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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PAINT-ROLLER MANUFACTURING WITH INTEGRATED FINAL CUTTING ON-LINE AND FOR CONDITIONING PAINT-ROLLER COVER FABRIC

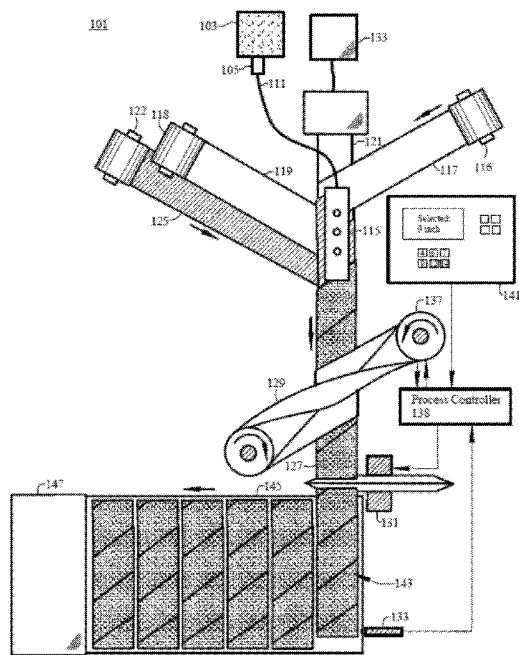


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: A paint roller manufacturing system and method are described. In an embodiment, an inner strip of material and an outer strip of material are wound about a mandrel in offset relation. The inner strip of material and the outer strip of material each comprise material that results in a final paint roller which shrinks by less than 2.5 percent of the final paint roller axial length, or which has shrinkage that varies by less $\pm 0.1\%$, upon hardening and setting. An adhesive is applied to at least a portion of the outer strip as it is wound about the mandrel. A length of fabric is wound about at least the outer strip to form a paint roller tube, and compression is applied to the paint roller tube while advancing the paint roller tube in a direction parallel to the mandrel.

**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PAINT-ROLLER MANUFACTURING WITH
INTEGRATED FINAL CUTTING ONLINE AND FOR CONDITIONING PAINT-
ROLLER COVER FABRIC**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority to United States Patent Application No. 16/261,227, filed January 29, 2019, titled MACHINE AND METHOD FOR PAINT-ROLLER MANUFACTURING WITH INTEGRATED FINAL CUTTING ONLINE, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

[0002] This application claims priority to United States Patent Application No. 16/580,662, filed September 24, 2019, titled MACHINE AND METHOD FOR PAINT-ROLLER MANUFACTURING WITH INTEGRATED FINAL CUTTING ONLINE, which is a Continuation-In-Part of and claims the benefit of United States Patent Application No. 16/261,227, filed January 29, 2019, titled MACHINE AND METHOD FOR PAINT-ROLLER MANUFACTURING WITH INTEGRATED FINAL CUTTING ONLINE, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

[0003] This application claims priority to United States Patent Application No. 16/539,832, filed August 13, 2019, titled SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDITIONING PAINT-ROLLER COVER FABRIC, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 16/261,227 filed January 29, 2019; a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 16/103,550 filed August 14, 2018, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 15/968,476 filed May 1, 2018, which is a continuation of U.S. Patent Application No. 15/676,507 filed August 14, 2017, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD

[0004] The present invention relates in general to the field of paint roller manufacturing, and in particular to a novel machine and process for cutting and/or conditioning operations in the manufacture of paint rollers.

BACKGROUND

[0005] Paint roller manufacturing typically involves multiple stages. By the late 1980s, and into the 1990s commercially viable methods of manufacturing thermoplastic paint rollers were

developed. See, e.g., U.S. Patents 5,195,242, 5,572,790 having a common inventor herewith. These patents describe continuous processes of manufacturing paint roller sticks. Sticks are several times the length of a finished paint roller. Thermoplastic paint rollers used heat or molten plastic materials in the process of manufacturing paint roller sticks. For example, many processes used molten polypropylene or molten polypropylene compounds with melting points in excess of 300 degrees Fahrenheit.

[0006] Sticks are typically 65 inches long when they come off a production line (e.g., as the end product of a continuous production line) at an elevated exterior temperature. For example, a stick may be cut from the output of a continuous processing line with an exterior temperature that is greater than about 90 degrees Fahrenheit, or greater than about 100 degrees Fahrenheit, or greater than about 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Internal components of the sticks may remain much hotter than the exterior temperature when cut.

[0007] After manufacture, the sticks are allowed to cool, harden and set over time. During the cooling, hardening and setting processes, the sticks shrink, often substantially, e.g., more than about an inch, or more than about 1.5 inches. Indeed, it is likely that the principal reason for the historical selection of 65 inches as the industry standard stick length is the ability to cut seven 9-inch paint rollers (which is a very popular size) therefrom, after shrinkage. After the sticks are hardened and set, and thus have shrunk, they are cut down to final paint-roller lengths. In an embodiment, a typical paint roller length may be 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, or 18 inches long. Other lengths (e.g., metric lengths) may be used as well. As an illustration, a 65-inch stick that has hardened and set may have shrunk by well over an inch, but it can still be cut into to seven 9-inch paint rollers. Other typical stick sizes may be used (i.e., other than 65 inches) for making 9-inch or other roller sizes, however, all sticks are sized to allow for substantial shrinkage and result in waste in the cutting process.

[0008] Prior to the invention described herein it was well known to persons skilled in the art that cutting a paint roller stick into paint rollers of final length should not be done until all or substantially all of the (axial and radial) shrinkage has occurred. Thus, typically, final cutting of paint rollers would not be performed until the stick has hardened and set. For example, final cutting may be performed when the exterior surface of the stick has a temperature of less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit or less than 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Objects, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following description of preferred embodiments as illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which reference characters refer to the same parts throughout the various views. The drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating principles of the invention.

[0010] FIG. 1 shows a top view illustrating a machine and two-strip process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment wherein paint rollers are manufactured and cut to final length in a single process.

[0011] FIG. 2 shows a top view illustrating a machine and one-strip process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment wherein paint rollers are manufactured and cut to final length in a single process.

[0012] FIG. 3 shows a paint roller tube traveling through a machine past a series of notches into which one or more sensors and/or switches are inserted.

[0013] FIG. 4 shows a schematic diagram of a process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment wherein paint rollers are manufactured and cut to final length.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a block diagram that illustrates a computer system upon which an embodiment of the invention may be implemented.

[0015] FIG. 6 illustrates a chip set upon which an embodiment of the invention may be implement.

[0016] FIG. 7 shows a top view illustrating a machine and process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment wherein a fabric conditioning process is utilized in a two-strip process paint roller manufacturing process.

[0017] FIG. 8 shows a side view illustrating a fabric conditioning unit utilized in the machine and process shown in FIG. 7.

[0018] FIG. 9 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline shearing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

[0019] FIG. 10 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline beveling in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

[0020] FIG. 11 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline buffing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

[0021] FIG. 12 shows a top view illustrating a machine and process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment of the invention wherein a fabric conditioning process is utilized in a single-strip paint roller manufacturing process.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] Reference will now be made in detail to the preferred embodiments of the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. The following description and drawings are illustrative and are not to be construed as limiting. Numerous specific details are described to provide a thorough understanding. However, in certain instances, well-known or conventional details are not described in order to avoid obscuring the description. References to one or an embodiment in the present disclosure are not necessarily references to the same embodiment, and such references mean at least one.

[0023] In a two-strip embodiment of the process, an inner strip of material and an outer strip of material are wound about a mandrel in offset relation, the inner strip of material and the outer strip of material each comprising polypropylene or a polypropylene compound including polypropylene and at least one filler.

[0024] According to various embodiments, the paint roller may comprise a material or a combination of materials selected to result in a shrinkage (between the cut length of paint roller and the final hardened-and-set length) of less than about 2.5%. In an embodiment, the materials used may be selected to reduce roller-to-roller variation in shrinkage to within manufacturing tolerances, such as to less than about one tenth of 1 percent (0.1%). According to various embodiments, the materials may include a combination of a filler and a polymeric material.

[0025] According to various embodiments, the filler may be selected from Alumina Trihydrate, Barium Sulfate, Calcium Carbonate, Carbon Black, Diatomaceous earth, Dolomite, Halloysite, Kaolin, Magnetite/Hematite, Magnesium Hydroxide, Mica, Silica, Talc, Titanium Dioxide, Wollastonite, Zinc Oxide.

[0026] According to various embodiments, the filler may have a density within a range having a lower limit and/or an upper limit. The range may include or exclude the lower limit and/or the upper limit. The lower limit and/or upper limit may be selected from about 1, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, and 7 g/cm³. For example, according to certain embodiments, according to various embodiments, the filler may have a density of from about 1 to about 6 g/cm³, or any combination of lower limits and upper limits described.

[0027] According to various embodiments, the filler may have an average particle size within a range having a lower limit and/or an upper limit. The range may include or exclude the lower limit and/or the upper limit. The lower limit and/or upper limit may be selected from about 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.5, 1, 5, 10, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, and 1000 microns. For example, according to certain embodiments, according to various embodiments, the filler may have an average particle size of from about 0.001 to about 1000 microns, or any combination of lower limits and upper limits described.

[0028] According to various embodiments, the polymeric material may be a thermoplastic, a thermoset, an elastomer, a copolymer thereof, and/or a blend thereof. The polymeric material may have any suitable molecular weight. The polymeric material may further comprise one or more additives including plasticizers to modify various properties of the polymeric material including but not limited to interactions between polymer chains, glass transition temperature, melt viscosity, and/or elastic modulus. The polymeric material may be a commercially-available virgin or non-virgin grade.

[0029] According to various embodiments, the thermoplastic material may be crystalline or amorphous. According to various embodiments, the thermoplastic may be selected from a polypropylene, a poly(methyl methacrylate), an acrylonitrile butadiene styrene polymer, a polyamide, a polylactic acid (polylactide), a polybenzimidazole, a polycarbonate, a polysulfone, a polyoxymethylene, a polyether ether ketone, a polyetherimide, a polyethylene, a polyethylene terephthalate, a polyphenylene oxide, a polyphenylene sulfide, a polypropylene, a polystyrene, a polyvinyl chloride, a polyvinylidene fluoride, a polytetrafluoroethylene, or combinations thereof.

[0030] According to various embodiments, the thermoset may be selected from a polyester, a polyurethane, a polyurea, vulcanized rubber, a phenol-formaldehyde resin, a melamine resin, and epoxy resin, a benzoxazine, a polyimide, a polycyanurate, a furan resin, a silicone resin, a vinyl ester resin, or a combination thereof.

[0031] According to various embodiments, the elastomer may be selected from a polyisoprene, a polybutadiene, a polychloroprene, a butyl rubber, a halogenated butyl rubber, a styrene-butadiene rubber, a nitrile rubber, an ethylene propylene rubber, an epichlorohydrin rubber, a polyacrylic rubber, a silicone rubber, a fluorosilicone rubber, a fluoroelastomer, a perfluoroelastomer, a polyether block amide, a chlorosulfonated polyethylene, an ethylene-vinyl acetate, or a combination thereof.

[0032] The amount of filler present in the combination (of filler and polymer material) may be within a range having a lower limit and/or an upper limit. The range may include or exclude the lower limit and/or the upper limit. The lower limit and/or upper limit may be selected from about 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, and 75 % by weight. For example, according to certain embodiments, the amount of filler present in the combination (of filler and polymer material) may be in a range from about 10 to about 70% by weight, or any combination of lower limits and upper limits described.

[0033] In an embodiment, the materials used are selected to result in a shrinkage of less than 0.6% or 0.05 inches for a 9" paint roller. In an embodiment, the materials used should be selected to reduce roller-to-roller variation in shrinkage to within manufacturing tolerances, such as to less than 0.013% or 0.001 inches for a 9" roller. In an embodiment, the materials used are selected to result in a shrinkage of less than 1.2% or 0.1 inches for a 9" paint roller. In an embodiment, the materials used should be selected to reduce roller-to-roller variation in shrinkage to within manufacturing tolerances, such as to less than 0.026% or 0.002 inches for a 9" roller. In an embodiment, the materials used are selected to result in a shrinkage of less than 2.4% or 0.2 inches for a 9" paint roller. In an embodiment, the materials used should be selected to reduce roller-to-roller variation in shrinkage to within manufacturing tolerances, such as to less than 0.052%, or 0.004 inches, for a 9" roller. Applying the foregoing to an 18 inch paint

roller, in an embodiment, the materials used should be selected to result in a shrinkage of less than 0.11 inches or less than 0.22 inches, or less than 0.33 inches. In an embodiment, the materials (e.g., proportions of polypropylene to filler) are selected to result in a final paint roller shrinkage which is repeatable. In an embodiment, the materials are selected to result in a final paint roller shrinkage which is repeatable within normal manufacturing tolerance (i.e., that the finished paint rollers manufacture with the materials harden and set to the finished length within manufacturing tolerance.)

[0034] Shrinkage also occurs radially, in addition to axially as discussed above. In other words, there is some reduction in paint roller diameter due to shrinkage. Rollers manufactured with a compound that includes a filler, as described herein, shrink less than traditional polypropylene-only rollers. Polypropylene-only rollers are typically made with an internal diameter of 1.52", and shrink to a finished internal diameter of 1.485", which represents a shrinkage of about 2.3%. Rollers manufactured with a compound that includes a filler are typically made with an internal diameter of 1.5", and they shrink to 1.485", which represents a shrinkage of about 1%. Mini rollers, which typically have a length of 4.5 inches and a diameter of 0.5 inch or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, or a length of 6.5 inches and a diameter of 0.5 inch or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, are subject to similar shrinkage. Therefore, rollers of all sizes made with such compounded material shrink less, typically more than 50% less, than paint rollers made solely from the more traditional polypropylene material.

[0035] In an embodiment of the present invention, an adhesive is applied to at least a portion of the outer strip as it is wound about the mandrel, a length of fabric is wound about at least the outer strip to form a continuous paint roller tube, and compression is applied to the paint roller tube. The paint roller tube may be cut into pre-specified lengths inline with the manufacturing process prior to the paint roller tube hardening and setting. In an embodiment, a precision measuring and/or sensing device is used to control a cutting device so as to cut the paint roller tube into pre-specified lengths prior to the paint roller tube hardening and setting. In an embodiment, a measuring and/or sensing device controls a cutting device which cuts the continuous paint roller tube into pre-specified lengths inline with the paint roller tube manufacturing process prior to the paint roller tube hardening and setting. The cut lengths of paint roller tubes are subsequently allowed to harden and set. In an embodiment, the hardened and set cut paint roller tube is the desired length of a paint roller. In an embodiment, the

hardened and set cut paint roller tube is the desired length of a paint roller, within normal manufacturing variation.

