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(54) **SHIPPING AND STORAGE CONTAINER FOR LAPTOP COMPUTERS**

filed on Dec. 22, 1999, now Pat. No. 6,305,539, which is a continuation of application No. 08/844,558, filed on Apr. 18, 1997, now abandoned.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

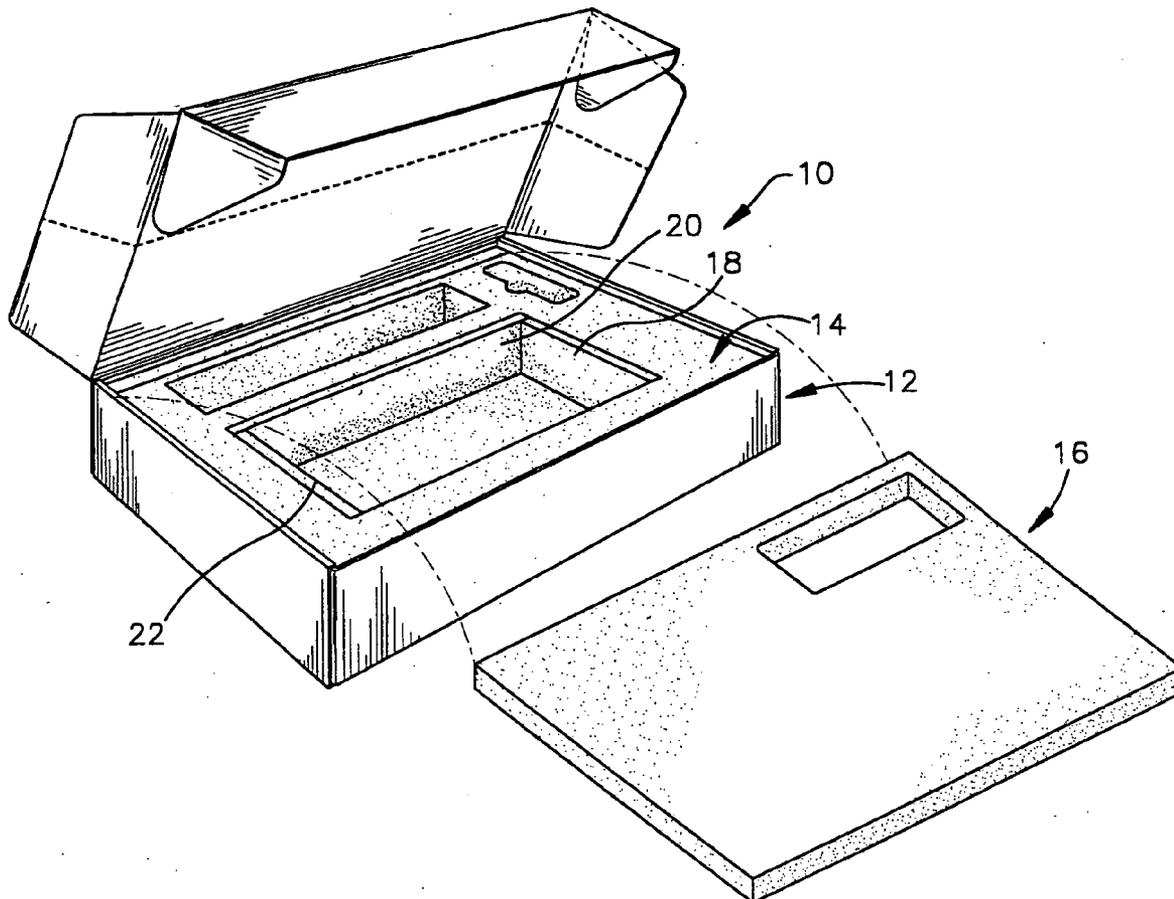
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A shipping and storage container for laptop computers or the like, which may include a one (1) piece exterior portion, preferably fabricated from corrugated cardboard, an inner protective bottom support and an inner protective side support, and an inner protective top support, all of the protective supports preferably being fabricated from a material which provides cushioning and protection, most preferably a protective foam type material. The one (1) piece outer container is preferably fabricated from a die cut blank of corrugated cardboard. The protective side support may be formed of a single piece blank, and may additionally include removable portions that are used to adjust the protective side support.

**Related U.S. Application Data**

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/267,996, filed on Oct. 9, 2002, now Pat. No. 6,981,589, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/877,858, filed on Jun. 8, 2001, now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/471,066,



