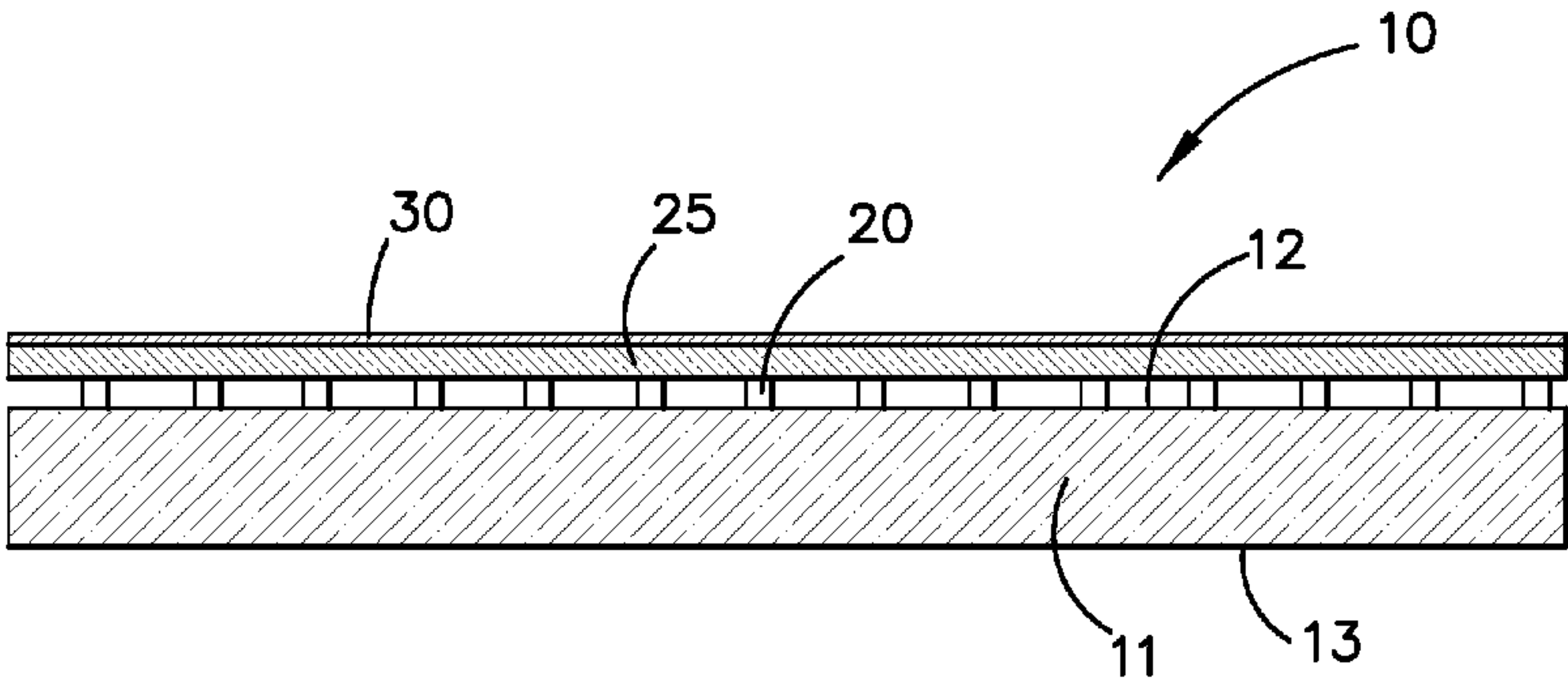




<p>(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2010/03/24</p> <p>(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2010/09/30</p> <p>(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2018/10/30</p> <p>(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2011/09/23</p> <p>(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: AU 2010/000339</p> <p>(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2010/108222</p> <p>(30) Priorité/Priority: 2009/03/25 (AU2009901272)</p>	<p>(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. <i>G09F 13/18</i> (2006.01), <i>B32B 3/22</i> (2006.01), <i>B32B 3/30</i> (2006.01), <i>B32B 7/04</i> (2006.01), <i>G09F 13/42</i> (2006.01)</p> <p>(72) Inventeur/Inventor: MATYEAR, JOHN, AU</p> <p>(73) Propriétaire/Owner: MATYEAR, JOHN, AU</p> <p>(74) Agent: PIASETZKI NENNIGER KVAS LLP</p>
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(54) Titre : PANNEAU D'ECLAIRAGE
(54) Title: ILLUMINATION PANEL



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**
An illumination panel comprising a transparent core having opposing surfaces, a matrix of light releasing dots substantially covering one surface, and a protective layer in abutting contact with said surface whereby the dots act as an adhesive bonding the core to the protective layer.

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau(43) International Publication Date
30 September 2010 (30.09.2010)(10) International Publication Number
WO 2010/108222 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:

G09F 13/18 (2006.01) *B32B 3/22* (2006.01)
B32B 3/30 (2006.01) *B32B 7/04* (2006.01)
G09F 13/42 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/AU2010/000339

(22) International Filing Date:

24 March 2010 (24.03.2010)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data:

2009901272 25 March 2009 (25.03.2009) AU

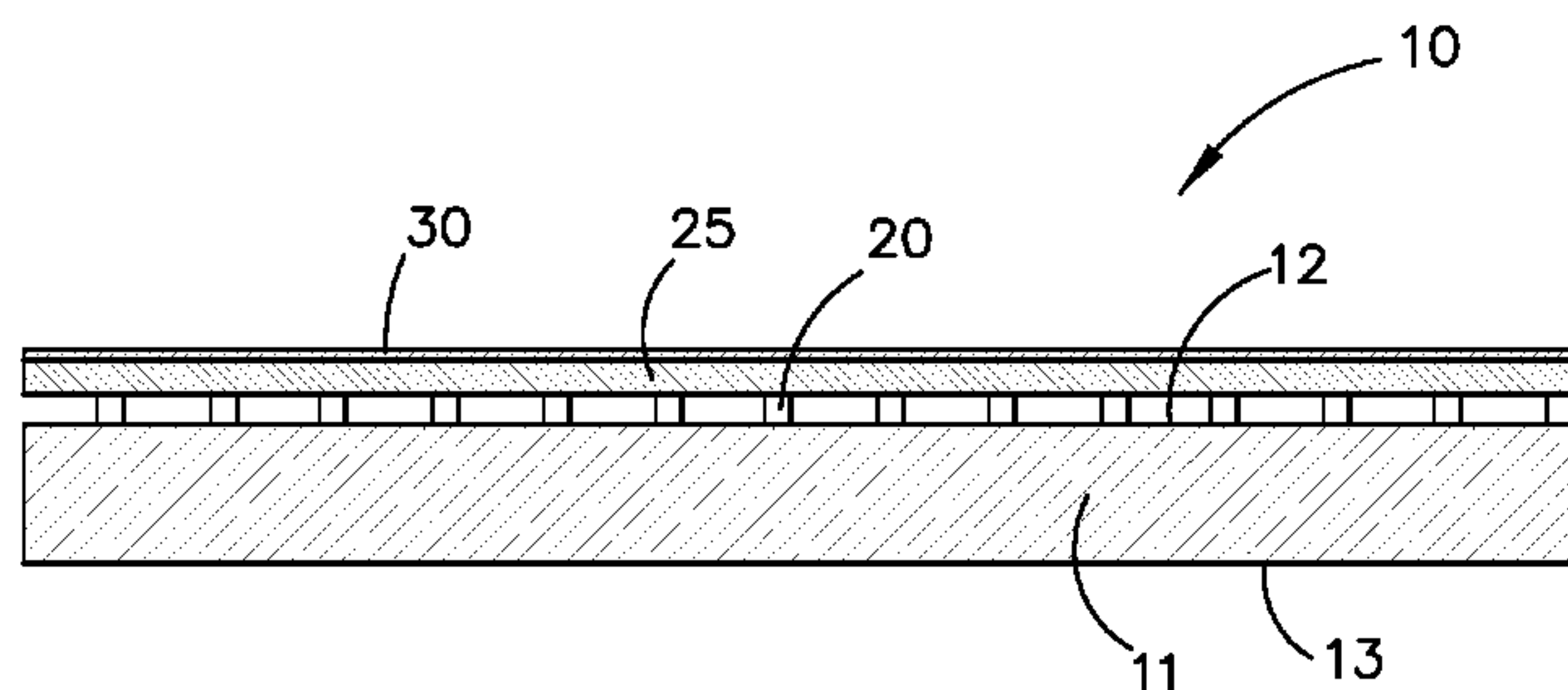
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(84) **Designated States** (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:— *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*(81) **Designated States** (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available*): AE, AG, AL, AM,

(54) Title: ILLUMINATION PANEL

**FIGURE 1**

(57) **Abstract:** An illumination panel comprising a transparent core having opposing surfaces, a matrix of light releasing dots substantially covering one surface, and a protective layer in abutting contact with said surface whereby the dots act as an adhesive bonding the core to the protective layer.