[0036] FIG. 1 illustrates a two-strip embodiment of a paint roller manufacturing system 101 for implementing the above process. The system includes a cover dispenser 122 that continuously dispenses a windable width of paint roller cover fabric 125, the paint roller cover fabric having a back side and an applicator side. The paint roller cover fabric 125 may comprise a conventional cover fabric or a coated fabric that has been coated offline or online, as is taught in U.S. Patent No. 9,956,719 which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety and shares a common inventor herewith.

[0037] A mandrel 121 is provided, and may be cooled by a mandrel cooler 133 so as to facilitate movement of strips around the mandrel in a helical manner without adhesion of the strips to the mandrel and with lower resistance.

[0038] First and second strip dispensers 116, 118 are configured to continuously dispense first and second windable widths of strip material 117, 119. A guide system (not shown) may be used to guide the first and second strip coming from the first and second strip dispensers such that it is wound about the mandrel and to guide a paint roller cover fabric to be wound about the first and second strips 117, 119. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be coated. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be perforated. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be coated and perforated. The second strip 119 and/or the first strip 117 may be a solid strip, a perforated strip or an embossed strip (e.g., having recessed dimples or other recessed features).

[0039] In an embodiment, the cover fabric 125 has been perforated in order to increase adhesion of the fabric to the outer strip in a two-strip process, or to the sole strip in a single-strip process. Methods and devices for perforating cover fabrics are taught, for example, in U.S. Patent Application No. 16/103,550 filed August 14, 2018, which shares a common inventor herewith and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Paint roller fabric can either be perforated in the paint roller manufacturing process, or at any time prior to the fabric being wound around the mandrel, such as when the fabric is manufactured. In an embodiment, perforating paint roller fabric may provide for greater adhesion and/or a reduction in shedding (i.e., the amount of fibers

that are dislodged during the paint roller manufacturing process or the process of using a finished paint roller).

[0040] In an embodiment, an applicator 115 is configured to apply adhesive (which may be glue, a polymer, or a compound polymer with or without a filler material) on substantially all of the outer side of the first and second windable strips 117, 119 upstream of a location where the conventional or coated paint roller cover fabric 125 is wound about the first and second strips. In an embodiment, the adhesive is in a molten state or a liquified state when applied. In an embodiment, the adhesive is molten or liquified polypropylene. In an embodiment, the adhesive is molten or liquified compound which includes polypropylene. In an embodiment, the adhesive is molten or liquified compound which includes polypropylene and calcium carbonate.

[0041] In an embodiment, a compressing and advancing device 129 is provided for applying inward pressure normal to the mandrel on a conventional or coated paint roller fabric cover 125 after it is wound about the first and second strips 117, 119, and for advancing the first and second windable strips and the paint roller fabric cover along the mandrel 121. As discussed above, the paint roller fabric cover may be conventional, coated, perforated, or coated and perforated.

[0042] In an embodiment, the machine includes an extruder 103, which may be configured for extrusion of an adhesive material through a die 105. In an embodiment, the material is molten when it is extruded through the die 105 and the molten material is pushed through hose 111 to the strip-coating adhesive applicator 115. The strip-coating applicator 115 may comprise any device for applying liquid adhesive to a fabric, including a die head, sprayer, brush, extruder, or the like.

[0043] The inner strip 117 and outer strip 119 of material are helically wound about the mandrel 121 in offset relation. In an embodiment, the offset relation is approximately 50%, that is, the center of one strip wraps at a location under or over (as the case may be) the middle of the other strip. In an embodiment, the offset relation is at least 5% to prevent the seams of the inner strip and the outer strip from aligning. A 5% offset relation refers to having the seam at least 5% of the width of the strip away from the edge of the strip. In an embodiment, the entire inner surface of the inner strip 117 contacts the mandrel 121. In an embodiment, no portion of the outer strip 119 contacts the mandrel 121.

[0044] In an embodiment, the inner strip 117 and the outer strip 119 comprise a material that, for a given roller length, will result in repeatable shrinkage due to hardening and setting. In an embodiment, the inner strip 117 and the outer strip 119 comprise a material that, for a given roller length, will result in repeatable shrinkage due to hardening and setting, within a manufacturing tolerance.

[0045] In an embodiment, the outer surface of the inner strip 117 and the outer surface of the outer strip 119 are coated with adhesive by the strip-coating applicator 115. In an embodiment (not shown), the strip-coating applicator 115 comprises two separate strip-coating applicators, one to coat each of the two strips 117, 119. Thus, such coating of the outside of each of the two strips may be performed by the same applicator or, in another embodiment, by two separate applicators. As shown in FIG. 1, coating of the strip or strips is performed by a single applicator. In an embodiment, only the outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive by the strip-coating applicator 115. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the inner strip or the inner surface of the outer strip such that the adhesive ends out between the inner and outer strips after it is applied. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the inner strip or the inner surface of the outer strip such that the adhesive ends out between the inner and outer strips after it is applied, and liquid adhesive applied by an optional fabric coating applicator is not set when the outer strip 119 and the fabric cover 125 come together on the mandrel. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the outer strip or the inner surface of the fabric cover 125 such that the adhesive ends out between the outer strip and fabric after it is applied. In an embodiment, a portion of the outer surface (rather than the entire outer surface) of the outer strip 119 (or the only strip in a single-strip embodiment) is coated with adhesive. In an embodiment, the entire outer surface of the outer strip 119 is coated with adhesive. The strip-coating applicator 115, in each case, may be configured to apply a contiguous or non-contiguous coat of material to the strip. Examples of a non-contiguous coat include, without limitation, a mesh of material, or stripes of coating material. In addition, the strip-coating application may be configured to apply additional material, such as a mesh material in addition to a coating material. In an embodiment, a mesh material and a contiguous coat of material are applied by the strip coating applicator 115. In an

embodiment, the mesh material is a resin. In an embodiment, the mesh material is an adhesive mesh. In an embodiment, only a portion of the outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive. In an embodiment, the entire outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive.

[0046] In an embodiment, the strips and/or adhesive are made from or comprise polypropylene. In an embodiment, the strips and/or adhesive comprise a compound of polypropylene and a filler. In an embodiment, the filler comprises calcium carbonate. A variety of formulations for strips and/or adhesive may be found, e.g., in Applicant's U.S. Patent Application No. 14/789,723 filed July 1, 2015 and the references cited therein, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference. It is not necessary to use strips of identical materials. It is similarly not necessary to employ an adhesive of similar materials to one or both of the strips.

[0047] In an embodiment, the material used for both or either of the strips may comprise, for example: (1) commonly-available polypropylene; (2) a blend of polypropylene, with an effective Melt Flow Rate (MFR) of 2 – 20 g/10 min.; (3) a combination of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) and Polypropylene, with CaCO₃ ranges used from 10-70% CaCO₃; or (4) a combination of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) and a blend of polypropylenes, with CaCO₃ ranges used from 10-70% CaCO₃.

[0048] In an embodiment, the material used for the adhesive may comprise, for example: (1) commonly-available polypropylene; (2) a blend of polypropylene, with an effective Melt Flow Rate (MFR) of 20 – 180 g/10 min.; (3) a combination of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) and Polypropylene, with CaCO₃ ranges used from 10-70% CaCO₃; or (4) a combination of calcium carbonate and blend of polypropylene (having a high MFR ranging from 700-1400 g/10 min), with CaCO₃ ranges from 10-70% CaCO₃ by weight, for an effective total MFR of 20-180 g/10 min. In an embodiment, the adhesive comprises a combination of calcium carbonate and blend of polypropylene, the combination having an effective MFR within the range of 20-180 g/10 min. In an embodiment, the adhesive comprises a combination of calcium carbonate and blend of polypropylene, the combination having an effective MFR within the range of 80-170 g/10 min. In an embodiment, the adhesive comprises a combination of calcium carbonate and blend of polypropylene, the combination having an effective MFR within the range of 160-175 g/10 min.

[0049] Once the component parts (e.g., strips, adhesive, cover) are wound about the mandrel 121, the in-process paint roller cover material tube 127 may be driven by a motorized compressing and advancing device. In an embodiment, the in-process paint roller cover material tube 127 is driven by a compressing and advancing device comprising a belt 129 driven by a motorized roller 137. Operation of the motorized roller 137 may be controlled by a process controller 138 in one-way or two-way communication with the motorized roller 137. According to various embodiments, the process controller 138 may comprise a computer system 500 as illustrated in FIG. 5.

[0050] The formed paint roller cover material tube 127 is advanced along the mandrel 121 by the belt 129 to a cutting device 131 that cuts the tube into lengths. The cutting device 131 may be, e.g., a rotary cutter, a flyaway saw, a traveling saw, a stationary cutter, or other suitable cutter or chopper. In an embodiment, the cutting device is under the control of the process controller 138.

[0051] The process controller receives a signal from a precision measuring and/or sensing device 133, the signal indicating that the tube 127 has advanced to a particular point either along or after the mandrel 121. The precision measuring and/or sensing device 133 may be, e.g., a mechanical, optical, electromagnetic, Hall effect, piezoelectric, or magnetic sensor capable of measuring a desired length of the tube 127, or detecting or determining a location of the tube 127 with sufficient precision, accuracy, and speed to allow the cutting device 131 to cut the tube 127 such that once set, the cut lengths result in tubes in a desired length (e.g., a paint roller length) within a manufacturing tolerance. In an embodiment, such tolerance is less than 0.001 inches per final paint roller length. In an embodiment, such tolerance is less than +/- 0.002 inches. In an embodiment, such tolerance is +/- 0.004 inches. In an embodiment, such tolerance comprises shrinkage of less than 0.05 inches per final paint roller length. In an embodiment, such tolerance comprises shrinkage of less than 0.10 inches per final paint roller length. In an embodiment, such tolerance comprises shrinkage of less than 0.20 inches per final paint roller length. In an embodiment, such tolerance comprises shrinkage which varies by less than 0.004 inches per final paint roller length. In an embodiment, such tolerance comprises shrinkage which varies by less than 0.8 percent of the final paint roller length.

[0052] The precision measuring and/or sensing device 133 is illustratively shown in FIG. 1 downstream from the cutting device 131, however, the precision measuring and/or sensing

device 133 may be located at virtually any part of the machine where there is movement proportional to the manufacturing process. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device 133 is located at a part of the machine past which the tube 127 is moving. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device 133 is located at a part of the machine past which one or more of the strips 117, 119 or cover 125 are moving. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device comprises a shaft encoder on the shaft of motorized roller 137. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device comprises a shaft encoder on the shaft of one or more of rollers 116, 118, and 122. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device comprises a wheel in contact with either strips 117, 119, or cover 125, or any combination of those components. In an embodiment, the precision measuring and/or sensing device comprises a wheel in contact with the tube 127.

[0053] The process controller 138 is in communication with a selection interface 141, which may comprise hard buttons and/or a touch interface with soft buttons, that allow selection of final paint roller length. According to various embodiments, the selection interface may comprise an input device 512, a display 514, and/or a pointing device 516 as illustrated in FIG. 5. The selection interface 141 is in direct or indirect communication with the cutting device 131 and/or the precision measuring device 133, and is configured to allow an operator to select the final paint roller length from one of a plurality of preset lengths to another of the plurality of preset lengths. Examples of such preset lengths include, e.g., three inches, four inches, four and a half inches, six inches, six and a half inches, seven inches, nine inches, twelve inches, fifteen inches, and eighteen inches. Based on such selection, and the signal from the precision measuring device 133, the process controller 138 causes the cutting device 131 to be actuated with a specific timing that results in the length of the final paint rollers 143 to be at or near a length selected using the selection interface 141. The functions of the process controller may be incorporated in whole or in part in other sensing, detecting, or computational components already in use elsewhere in the process.

[0054] Once rollers have been cut via the above-described inline cutting process, they can be conveyed via a conveyor 145 to a finishing machine 147 where they are finished. In an embodiment, finishing includes beveling the edges of the final roller, trimming excess fabric, and removing any detritus / debris. Finishing may include any other process that a manufacturer

requires before rollers are placed into packaging, and may include placement into packaging. In an embodiment, conveyor 145 comprises a conveyor belt with short walls on either side.

[0055] The rollers can then be loaded into a loading mechanism such as a magazine. The process may further utilize an apparatus that evenly distributes the rollers to a number of downstream finishing machines, based on various methods used to sense the current capacity / queue at each of the machines. Various methods can be utilized for assessing how “busy” a finishing machine is. Such methods include, e.g., receiving and processing signals from electromechanical sensors, optical sensors, or operator input.

[0056] In an embodiment, the finishing machine 147 includes a queuing station and an indexing device. Once a roller has been deposited at the queuing station of the finishing machine, the finishing process can begin. The indexing device is used to finish rollers using functions performed at each of a plurality of different stations selected per the particular manufacturer’s finishing requirements.

[0057] There are two main types of indexing machines, single-turntable machines and dual-turntable machines. Single-turntable indexing machines typically utilize a single rotary turntable that turns a roller through a plurality of stations. For example, a six-station machine would load, spin, buff, bevel, spin, and unload a roller. Spinning is used to remove excess particles from fibers. One of the main issues with a single-turntable process is that it typically is unable to easily process a roller on both ends (i.e., the end of the roller that is closest to the indexing turntable is hard to reach). A dual-turntable indexing machine, on the other hand, allows rollers to be finished at both ends, using two sets of turntables. One example of a machine of this type uses two eight-station turntables that would each load, buff, bevel, shear, clean ends, spin, (an ancillary action), and unload the roller. Either type of finishing machine is also capable of tucking in excess fabric on one end of the roller to increase the surface area of the roller that can be exposed to paint, or for aesthetic purposes.

[0058] As an alternative to or in addition to using a finishing machine, roller fabric can be pre-finished by cleaning, shearing, vacuuming, de-linting, or otherwise manipulating it inline before it is wound around a mandrel or otherwise applied to a core as a part of any paint roller manufacturing process. The fabric can be treated either before it is applied to a core, or even after the fabric has been applied to the core, and before the roller cores are cut to desired lengths.

Finishing processes other than beveling and spinning can be performed prior to roller cores being cut to desired lengths.

[0059] In an embodiment, roller cores are marked with a day / date code or other identifying codes / marks on the inside portion of the core. In an embodiment, marking can be accomplished by laser marking strip material 117, 119 (composed of any material) before it is wound around the mandrel, or by laser marking the core of any tube after rollers are cut to length. The printing / laser marking / burning of the code can also take place during the finishing process, potentially as a separate station of the process, or this function can be incorporated into a finishing station of the finishing machine 147.