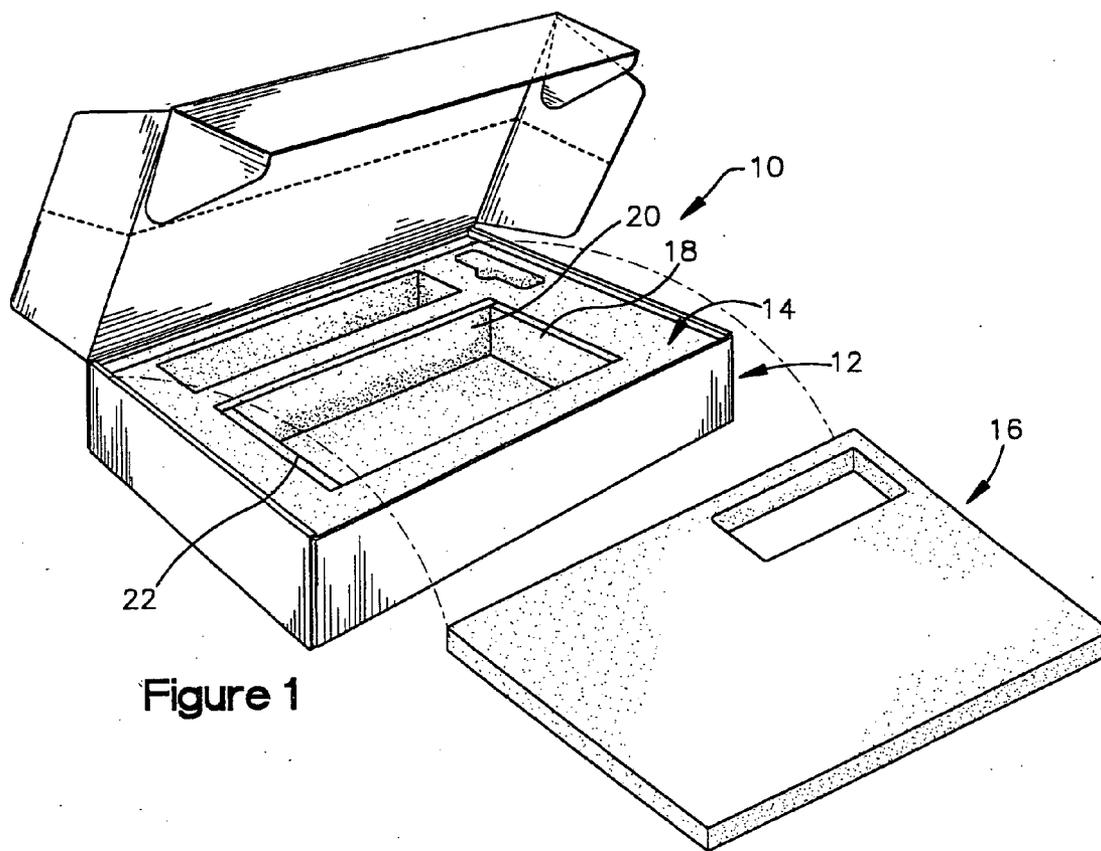


Figure 1

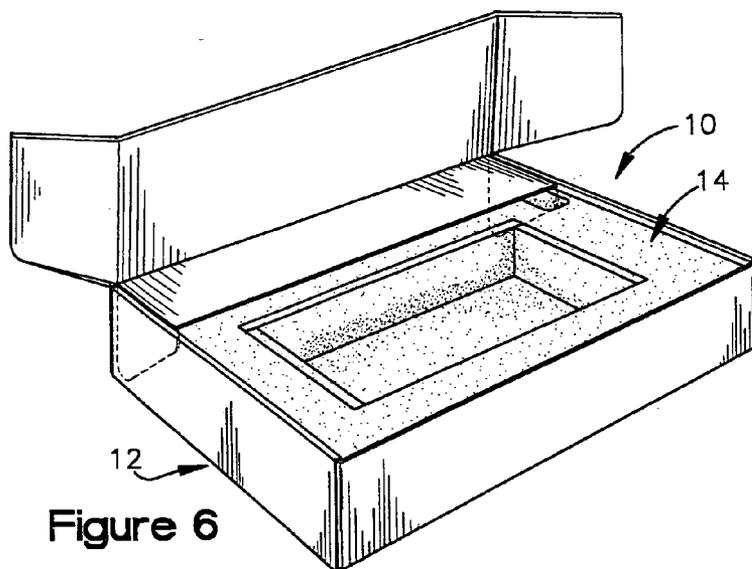


Figure 6

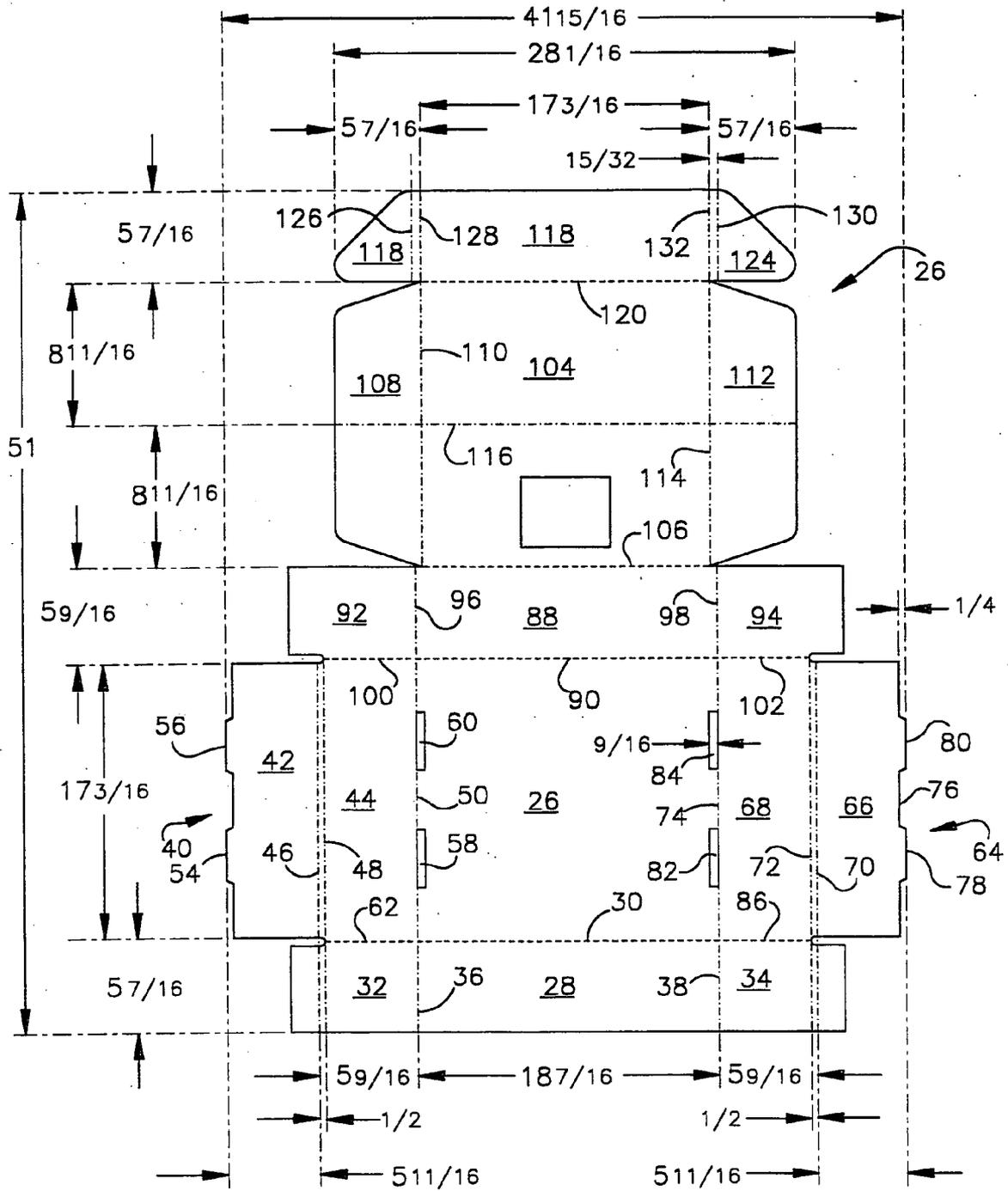


Figure 2

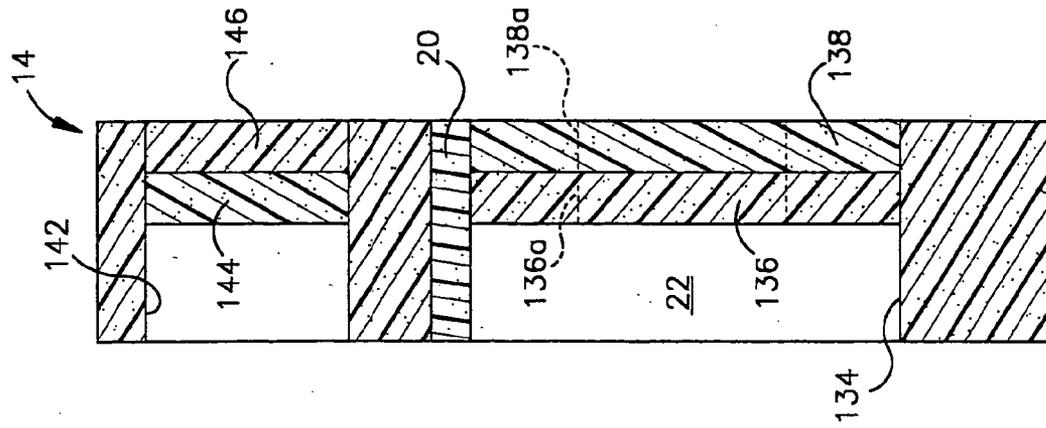


Figure 3

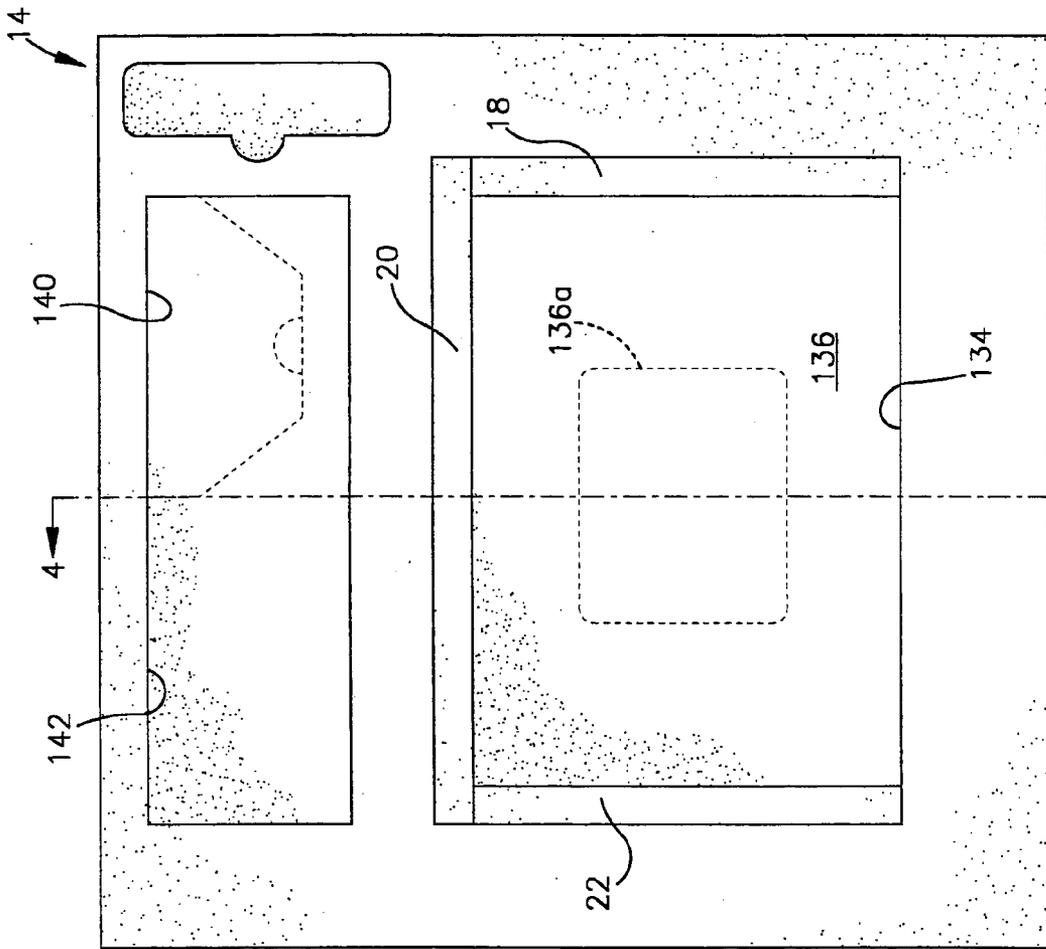


Figure 4

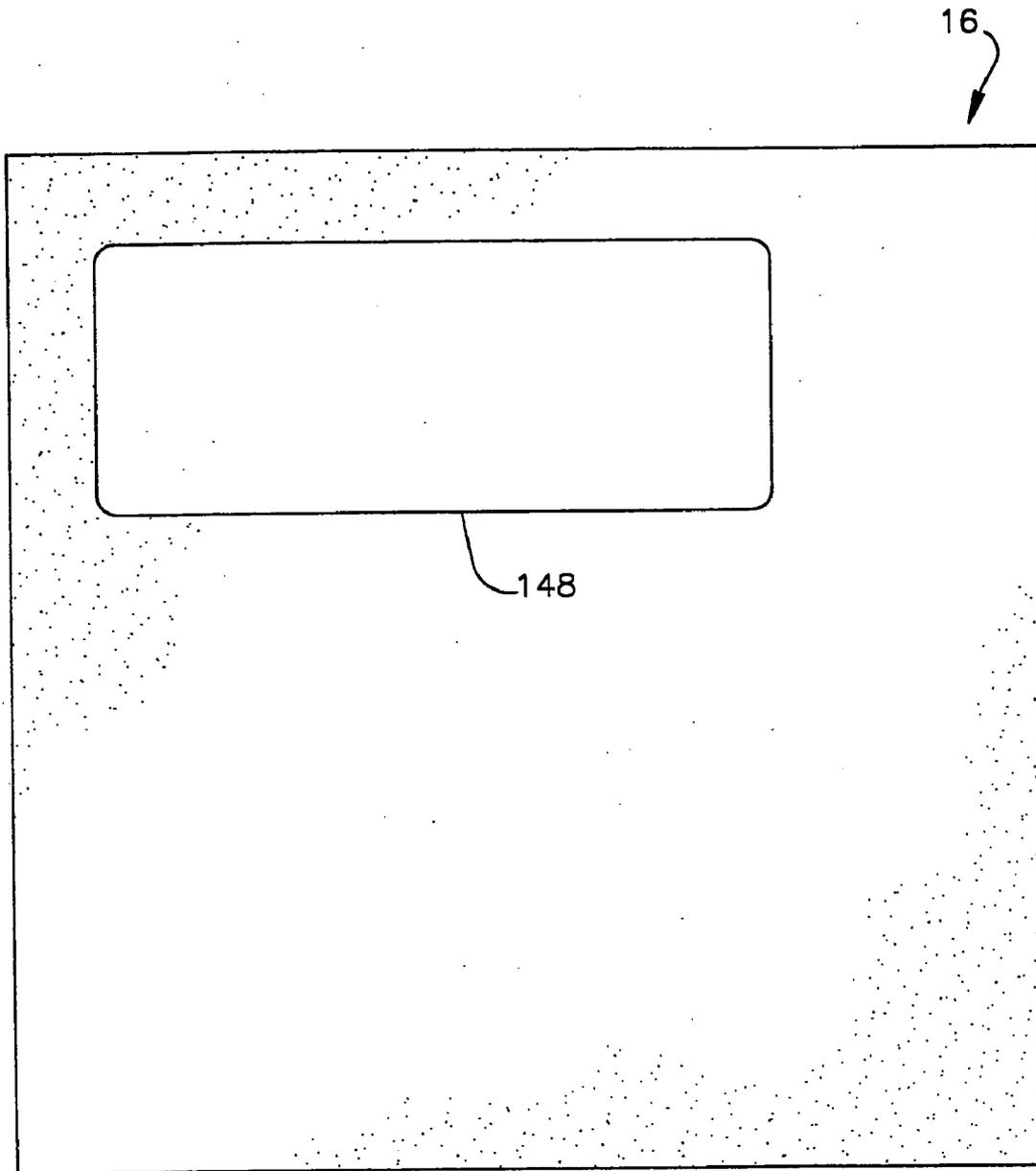


Figure 5

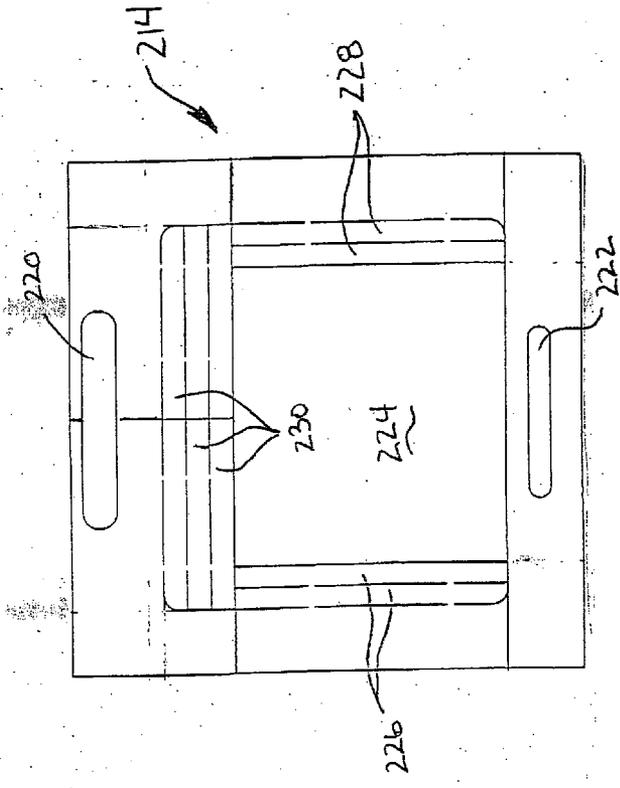


Fig. 7

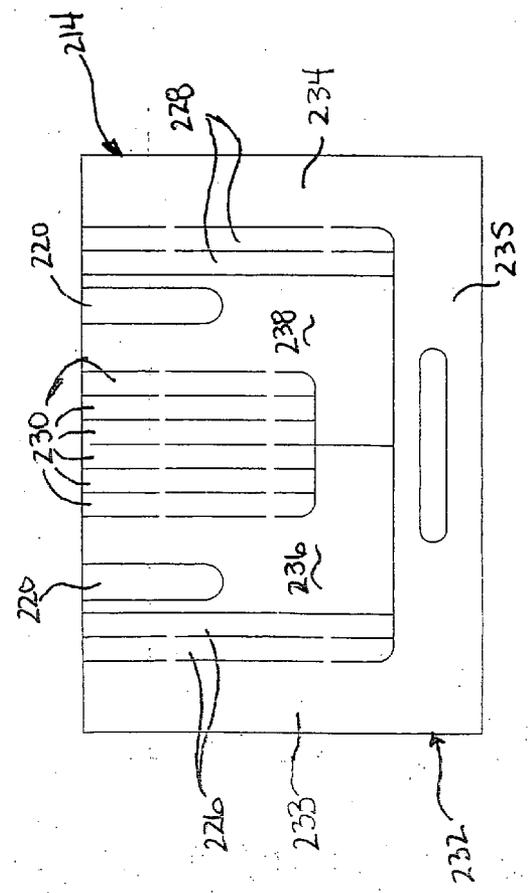


Fig. 8

**SHIPPING AND STORAGE CONTAINER FOR LAPTOP COMPUTERS**

**CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

[0001] This application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 10/267,996, filed Oct. 9, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,981,589 which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/877,858, filed Jun. 8, 2001 now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/471,066, filed Dec. 22, 1999, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,305,539, which a continuation of Ser. No. 08/844,558 filed Apr. 18, 1997 now abandoned, all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

**BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

[0002] The present invention relates generally to a new and novel shipping and storage container for laptop computers. More particularly, the present invention relates to a new and novel shipping and storage container for laptop computers which can be used for holding and protecting laptop computers placed therein during shipment and storage and which may be used as a base to support the laptop computers while they are being tested, maintained and/or repaired.

