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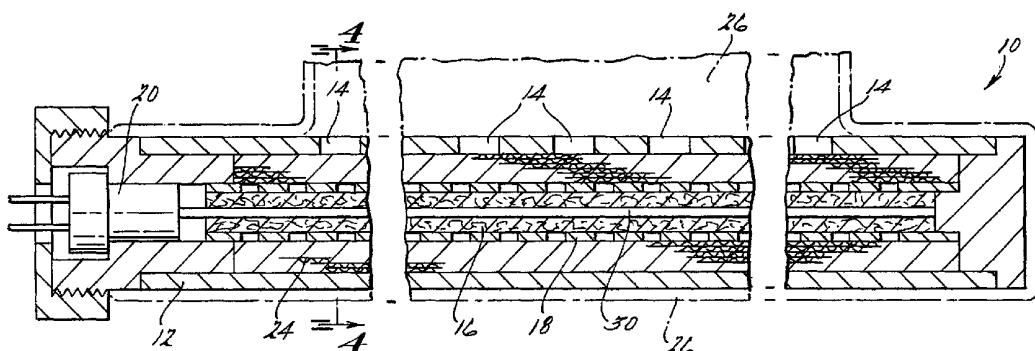
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(54) Title: INFLATOR



(57) **Abstract:** An inflator (10) of a vehicle occupant protection system contains an elongated housing (12) having a plurality of gas exit orifices (14) spaced along the length thereof. An ignition body (30) and propellant (16) are provided in lengths substantially equivalent to the length of the housing (12) wherein the ignition body (30) is placed in physical contact with the propellant body (16) for all or most of their respective lengths. Once the ignition body (30) is ignited upon a crash event, resultant uniform ignition and combustion across the length of the propellant (16) results in uniform gas generation and uniform inflation of an airbag (26), wherein the airbag (26) is at least substantially coextensive with and in fluid communication with the housing (12). Preferred mixtures of propellant (16) contain silicone, a perchlorate oxidizer, and a coolant.

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INFLATOR

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application
5 Number 60/201,130 filed on May 1, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to gas generators used to inflate air bags in an automobile occupant protection system and, more particularly, to a head curtain inflator designed to protect the occupants of a vehicle during a 10 rollover accident. The novel design provides a steady and uniform production of gas thereby providing sustained inflation of the airbag across its length, and is particularly useful as a linear head side airbag inflator.

Inflation systems for deploying an air bag in a motor vehicle 15 generally employ a gas generator in fluid communication with an uninflated air bag. The gas generator is typically triggered by a firing circuit when the sensed vehicle acceleration exceeds a predetermined threshold value, as through the use of an acceleration-responsive inertial switch.

Air bag inflation systems designed for rollover accidents often 20 utilize a gas generator stored within the B-pillar of the car, for example. Hybrid gas generators are typical and contain pressurized gas that is released upon receipt of a predetermined signal. The gas must then be transferred to the point of application and thus requires additional plumbing.

Certain known side-impact inflators require plumbing to convey 25 gas generated in a relatively remote gas generator to the airbag, thus complicating the manufacturing of the vehicle occupant protection system and furthermore resulting in a relative delay prior to airbag inflation.

Other known gas generators sometimes result in less than optimum inflation profiles. For example, original equipment manufacturers

oftentimes require sustained inflation of the airbag thereby ensuring continued protection during a rollover accident. To ensure sustained inflation, gas generant compositions must exhibit sustained combustion over the desired or required time.

5 Gas quantities plumbed to the airbag are often not uniform across the inflation profile of the airbag. Stated another way, a portion of the airbag may inflate or pressurize to a greater degree than another portion of the airbag. As a result, the airbag may provide less protection in the regions not completely inflated.

10 As such, a challenge remains to provide sustained and uniform inflation across the length of airbag employed for vehicular side-impact protection.

15 Related vehicle occupant protection systems are known. U.S. Patent Nos. 5,322,322, 5,094,475, 3,733,088, 5,540,459, 5,588,672, and 5,921,576 are cited by way of example and are herein incorporated by reference.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 The above-referenced concerns are resolved by a vehicle occupant protection system of the present invention. In accordance with the present invention, a side-impact head curtain inflator contains an elongated housing. Gas exit apertures are spaced along the length of the housing thereby facilitating the release of gas. A propellant body is contained within the housing and is substantially coextensive therewith. An ignition body or rapid deflagration cord is juxtaposed or contained within the propellant body 25 and is substantially coextensive and in physical contact therewith. An airbag or side-impact head curtain airbag extends along the length of the housing and is in fluid communication therewith.