[0060] In an embodiment, a method for manufacturing paint rollers includes winding an inner strip of material and an outer strip of material about a mandrel in offset relation, the inner strip of material and the outer strip of material each comprising polypropylene or polypropylene and at least one filler in proportions of polypropylene to filler that result in final paint roller shrinkage of less than 0.015 inches per inch of final paint roller length or less than 0.87 percent of the final paint roller length. An adhesive is applied to at least a portion of the outer strip as it is wound about the mandrel. A length of fabric is wound about at least the outer strip to form a paint roller tube, and compression is applied to the paint roller tube. A precision measuring or sensing device is used to control a cutting device so as to cut the paint roller tube into final paint roller lengths online with the paint roller tube manufacturing process and prior to the paint roller tube being allowed to harden and set. In an embodiment, the proportions of polypropylene to filler may result in final paint roller shrinkage of less than 0.010 inches per inch of final paint roller length, less than 0.006 inches per inch of final paint roller length, or less than 0.004 inches per inch of final paint roller length.

[0061] The methods and system are described above in the context of a two-strip process for manufacturing paint rollers. One skilled in the art will recognize that the same or similar methods can be used in a single-strip process, a three-strip process, or the like, without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

[0062] It is within the scope and spirit of the inventions described herein that a continuous process of manufacturing paint rollers employs a cutter to cut the in-process semi-finished continuous tube of paint roller material prior to setting. It is also within the scope and spirit of

the inventions described herein that the length of material that is cut from the continuous tube of paint roller material includes the length of the desired finished paint roller plus a predetermined amount or range of shrinkage which will permit the cut length to harden and set to a finished length within a manufacturing tolerance. In an embodiment, the predetermined amount of shrinkage may be determined empirically, by operating the process over a known cut size, or a range of cut sizes and measuring the cutting results after they have hardened and set to substantially their final size. In an embodiment, the predetermined amount of shrinkage may be determined through calculation from known shrinkage properties of each of the relevant constituent materials. Despite the hundreds of millions of thermoplastic paint rollers made each year for at least the last twenty years or more, no known paint rollers have been continuously manufactured to finished length solely by cutting the continuously manufactured paint roller tube to a prespecified larger size, and allowing the cut section to harden and set, and thereby shrink. Regardless of the method of determining the predetermined amount of shrinkage, using an enlarged cut size to accommodate the predetermined shrinkage has heretofore not been taught or suggested.

[0063] FIG. 2 shows a single-strip embodiment 201 of the two-strip machine and process shown in FIG. 1. This embodiment generally operates as per the descriptions of FIG. 1 above, except that a single strip 117 is used instead of the dual strips 117 and 119.

[0064] With respect to the process controller 138, the selection interface 141, and the precision measuring device 133 shown in FIGS. 1 and 2 and discussed above, it is noted that roller lengths can also be measured via a device that uses a mechanical switch that is triggered by the forward motion of the roller tube, or the presence of the roller tube. The mechanical switch, or any other apparatus that is used to measure the presence of the roller, can be positioned at arbitrary or preset lengths in order to allow operators to quickly change the desired length of the roller tube between preset desired lengths. Markers, mechanical stops, and/or other physical or virtual demarcation devices can be placed inline with respect to roller tube travel, or parallel or perpendicular to the direction of roller tube travel. Physical / virtual preset length stops or other demarcations can be used in conjunction with or in lieu of a selection device and/or a processor controller. An embodiment of such method and system is illustrated in FIG. 3.

[0065] FIG. 3 shows a paint roller tube 127 traveling through a machine past a series of preset notches 301, 302, 303, 304 into which one or more sensors 133 is inserted. The preset notches 301, 302, 303, 304 correspond to different paint roller lengths, e.g., three inch, six inch, nine inch and 12 inch. In an embodiment the sensor 133 is a “flipper” switch is triggered whenever the roller tube is pushed against it via forward motion. The switch 133 can be positioned at preset or arbitrary intervals that allow the operator to quickly change the switch’s position between desired lengths. In this manner, the triggering / sensing device that is utilized can be positioned precisely where the manufacturer desires to position it. Instead of using a switch, an optoelectronic array, Hall effect device, or other suitable sensor or measuring device could be used.

[0066] In addition to embodiments wherein a trigger is moved, other embodiments can utilize radar or other non-contact measuring devices to measure a length of roller tube as it passes by the scanning area of the manufacturing system. The length can be continually assessed, and once the device decides that the length is adequate as per operator instructions, the device then sends a signal to cut. All devices can either communicate with an intermediary process controller, or directly with the cutting device itself.

[0067] Advantages of the present invention over the present inventor’s prior patents include, but are not limited to the following. It should be noted that some but not all embodiments of the present invention provide each of these advantages. The present invention can provide a single-step in-line process for manufacturing a paint roller using inline cutting, rather than a two-step offline process, thereby reducing the amount of time, resources, labor, machinery, and waste materials required to produce paint rollers in final lengths. Machines operating according to the present invention can be configured to use less expensive molten material that includes one or more fillers. In addition to not requiring additional labor, space, and time to deal with roller tubes as opposed to rollers cut to desired final lengths, other benefits include:

- o If roller tubes are constructed of materials that reduce roller tube shrinkage relative to materials that experience greater shrinkage (as described above), waste is reduced, and thus, less material is required to make each paint roller. Historically, 65 inch tubes were produced because up to one inch of shrinkage was expected, and because one inch of material was needed to accommodate imprecision in the cutting process. Although using a compounded polypropylene

material reduced shrinkage, it did not reduce waste because manufacturers have continued to manufacture paint rollers by producing 65" sticks. Indeed, persons of ordinary skill in the art failed to recognize the benefits of the present invention, which may dramatically reduce waste.

o Eliminating the need for recutting--that is, to cut rollers to desired lengths from sticks--saves both capital and labor costs associated with owning and operating the equipment needed to cut sticks into paint rollers of exact lengths. Eliminating the need for recutting also saves the cost of storage space that was taken up by intermediary storage of roller tubes and the recutting equipment.

o Overall manufacturing time decreases with the elimination of recutting paint roller tubes.

[0068] It is noted that the last two benefits accrue to anyone that uses inline paint roller cutting with any paint roller manufacturing process, including spiral-winding processes using any strip and resin material, and any non-spiral-winding processes. With respect to non-spiral winding processes, the methods and systems described herein can be used for inline cutting with processes such as those that use extruded tubes. Extruded tubes can be pre-fabricated before the paint roller manufacturing process or extruded as part of the paint roller manufacturing process. This includes extruded tubes that rotate as they are made inline.

[0069] Although reference has been made to specific paint roller manufacturing techniques, various embodiments of cutting paint rollers to specified lengths may be performed with any paint roller manufacturing system where tubes, comprised of any sufficiently rigid material, are moved through a manufacturing line using forward motion. The motion can be linear or rotational. The term "paint roller tube" refers to a tube of material or a tube comprised of a combination of materials that may or may not have paint roller fabric or other materials, such as lambskin, applied to it. These paint roller tubes are then cut to desired individual roller lengths.

[0070] FIG. 4 shows a schematic view of a process 401 for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment wherein paint rollers are manufactured and cut to final length. As shown in Figure 4, uncut paint roller tubes 405 may be manufactured by any paint roller manufacturing process 403. The paint roller manufacturing process 403 may be a continuous process or a batch process. The paint roller tubes 405 may be supplied continuously or in a batch-wise manner to a finishing section 407 of the process 401. The paint roller tubes 405 may

be cut into finished lengths in finishing section 407 as described according to any of the other embodiments described herein.

[0071] Any paint roller manufacturing process 403 may be used. The examples below are neither limiting nor exhaustive. The paint roller tubes 405 may comprise any combination of materials and may be manufactured by any process.

[0072] Paint roller tubes may be made with sufficiently rigid paper or paper-like material. These tubes are typically made from several plies of paper that are fed into a process that winds there plies around a mandrel. The paper is pre-treated with adhesive, and/or an adhesive is dripped or extruded upon the paper strips, binding the plies to each other and to the fabric which is applied later in the process. The resulting tube moves forward due to the motion created from the spiral winding process. Spirally-wound paint roller tubes may be produced in a separate process, and then fabric may be wound around the tubes in a subsequent process. The tubes may then be cut to desired lengths.

[0073] Paint roller tubes may be made of pre-formed tubes of thermoplastic material. This material may be made of polypropylene or PVC, for instance. The pre-formed tubes may be made of continuously-extruded material, or may be made of strips of material that are wound around a mandrel using a spiral winding process. The pre-formed tubes are loaded onto a mandrel, and are then rotated and moved forward by a spiral winding process. Fabric is applied to the tube via the same spiral winding process, and the fabric is secured either via a resin made of thermoplastic material or an adhesive that is extruded on the tube, or via heating the tube at the point at which the fabric is applied so that the plastic material that the tube at that point is made of is sufficiently heated to create adhesion between the heated surface and the fabric. The resulting fabric-coated tube is then cut to desired lengths.

[0074] Paint roller tubes may be made tubes of thermoplastic material that are extruded from an extruder. The die from which the tube is extruded rotates, imparting rotational and forward motion to the tube. A resin is extruded upon the tube, and fabric is then wound around the resin-coated tube. The resulting fabric-coated tube is then cut to desired lengths.

[0075] Paint roller tubes may be made of pre-formed tubes of thermoplastic material. This material may be made of polypropylene or PVC, for instance. The pre-formed tubes may be made of continuously-extruded material, or may be made of strips of material that are wound

around a mandrel using a spiral winding process. The tubes are then joined together using tape or some other adhesive, and are then rotated via a spiral winding process. A resin made of molten thermoplastic or an adhesive is extruded onto the tube, and fabric is then wound onto the tube via a spiral winding process, which also moves the tube forward. The resulting fabric-covered tube is then cut into desired lengths.

[0076] Paint roller tubes may be made via a spiral winding process. One or more strips of thermoplastic material are wound around a mandrel via a spiral winder. The strips may be extruded inline, or may be pre-formed. A resin or adhesive is extruded onto the strip(s), and fabric is wound using the spiral winder shortly thereafter. The resin / adhesive binds the strips to each other (if multiple plies are used), and the strip(s) to the fabric. The resulting paint roller tube is then cut into desired lengths.

[0077] FIG. 5 is a block diagram that illustrates a computer system 500 upon which an embodiment of the invention may be implemented. Computer system 500 includes a communication mechanism such as a bus 510 for passing information between other internal and external components of the computer system 500. Information is represented as physical signals of a measurable phenomenon, typically electric voltages, but including, in other embodiments, such phenomena as magnetic, electromagnetic, pressure, chemical, molecular atomic and quantum interactions. For example, north and south magnetic fields, or a zero and non-zero electric voltage, represent two states (0, 1) of a binary digit (bit). Other phenomena can represent digits of a higher base. A superposition of multiple simultaneous quantum states before measurement represents a quantum bit (qubit). A sequence of one or more digits constitutes digital data that is used to represent a number or code for a character. In some embodiments, information called analog data is represented by a near continuum of measurable values within a particular range. Computer system 500, or a portion thereof, constitutes a means for performing one or more steps of one or more methods described herein.

[0078] A sequence of binary digits constitutes digital data that is used to represent a number or code for a character. A bus 510 includes many parallel conductors of information so that information is transferred quickly among devices coupled to the bus 510. One or more processors 502 for processing information are coupled with the bus 510. A processor 502 performs a set of operations on information. The set of operations include bringing information

in from the bus 510 and placing information on the bus 510. The set of operations also typically include comparing two or more units of information, shifting positions of units of information, and combining two or more units of information, such as by addition or multiplication. A sequence of operations to be executed by the processor 502 constitutes computer instructions.

[0079] Computer system 500 also includes a memory 504 coupled to bus 510. The memory 504, such as a random access memory (RAM) or other dynamic storage device, stores information including computer instructions. Dynamic memory allows information stored therein to be changed by the computer system 500. RAM allows a unit of information stored at a location called a memory address to be stored and retrieved independently of information at neighboring addresses. The memory 504 is also used by the processor 502 to store temporary values during execution of computer instructions. The computer system 500 also includes a read only memory (ROM) 506 or other static storage device coupled to the bus 510 for storing static information, including instructions, that is not changed by the computer system 500. Also coupled to bus 510 is a non-volatile (persistent) storage device 508, such as a magnetic disk or optical disk, for storing information, including instructions, that persists even when the computer system 500 is turned off or otherwise loses power.

[0080] Information, including instructions, is provided to the bus 510 for use by the processor from an external input device 512, such as a keyboard containing alphanumeric keys operated by a human user, or a sensor. A sensor detects conditions in its vicinity and transforms those detections into signals compatible with the signals used to represent information in computer system 500. Other external devices coupled to bus 510, used primarily for interacting with humans, include a display device 514, such as a cathode ray tube (CRT) or a liquid crystal display (LCD), for presenting images, and a pointing device 516, such as a mouse or a trackball or cursor direction keys, for controlling a position of a small cursor image presented on the display 514 and issuing commands associated with graphical elements presented on the display 514.

[0081] In the illustrated embodiment, special purpose hardware, such as an application specific integrated circuit (IC) 520, is coupled to bus 510. The special purpose hardware is configured to perform operations not performed by processor 502 quickly enough for special purposes. Examples of application specific ICs include graphics accelerator cards for generating images for

display 514, cryptographic boards for encrypting and decrypting messages sent over a network, speech recognition, and interfaces to special external devices, such as robotic arms and medical scanning equipment that repeatedly perform some complex sequence of operations that are more efficiently implemented in hardware.

[0082] Computer system 500 also includes one or more instances of a communications interface 570 coupled to bus 510. Communication interface 570 provides a two-way communication coupling to a variety of external devices that operate with their own processors, such as printers, scanners and external disks. In general the coupling is with a network link 578 that is connected to a local network 580 to which a variety of external devices with their own processors are connected. For example, communication interface 570 may be a parallel port or a serial port or a universal serial bus (USB) port on a personal computer. In some embodiments, communications interface 570 is an integrated services digital network (ISDN) card or a digital subscriber line (DSL) card or a telephone modem that provides an information communication connection to a corresponding type of telephone line. In some embodiments, a communication interface 570 is a cable modem that converts signals on bus 510 into signals for a communication connection over a coaxial cable or into optical signals for a communication connection over a fiber optic cable. As another example, communications interface 570 may be a local area network (LAN) card to provide a data communication connection to a compatible LAN, such as Ethernet. Wireless links may also be implemented. Carrier waves, such as acoustic waves and electromagnetic waves, including radio, optical and infrared waves travel through space without wires or cables. Signals include man-made variations in amplitude, frequency, phase, polarization or other physical properties of carrier waves. For wireless links, the communications interface 570 sends and receives electrical, acoustic or electromagnetic signals, including infrared and optical signals, that carry information streams, such as digital data.

[0083] The term computer-readable medium is used herein to refer to any medium that participates in providing information to processor 502, including instructions for execution. Such a medium may take many forms, including, but not limited to, non-volatile media, volatile media and transmission media. Non-volatile media include, for example, optical or magnetic disks, such as storage device 508. Volatile media include, for example, dynamic memory 504. Transmission media include, for example, coaxial cables, copper wire, fiber optic cables, and

waves that travel through space without wires or cables, such as acoustic waves and electromagnetic waves, including radio, optical and infrared waves. The term computer-readable storage medium is used herein to refer to any medium that participates in providing information to processor 502, except for transmission media.