[0003] Laptop computers are becoming increasingly popular. While laptop computer are relatively durable, they do contain sensitive components, and protection should generally be provided during shipping, storage and handling. Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary to send laptop computers to manufacturers or other test, maintenance and repair facilities to have the laptop computers tested, maintained and/or repaired. In the past, shipping and storage containers for laptop computers have generally included a box, most usually fabricated from corrugated, having some type of padding or filler which may, or may not, conform to the configuration of the laptop computer placed therein. Such prior art shipping and storage containers for laptop computers are generally of two (2) types. The first type of shipping and storage container for laptop computers includes a separate cover which is removed and set aside when the container is opened, and thus the exterior portion consists of at least two (2) separate pieces. The second type of shipping and storage container for laptop computers includes an exterior portion which is fabricated from a single integral piece and includes one or more cover "flaps" which fold over the top of the container to form the cover. However, such cover "flaps" tend to get in the way and impede the testing, maintenance and/or repair of the laptop computer when the container is opened. Therefore, when using shipping and storage containers for laptop computers having such cover "flaps," the typical practice is to remove the laptop computer from the container and place it onto a bench or some other work surface to carry out the test, maintenance and/or repair procedures.

[0004] Accordingly, an object of the present invention is the provision of a shipping and storage container for laptop computers which is of one (1) piece construction, but which allows the laptop computer positioned therein to be tested, maintained and/or repaired without interference from the cover "flaps" which form the cover of the container.

[0005] Another object of the present invention is the provision of a shipping and storage container for laptop computers which cushions and protects the laptop computer positioned therein from damage during shipment and storage and which can also be used as a base to support the laptop computer during testing, maintenance and/or repair procedures.

[0006] An additional object of the invention relates to providing enhanced and proper support for both the top and bottom of the laptop computer as well as the sides thereof by tailoring the foam type material characteristics to provide the desired support.

[0007] These and other objects of the present invention are attained by the provision of a shipping and storage container for laptop computers which generally includes a one (1) piece exterior portion, preferably fabricated from corrugated cardboard, an inner protective base insert and an inner protective cover insert, both of the protective inserts preferably being fabricated from a material which provides cushioning and protection and also dissipates static charges, most preferably a foam type material. The one (1) piece exterior portion is preferably fabricated from a die cut blank of corrugated cardboard and includes a cover "flap" which has a horizontally extending score line located in an intermediate portion of the cover "flap" to allow the cover "flap" to be folded over against itself and retained between the inner protective base insert and the interior back surface of the exterior portion to retain the cover "flap" out of the way and allow the shipping and storage container for laptop computers to be used as a base to support the laptop computer positioned therein during test, maintenance and/or repair procedures.

[0008] Other advantages and novel features of the present invention will become apparent in the following detailed description of the invention when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

[0009] **FIG. 1** illustrates a top perspective view of a shipping and storage container for laptop computers in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] **FIG. 2** illustrates a top view of a corrugated cardboard die cut blank which is used to form the external portion of the shipping and storage container for laptop computers in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention shown in **FIG. 1**.

[0011] **FIG. 3** illustrates a top view of an inner protective base insert which is placed inside the external portion of the shipping and storage container for laptop computers in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention shown in **FIG. 1**.

[0012] **FIG. 4** illustrates a cross-sectional side view of the inner protective base insert which is placed inside the external portion of the shipping and storage container for laptop computers in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention shown in **FIG. 1** taken across line 4-4.

[0013] **FIG. 5** illustrates a top view of an inner protective cover insert which is placed inside the external portion of the

shipping and storage container for laptop computers on top of the inner protective base insert and the laptop computer positioned therein in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention shown in FIG. 1.

[0014] FIG. 6 illustrates a top perspective view of the shipping and storage container for laptop computers in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention shown in FIG. 1 with the cover “flap” portion being folded over upon itself and secured between the external portion of the shipping and storage container for laptop computers and the inner protective base insert such that the shipping or storage container for laptop computers can be used as a base to provide support for the laptop computer positioned therein while it is being tested, maintained and/or repaired.

[0015] FIG. 7 illustrates a top view of an alternative protective base insert for use in the container according to the invention.

[0016] FIG. 8 is a top view of the base insert of FIG. 7 prior to assembly, showing a configuration which is die cut to form the assembly of FIG. 7.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] In the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the present invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings which, in conjunction with this detailed description, illustrate and describe a preferred embodiment of a laptop computer shipping and storage container in accordance with the present invention. Referring first to FIG. 1, which illustrates a top perspective view of a shipping and storage container for laptop computers, generally identified by reference number 10, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 generally includes external portion 12, inner protective base insert 14 and inner protective cover insert 16. Shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 may also include a number of removable inner protective spacers, three (3) of which are shown in FIG. 1, identified by reference numbers 18, 20 and 22, to accommodate and protect laptop computers of different sizes positioned within shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10.

[0018] Referring now to FIG. 2, which illustrates a top view of corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24 which is used to form external portion 12 of shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 and includes base portion 26, which is generally rectangular in configuration, most preferably being approximately  $17\frac{7}{16}$  inches wide and approximately  $17\frac{3}{16}$  inches deep. Front flap portion 28 extends forwardly from base portion 26 and score line 30 is located between base portion 26 and front flap portion 28. Front flap portion 28 is preferably approximately the same width as base portion 26 and is approximately  $5\frac{7}{16}$  inches high. Left forward flap portion 34 extends from the left side of front flap portion 28 and right forward flap portion 34 extends from the right side of front flap portion 28. Score lines 36 and 38 are located between front flap portion 28 and left forward flap portion 32 and right forward flap portion 34, respectively, and both left forward flap portion 32 and right forward flap portion 34 are approximately the same width as front flap portion 28 and extend outwardly from score lines 36 and 38, respectively, approximately 7 inches.

