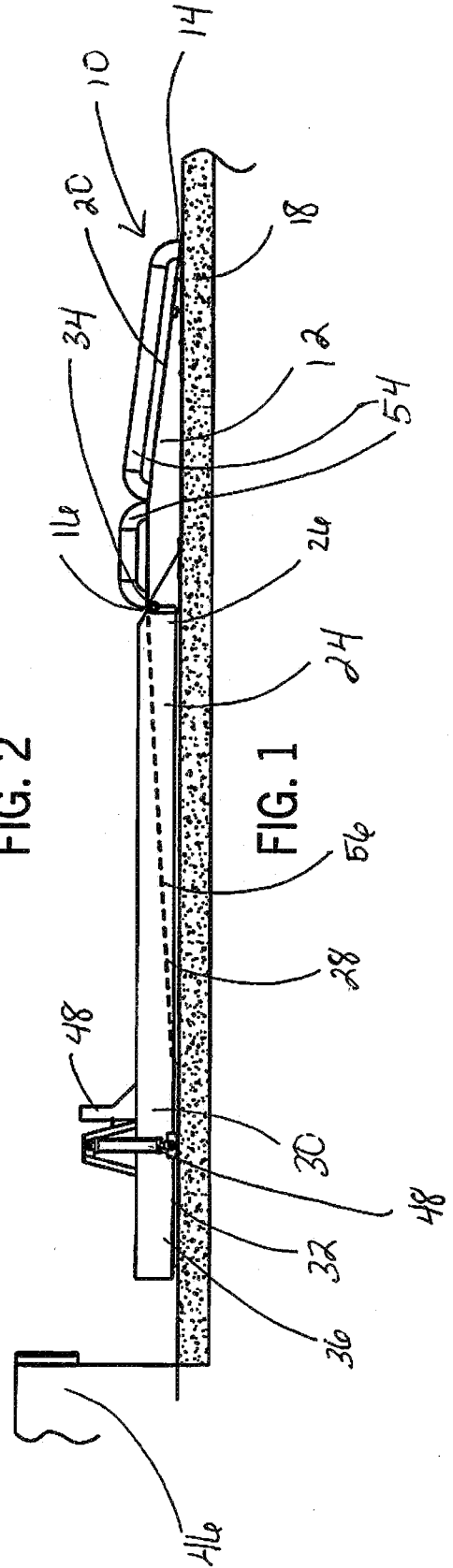


FIG. 1