[0084] Common forms of computer-readable media include, for example, a floppy disk, a flexible disk, a hard disk, a magnetic tape, or any other magnetic medium, a compact disk ROM (CD-ROM), a digital video disk (DVD) or any other optical medium, punch cards, paper tape, or any other physical medium with patterns of holes, a RAM, a programmable ROM (PROM), an erasable PROM (EPROM), a FLASH-EPROM, or any other memory chip or cartridge, a carrier wave, or any other medium from which a computer can read. The term non-transitory computer-readable storage medium is used herein to refer to any medium that participates in providing information to processor 502, except for carrier waves and other signals.

[0085] Logic encoded in one or more tangible media includes one or both of processor instructions on a computer-readable storage media and special purpose hardware, such as ASIC 520.

[0086] Network link 578 typically provides information communication through one or more networks to other devices that use or process the information. For example, network link 578 may provide a connection through local network 580 to a host computer 582 or to equipment 584 operated by an Internet Service Provider (ISP). ISP equipment 584 in turn provides data communication services through the public, world-wide packet-switching communication network of networks now commonly referred to as the Internet 590. A computer called a server 592 connected to the Internet provides a service in response to information received over the Internet. For example, server 592 provides information representing video data for presentation at display 514.

[0087] The invention is related to the use of computer system 500 for implementing the techniques described herein. According to one embodiment of the invention, those techniques are performed by computer system 500 in response to processor 502 executing one or more sequences of one or more instructions contained in memory 504. Such instructions, also called software and program code, may be read into memory 504 from another computer-readable medium such as storage device 508. Execution of the sequences of instructions contained in

memory 504 causes processor 502 to perform the method steps described herein. In alternative embodiments, hardware, such as application specific integrated circuit 520, may be used in place of or in combination with software to implement the invention. Thus, embodiments of the invention are not limited to any specific combination of hardware and software.

[0088] The signals transmitted over network link 578 and other networks through communications interface 570, carry information to and from computer system 500. Computer system 500 can send and receive information, including program code, through the networks 580, 590 among others, through network link 578 and communications interface 570. In an example using the Internet 590, a server 592 transmits program code for a particular application, requested by a message sent from computer 500, through Internet 590, ISP equipment 584, local network 580 and communications interface 570. The received code may be executed by processor 502 as it is received or may be stored in storage device 508 or other non-volatile storage for later execution, or both. In this manner, computer system 500 may obtain application program code in the form of a signal on a carrier wave.

[0089] Various forms of computer readable media may be involved in carrying one or more sequence of instructions or data or both to processor 502 for execution. For example, instructions and data may initially be carried on a magnetic disk of a remote computer such as host 582. The remote computer loads the instructions and data into its dynamic memory and sends the instructions and data over a telephone line using a modem. A modem local to the computer system 500 receives the instructions and data on a telephone line and uses an infra-red transmitter to convert the instructions and data to a signal on an infra-red a carrier wave serving as the network link 578. An infrared detector serving as communications interface 570 receives the instructions and data carried in the infrared signal and places information representing the instructions and data onto bus 510. Bus 510 carries the information to memory 504 from which processor 502 retrieves and executes the instructions using some of the data sent with the instructions. The instructions and data received in memory 504 may optionally be stored on storage device 508, either before or after execution by the processor 502.

[0090] FIG. 6 illustrates a chip set 600 upon which an embodiment of the invention may be implemented. Chip set 600 is programmed to perform one or more steps of a method described herein and includes, for instance, the processor and memory components described with respect

to FIG. 5 incorporated in one or more physical packages (e.g., chips). By way of example, a physical package includes an arrangement of one or more materials, components, and/or wires on a structural assembly (e.g., a baseboard) to provide one or more characteristics such as physical strength, conservation of size, and/or limitation of electrical interaction. It is contemplated that in certain embodiments the chip set can be implemented in a single chip. Chip set 600, or a portion thereof, constitutes a means for performing one or more steps of a method described herein.

[0091] In one embodiment, the chip set 600 includes a communication mechanism such as a bus 601 for passing information among the components of the chip set 600. A processor 603 has connectivity to the bus 601 to execute instructions and process information stored in, for example, a memory 605. The processor 603 may include one or more processing cores with each core configured to perform independently. A multi-core processor enables multiprocessing within a single physical package. Examples of a multi-core processor include two, four, eight, or greater numbers of processing cores. Alternatively, or in addition, the processor 603 may include one or more microprocessors configured in tandem via the bus 601 to enable independent execution of instructions, pipelining, and multithreading. The processor 603 may also be accompanied with one or more specialized components to perform certain processing functions and tasks such as one or more digital signal processors (DSP) 607, or one or more application-specific integrated circuits (ASIC) 609. A DSP 607 typically is configured to process real-world signals (e.g., sound) in real time independently of the processor 603. Similarly, an ASIC 609 can be configured to performed specialized functions not easily performed by a general purposed processor. Other specialized components to aid in performing the inventive functions described herein include one or more field programmable gate arrays (FPGA) (not shown), one or more controllers (not shown), or one or more other special-purpose computer chips.

[0092] The processor 603 and accompanying components have connectivity to the memory 605 via the bus 601. The memory 605 includes both dynamic memory (e.g., RAM, magnetic disk, writable optical disk, etc.) and static memory (e.g., ROM, CD-ROM, etc.) for storing executable instructions that when executed perform one or more steps of a method described herein. The memory 605 also stores the data associated with or generated by the execution of one or more steps of the methods described herein.

[0093] The quality and condition of the fabric on the outer surface of a paint roller core is important to an end-user's perception of quality, as well as paint application performance. The quality of the paint roller fabric is controlled by both manufacturers of paint roller fabric and manufacturers of paint rollers. Certain factors determine paint roller fabric quality, including fiber density, the quality of the fabric backing, and the materials used to make the fibers are controlled by fabric manufacturers.

[0094] A significant issue with lower-quality paint roller fabrics is their tendency to have loose fibers that can become dislodged during the painting process. These fibers can become embedded in the paint, causing undesirable side-effects.

[0095] Furthermore, for aesthetic and performance reasons, paint roller manufacturers try to ensure that all paint roller fabric fibers are the same length from the core, and that paint roller fibers are generally perpendicularly oriented with respect to the core (i.e., normal to the core surface). This creates a uniform appearance.

[0096] The fabric on the edges of paint rollers are typically beveled at an angle for aesthetic and performance reasons. Beveling each side of a roller core's fabric prevents paint from being applied outside of the length of the roller core.

[0097] Disclosed herein are machines and methods for continuous paint roller manufacturing processes which include a step of conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline with the manufacturing process. In an embodiment, the inline fabric conditioning process removes loose fibers and positions the remaining fibers so that they are normal with respect to the fabric backing and/or core of the paint roller. In an embodiment, a comb or carding cloth is run through paint roller fabric as the paint roller fabric advancing towards a roller core as a part of the paint roller manufacturing process, but prior to the time it is applied to the core. In an embodiment, a comb or carding cloth is run through paint roller fabric after it is applied to the core, but prior to the time that a continuously manufactured core is separated into lengths or paint rollers. The machines and methods described herein may be configured to use a fabric cover that has been conditioned inline upstream of the strip winding step in a paint roller manufacturing process, and/or can be configured to condition the fabric inline with the paint roller manufacturing process after the strip winding step (e.g., at the paint roller tube cutting step).

[0098] With reference to FIGS. 7 and 8, a paint roller manufacturing system 101 and process for manufacturing paint rollers in accordance with an embodiment are illustrated. The paint roller manufacturing system 101 includes a cover dispenser 122 that continuously dispenses a windable width of paint roller cover fabric, the paint roller cover fabric having a fabric backing side. A fabric conditioning unit 124 is provided, and may include a perforating wheel 140, a conditioning device 113, and fabric guides to support the fabric and maintain a width-wise dimension of the paint roller cover fabric as the fabric advances across the fabric conditioning unit. In an embodiment, the fabric may be fed from the cover dispenser 122 by motors located outside the machine, or motors within the machine itself. In an embodiment, the fabric from the cover dispenser 122 is drawn towards the downstream process. In an embodiment, the fabric from the cover dispenser 122 is drawn towards the downstream process as a consequence of a compressing and advancing device 129. According to various embodiments, the compressing and advancing device 129 may be a winding belt. In an embodiment, the fabric from the cover dispenser is drawn towards the downstream processes by a fabric conditioning unit 124.

[0099] As already stated, with respect to other embodiments, the paint roller cover fabric 123 may comprise a conventional cover fabric or a coated fabric that has been coated offline or online, as is taught in U.S. Patent No. 9,956,719 which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety and shares a common inventor herewith.

[00100] In an embodiment, cover fabric 123 fed from the cover dispenser 122 to the fabric conditioning unit 124 is pressed against a perforating roller 140. The perforating roller 140 may have cone-shaped protrusions, or protrusions of other shapes. In an embodiment, the protrusions from the perforating roller 140 end in sharp points. In an embodiment, another wheel, or a plate, or another apparatus 841 pushes the fabric against the perforating wheel. In an embodiment, the force in the direction of the perforating roller 140 made by apparatus 841 may increase the size of the perforation or otherwise increase perforation performance. The apparatus 841 that pushes the fabric against the wheel 140 can be vertically adjusted in order to accommodate fabric of different pile heights. In an embodiment, the perforation roller 140 comprises a plurality of spaced perforators, which may comprise perforating pins, that can perforate the fabric and thus create spaces (e.g., pores) through which adhesive may flow. In an embodiment, the perforators are sharp at a distal end (away from the perforation roller) and are configured so that they can

extend through the backing layer of the fabric. Methods and devices for perforating cover fabrics are taught, for example, in U.S. Patent Application No. 16/103,550 filed August 14, 2018, which shares a common inventor herewith and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Paint roller fabric can either be perforated in the paint roller manufacturing process, or at any time prior to the fabric being wound around the mandrel, such as when the fabric is manufactured. In an embodiment, perforating paint roller fabric may provide for greater adhesion and/or a reduction in shedding (i.e., the amount of fibers that are dislodged during the paint roller manufacturing process or the process of using a finished paint roller).

[00101] In an embodiment, cover fabric 123 fed from the cover dispenser 122 to the fabric conditioning unit 124 is processed by the conditioning device 113. In an embodiment, pre-perforated cover fabric 123 fed from the cover dispenser 122 to the fabric conditioning unit 124 is processed by the conditioning device 113. In an embodiment, the fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises both a perforating roller 140 and a conditioning device, and after being perforated by the perforating roller 140, the fabric is processed by the conditioning device 113. In an embodiment, the conditioning device 113 removes lint and loose fibers, and properly orients the fabric in an upright position normal to the roller core and backing of the fabric. In an embodiment, the conditioning device 113 in the fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a carding cloth having a plurality of needles 112 that contact the paint roller cover fabric. In an embodiment, a conveyor 114 is provided for conveying the carding cloth past the paint roller cover fabric. It should be noted that the conditioning device 113 is shown in phantom in the top view of FIG. 7 because the conditioning device 113 is positioned on the pile side of the paint roller cover fabric 123. (Note that the orientation of the embodiment shown in FIG. 7 shows the paint roller fabric with the pile side down and the non-pile side up, however, in an embodiment, the paint roller fabric can be fed towards the mandrel at any orientation, e.g., with the non-pile and pile side being, left-right, right-left or down-up, or in between.) FIG. 8 shows a side view of the conditioning device 113 in the fabric conditioning unit 124.

[00102] In an embodiment, needles 112 of the conditioning device 113 may be, e.g., straight, oriented at an angle, or straight with an angled tip. In an embodiment, the carding cloth is positioned directly opposite the paint roller fabric, and may travel in the same direction in which the fabric moves, travel in a direction opposite to the direction in which the fabric moves,

or remain stationary. In an embodiment, changing the direction of motion of the carding cloth relative to the motion of the fabric can result in varied types of conditioning. In an embodiment, carding cloth travel direction will vary with the fabric used, as different carding cloth travel directions may produce more desirable results than others on a specific fabric pile. In an embodiment, the carding cloth remains in contact with the fabric over a certain distance, for example between 5 to 12 inches, in order to provide a more thorough fabric conditioning than buffing, the latter of which only provides temporary contact against the paint roller fabric.

[00103] In an embodiment, a vacuum is used to remove loose fibers directly off of the fabric, and/or to remove debris caused by the fabric conditioning process.

[00104] A significant advantage to conditioning of the paint roller fabric, in line, before it is applied to the paint roller core is that this inline manufacturing step eliminates the need to perform the steps involved in fabric conditioning later after the paint roller core/tube has been manufactured, and after the paint rollers have been separated from the continuously produced core. This can save time, money, and labor by eliminating a step from the paint roller finishing process that often takes place after the roller core/tube has been manufactured.

[00105] In an embodiment, conditioning device 113 in the fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a comb.

[00106] In an embodiment, a roller 126 is positioned downstream of the fabric conditioning unit 124 and configured to retain the bottom surface (i.e., non-pile side) of the fabric on the top surface of the fabric conditioning unit 124. In an embodiment, roller 126 is part of the fabric conditioning unit 124 and configured to retain the bottom surface (i.e., non-pile side) of the fabric in an operable position and tension for the proper operation of the fabric conditioning unit 124.

[00107] A mandrel 121 is provided, and may be cooled by a mandrel cooler 133 so as to facilitate movement of strips around the mandrel in a helical manner without adhesion of the strips to the mandrel and with lower resistance.

[00108] First and second strip dispensers 116, 118 are configured to continuously dispense first and second windable widths of strip material 117, 119. A guide system (not shown) may be used to guide the first and second strip coming from the first and second strip dispensers such that it is wound about the mandrel and to guide a paint roller cover fabric to be wound about the

first and second strips 117, 119. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be coated. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be perforated. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover may be coated and perforated. The second strip 119 and/or the first strip 117 may be a solid strip, a perforated strip or an embossed strip (e.g., having recessed dimples or other recessed features).

[00109] In an embodiment, an applicator 115 is configured to apply adhesive (which may be glue, a polymer, or a compound polymer with or without a filler material) on substantially all of the outer side of the first and second windable strips 117, 119 upstream of a location where the conventional or coated paint roller cover fabric 125 is wound about the first and second strips. In an embodiment, the adhesive is in a molten state or a liquified state when applied. In an embodiment, the adhesive is molten or liquified polypropylene. In an embodiment, the adhesive is a molten or liquified compound which includes polypropylene. In an embodiment, the adhesive is a molten or liquified compound which includes polypropylene and calcium carbonate.