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ILLUMINATION PANELIntroduction

This invention relates to an illumination panel and, in particular, a panel for use in building and display applications including illuminated signage.

Background of the Invention

Illuminated signage, advertising and display boards are in popular use across the world. These signs usually incorporate discrete lighting which has the effect of illuminating the whole of the sign. There has been a number of past suggestions for using translucent plastics with edge lighting whereby the light is released by a matrix of dots to fully and evenly illuminate the entire surface area of the sign. Well known arrangements of this type of sign utilise an acrylic panel that has printed thereon a graded matrix of ink dots on one or both faces of the panel. The dots of ink affect the refractive and reflective nature of the acrylic and allow light introduced along an edge of the panel to be released across the whole surface area of the panel. When the dots are carried on both sides, the light reflects and refracts more effectively through both surfaces. In one option, a reflective film or sheet is placed on one side causing the light released on that side to be reflected back through the panel so the majority of light leaves the panel only through one ("front") surface. The same process of controlled, even light release can be achieved by laser etching the surface of an acrylic panel.

A problem with lighting systems of the kind described above is that the acrylic panel which carries the matrix of printed dots or laser etching has to be handled very carefully. If the panel becomes scratched or subjected to moisture, light escapes as bright spots thereby upsetting

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the even light distribution across the surface of the panel.

5 The vulnerability of the surfaces of the acrylic panel reduces the effective use of such panels and it is consideration of the problems associated with these structures that has brought about the present invention.

Summary of the Invention

10 According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided an illumination panel comprising a transparent core having opposing surfaces, a matrix of dots substantially covering one surface, and a protective panel in abutting contact with said surface whereby the dots act
15 as an adhesive bonding the core to the protective panel.

In a preferred embodiment, both surfaces of the core are provided with a matrix of dots that act as adhesive to bond both surfaces to protective panels. The matrix of
20 dots may be applied to the transparent core by etching, painting, screen printing, printing or spraying or any one of a number of application techniques such as transfer from a film or even as part of a film or panel that then becomes the protective layer. Alternatively, the array of
25 dots may be provided by laser etching the surface of the panel to define the array of dots.

Preferably, the core is acrylic and the protective panel may be any suitable material that will bond to the core
30 via the medium of the dots. In one embodiment, a reflective protective panel is attached to one side of the core with a transparent or translucent protective cover being bonded to the other side.

35 In accordance with a still further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of producing an illumination panel comprising placing a protective panel

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in abutting parallel contact with a transparent core and laser etching an array of dots through the protective panel onto the surface of the core which at the same time adheres the panel to the core.

5

The dots described above can be of any size or shape and are, for example, square, round, linear, rectangular, triangular, doughnut, or any other shape, even an irregular shape. The dots may be clear, translucent or
10 opaque and, more preferably, light coloured, for example, white.

Description of the Drawings

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described
15 by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic cross sectional view of a single sided illumination panel;

20

Figure 2 is a schematic cross sectional view of a double sided illumination panel;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of part of a process line
25 for manufacturing the panel of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a perspective view of the end of the process line;

30 Figure 5 is a perspective view of a kitchen cabinet incorporating illumination panels of Figures 1 or 2;

Figure 6 is a perspective view of an illumination panel of Figures 1 or 2 attached to a structural panel

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Figure 7 is a perspective view of the interior of a refrigerator lined with panels of the kind illustrated in Figures 1 or 2;

- 5 Figure 8 is a perspective view of a retail display cabinet using illuminated walls, back panel and shelving incorporating panels shown in Figures 1 or 2;

Figure 9 is a perspective view of a street sign
10 incorporating a panel of Figures 1 or 2; and

Figure 10 is a perspective view of a solar powered panel for use with a light diffusing panel of Figures 1 or 2.

15 Description of the Preferred Embodiments

An illumination panel essentially comprises a transparent sheet of clear acrylic plastics with at least one surface covered with a matrix of spaced light refracting and reflecting dots. When light is introduced to the
20 appropriate edges of the panel it is refracted and reflected by the dots to illuminate the whole surface of the panel. Patent Application No. W092/05535 is an example of this kind of illumination panel.

25 As shown in Figures 1 and 2, an illumination panel 10 in accordance with the embodiments of this invention is shown in both a double sided (Figure 2) configuration and a single sided (Figure 1) configuration.

30 Each illumination panel 10 comprises a core 11 of transparent acrylic which is usually 6mm, 8mm or 10mm in thickness. The core may include an optical brightener. The core 11 can have any surface sectional area and, although shown planar in Figures 1 and 2, could be
35 appropriately curved. The acrylic core 11 has opposed surfaces 12 and 13, each of which is covered by a matrix of opaque, translucent or clear glue dots 20. The matrix

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- 5 -

of glue dots 20 acts as an adhesive to secure a protective panel 25, 26 to one or both sides of the core 11.

If required, a layer 30, 31 can be added to the outer side
5 of the protective panels 25, 26. It is understood that the layer 30, 31 may be any material such as glass, timber, metal, paint, ink, photographic film or veneer which could be attached to the protective panel 25, 26 for various purposes, for example painting or veneering a
10 surface to match the surroundings, or printing signs and images. The surfaces of the protective panels 25, 26 may also be left untreated, simply allowing the light to release for general illumination.

15 In a simpler configuration shown in Figure 1, the core 11 has the matrix of glue dots 20 only on one side 12 and a single protective panel 25 is attached to that side. The important feature of this embodiment is that the matrix of glue dots 20 acts as a light transmitting, refracting and
20 reflecting medium as well as an adhesive, firmly securing the protective panel 25 to the core 11 and protecting the core and dot matrix from damage, for example, by scratching or moisture while also providing a light transmitting surface that can be used without affecting
25 light distribution from the core. The glue is of a light reflecting, refracting or transmitting material and it is understood that there are a large variety of different glues which are suitable.

30 The matrix of adhesive dots may be applied in many different ways including by etching, painting, printing, screen printing or spraying or transferred from a film or even as part of a film or layer that is then fixed to the core by the adhesive dots. Alternatively, a laser can be
35 used to etch the surface of the core 11 through the protective panel 25 to define the array of dots whilst, at the same time, bonding the protective layer to the core.

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The process might also be achieved by laying an appropriate film between the core and protective layer and under laser activation, have the film bond to both surfaces in an array of light transmitting dots.

5

One method of producing the panel shown in Figure 1 is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. In this embodiment, the core of acrylic plastics 11 is passed along a roller conveyor 100 in the direction of the arrows shown in
10 Figures 3 and 4. An adhesive dispenser 101 is arranged to complete a reciprocal movement along a rod 102 transversely across the conveyor 100. The rod 102 is held by fixed rectangular supports 103, 104. The dispenser 101 places a line of spaced dots of adhesive transversely
15 across one surface of the core and, as the core moves forward, the rows of dots are spaced as shown in Figure 3. Downstream of the dispenser 101 is a UV light 105 which fully or partially cures the adhesive depending on type or process. A protective panel 25 is placed on top of the
20 glued surface and is then consolidated thereon through a pressing roller 110 that rotates to exert downward pressure on the panel 25 to bring the cover panel 25 into abutting contact with the dots on the core 11. It is understood that this process may also be achieved by the
25 adhesive being applied to the protective panel which is then bonded to the cores. In another method, the adhesive may be printed to the core or protective panel and the two components then pressed together and the adhesive cured by light.

30

The dot matrix substantially covers the surface of the core 11 and operates to control the release of light introduced along one or more sides of the panel 10. It is usual for the density or size of dots, or both to increase
35 along the panel 10 in a direction away from the edge where the light is introduced for a single light source, and when light is introduced from opposite sides of the core

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panel, the density or size of dots or both increases to a point equal distance from both light sources. To achieve an even light distribution across the core panel, the density of dots can be increased or alternatively, the
5 gaps between the dots can remain constant and the size of the dots increased, or both the density and size of the dots increased.