30 In a preferred embodiment, the propellant body contains a mixture of silicone as a fuel and an oxidizer. The pliant nature of silicone promotes the extrusion of a long cylindrical body coextensive with the

housing. The ignition body may be contained within the cylindrical body of the propellant, axially disposed for example.

Silicone employed as a fuel results in a sustained burn and therefore sustained combustion. The ignition body or rapid deflagration cord provides an essentially simultaneous ignition and burn across the length of the propellant. As a result, gas exiting the gas exit orifices spaced along the length of the housing uniformly inflates an airbag sealed about the length of the housing and in fluid communication therewith. In operation, once a crash event occurs, the airbag is immediately deployed exhibiting a sustained and uniform inflation profile across the length of the housing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 illustrates a first embodiment of the present invention taken in partial section and partial elevation.

Fig. 2 illustrates a second embodiment of the present invention taken in section.

Fig. 3 illustrates a cross-section of the first embodiment taken along the line 3-3 of Fig. 1.

Fig. 4 illustrates a cross-section of the second embodiment of Fig. 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In accordance with the present invention a gas generator 10 comprises an elongated housing 12, made from a rigid material such as carbon steel. A plurality of gas exit orifices 14 is spaced along the length of the housing 12. The housing 12 is preferably formed from a carbon steel pipe or tube. The dimensions are based on design specifications. A propellant charge 16 may be disposed within an optional and substantially coextensive perforated tube 18 within the housing 12. A standard igniter 20 or initiator assembly is disposed at one end of the housing 12 and communicates with a signal from a firing circuit thereby initiating operation of the inflator 10. A

plurality of filter screens 22 is fixed to the external surface of the housing 12 whereby a filter screen 22 covers each gas outlet 14. See figures 1 and 3. The welded wire mesh filters 22 are readily obtainable from suppliers such as Wayne Wire, Inc. of Kalkaska, Michigan.

5 Alternately, a woven wire sock 24, also made by Wayne Wire, Inc., may be used to cover the perforated tube 18 containing the propellant charge 16 and thereby provide suitable filtration of the combustion products. Or, the annular filter sock 24, substantially coextensive with the propellant charge 16, may simply encase the propellant across its respective length if a 10 perforated tube 18 is not provided. Once covered with the woven wire sock 24, the perforated tube 18 is then inserted into the housing 12. The need to weld wire mesh filters 22 on the external surface 32 of the housing 12 is thus eliminated. See figures 1 and 3.

15 The propellant charge 16 should essentially extend for all or most of the length of the housing 12 thereby facilitating a substantially uniform gas generation once the propellant 16 is ignited. Uniform gas generation across the length of the inflator 10 is desirable so that an airbag 26, fixed and sealed over the length of the housing 12, is uniformly inflated. An insulating material 28 such as woven glass fiber (made by BGF Industries, Inc. of Greensboro, 20 North Carolina for example) or other materials known by their tradenames such as NOMEX (made by Dupont) or KYNOL (made by Nippon Kynol of Japan) is disposed about the periphery of the housing and functions to inhibit heat transfer from the housing to the airbag. The plurality of gas outlets 14 fluidly communicate with the airbag 26 once the propellant 16 is ignited and 25 thereby provide sustained and uniform inflation over the length of the airbag 26.

30 The propellant charge 16 is formed into a single cylindrical or elongated extrusion that is at least substantially if not essentially coextensive with the housing 12 and the perforated tube 18. The housing 12 also contains an ignition compound 30 in the form of a string or wick coextensively communicating with the propellant charge 16. Stated another way, the propellant charge 16 and the wick 30 are at least substantially, if not

completely, in physical contact for their respective lengths. The wick 30 is an ignitable material such as, but not limited to, cesium potassium nitrate. The wick 30, for example, is readily obtainable from McCormick Selph, Inc. of Hollister, California and is thus marketed as a tin or metal sheath pyrotechnic 5 cord known as RDC (Rapid Deflagrating Cord). The wick 30 is connected to the igniter 20 and is quickly ignited across its length upon actuation of the inflator firing circuit. In general, the wick 30 preferably burns about ten times as fast as the propellant charge 16. Stated another way, the wick 30 must burn at a relatively greater rate, or at least twice as fast as compared to the 10 burn rate of the propellant 16. Ignition of the wick 30 thereby facilitates uniform combustion of the propellant charge 16 and uniform generation of gas across the propellant 16.