[00110] In an embodiment, a compressing and advancing device 129 is provided for applying inward pressure normal to the mandrel on a conventional or coated paint roller fabric cover 125 after it is wound about the first and second strips 117, 119, and for advancing the first and second windable strips and the paint roller fabric cover along the mandrel 121. As discussed above, the paint roller fabric cover may be conventional, coated, perforated, or coated and perforated.

[00111] In an embodiment, the machine includes an extruder 103, which may be configured for extrusion of an adhesive material through a die 105. In an embodiment, the material is molten when it is extruded through the die 105 and the molten material is pushed through hose 111 to the strip-coating adhesive applicator 115. The strip-coating applicator 115 may comprise any device for applying a molten or liquefied adhesive to a fabric, including a die head, sprayer, brush, extruder, or the like.

[00112] The inner strip 117 and outer strip 119 of material are helically wound about the mandrel 121 in offset relation. In an embodiment, the offset relation is approximately 50%, that is, the center of one strip wraps at a location under or over (as the case may be) the middle of the other strip. In an embodiment, the offset relation is at least 5% to prevent the seams of the inner

strip and the outer strip from aligning. A 5% offset relation refers to having the seam at least 5% of the width of the strip away from the edge of the strip. In an embodiment, the entire inner surface of the inner strip 117 contacts the mandrel 121. In an embodiment, no portion of the outer strip 119 contacts the mandrel 121.

[00113] In an embodiment, the inner strip 117 and the outer strip 119 comprise a material that, for a given roller length, will result in repeatable shrinkage due to hardening and setting. In an embodiment, the inner strip 117 and the outer strip 119 comprise a material that, for a given roller length, will result in repeatable shrinkage due to hardening and setting, within a manufacturing tolerance.

[00114] In an embodiment, the outer surface of the inner strip 117 and the outer surface of the outer strip 119 are coated with adhesive by the strip-coating applicator 115. In an embodiment (not shown), the strip-coating applicator 115 comprises two separate strip-coating applicators, one to coat each of the two strips 117, 119. Thus, such coating of the outside of each of the two strips may be performed by the same applicator or, in another embodiment, by two separate applicators. As shown in FIG. 7, coating of the strip or strips is performed by a single applicator. In an embodiment, only the outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive by the strip-coating applicator 115. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the inner strip or the inner surface of the outer strip such that the adhesive ends out between the inner and outer strips after it is applied. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the inner strip or the inner surface of the outer strip such that the adhesive ends up between the inner and outer strips after it is applied, and liquid adhesive applied by an optional fabric coating applicator is not set when the outer strip 119 and the fabric cover 125 come together on the mandrel. In an embodiment, the strip-coating applicator 115 applies adhesive to either the outer surface of the outer strip or the inner surface of the fabric cover 125 such that the adhesive ends up between the outer strip and fabric after it is applied. In an embodiment, a portion of the outer surface (rather than the entire outer surface) of the outer strip 119 (or the only strip in a single-strip embodiment) is coated with adhesive. In an embodiment, the entire outer surface of the outer strip 119 is coated with adhesive. The strip-coating applicator 115, in each case, may be configured to apply a contiguous or non-contiguous coat of material to the strip. Examples of a

non-contiguous coat include, without limitation, a mesh of material, or stripes of coating material. In addition, the strip-coating application may be configured to apply additional material, such as a mesh material in addition to a coating material. In an embodiment, a mesh material and a contiguous coat of material are applied by the strip coating applicator 115. In an embodiment, the mesh material is a resin. In an embodiment, the mesh material is an adhesive mesh. In an embodiment, the mesh material can be wound around the mandrel as the outer strip of material 119 can. In an embodiment, the mesh material replaces the outer strip 119. In an embodiment, only a portion of the outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive. In an embodiment, the entire outer surface of the inner strip 117 is coated with adhesive. The strips and/or adhesive may have the same composition as described with respect to other embodiments.

[00115] Once the component parts (e.g., strips, adhesive, cover) are wound about the mandrel 121, the in-process paint roller cover material tube 127 may be driven by a motorized compressing and advancing device. In an embodiment, the in-process paint roller cover material tube 127 is driven by a compressing and advancing device comprising a belt 129 driven by one or more motorized rollers. Operation of the motorized roller may be controlled by a process controller in one-way or two-way communication with the motorized roller(s).

[00116] The formed paint roller cover material tube 127 is advanced along the mandrel 121 by the belt 129 to a cutting device 131 that cuts the tube into lengths. The cutting device 131 may be, e.g., a rotary cutter, a flyaway saw, a traveling saw, a stationary cutter, or other suitable cutter, drill, or chopper. In an embodiment, the cutting device is under the control of the process controller.

[00117] Spinning has been used previously to remove excess fibers from a formed paint roller tube/core. Spinning is usually done after the paint roller core/tube has been formed, by placing the product on a mandrel and spinning it at high speed. In an embodiment, a paint roller fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a fabric spinner (not shown) and an accumulator (not shown). In an embodiment, a paint roller fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a perforation wheel 140 and a fabric spinner. In an embodiment, a paint roller fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a perforation wheel 140, a fabric spinner and an accumulator. In an embodiment, a paint roller fabric conditioning unit 124 comprises a perforation wheel 140, a first accumulator, a fabric spinner and a second accumulator. In an embodiment, cover fabric 123 is fed from the

cover dispenser 122 to the fabric conditioning unit 124, and as part of the fabric conditioning the fabric cover 123 is spun at high speed, e.g., to remove lint. In an embodiment, the fabric 123 is spun at a much faster rate than the manufacturing processing can receive, and thus, a buffering device is used. In an embodiment, fabric is rapidly spun for conditioning and deposited into an accumulator. The spinning process then temporarily pauses until the manufacturing line catches up with the accumulated conditioned fabric. In an embodiment, the fabric is spun at a much faster rate than the manufacturing process can receive, and then spun in reverse, and then forward again, allowing the forward spinning to outpace the reverse spinning by the overall speed of the manufacturing line. The forward-reverse-forward process may employ two accumulators (one on each side of the spinning process) to buffer the input and output, then deposited into an accumulator. In an embodiment, the paint roller fabric cover 123 may be spun forwards and backwards at high speed, and thus may require an accumulator on each side of the spinning system. In an embodiment, paint roller cover fabric 123 is spun around a mandrel such that the paint roller cover fabric is spun at a speed exceeding 1800RPM so as to remove excess fibers from the paint roller cover fabric. After conditioning, the conditioned fabric is then passed to the remainder of the paint roller manufacturing process from the accumulator.

[00118] FIG. 9 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline shearing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. Shearing (also known as “face shearing”) ensures that all fibers on a section of fabric are the same height, for aesthetic and performance reasons. This can be done either before or after paint roller fabric is applied to a core / tube. Fibers are cut to a uniform height by a cutting apparatus. In an embodiment, rotary blades are used. In an embodiment, the rotary blades are oriented parallel to the direction of travel of the fabric on the paint roller core / tube. In an embodiment, the rotary blades are oriented in any other direction that results in an even reduction in paint roller core / tube fabric height. In an embodiment, any suitable cutting device may be employed to perform inline shearing. The benefits of performing this action as a part of a continuous single manufacturing process are the same as those of carding / combing fabric inline. In an embodiment, shearing is performed after inline fabric conditioning. In an embodiment, shearing is performed after buffing / sweeping. In an embodiment, shearing is performed when the fibers

are generally oriented normal to the roller core, and thus at their maximum height with respect to the roller core.

[00119] FIG. 10 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline beveling in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. Beveling creates angled edges on each edge of a paint roller. If using a paint roller manufacturing process that cuts rollers to final lengths inline, as opposed to producing tubes that are later cut to final lengths, this can be accomplished inline. In an embodiment, beveling is accomplished by using a set of spinning blades set at angles opposing each other on either side of a cutoff saw. In an embodiment, the blades are applied to the trailing edge of one roller and the leading edge of the next, as the two rollers are separated. In an embodiment, beveling is accomplished by a beveling blade (e.g., a single spinning blade) that is deployed prior to the cutoff saw, but at the same location along the continually manufactured paint roller product. In an embodiment, beveling is accomplished by a beveling blade (e.g., a single spinning blade) that is deployed in lieu of a cutoff saw. A cutoff saw then separates the paint roller at the apex of the beveling blade's cut. In an embodiment, the beveling blade comprises a less angled or straight portion (in cross section) that can cut through the roller core, and an angled portion that can bevel the fabric edge. In an embodiment, the beveling blade or blades move with the continuously manufactured paint roller product as the cut is being made. In an embodiment, both the cutoff saw and the beveling blade or blades move with the continuously manufactured paint roller product as the cuts are being made.

[00120] If the paint roller manufacturing process produces larger tubes as opposed to rollers cut to final lengths, beveling is typically performed after paint rollers have been cut, using an apparatus that bevels both sides of the roller simultaneously. The benefits to beveling inline are the same as performing other finishing processes inline. The term "final lengths" refers to lengths of paint rollers that are commonly purchased by end users, or that manufacturers ship to their customers.

[00121] FIG. 11 shows a diagrammatic view illustrating a machine and process for performing inline buffing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. Buffing/sweeping operations use a wheel covered in carding cloth to remove loose fibers and properly orient the fibers that remain on the roller core. This previously was performed after the

paint roller / tube has been manufactured. In an embodiment, a wheel, which may be the length of the entire roller / tube or just a portion of it, briefly spins against the roller / tube. In an embodiment, buffing may be performed in a dedicated operation as part of a larger paint roller finishing indexing operation or may be performed in between paint roller finishing operations. When performed in between other paint roller finishing operations, this procedure is called “sweeping”.

[00122] FIG. 12 shows single-strip embodiments 701 of the two-strip machine and process shown in FIGS. 7 and 8. These embodiments generally operate as per the descriptions of FIGS. 7 and 8 above, except that a single strip 117 is used instead of the dual strips 117 and 119.

[00123] Reference in this specification to “an embodiment” or “the embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least an embodiment of the disclosure. The appearances of the phrase “in an embodiment” in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, nor are separate or alternative embodiments mutually exclusive of other embodiments. Moreover, various features are described which may be exhibited by some embodiments and not by others. Similarly, various requirements are described which may be requirements for some embodiments but not other embodiments.

[00124] As used herein, and especially within the claims, ordinal terms such as first and second are not intended, in and of themselves, to imply sequence, time or uniqueness, but rather are used to distinguish one claimed construct from another. In some uses where the context dictates, these terms may imply that the first and second are unique. For example, where an event occurs at a first time, and another event occurs at a second time, there is no intended implication that the first time occurs before the second time. However, where the further limitation that the second time is after the first time is presented in the claim, the context would require reading the first time and the second time to be unique times. Similarly, where the context so dictates or permits, ordinal terms are intended to be broadly construed so that the two identified claim constructs can be of the same characteristic or of different characteristic.

[00125] All numeric values are herein assumed to be modified by the term “about,” whether or not explicitly indicated. The term “about” generally refers to a range of numbers that

one of skill in the art would consider equivalent to the recited value (i.e., having the same function or result). In many instances, the term “about” may include numbers that are rounded to the nearest significant figure.

[00126] Where a range of values is provided, it is understood that each intervening value, to the tenth of the unit of the lower limit (unless the context clearly dictates otherwise), between the upper and lower limit of that range, and any other stated or intervening value in that stated range, is encompassed within the disclosure. The upper and lower limits of these smaller ranges may independently be included in the smaller ranges and are also encompassed within the disclosure, subject to any specifically excluded limit in the stated range. Where the stated range includes one or both of the limits, ranges excluding either or both of those included limits are also included in the disclosure.

[00127] Unless otherwise indicated, the present disclosure is not limited to particular materials, reagents, reaction materials, manufacturing processes, or the like, as such can vary. It is also to be understood that the terminology used herein is for purposes of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting. It is also possible in the present disclosure that steps can be executed in different sequence where this is logically possible.

[00128] It must be noted that, as used in the specification and the appended claims, the singular forms “a,” “an,” and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. Thus, for example, reference to “a support” includes a plurality of supports. In this specification and in the claims that follow, reference will be made to a number of terms that shall be defined to have the following meanings unless a contrary intention is apparent.

[00129] All the features disclosed in this specification (including any accompanying claims, abstract, and drawings) may be replaced by alternative features serving the same, equivalent or similar purpose, unless expressly stated otherwise. Thus, unless expressly stated otherwise, each feature disclosed is one example only of a generic series of equivalent or similar features.

[00130] The above embodiments and preferences are illustrative of the present invention. It is neither necessary, nor intended for this patent to outline or define every possible combination or embodiment. The inventor has disclosed sufficient information to permit one skilled in the art to practice at least one embodiment of the invention. The above description and

drawings are merely illustrative of the present invention and that changes in components, structure and procedure are possible without departing from the scope of the present invention as defined in the following claims. For example, elements and/or steps described above and/or in the following claims in a particular order may be practiced in a different order without departing from the invention. Thus, while the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for manufacturing paint rollers, the method comprising:
using a precision measuring or sensing device to control a cutting device causing the cutting device to cut an advancing paint roller tube into pre-selected lengths prior to the paint roller tube hardening and setting; and
allowing the cut lengths to harden and set into final paint rollers having final paint roller lengths.
2. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the final paint roller lengths measured axially are three inches, four inches, four and a half inches, six inches, six and a half inches, seven inches, nine inches, twelve inches, fifteen inches, or eighteen inches.
3. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, further comprising:
winding at least one strip of material about a mandrel, the at least one strip of material comprising a polymeric material and a filler.
4. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 3, wherein the polymeric material comprises a thermoplastic, a thermoset, an elastomer, a copolymer thereof, and/or a blend thereof.
5. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 3, wherein the filler comprises Alumina Trihydrate, Barium Sulfate, Calcium Carbonate, Carbon Black, Diatomaceous earth, Dolomite, Halloysite, Kaolin, Magnetite/Hematite, Magnesium Hydroxide, Mica, Silica, Talc, Titanium Dioxide, Wollastonite, Zinc Oxide.
6. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 5, wherein the filler is present in an amount of from about 10 to about 70% by weight.
7. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 3, wherein the polymeric material and the filler are present in a ratio that results in a final paint roller which shrinks

- axially by less than 2.5 percent of the final paint roller axial length upon hardening and setting.
8. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 3, wherein the polymeric material and the filler are present in a ratio that results in final paint roller shrinkage which varies by less than 0.1 percent per final paint roller axial length.
 9. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 3, wherein the polymeric material and the filler are present in a ratio that results in final paint roller shrinkage of less than 0.05 percent per final paint roller axial length.
 10. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, further comprising: applying an adhesive to at least a portion of the at least one strip as it is wound about the mandrel.
 11. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 10, wherein the adhesive comprises a combination of the polymeric material and the filler.
 12. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 11, wherein, the combination has an effective melt flow rate (MFR) within the range of from about 80 to about 170 g/10 min.
 13. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the cutting device comprises a rotary cutter.
 14. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the cutting device comprises a travelling saw or a stationary saw.
 15. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the step of using the precision device to control the cutting device results in cutting the paint roller tube into desired axial lengths with a tolerance lower than ± 0.01 inches per final paint roller length.
 16. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the step of using the precision device to control the cutting device results in cutting the paint roller tube into desired axial lengths online with a tolerance lower than ± 0.005 inches.

17. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the step of using the precision device to control the cutting device results in cutting the paint roller tube into desired axial lengths online with a tolerance of ± 0.0025 inches.
18. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the step of using the precision device to control the cutting device is performed when an exterior surface of the advancing paint roller tube has a temperature that is more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit.
19. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, further comprising a step of changing the pre-selected lengths from one of a plurality of preset lengths to another of the plurality of preset lengths by operating a device in operative communication with the cutting device or the precision device.
20. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 19, wherein the plurality of preset lengths comprises at least two of: three inches, four inches, four and a half inches, six inches, six and a half inches, seven inches, nine inches, twelve inches, fifteen inches, and eighteen inches.
21. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, further comprising: winding a length of fabric about the at least one strip to form a paint roller tube; and applying compression to the paint roller tube while advancing the paint roller tube in a direction parallel to the mandrel.
22. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 21, wherein the step of winding a length of fabric about at least the outer strip comprises winding a length of coated fabric about at least the outer strip.
23. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the method is a continuous process.
24. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the method is a batch-wise process.

25. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the advancing paint roller tube is manufactured from a material selected from the group consisting of paper, a paper-like material, an extruded material, and combinations thereof.
26. The method for manufacturing paint rollers according to Claim 1, wherein the advancing paint roller tube is manufactured by a process selected from a continuous extrusion process, a spiral-winding process, and combinations thereof.
27. A paint roller manufacturing system, comprising:
 - a mandrel;
 - first strip feeder for continuously feeding an inner strip about the mandrel in helical fashion;
 - second strip feeder for continuously feeding an outer strip about the mandrel in helical fashion such that the outer strip partially overlaps the inner strip on the mandrel;
 - adhesive applicator for applying adhesive on at least a portion of an outer side of the outer strip;
 - cover feeder for continuously feeding a windable width of paint roller cover fabric about the outer strip;
 - compressing and advancing roller system positioned downstream of the cover feeder and configured to apply a compressive force on the cover fabric to form a paint roller tube and to advance the paint roller tube in a direction parallel to the mandrel;

precision device configured to determine a length of the paint roller tube that has advanced;

cutting device configured to cut the paint roller tube into desired lengths prior to the paint roller tube hardening and setting, the desired lengths corresponding to a resulting final paint roller length of the paint roller tube after hardening and setting;

controller operatively communicating with the cutting device and the precision device, the controller being configured to permit the operator to select a final paint roller length from a plurality of preset axial lengths.

28. A method for manufacturing finished-length thermoplastic paint rollers from a continuously manufactured tube of paint roller material having an exterior temperature in excess of 90 degrees Fahrenheit, comprising:

predetermining an amount of shrinkage that will occur on a cut section of a continuously manufactured tube of paint roller material;

cutting a section of the continuously manufactured tube of paint roller material in an axial length equal to a desired finished-length thermoplastic paint roller plus the predetermined amount of shrinkage; and

allowing the cut section to harden and set to the desired finished-length thermoplastic paint roller.

29. A method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a continuous paint roller manufacturing process, the continuous paint roller manufacturing process comprising feeding an inner strip and an outer strip towards a mandrel, wrapping the inner strip and the outer strip about the mandrel in offset relation, applying a strip adhesive to at least a portion of an outer side of the inner strip and at least a portion of an outer side of the outer strip, feeding a paint roller fabric cover strip having a fabric side and a backing side towards the outer side of the outer strip, the fabric side comprising loose fibers and attached fibers, forming a paint roller tube by wrapping the paint roller fabric cover strip about the outer strip at a point in the process after the strip adhesive has been applied to the outer side of the outer strip such that the backing side contacts the strip adhesive, applying compression to the paint roller tube, and cutting the paint roller tubes into like lengths, the method comprising:

providing a fabric conditioning unit upstream of the point in the process that the paint roller fabric cover strip is wrapped about the outer side of the outer strip, the fabric conditioning unit including a fabric conditioning device that conditions the paint roller fabric cover strip as it is being fed towards the outer side of the outer strip by removing loose fibers from the fabric side of the paint roller fabric cover and by generally orienting the attached fibers.

30. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, wherein the conditioning device comprises a carding cloth having a plurality of needles.

31. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the conditioning device comprises a conveyor for conveying the carding cloth past the paint roller cover fabric.

32. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 31, wherein the conveyor is configured to move in a direction in which the paint roller cover fabric is being fed.

33. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 31, wherein the conveyor is configured to move in a direction that is opposite to a direction in which the paint roller cover fabric is being fed.

34. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the conditioning device comprises a stationary carding cloth retaining device for retaining the carding cloth as the paint roller cover fabric moves therepast.

35. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the needles of the carding cloth are oriented normal with respect to a plane of the carding cloth.

36. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 35, wherein the needles of the carding cloth have angled tips.

37. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the needles of the carding cloth are oriented at an angle other than ninety degrees with respect to a plane of the carding cloth.

38. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 31, further comprising changing a direction in which the conveyor moves prior to feeding the paint roller cover fabric so as to apply an alternate type of conditioning to the paint roller cover fabric.

39. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, wherein the conditioning device comprises a comb.

40. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the carding cloth remains in contact with the paint roller cover fabric for a length of between 5 to 12 inches of travel of the paint roller cover fabric at the conditioning unit.

41. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, further comprising using a vacuum to remove loose fibers or debris caused by fabric conditioning in the fabric conditioning unit.

42. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, further comprising winding paint roller cover fabric around a second mandrel such that the paint roller cover fabric is spun at a speed exceeding 1800RPM so as to remove excess fibers from the paint roller cover fabric.

43. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, further comprising shearing the conditioned paint roller cover fabric so as to cause fibers of the paint roller cover fabric to extend from the backing to a more uniform height.

44. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 29, further comprising using a plurality of spinning blades set at angles opposing each other to bevel a trailing edge of the paint roller tube as it is cut.

45. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 30, wherein the conditioning station uses a wheel covered in the carding cloth to contact the paint roller cover fabric so as to remove loose fibers and to orient fibers that remain on the roller core.

46. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 45, wherein the wheel has a length that is at least equal to a length of the paint roller tube.

47. The method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a paint roller manufacturing process according to claim 45, wherein the wheel has a length that is equal to a length of a portion of the paint roller tube.

48. A method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric in a paint roller manufacturing process, comprising:

- winding a length of paint roller cover fabric around a first mandrel such that the paint roller cover fabric is spun at a speed exceeding 1800RPM so as to remove excess fibers from the paint roller cover fabric;

- feeding spun paint roller cover fabric from the first mandrel;

- feeding the spun paint roller cover fabric into an accumulator;

- winding an inner strip and an outer strip about a second mandrel in offset relation;

- using a strip-coating applicator to apply a strip adhesive to at least a portion of the outer strip as it is wound about the second mandrel;

- simultaneously with the step of applying the strip adhesive to the outer strip, receiving a portion of the spun paint roller cover fabric at the outer strip and winding the portion of spun paint roller fabric material about at least the outer strip to form a paint roller tube;

- applying compression to the paint roller tube; and,

- cutting the paint roller tube into like lengths.

49. A method for conditioning paint roller cover fabric inline in a single-strip continuous paint roller manufacturing process, the single-strip continuous paint roller manufacturing process comprising feeding a single strip towards a mandrel, wrapping the single strip about the mandrel so that individual adjacent winds are in offset relation, applying a strip adhesive to at least a portion of an outer side of the single strip, feeding a paint roller fabric cover strip having a fabric side and a backing side towards the outer side of the single strip, the fabric side comprising loose fibers and attached fibers, forming a paint roller tube by wrapping the paint roller fabric cover strip about the single strip at a point in the process after the strip adhesive has been applied to the outer side of the single strip such that the backing side contacts the strip adhesive, applying compression to the paint roller tube, and cutting the paint roller tubes into like lengths, the method comprising:

providing a fabric conditioning unit upstream of the point in the process that the paint roller fabric cover strip is wrapped about the outer side of the outer strip, the fabric conditioning unit including a fabric conditioning device that conditions the paint roller fabric cover strip as it is being fed towards the outer side of the outer strip by removing loose fibers from the fabric side of the paint roller fabric cover and by generally orienting the attached fibers.