The dots may comprise a grid work of lines or even
10 concentric circles of differing diameters. The adhesive dots may be any one of a number of adhesive materials including various formulations of UV curing inks and adhesives, and adhesive of clear or white silicon.

15 Both panels 10 described above are in themselves structural units and thus can be supported or used as wall panels, shelves or in a wide variety of structural environments. The panels do not have to be enclosed within a supporting frame and can, by themselves, operate
20 as structural elements. In one embodiment, it is envisaged that at least one edge of the panel would have LEDs embedded therein which would operate on low voltage to define a highly illuminated structural element. The LEDs could also be simply attached to one or more edges of
25 the panel by a metal or plastic extrusion, or clips. The advantage of embedding LED lighting into the panel means that, as a structural unit, it is complete. Since LEDs have a long lifespan the panels could be left illuminated for very lengthy periods operating on a low safe voltage
30 without the need of maintenance. The light delivered could be white or any number of different colours available from LED lighting elements.

In another embodiment, the protective panel 25 could be
35 either light transmitting or a reflective panel. The protective panel could be a suitable material such as plastics, glass, laminex, metal or timber. The surface of

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the panel 25 that is to be bonded to the core could be painted or treated to define a reflective surface when the panel operates as a reflector. For example, a white polystyrene or polyethylene panel may be bonded directly to the core 11 with the surface of the plastics reflecting the light released from the core by the glue dots. The opposite side of the core could be left untouched and the assembly may be placed behind, under or above a glass sheet without being attached. This arrangement could be used for a kitchen splashback or a glass shelf.

Alternatively, the opposite side of the core could have an opal translucent panel bonded by a matrix of adhesive dots, and used as a single sided sign.

In a further example, a laminex veneer may be bonded directly to the core 11 with the inside (or bonding) surface of the veneer having been painted white to reflect light. The veneer then provides the finished external surface while the internal face of the veneer acts to reflect light back through the core and out the opposite surface. This front light releasing surface of the core can be protected by a clear or opal translucent material that is attached by another light releasing matrix of glue dots. This could be the case when the illumination panel is used as the walls and/or base of a cupboard, or a retail display, see Figures 5 and 8.

A rectangular kitchen cupboard 50 is shown in Figures 5 and 6, comprising hinged doors 51, 52, a top 53, sides 54, 55, base 56 and rear panel 57. The rear panel 57, top 53 and doors 51, 52 are manufactured of conventional joinery such as laminex, plywood, timber, chip board etc. The base 56 and sides panels 54, 55 are constructed of illuminated panels 10 shown in greater detail in Figure 6. In Figure 5, the cupboard is mounted against a wall 60 above a bench surface 61. Since the side panels and base panels are illuminated panels, light is passed into the

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interior of the cupboard by the side panels and down onto the bench surface 61 by the base panel 56.

As shown in Figure 6, each panel 10 comprises an acrylic
5 core 11 with a matrix of dots 20 on either side. The
matrix of glue dots secures a reflective cover 25 on one
side and a translucent layer 26 on the other side. The
edge of the panel has attached thereto an elongated light
strip 65 and the light strip, together with the panel, is
10 located within a rectangular aluminium extrusion 70. The
extrusion 70 has an upstanding web 77 which is keyed into
a slot 72 in the panel 57 which constitutes the timber,
veneer or laminex structural rear panel 57 of the cabinet
50. The side panels may transmit light either internally
15 into the cabinet or on both sides and the base panel is
designed primarily to transmit light to the underside. A
single or dual light source is located along the rear and
or front edges and a reflective covering is placed on the
top side. Where the light travels in both directions it
20 is understood that translucent panels would be used on
both sides.

In Figure 7, there is an illustration of an embodiment
where illuminated panels 10 are incorporated as the walls
25 of a refrigerator 40. The panels have at least one edge
lined with LEDs. The core 11 is bonded to a reflecting
panel or the wall of the refrigerator so that each side
wall 41, 42 and rear panel 43 constitutes a light source.
A translucent acrylic panel is bonded to the core to
30 provide the hard wearing exterior surface within the
interior of the refrigerator. A door operated switch (not
shown) can be used to control operation of the lights. In
both embodiments shown in Figures 5 to 7, it is understood
that the shelves could incorporate illumination panels of
35 the kind described above.

- 10 -

In Figure 8, there is an illustration of a retail display 65 in which the side walls 66, 67, back panel 68 or shelving 69 could be manufactured of illuminating panels 10 of the kind described above. As described in earlier
5 embodiments, a line of LEDs is secured along the edges of the side walls and rear wall and along one or more edges of the shelves and the core is covered on both sides by acrylic or glass panels to provide hard wearing surfaces that can be used as shelving in retail displays, or carry
10 images and branding information.

In Figure 9, there is an illustration of a street sign 80 comprising an elongate rectangular panel 10 incorporating a core 11 and front and rear translucent acrylic faces 25,
15 26. The longitudinal and side edges of the panel are sealed and LED elements 81 are positioned along the inner edge. The whole assembly is housed in an aluminium extrusion 82 which forms a housing which in turn contains a battery or transformer to power it as an illuminated
20 street sign. The printing can be carried on either acrylic face.

In the embodiment shown in Figure 10, a solar panel 90 incorporates an illuminated panel 10 of the kind described
25 above whereby solar panels in the form of photo voltaic cells with a reflective under surface are bonded to the exterior of the panel 10 on the top surface and they are coupled to either battery storage or battery packs which in turn power LEDs 92 positioned down the side edges of
30 the panel. The edges of the panel can be protected with an acrylic or metal edging strip 94, 95 and, in this manner, the panel absorbs the sun during the day which can be stored as electricity in a battery pack ensuring that the panel is illuminated at night. In this panel, a
35 translucent diffuser is bonded to the core 11 to define the underside of the panel and the upper side of the panel

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has a reflective surface that is part of or which supports the solar panels 91.

In another embodiment, the core could comprise a series of thin panels each with appropriate positioning of adhesive dots which are in alignment or offset from the adhesive dots on the adjacent panel. In this way a laminated structure is produced with an added dimension of dot matrix refinement; in the direction horizontally away from the light source the dots may get bigger on each layer and then vertically in the direction of the light being released the dots may get proportionally smaller. Seen from the light releasing face, the dots may appear to cover the surface, but in fact they may be positioned on each layer in different positions.

In the claims which follow and in the preceding description of the invention, except where the context requires otherwise due to express language or necessary implication, the word "comprise" or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising" is used in an inclusive sense, i.e. to specify the presence of the stated features but not to preclude the presence or addition of further features in various embodiments of the invention.

**THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE
PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:**

1. An illumination panel comprising:
 - 5 a transparent structural core having a first surface, and a second surface opposing said first surface;
 - a first matrix of light releasing dots covering said first surface;
 - a second matrix of light releasing dots covering said second surface;
 - a first protective panel in abutting contact with said first surface; and
 - 10 a second protective panel in abutting contact with said second surface;
 - wherein each of said first and said second matrix of light releasing dots acts as a light transmitting, refracting and reflecting medium, as well as an adhesive for bonding said transparent structural core to said first
 - 15 protective panel and said second protective panel, respectively, so that said illumination panel operates as a structural element without a supporting edge frame; and
 - wherein at least one of a density and a size of said light releasing dots increases across said illumination panel in a direction away from an edge of
 - 20 said illumination panel adjacent a light emitting element.
2. The illumination panel according to claim 1, wherein both of said density and said size of said light releasing dots increases across said illumination panel in said direction away from said edge of said illumination
- 25 panel adjacent said light emitting element.
3. The illumination panel according to claim 1 or 2, wherein an outer layer is bonded to said first protective panel, or said second protective panel.
- 30 4. The illumination panel according to claim 3, wherein said outer layer comprises paint, ink, a transfer, steel, glass, plastics, wood, or wood veneer.
5. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said transparent structural core comprises acrylic.
- 35

6. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein said first and said second protective panels comprise metal, timber, plastic, or glass.

5 7. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots is applied to said transparent structural core by etching, painting, screen printing, printing, or spraying, or is transferred to said transparent structural core from, or as part of, a film.

10

8. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots is applied to said transparent structural core by laser etching said first or said second surface of said transparent structural core through said first or said second protective
15 panel, respectively.

9. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots is applied to said transparent structural core by induction, dielectric, or microwave activation of
20 a distributed receptor that bonds said first or said second surface of said transparent structural core to said first or said second protective panel, respectively.

10. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein
25 said first and said second protective panels are independently reflective, transparent, or translucent.

11. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein one of said first and said second protective panels is reflective, and the other
30 of said first and said second protective panels is transparent, or translucent.

12. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein both of said first and said second protective panels are transparent, or translucent.

35

13. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 9, and 10 to 12, wherein said light emitting element is positioned adjacent, or on one edge of, the illumination panel.
- 5 14. The illumination panel according to claim 13, wherein said light emitting element comprises a plurality of LEDs secured to, or embedded in, one or more edges of the illumination panel.
- 10 15. The illumination panel according to any one of claims 1 to 9, or 10 to 14, wherein said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots is a pressure sensitive adhesive for bonding said transparent structural core to said first or said second protective panel, respectively.
- 15 16. A composite illumination panel comprising a plurality of illumination panels as defined in any one of claims 1 to 9, and 10 to 14, wherein said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots of one illumination panel of said plurality of said illumination panels are offset from said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots of another illumination panel of said plurality of said illumination panels.
- 20 17. A use of at least one illumination panel as defined in any one of claims 1 to 9, and 10 to 14, to make one or more walls or shelves of a cabinet, wherein said one or more walls or said shelves comprise said at least one illumination panel.
- 25 18. A use of the illumination panel as defined in any one of claims 1 to 9, and 10 to 14, in a road sign, wherein said road sign comprises a housing having a mounting flange adapted to be secured to one edge of said illumination panel, and said light emitting element being wired to an interior
- 30 of said housing.
19. A method of manufacturing the illumination panel as defined in claim 1, including the step of curing said first or said second matrix of light releasing dots by UV light, or infra-red heating, or by laser activation to bond
- 35 said first or said second surface of said transparent structural core to said

first or said second protective panel, respectively.

20. A method of producing the illumination panel according to claim 1, comprising the steps of:

- 5 placing a protective panel in abutting parallel contact with a transparent structural core;
- laser etching or activating a matrix of light releasing dots through said protective panel onto a surface of said transparent structural core to adhere said illumination panel to said transparent structural core; and
- 10 providing light distribution across said transparent structural core.

21. An illuminated solar panel comprising:

- a transparent structural core having opposing surfaces;
- a matrix of dots that act as a light transmitting, refracting and
- 15 reflecting medium as well as an adhesive, substantially covering both said opposing surfaces; and
- a protective layer of reflective material bonded to an upper surface of said transparent structural core by said matrix of dots, said protective layer of reflective material carrying a plurality of solar cells;
- 20 wherein said solar cells generate electricity that is passed to a battery pack or accumulator and power from said battery pack or said accumulator is fed back to a light source positioned along at least one edge of said illuminated solar panel to allow light to be introduced and distributed by said transparent structural core and transmitted, refracted, and reflected by said
- 25 matrix of dots on a lower surface of said transparent structural core and released through a diffuser bonded to said lower surface of said transparent structural core by said matrix of dots.

- 22. A method of producing an illumination panel, said illumination panel
- 30 comprising: a transparent structural core having a first surface, a second surface, and a first protective panel bonded to said first surface via a first matrix of light releasing dots in the form of an adhesive, said light releasing dots increasing in density or size along said illumination panel in a direction away from a light source, wherein each of the light releasing dots acts as a
- 35 light transmitting, refracting and reflecting medium, as well as an adhesive

for bonding said transparent structural core to said first protective panel, so that said illumination panel operates as a structural element without a supporting edge frame, said method comprising the steps of:

placing said first protective panel in abutting parallel contact with said
5 transparent structural core;

laser etching or activating said matrix of light releasing dots through said first protective panel onto said first surface of said transparent structural core to adhere said illumination panel to said transparent structural core; and
providing light distribution across said transparent structural core.