[0019] Left side portion 40 extends outwardly from the left side of base portion 26 and preferably includes interior rectangular portion 42 and exterior rectangular portion 44 separated by score lines 46 and 48, which are preferably positioned approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart and are approximately equidistant from score line 50 between base portion 26 and interior rectangular portion 42 and distal edge 52 of exterior rectangular portion 44. First outwardly extending projection 54 and second outwardly extending projection 56 extend outwardly from distal edge 52 of interior rectangular portion 42 by approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch and are approximately 2 inches wide. First outwardly extending projection 54 and second outwardly extending projection 56 correspond to first elongated opening 58 and second elongated opening 60, respectively, located in base portion 26 positioned to the inside of, but adjacent to, score line 50. First elongated opening 58 and second elongated opening 60 are approximately  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long and approximately  $\frac{9}{16}$  of an inch wide to accommodate first outwardly extending projection 54 and second outwardly extending projection 56 therein when external portion 12 is assembled. Exterior rectangular portion 44 of left side portion 40 is preferably separated from left forward flap portion 32 by die cut 62 extending through the thickness of corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24.

[0020] Right side portion 64 is similar to left side portion 40 in configuration and extends outwardly from the right side of base portion 26 and preferably includes interior rectangular portion 66 and exterior rectangular portion 68 separated by score lines 70 and 72, which are preferably positioned approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch apart and are approximately equidistant from score line 74 between base portion 26 and interior rectangular portion 66 and distal edge 76 of exterior rectangular portion 68. First outwardly extending projection 78 and second outwardly extending projection 80 extend outwardly from distal edge 76 of interior rectangular portion 66 by approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch and are approximately 2 inches wide. First outwardly extending projection 78 and second outwardly extending projection 80 correspond to first elongated opening 82 and second elongated opening 84 located in base portion 26 positioned to the inside of, but adjacent to, score line 74. First elongated opening 82 and second elongated opening 84 are approximately  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long and approximately  $\frac{9}{16}$  of an inch wide to accommodate first outwardly extending projection 78 and second outwardly extending projection 80 therein when external portion 12 is assembled. Exterior rectangular portion 68 of right side portion 64 is preferably separated from right forward flap portion 34 by die cut 86 extending through the thickness of corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24.

[0021] Rear flap portion 88 extends rearwardly from base portion 26 and score line 90 is located between base portion 26 and rear flap portion 88. Rear flap portion 88 is preferably approximately the same width as base portion 26 and is approximately  $5\frac{7}{16}$  inches high. Left rear flap portion 92 extends from the left side of rear flap portion 88 and right rear flap portion 94 extends from the right side of rear flap portion 88. Score lines 96 and 98 are located between rear flap portion 88 and left rear flap portion 92 and right rear flap portion 94, respectively, and both left rear flap portion 92 and right rear flap portion 94 are approximately the same width as rear flap portion 88 and extend outwardly from score lines 96 and 98, respectively, approximately 7 inches.

Left rear flap portion 92 is preferably separated from exterior rectangular portion 44 of left side portion 40 by die cut 100 extending through the thickness of corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24. Similarly, right rear flap portion 94 is preferably separated from exterior rectangular portion 68 of right side portion 64 by die cut 102 extending through the thickness of corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24.

[0022] Cover portion 104 extends rearwardly from rear flap portion 88 and score line 106 is located between cover portion 104 and rear flap portion 88. Cover portion 104 is substantially rectangular in configuration and is, most preferably, approximately  $17\frac{3}{16}$  inches wide and approximately  $17\frac{7}{8}$  inches deep. Left side cover flap portion 108 extends from the left side of cover portion 104 and score line 110 is located between cover portion 104 and left side cover flap portion 108. Similarly, right side cover flap portion 112 extends from the right side of cover portion 104 and score line 114 is located between cover portion 104 and right side cover flap portion 112. The outer edges of both left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112 are preferably tapered inwardly from score line 110 and 114, respectively, to facilitate insertion of left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112 when exterior portion 12 is assembled. In addition, score line 116 extends horizontally across a central portion of cover portion 104, as well as across a central portion of left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112. Score line 116 permits cover portion 104, as well as left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112 to be folded against itself and positioned between inner protective base insert 14 and the interior of external portion 12, when assembled. This allows cover portion 104, as well as left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112, to be retained out of the way and allows shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 to be used as a base to support the laptop computer positioned therein during test, maintenance and repair procedures. Alternatively, cover portion 104 can be formed without score line 116. In this embodiment, inner protective cover insert 16 may be attached to cover portion 104.

[0023] Front cover flap portion 118 extends rearwardly from cover portion 104 and score line 120 is located between cover portion 104 and front cover flap portion 118. Front cover flap portion 118 is preferably approximately the same width as cover portion 104 and is approximately  $5\frac{7}{16}$  inches high. Left front cover flap portion 122 extends from the left side of front cover flap portion 118 and right front cover flap portion 124 extends from the right side of front cover flap portion 118. Score lines 126 and 128 are located between front cover flap portion 118 and left front cover flap portion 122 and score lines 126 and 128 are positioned approximately  $1\frac{5}{32}$  of an inch apart. Similarly, score lines 130 and 132 are located between front cover flap portion 118 and right front cover flap portion 124 and score lines 130 and 132 are positioned approximately  $1\frac{5}{32}$  of an inch apart. At least one of the outer edges of both left front cover flap portion 122 and right front cover flap portion 124 are preferably tapered inwardly from score lines 126 and 130, respectively, most preferably, the forward edge, to facilitate insertion of left front cover flap portion 122 and right front cover flap portion 124 when exterior portion 12 is assembled.