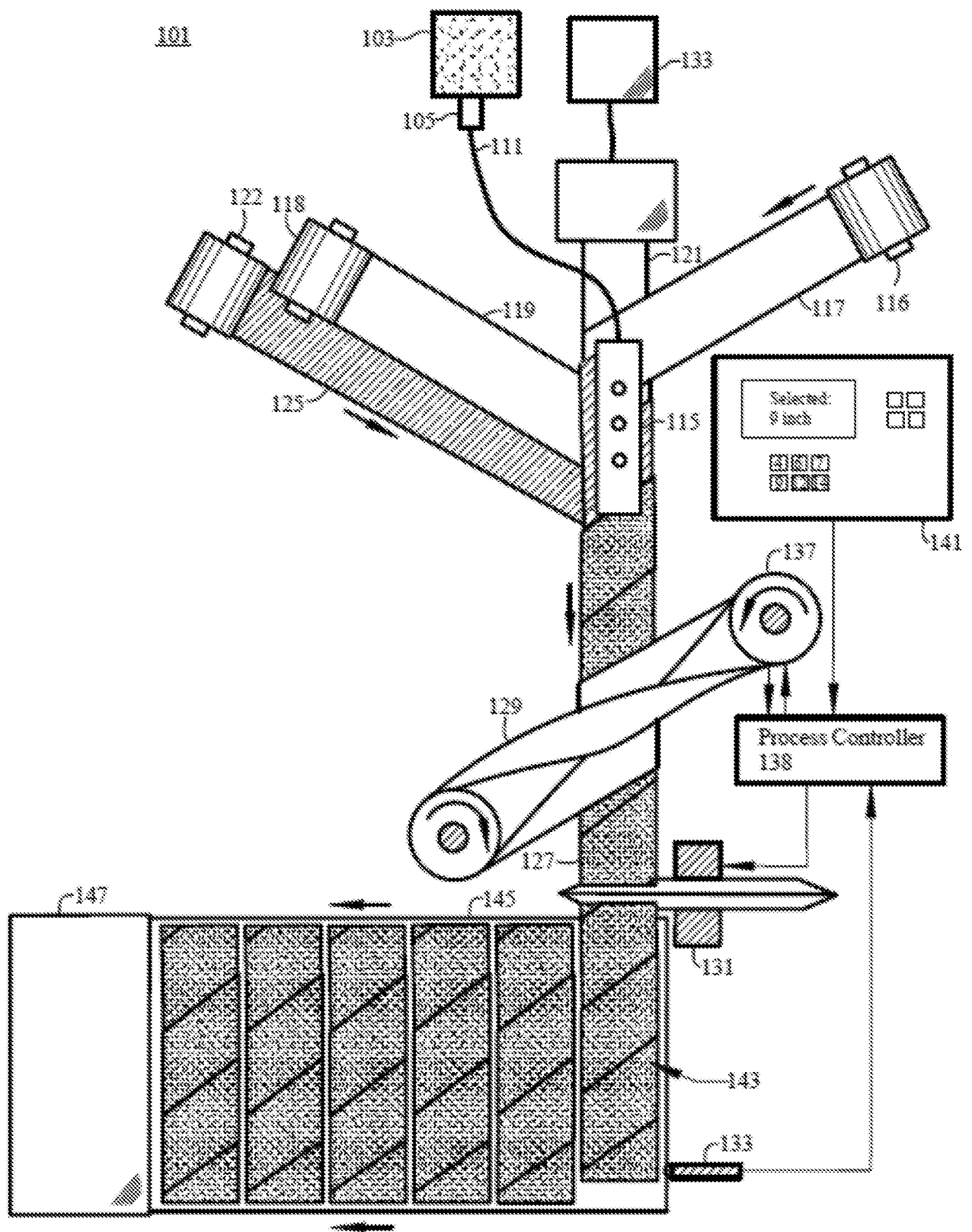


FIG. 1

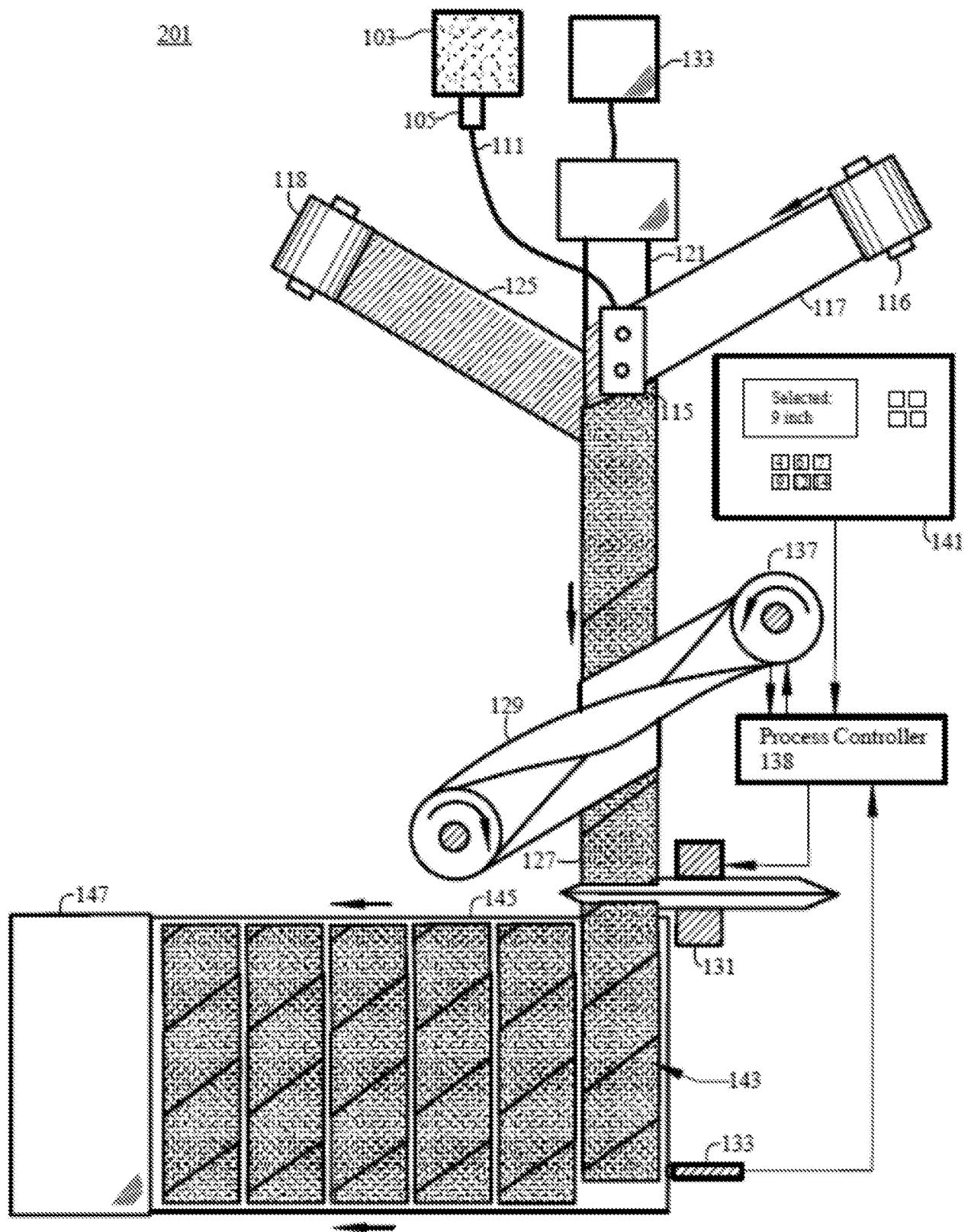


FIG. 2

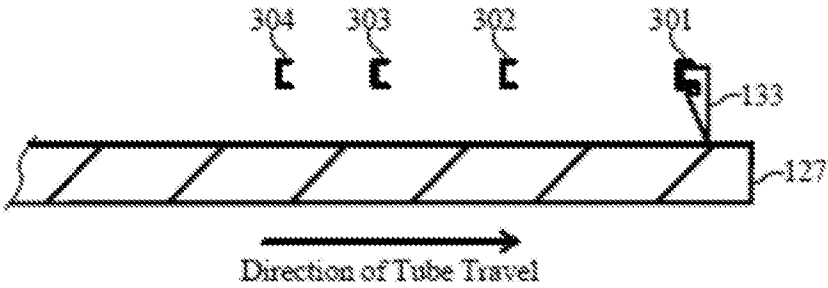


FIG. 3

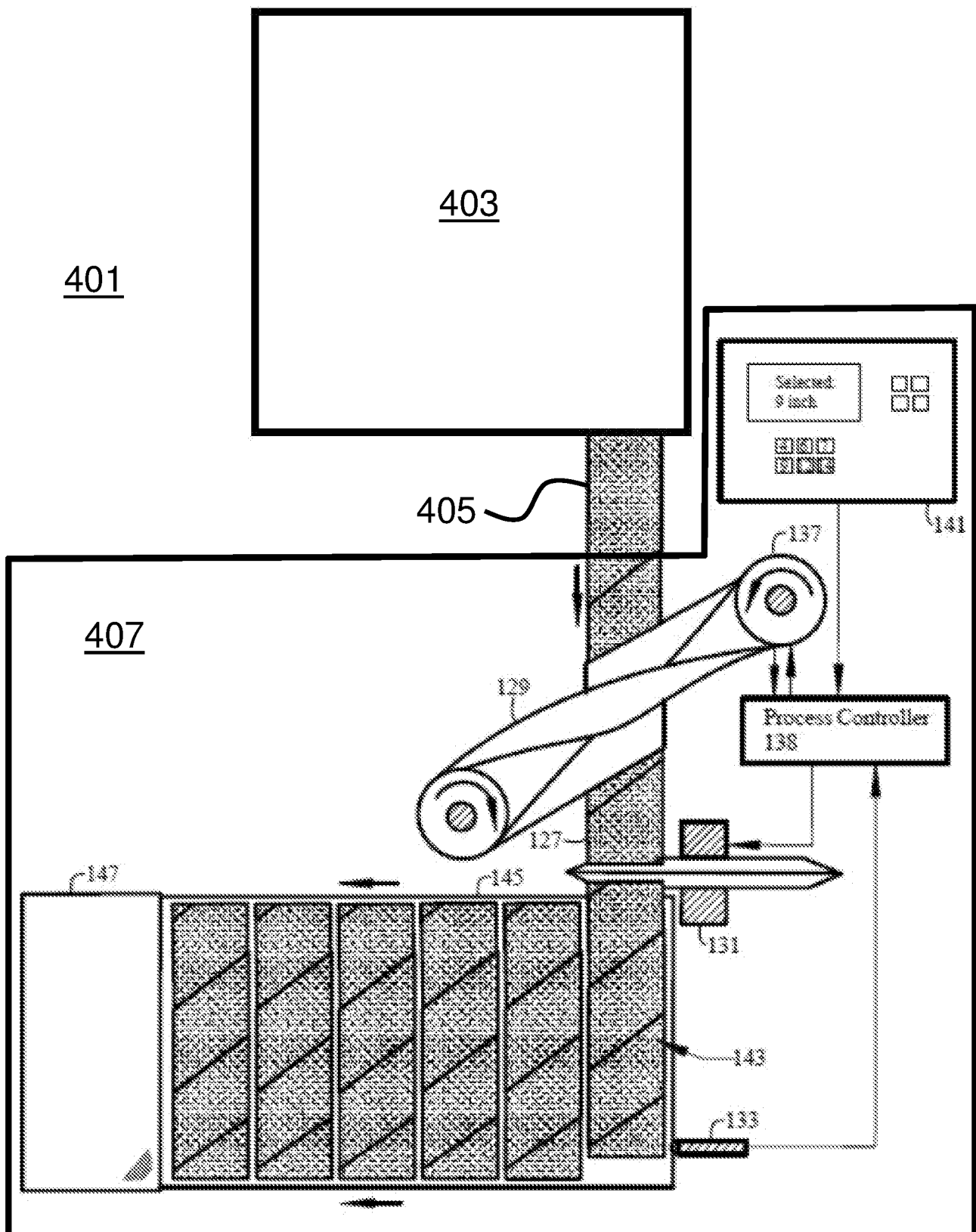


FIG. 4

FIG. 5

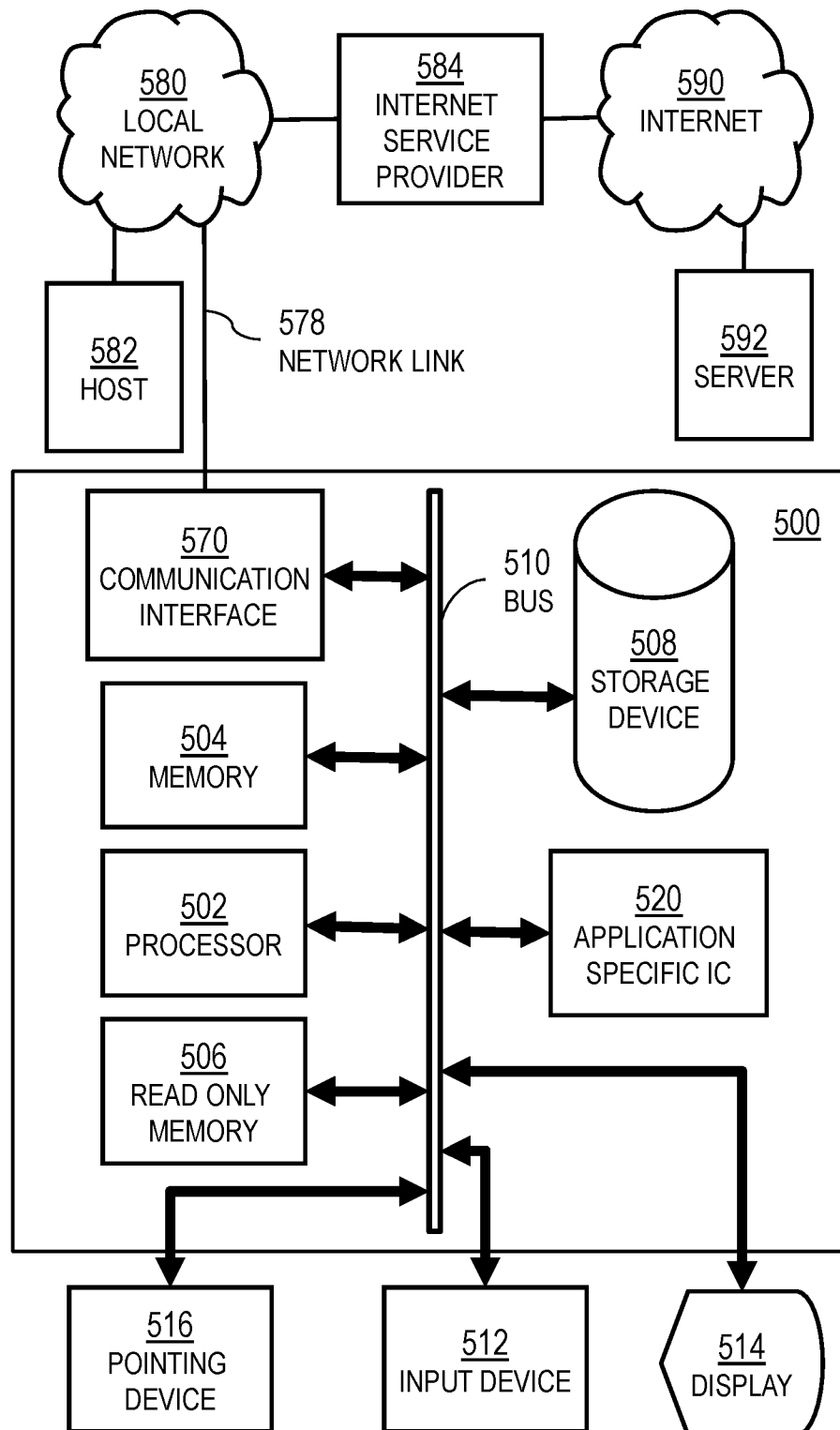
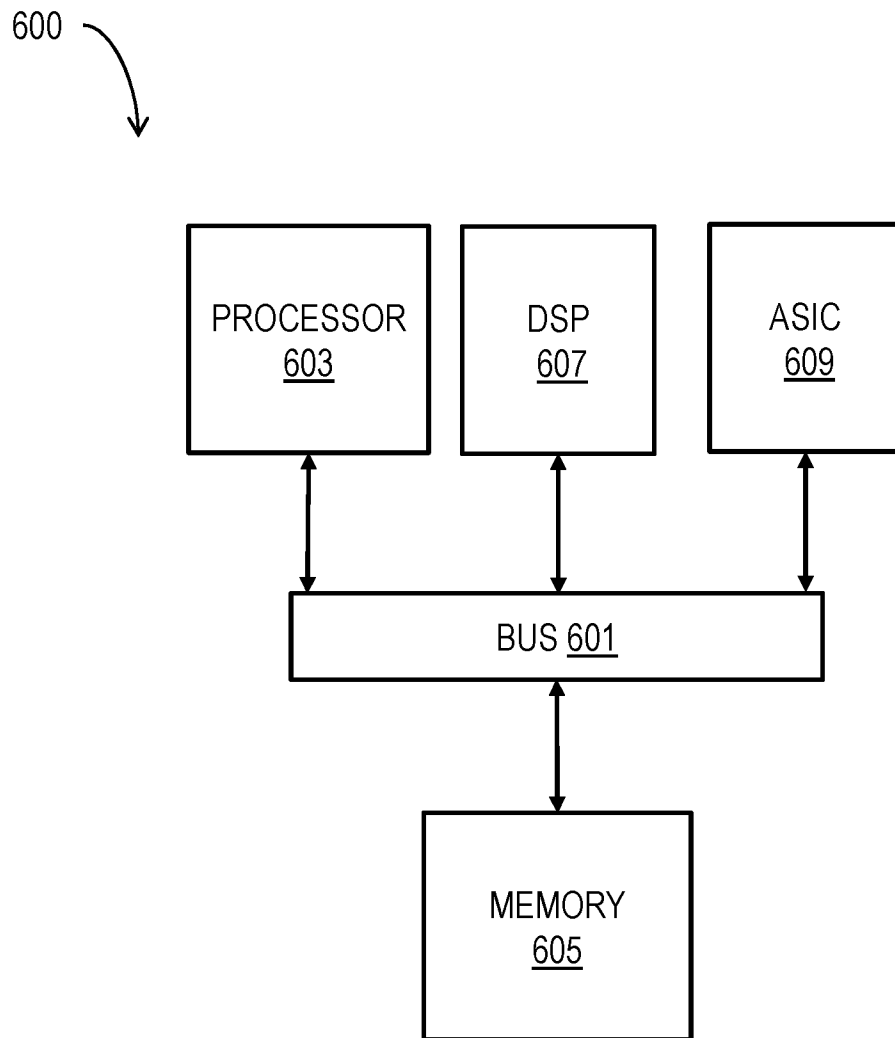
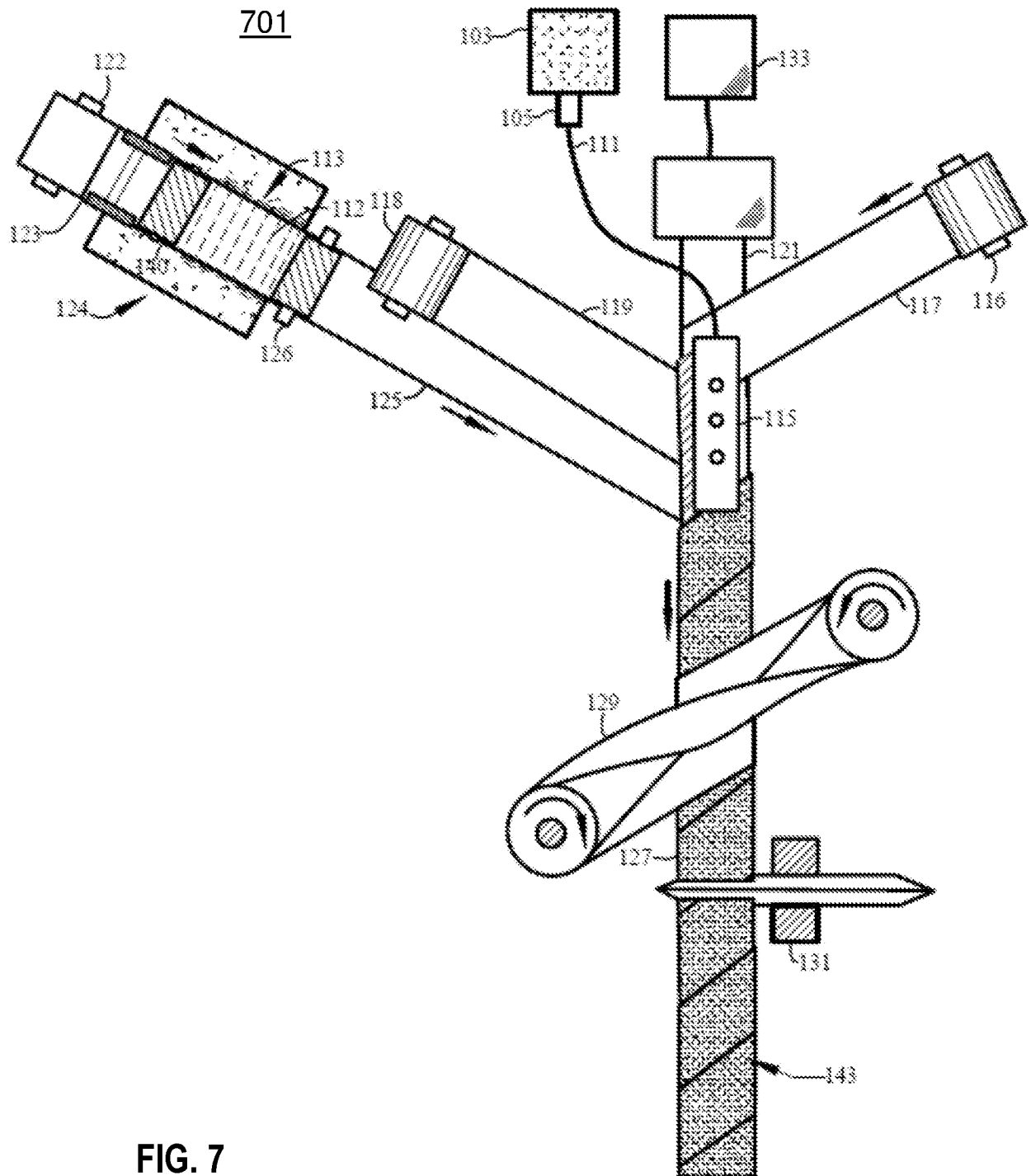