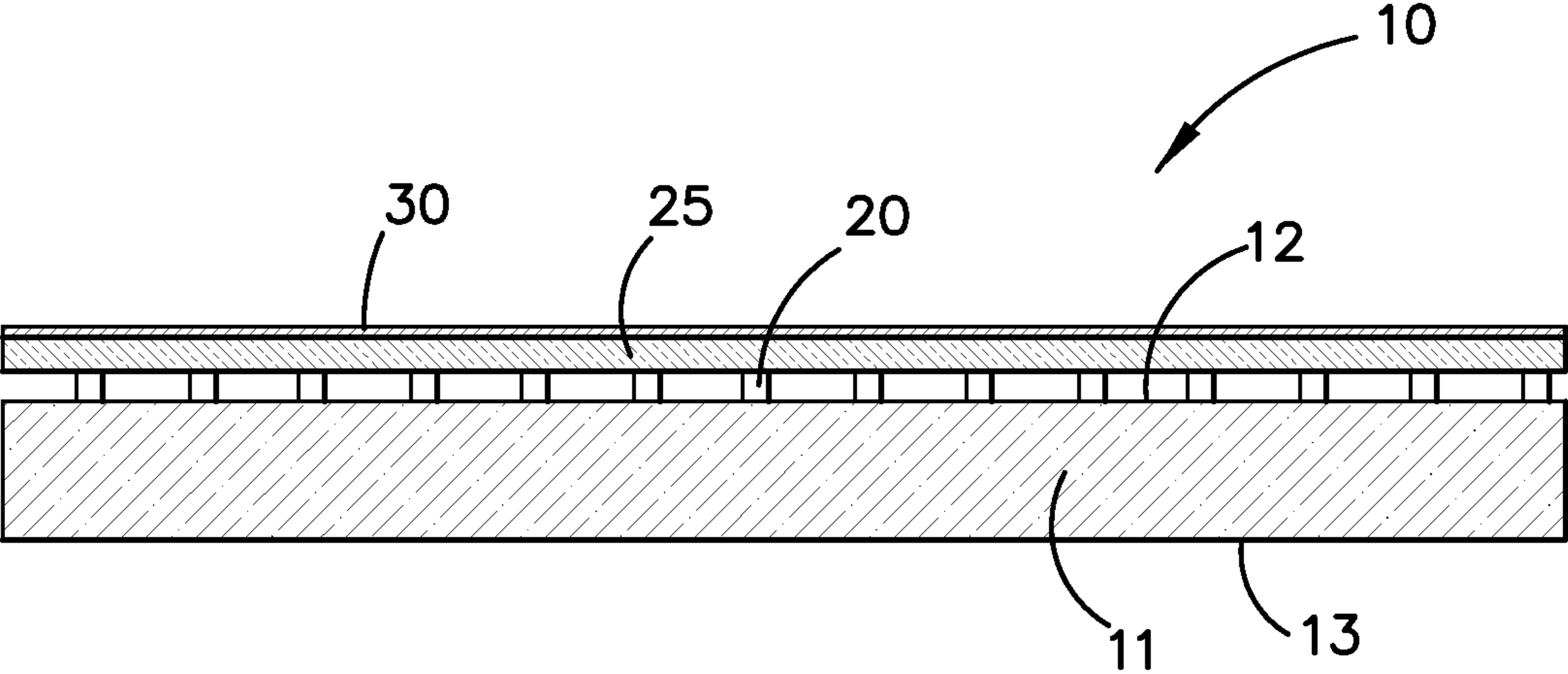


FIGURE 1

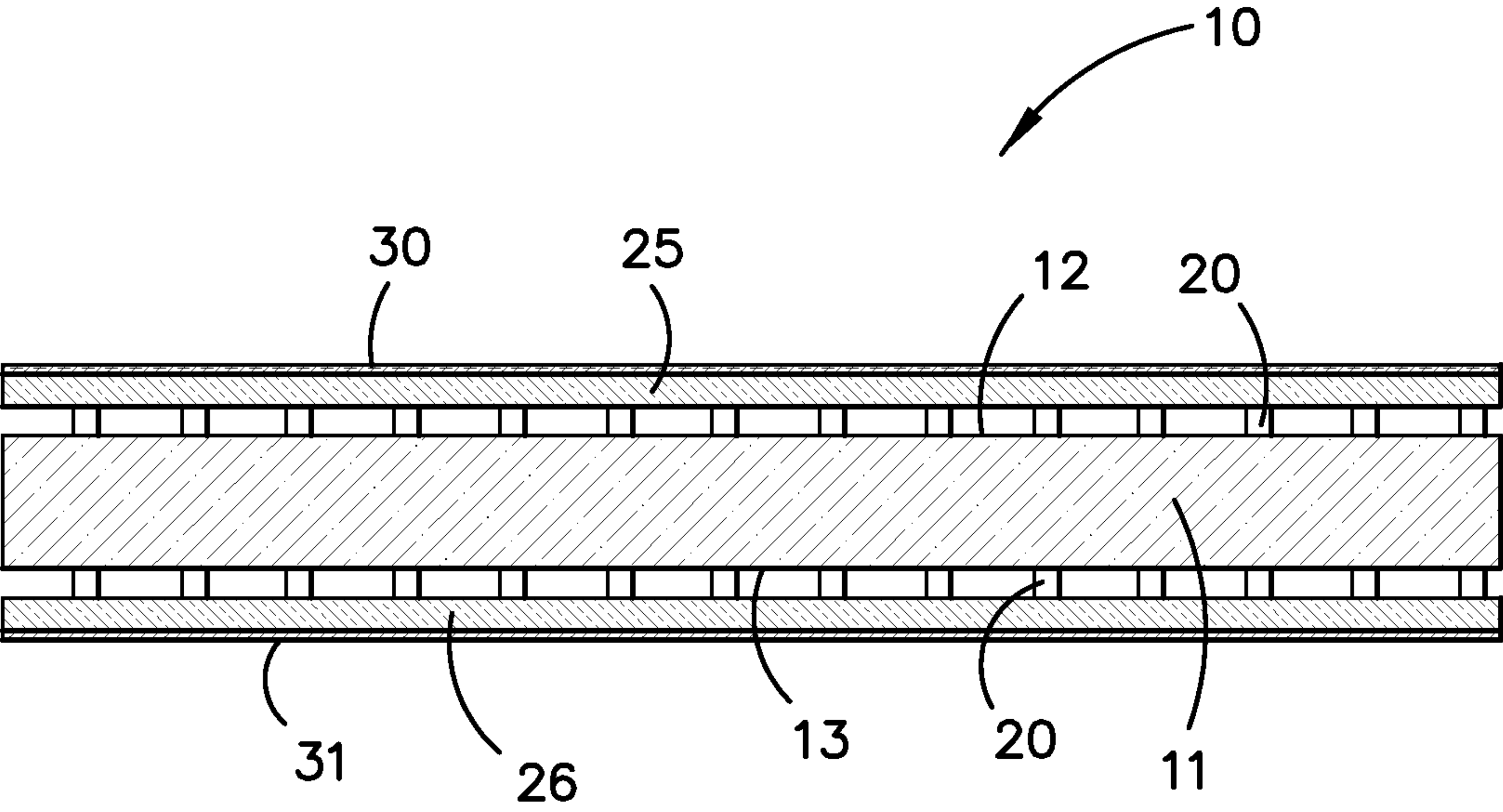


FIGURE 2

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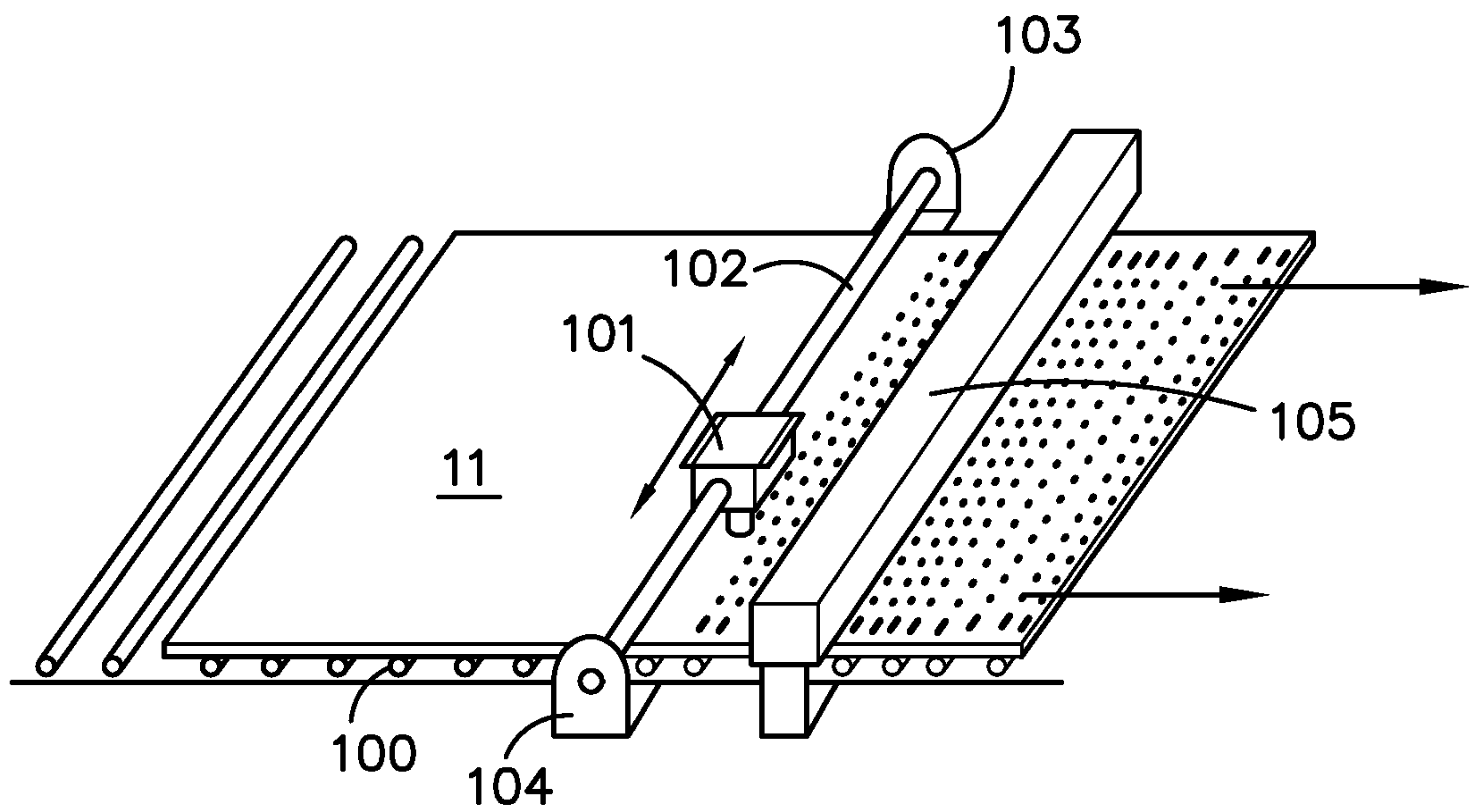