[0024] Referring now to FIGS. 3 and 4, which illustrate a top view and a cross-sectional side view, respectively, of inner protective base insert 14 which is dimensioned to be placed inside external portion 12 when assembled. Inner protective base insert 14 is substantially rectangular in configuration and is preferably fabricated from a cushioning protective material which is further capable of dissipating static charge, such as a foam type material. Inner protective base insert 14 includes a substantially rectangular cut-out 134 which is preferably approximately centrally positioned in inner protective base insert 14. Substantially rectangular cut-out 134 accommodates and provides protection for a laptop computer positioned therein. Substantially rectangular cut-out 134 is preferably cut through the entire width of inner protective base insert 14. However, substantially rectangular cut-out 134 could also be cut partially through the thickness of inner protective base insert 14, if desired. One or more rectangular protective pieces, two (2) of which are shown in FIG. 4, identified by reference numbers 136 and 138, are preferably inserted into substantially rectangular cut-out 134 to provide protection for the bottom surface of the laptop computer positioned therein. Additional cut-outs, two (2) of which are shown in FIG. 3, identified by reference numbers 140 and 142, may be provided, as desired, to hold and protect items such as connectors, adapters and peripheral devices used in conjunction with the laptop computer positioned therein. Additional rectangular protective pieces, two (2) of which are shown in FIG. 4, identified by reference numbers 144 and 146, are provided for additional cut-outs 140 and 142. Rectangular protective pieces 136, 138, 144 and 146 are preferably fabricated from a cushioning and protective material, which also dissipates static electricity, such as a foam type material.

[0025] Referring now to FIG. 5, which illustrates a top view of inner protective cover insert 16 which is placed inside external portion 12 on top of inner protective base insert 14 and the laptop computer positioned therein. If desired, inner protective cover insert 16 can include one or more cut-outs, one of which is shown in FIG. 5, identified by reference number 148, which can be removed, if desired, to provide clearance for the laptop computer positioned within shipping and storage container for laptop computers.

[0026] To assemble shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10, corrugated cardboard die cut blank 24 is first assembled into external portion 12 by folding front flap portion 28 upwardly along score line 30, folding left forward flap portion 32 upwardly along score line 36 and folding right forward flap portion 34 upwardly along score line 38 such that front flap portion 28 is positioned upwardly with left forward flap portion 32 located along score line 50 and right forward flap portion 34 located along score line 74. Rear flap portion 88 is then folded upwardly along score line 90, left rear flap portion 92 is folded upwardly along score line 96 and right rear flap portion 94 is folded upwardly along score line 98 such that rear flap portion 88 is positioned upwardly with left rear flap portion 92 located along score line 50 and right rear flap portion 94 located along score line 74. Left side portion 40 is then folded inwardly along score lines 46, 48 and 50 so interior rectangular portion 42 is positioned inwardly of exterior rectangular portion 44 over left forward flap portion 32 and left rear flap portion 92 and first and second outwardly extending projections 54 and 56 are inserted into first and second elongated openings 58 and 60, respectively.

[0027] Right side portion 64 is then folded inwardly along score lines 70, 72 and 74 so interior rectangular portion 66 is positioned inwardly of exterior rectangular portion 68 over right forward flap portion 34 and right rear flap portion 94 and first and second outwardly extending projections 78 and 80 are inserted into first and second elongated openings 82 and 84, respectively.

[0028] Inner protective base insert 14 is then positioned on base portion 26 and one or more rectangular protective pieces 136 and 138 are positioned in substantially rectangular cut-out 134. One or more removable inner protective spacers 18, 20 and 22 are then positioned, as needed, within substantially rectangular cut-out 134 and shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 is ready for placement of a laptop computer therein. Other components, such as connectors, adapters and peripheral devices are placed in the remaining cut-outs 140 and 142, if desired, and inner protective cover insert 16 is placed over inner protective base insert 14.

[0029] Left side cover flap portion 108 is then folded downwardly along score line 110 and right side cover flap portion 112 is folded downwardly along score line 114. Cover portion 104 is then folded over the top of inner protective cover insert 16 along score line 106. Front cover flap portion 118 is then folded downwardly along score line 120 and left front cover flap portion 122 is folded along score lines 126 and 128 and left front cover flap portion 122 is inserted into the opening between exterior rectangular portion 44 and left forward flap portion 32. Similarly, right front cover flap portion 124 is folded along score lines 130 and 132 and right front cover flap portion 124 is inserted into the opening between exterior rectangular portion 68 and right forward flap portion 34. At this time, shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 is ready for shipment and/or storage and, if desired, a mailing label and/or some product identification information could be placed on the exterior surface of cover portion 104.

[0030] When received, shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 is opened by removing left front cover flap portion 122 from the opening between exterior rectangular portion 44 and left forward flap portion 32 and removing right front cover flap portion 124 from the opening between exterior rectangular portion 68 and right forward flap portion 34. Cover portion 104 is then opened along score line 106 and inner protective cover insert 16 is removed to gain access to the laptop computer or electronic device positioned therein. If desired, cover portion, left side cover flap portion 108 and right side cover flap portion 112 can be folded along score line 116 and front cover flap portion 118, left front cover flap portion 122 and right front cover flap portion 124 positioned between the interior of rear flap portion 88 and inner protective base insert 14 to hold cover portion 104 out of the way and allow shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 to be used as a base to support the laptop computer positioned therein during test, maintenance and repair procedures. In addition, if desired, shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 could be stacked with cover portion 104 retained out of the way as described above so shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 would be open and ready for placement of a laptop computer therein.

[0031] In certain situations it has been found desirable to form a rectangular shaped hole in one or both of the

rectangular protective pieces 136 and 138 as best seen in FIGS. 3 and 4 of the drawings. This is now indicated by numeral 136a in FIG. 3 and FIG. 4 showing the approximate shape and position of these cut-outs. Cut-out in rectangular protective piece 138 is shown by dotted line 138a in FIG. 4. Essentially, the cut-outs 136a and 138a would be approximately four (4) inches by six (6) inches in size and are preferably approximately centrally positioned on respective rectangular protective pieces 136 and 138 as indicated by dotted line 136a in FIG. 3.

[0032] It has been found that a better cushioning of the laptop computer positioned in substantially rectangular cut-out 134 occurs with this cut-out because it tends to absorb the weight of the laptop computer in a better suspended relationship upon drop and/or jarring motions much in the same way that a donut is used to cushion a sore part of the human body, for example, the circular cushion used for corns or sore portions of feet or toes.

[0033] It should be understood that one of the primary utilitarian functions of the design shown in FIGS. 1 through 6 for shipping and storage container for laptop computers 10 is the protection of the laptop computer from jarring and dropping and any rough handling which normally occurs to a container as it sent by mail or truck or airplane in the normal course of its shipping and handling. To this end, thus, it is desirable to maintain the basic ratios of size and thickness of inner protective base insert 14, inner protective cover insert 16 and rectangular protective pieces 136 and 138 and the basic dimensional relationships shown in the drawings. There are certain standard drop specifications that are important to manufacturers of the laptop computers in order to properly protect the laptop computers during normal and routine handling in shipping of these products.