In a preferred embodiment, an elongated housing 12 contains a propellant chamber 13 (formed from a perforated tube 18) centrally disposed 15 of the housing 12. A plurality of gas exit orifices 14 are spaced along the length of the housing 12 thereby providing fluid communication with an airbag 26. The airbag 26 is sealed about the housing 12 for all or most of its length. A propellant 16 is disposed within the chamber 13. An ignition body or wick 30 is axially disposed within the propellant 16 or at least in physical contact 20 with the propellant 16 for at least the substantial length thereof. An elongated filter sock 24 is disposed radially outwardly of the perforated tube 18 and radially inwardly of an inner wall of the housing 12. An igniter 20 is provided at one end of the housing 12 and communicates with a crash sensor to facilitate ignition of the wick 30. The respective lengths of the housing 12, 25 the propellant 16, the perforated tube 18, the filter sock 24, and the wick 30 are at least substantially coextensive in length, and may be exact in length.

The propellant 16 generally comprises a mixture of silicone as a fuel at about 10-25% by weight, and an oxidizer such as ammonium or potassium perchlorate at about 75-90% by weight. Silicone not only 30 functions as a fuel but also functions as a binder thereby facilitating the formation of pliant cylindrical propellant extrusions.

The propellant 16 preferably comprises silicone as a fuel at about 10-25% by weight; a perchlorate oxidizer such as ammonium, lithium, or potassium perchlorate; and a strontium salt such as strontium nitrate or strontium carbonate as a coolant, wherein the oxidizer and coolant comprise 5 about 75-90% by weight of the propellant. The silicone may be purchased, for example, from General Electric or other well-known suppliers. The other gas generant constituents may be provided by suppliers or by manufacturing methods well known in the art.

The propellant composition more preferably comprises, in 10 percents by weight, 10-25% silicone, 75-90% oxidizer, 1-30% coolant, and 1-20% of a slag-forming constituent. The oxidizer may for example be selected from inorganic perchlorates and nitrates such as sodium perchlorate, potassium perchlorate, ammonium perchlorate, potassium nitrate, ammonium nitrate, and phase stabilized ammonium nitrate. The coolant may for example 15 be selected from metal hydroxides such as aluminum hydroxide; metal carbonates such as calcium carbonate, magnesium carbonate, strontium carbonate, and sodium carbonate; and inorganic oxalates such as calcium oxalate, strontium oxalate, and ammonium oxalate. The slag-forming constituent may for example be selected from metal oxides such as aluminum oxide and iron oxide. It has been found that gas generating compositions 20 containing silicone and a perchlorate oxidizer burn at relatively lower temperatures when a coolant, in accordance with the present invention, is added to the mixture. As a result, cooling requirements of gas generated within the inflator 10 can be substantially minimized.

25 When used within a vehicle, the inflator 10 is preferably mounted within the headliner on either side of the vehicle wherein the length of the inflator 10 runs substantially parallel with the length of the vehicle. Each side of the vehicle would thus contain an inflator 10 as described above. When actuated by remote fire circuitry, the airbag 26 is forced down from the 30 headliner thereby covering the side windows and providing a cushion during a rollover or other type of accident. The present invention exceeds customer

requirements of at least five seconds of sustained inflation of an airbag 26 in fluid communication with the gas generator10.

It will be understood that the foregoing description of the preferred embodiment of the present invention is for illustrative purposes only, 5 and that the various structural and operational features herein disclosed are susceptible to a number of modifications, none of which departs from the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined in the appended claims.

WE CLAIM:

1. A gas generator for a vehicle occupant protection system comprising:
 - 5 an elongated housing having a predetermined length and having a first end and a second end;
 - a plurality of gas exit orifices spaced along the length of said housing;
 - 10 a propellant body contained within said housing, said propellant body having a length substantially coextensive with said housing; and
 - 15 an ignition body substantially coextensive with said propellant, said ignition body in physical contact with said propellant for substantially the length of said propellant and said ignition body having a burn rate at least twice that of said propellant body,wherein ignition of said ignition body essentially provides uniform ignition and combustion of said propellant body along the entire length thereof.
- 20 2. The gas generator of claim 1 further comprising a perforated sleeve contained within said housing and substantially coextensive therewith, wherein said propellant is housed within said sleeve.
- 25 3. The gas generator of claim 1 further comprising a plurality of filters wherein each filter corresponds to and is fixed over at least one gas exit orifice in said plurality of gas exit orifices thereby filtering gases exiting the gas generator.