FIGURE 3

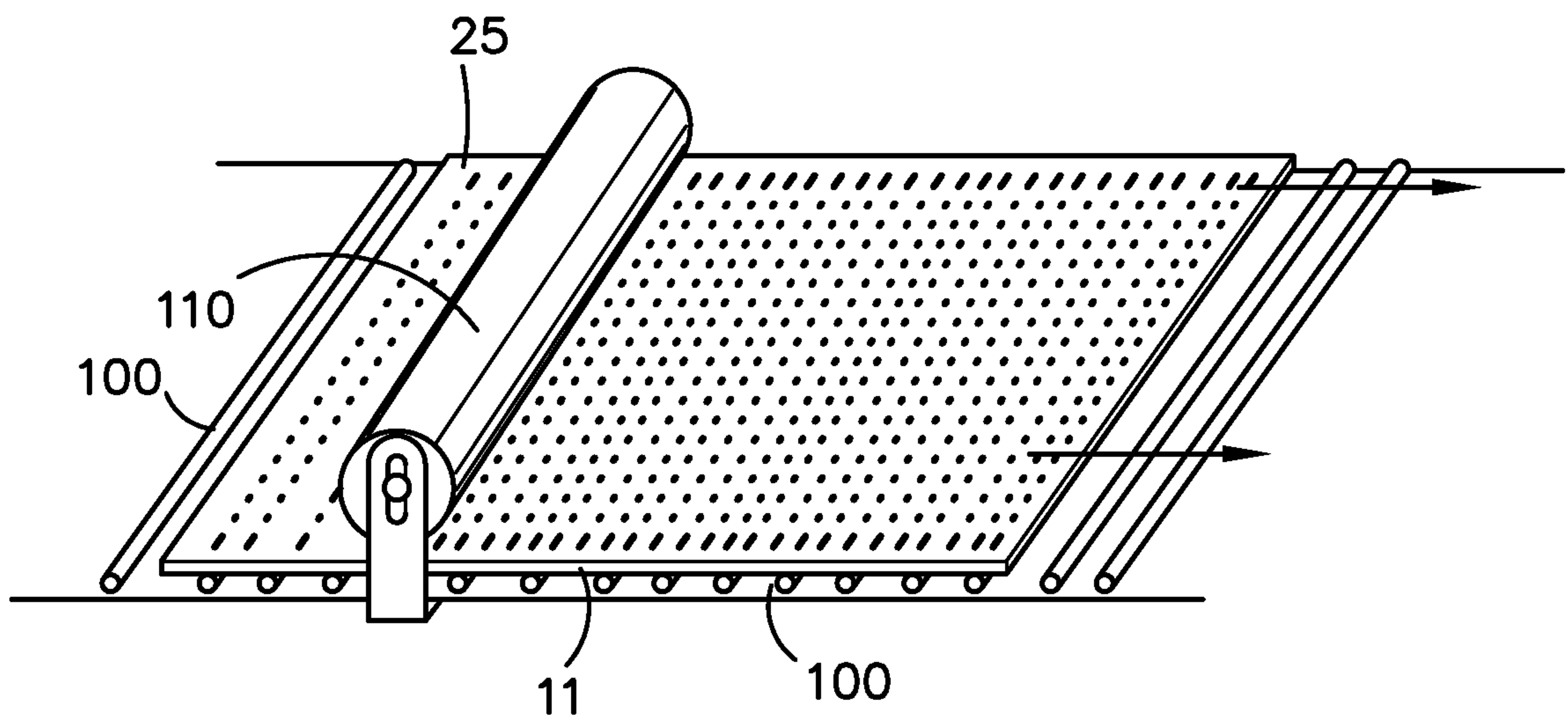


FIGURE 4

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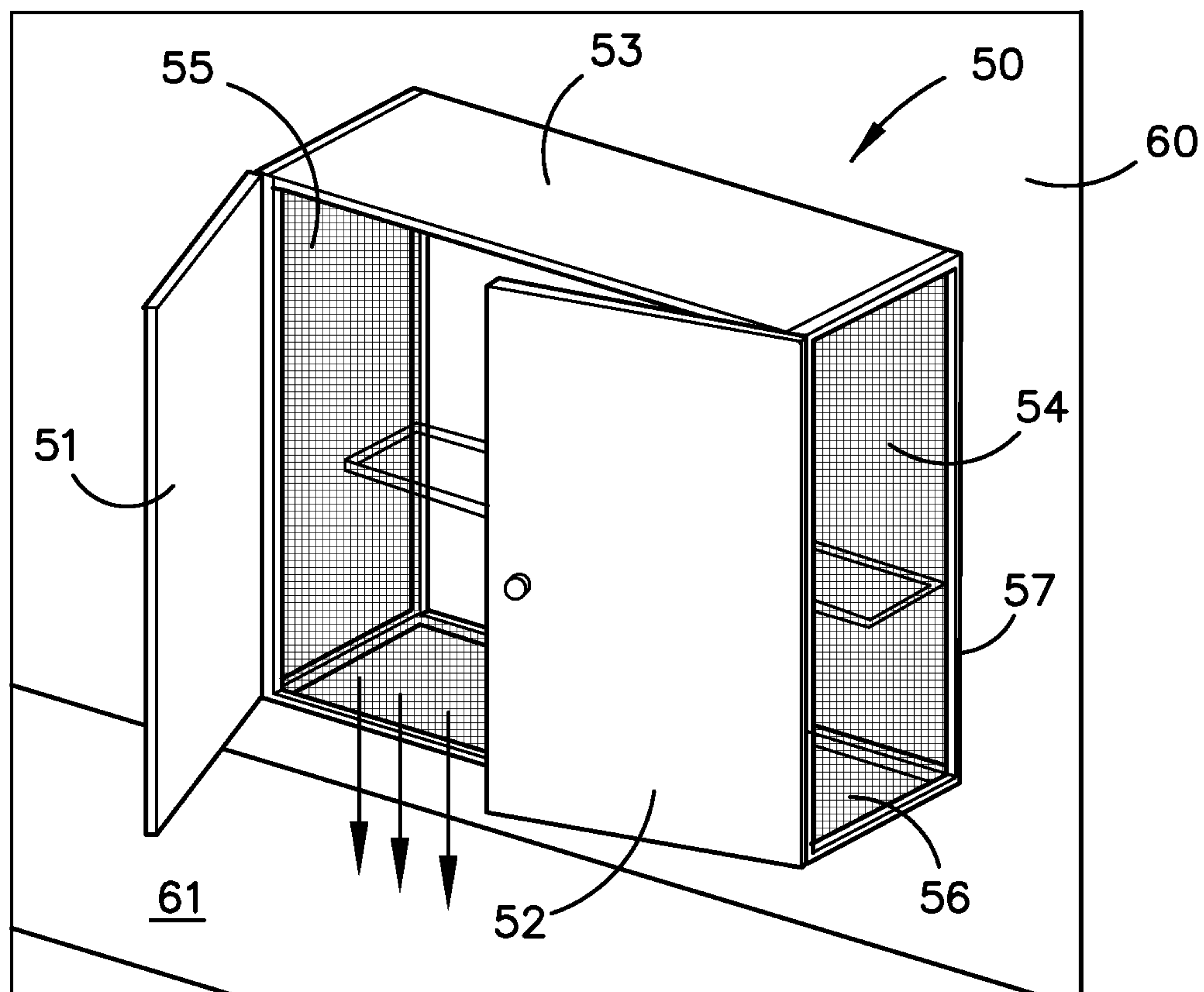