[0034] Turning to FIGS. 7 and 8, an alternative base insert, hereinafter referred to as side support 214, is shown. In this embodiment, the side support 214 again is configured to have a ratio of size and thickness relative to other sections to provide the desired support. To further enhance the support provided, the side support 214 may be constructed of a polyethylene foam material, such as a one and two-tenths pound (1.2 lb.) density polyethylene material, which has been found to provide enhanced side support for the laptop when placed therein. Upper and lower protective inserts, 16 and a continuous bottom insert, may be provided above and below side support 214 respectively, to provide support for the top and bottom of the laptop accordingly.

[0035] For the top and bottom foam inserts, it has been found that a polyurethane or other urethane material provides enhanced support for these areas. For example, top and bottom foam inserts may be constructed of a urethane foam material of one-pound (1 lb.) density. In this manner, the type of foam material is selected to enhance support of the laptop based upon the relative position of the foam inserts to the laptop, and are tailored to provide the desired support.

[0036] As seen in FIG. 7, the side support 214 may have first and second slots or cut-outs 220 and 222, for storage of accessories or other items therein. The side support 214 also has a main cut-out 224 in which the laptop is positioned similar to that previously described. One or more tear-out strips 226 and 228 may be formed on the sides of the cavity 224 to adjust the width of the cavity 224 accordingly.

Similarly, one or more tear-out strips 230 may be provided adjacent a rear portion of cavity 224 to adjust the depth thereof.

[0037] In the manufacture of the side support 214, the configuration can be assembled from a single foam piece which is die cut into the configuration as shown in FIG. 8. As should be recognized from FIG. 8, a U-shaped portion 232, comprising side portions 233 and 234 and front portion 235 is formed to include the cut-out 222 and tear out strips 226 and 228. The central portion of the foam member is cut into two similar portions 236 and 238, each of which included a portion of cut-out 220 and tear out strips 230. The portions 236 and 238 can then be repositioned into the configuration as shown in FIG. 7 to form the final insert configuration. This approach to manufacturing side support 214 eliminates scrap material and extra die cutting steps, thereby providing a more cost-effective construction.

[0038] Although the present invention has been described above in detail, the same is by way of illustration and example only and is not to be taken as a limitation on the present invention. Accordingly, the scope and content of the present invention are to be defined only by the terms of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

- 1. A shipping and storage container assembly, comprising:
  - a container having an open top, which is selectively closed by a cover; and,
  - at least one protective side support having an opening therein,
  - wherein the protective side support has at least one partially cutout or perforated portion that is selectively removable to vary the size of the opening.
- 2. The container assembly as recited in claim 1, further comprising:
  - a protective bottom support.
- 3. The container assembly as recited in claim 2, wherein the density of the protective side support is greater than the density of the protective bottom support.
- 4. The container assembly as recited in claim 3, wherein the density of the protective side support is approximately 1.2 to 2 pounds per cubic foot and the density of the protective bottom support is approximately 1 pound per cubic foot.
- 5. The container assembly as recited in claim 3, wherein the protective bottom support comprises polyurethane foam and the protective side support comprises polyethylene foam.
- 6. The container assembly as recited in claim 2, wherein the protective bottom support comprises polyurethane foam and the protective side support comprises polyethylene foam.
- 7. The container assembly as recited in claim 1, further comprising:
  - a protective top support.
- 8. The container assembly as recited in claim 7, wherein the top support is selectively attached to the cover.
- 9. The container assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein,
  - the protective side support is comprised of a generally U-shaped foam member that comprises three sides of

the opening, and a straight foam member that comprises one side of the opening;

the U-shaped foam member is cut from a single-piece foam blank; and wherein,

the portion of the foam blank that is removed to form the U-shaped member forms the straight foam member.

10. The container assembly as recited in claim 9, wherein the removed rectangular portion is substantially divided and unfolded to form the second piece of foam side support.

11. The container assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the protective side support includes portions on at least two sides of the opening that are selectively removable to vary the size of the opening.

12. The container assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein the cover is integral with the container.

13. A method of packaging an article in a shipping container, comprising the steps of:

providing a container having an open top and a protective side support for the article, wherein the protective side support includes at least one partially cutout or perforated portion that is selectively removable;

selectively removing at least one of the partially cutout or perforated portions to provide an article-receiving portion of a predetermined size; and,

inserting the article in the article-receiving portion.

14. The method as recited in claim 13, further comprising the step of:

providing a protective bottom support within the container.

15. A shipping and storage container assembly, comprising:

an exterior housing formed into an open top container, which is selectively closed by a cover;

at least one protective bottom support formed of a polyurethane foam having a first density; and,

at least one protective side support having an opening therein and formed of a polyethylene foam having a second density greater than the first density,

wherein the protective bottom support is adapted to cushion an article on a downward-facing surface when positioned in the container, and the protective side support is adapted to cushion the article on its sides when positioned in the container.

16. The shipping and storage container assembly as recited in claim 15, wherein the protective side support comprises a polyethylene foam having a density of approximately 1.2 to 2 pounds per cubic foot and the protective bottom support comprises a polyurethane foam having a density of approximately 1 pound per cubic foot.

17. The shipping and storage container assembly as recited in claim 15, wherein,

the protective side support is comprised of a generally U-shaped foam member that comprises three sides of the opening, and a straight foam member that comprises one side of the opening;

the U-shaped foam member is cut from a single-piece foam blank; and wherein,

the portion of the foam blank that is removed to form the U-shaped member forms the straight foam member.

**18.** The shipping and storage container assembly as recited in claim 15, wherein,

the protective side support includes at least one partially cutout or perforated portion that is selectively removable to vary the size of the protective side support.

**19.** The shipping and storage container assembly as recited in claim 18, wherein the cutout or perforated portion that selectively removable varies the size of the opening.

**20.** The shipping and storage container assembly as recited in claim 15, wherein,

the protective side support further comprises a second partially cutout or perforated portion that is selectively removable to form a second opening that receives accessory items.

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