4. The gas generator of claim 2 further comprising an annular filter contained within said housing and substantially coextensive therewith, wherein said annular filter encases said perforated sleeve.

5

5. The gas generator of claim 1 further comprising an insulator wrapped about said housing wherein said insulator has a plurality of gas exit apertures corresponding to said plurality of gas exit orifices.

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6. A gas generator for a vehicle occupant protection system comprising:

an elongated housing having a predetermined length and a plurality of gas exit orifices spaced along said length, said housing having a first end and a second end;

15

a propellant body contained within said housing, said propellant body having a length substantially coextensive with said housing, said propellant comprising a mixture of silicone as a fuel at about 10-25% by weight and an oxidizer at about 75-90% by weight, said percentages stated by weight of said propellant body; and

20

an ignition body substantially coextensive with said propellant, wherein said ignition body in physical contact with said propellant for substantially the length of said propellant,

25

wherein ignition of said ignition body provides essentially uniform ignition and combustion of said propellant body along the entire length thereof.

30

7. The gas generator of claim 6 wherein said oxidizer is selected from the group consisting of sodium perchlorate, ammonium perchlorate, lithium perchlorate, potassium

perchlorate, strontium nitrate, potassium nitrate, ammonium nitrate, phase stabilized ammonium nitrate, and mixtures thereof.

8. The gas generator of claim 6 wherein said propellant mixture further comprises a coolant selected from the group consisting of metal hydroxides, metal carbonates, inorganic oxalates, and mixtures thereof, said coolant provided at about 1-30% by weight of said propellant body

10 9. The gas generator of claim 2 wherein said propellant mixture further comprises strontium carbonate at about 1-30% by weight of said propellant body.

15 10. The gas generator of claim 6 wherein said oxidizer is a perchlorate oxidizer.

11. A gas generator for a vehicle occupant protection system comprising:

20 an elongated housing having a predetermined length and a plurality of gas exit orifices spaced along said length, said housing having a first end and a second end;

25 a propellant body contained within said housing, said propellant body having a length at least substantially coextensive with said housing, said propellant comprising a mixture of silicone as a fuel at about 10-25% by weight, a perchlorate oxidizer at about 75-90% by weight, and a coolant selected from the group consisting of metal hydroxides, metal carbonates, inorganic oxalates, and mixtures thereof at about 1-30% by weight, said percentages stated by weight of said propellant body; and

an ignition body at least substantially coextensive with said propellant, wherein said ignition body is in physical contact with said propellant for at least substantially the length of said propellant,

5 wherein ignition of said ignition body provides essentially uniform ignition and combustion of said propellant body along the entire length thereof.

10 12. The gas generator of claim 11 wherein said propellant mixture further comprises 1-20% by weight of a slag forming constituent, said percentage stated by weight of said propellant body.

15 13. The gas generator of claim 12 wherein said slag forming constituent is selected from the group consisting of aluminum oxide and iron oxide.

20 14. The gas generator of claim 11 wherein said coolant is selected from the group consisting of aluminum hydroxide, calcium carbonate, magnesium carbonate, strontium carbonate, sodium carbonate, calcium oxalate, strontium oxalate, and ammonium oxalate.