FIGURE 5

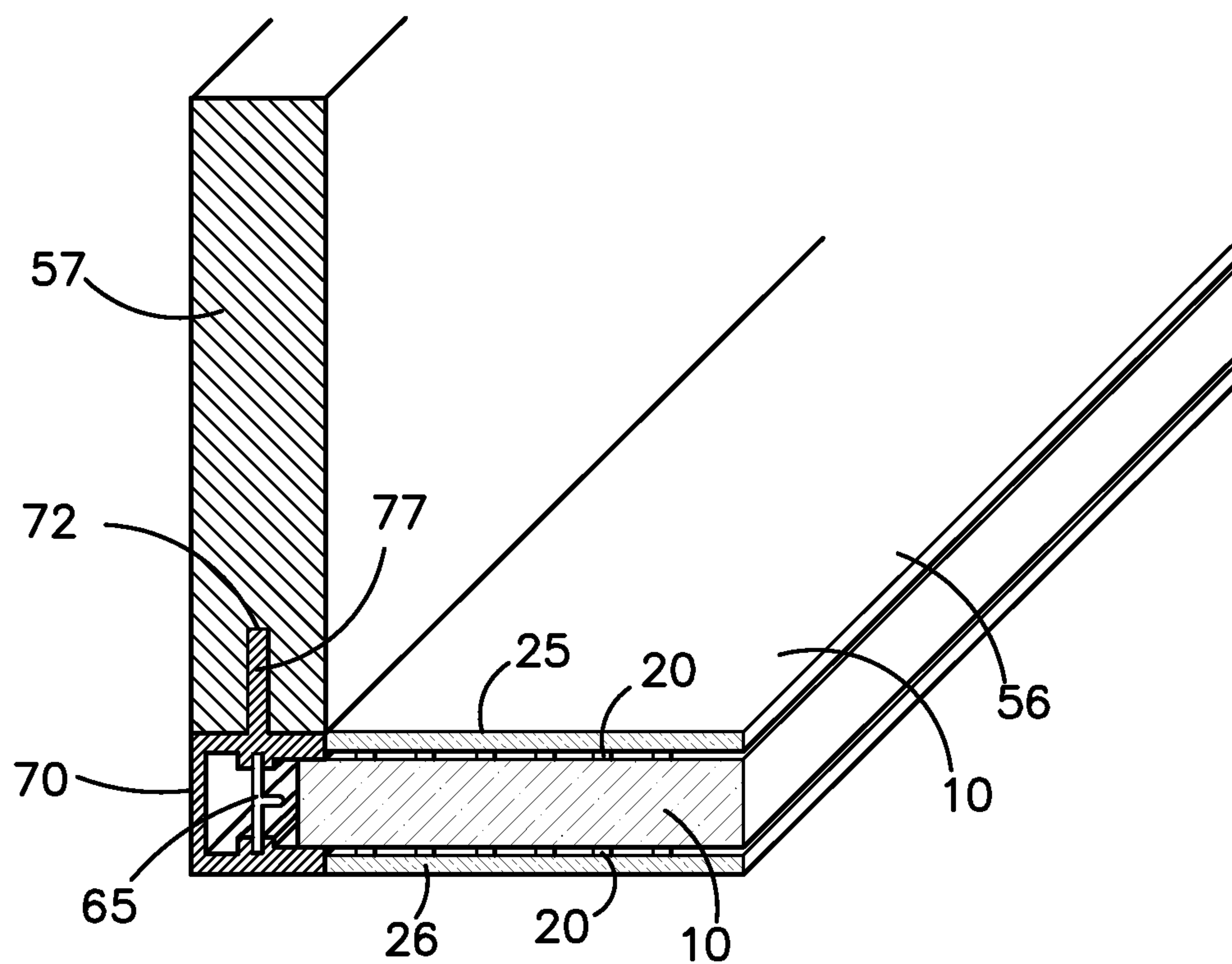


FIGURE 6

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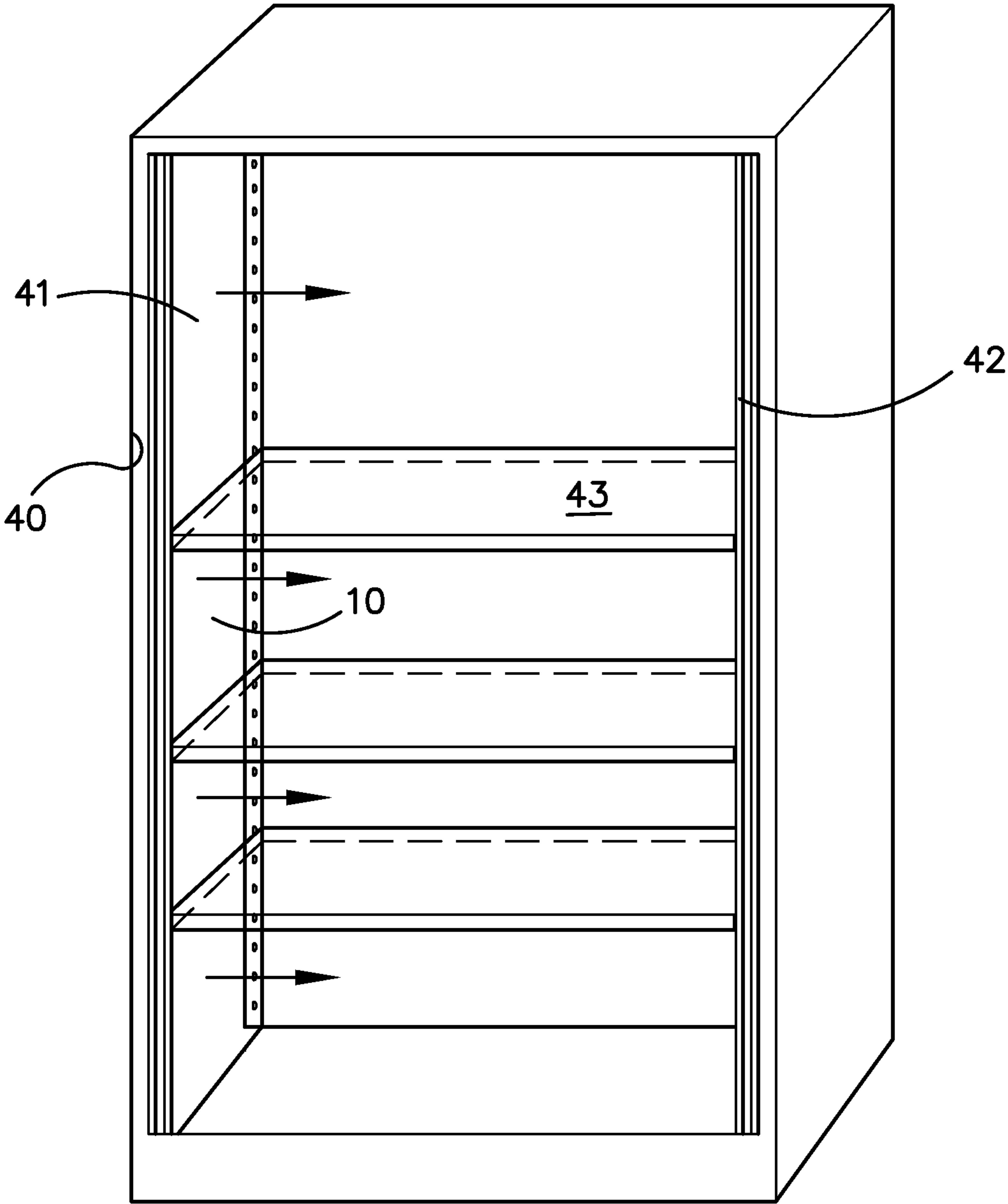


FIGURE 7

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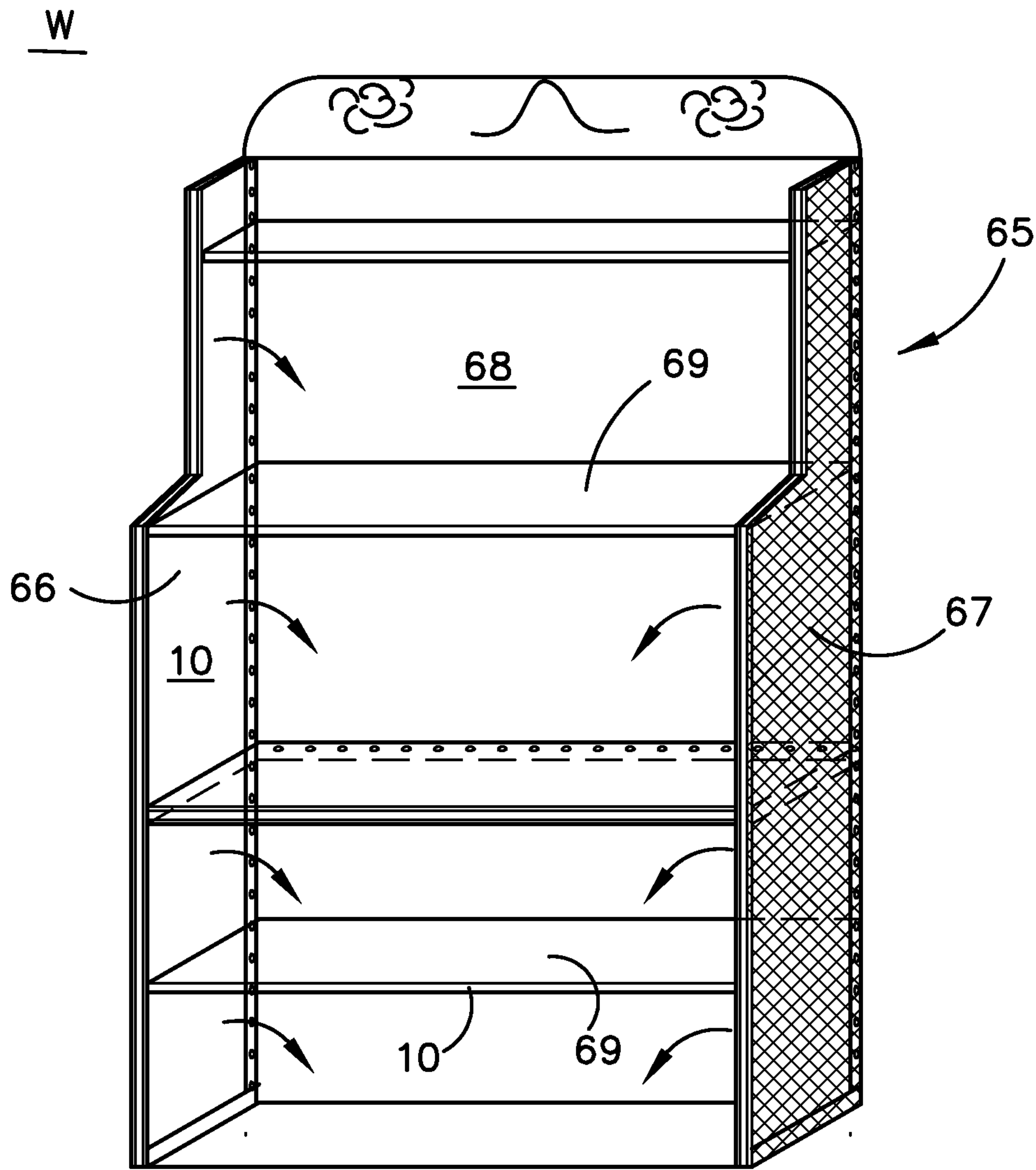