FIG. 6



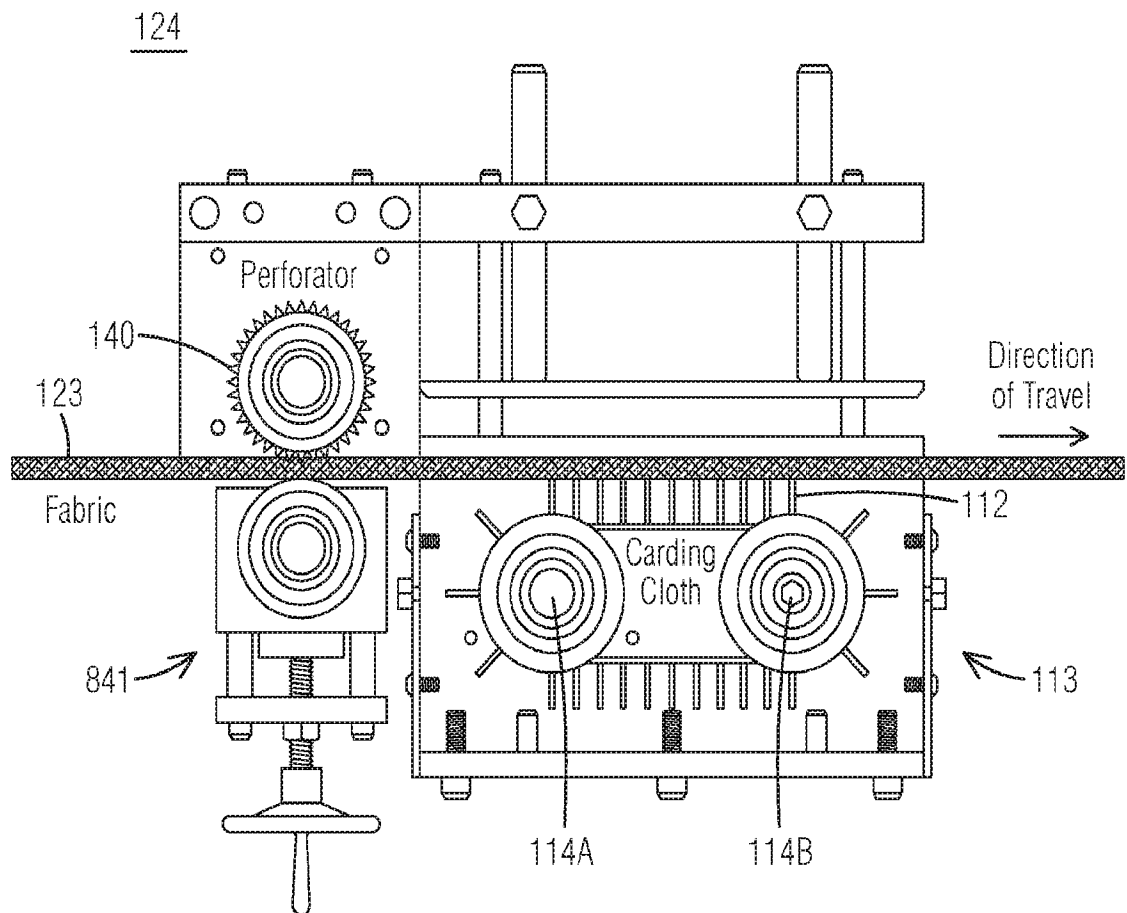


FIG. 8

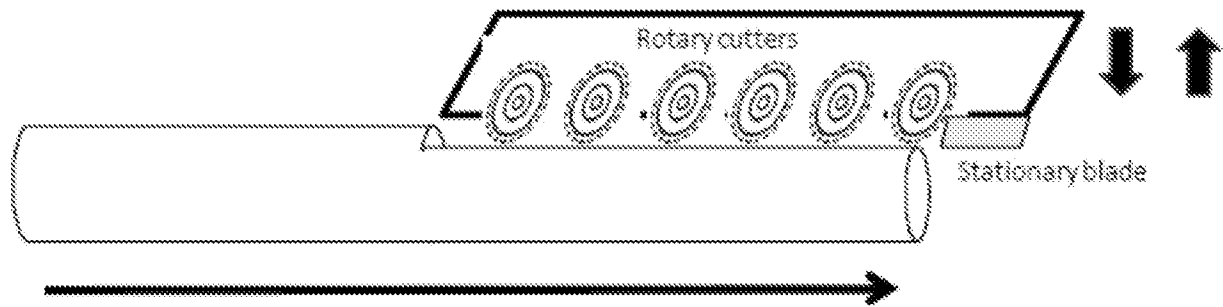


FIG. 9

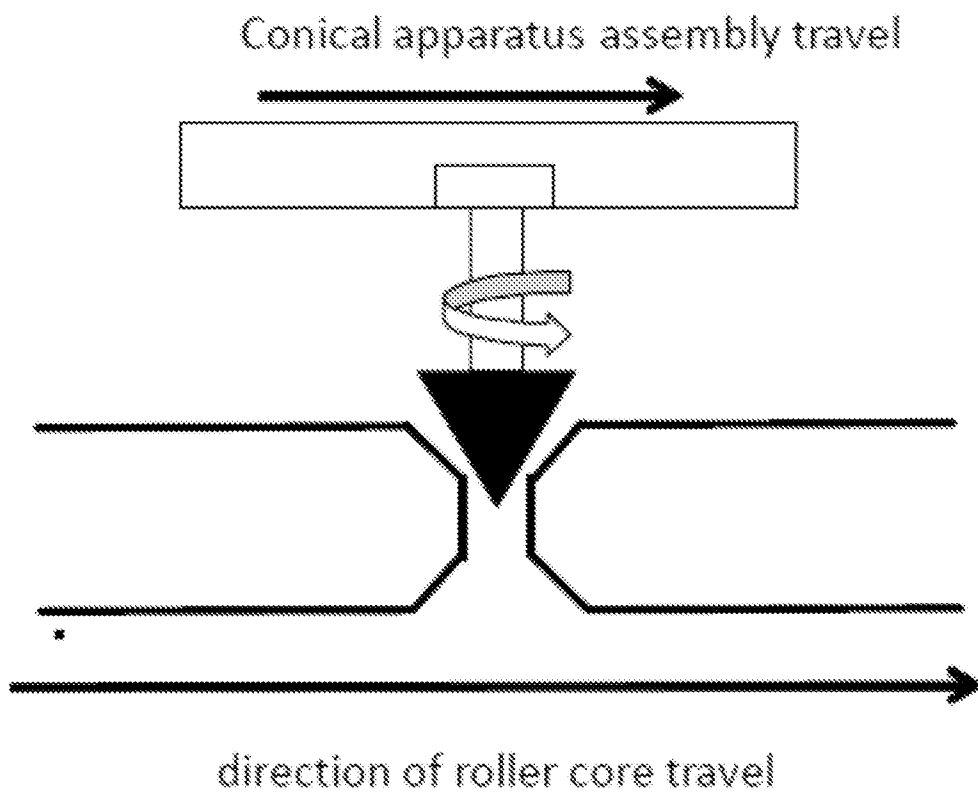


FIG. 10

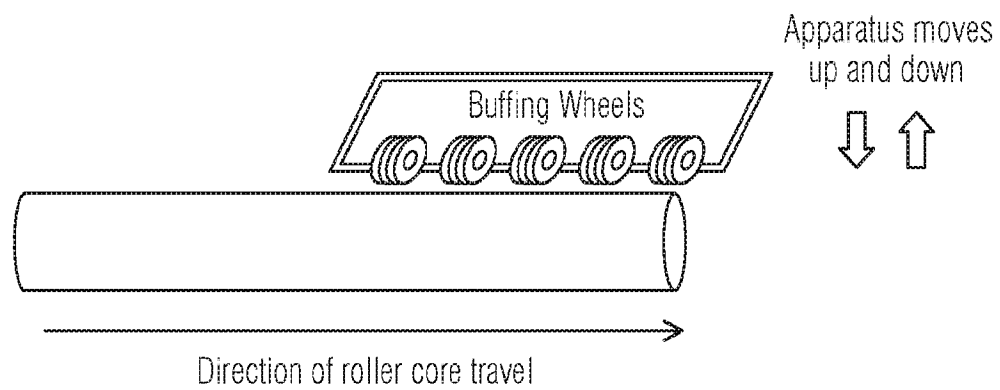


FIG. 11

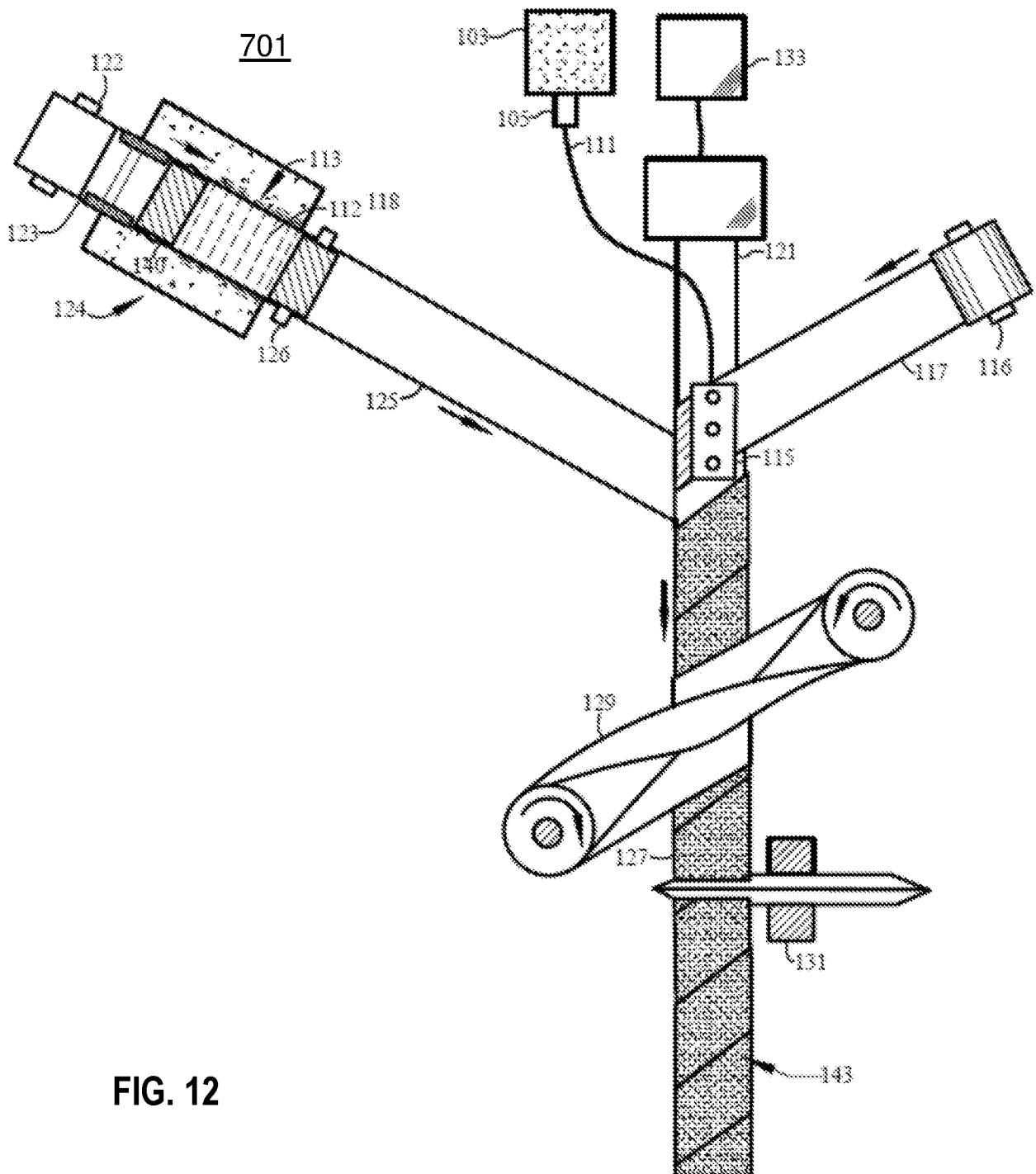


FIG. 12

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 20/15675

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC - B29C 53/60; D06B 1/14 (2020.01)

CPC - B29C 53/62; D06B 1/14; B29C 66/30325

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)

See Search History document

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

See Search History document

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

See Search History document

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 9,956,719 B1 (Sekar) 01 May 2018 (01.05.2018); abstract, col 2, ln 57, col 3, ln 10-15, 27-30, col 6, ln 15-20, claim 1	1-49
A	US 5,537,745 A (Musch et al.) 23 July 1996 (23.07.1996); abstract, col 2, ln 55-56, col 4, ln 61, col 5, ln 38-44	1-49
A	US 8,882,957 B2 (Sinykin et al.) 11 November 2014 (11.11.2014); abstract, col 3, ln 62-67, col 7, ln 58-60	1-49
X, E	US 10,5766,82 B2 (SEKAR et al.) 03 March 2020 (03.03.2020) entire document especially claims 1-20	1-49

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

06 April 2020

Date of mailing of the international search report

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