FIGURE 8

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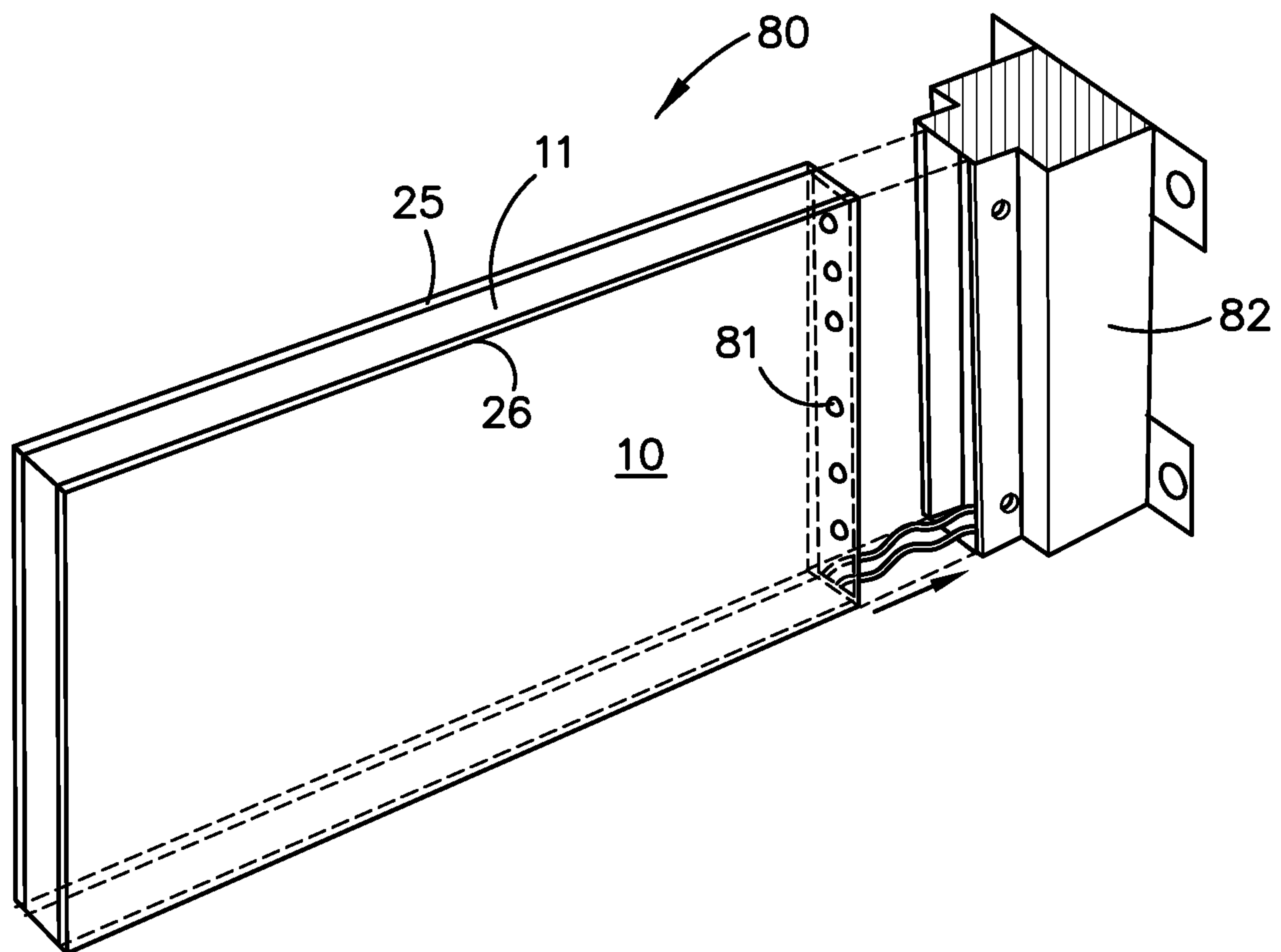


FIGURE 9

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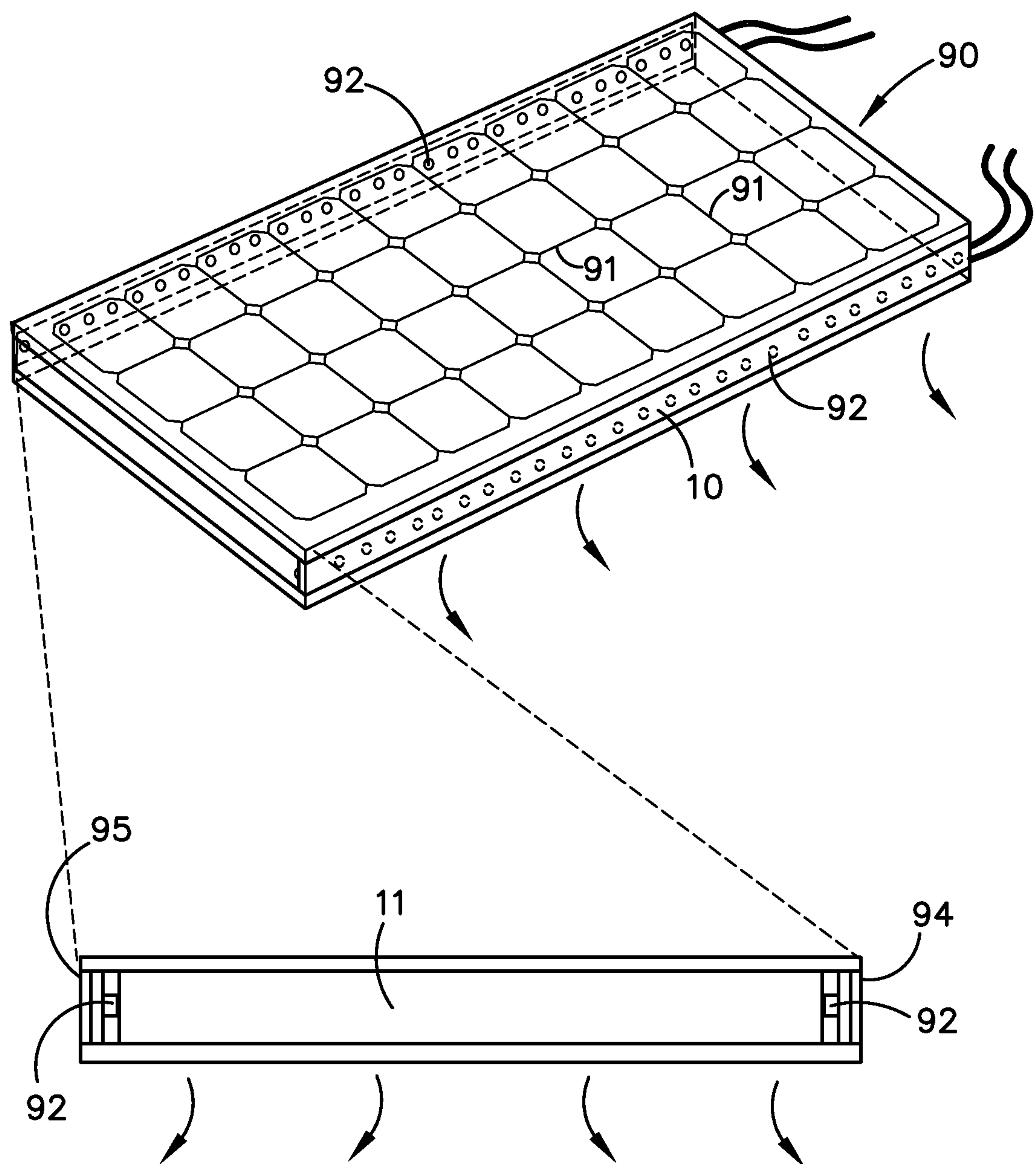


FIGURE 10