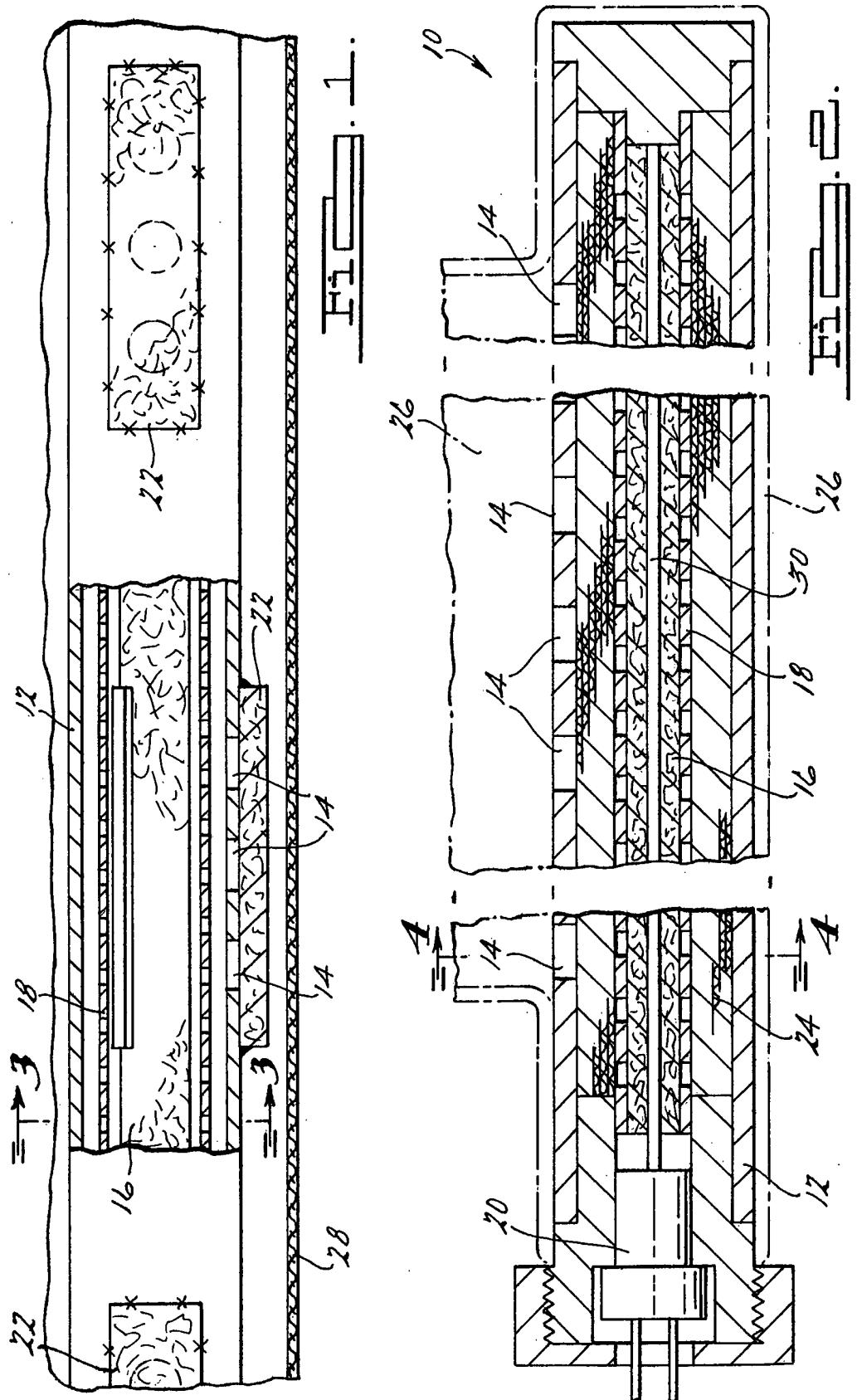
25 15. A gas generator for a vehicle occupant protection system comprising:

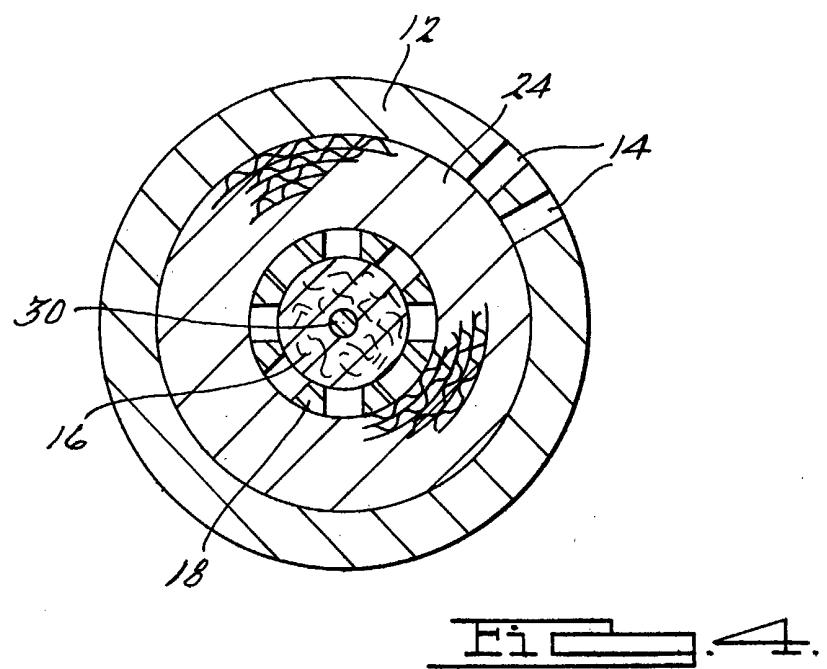
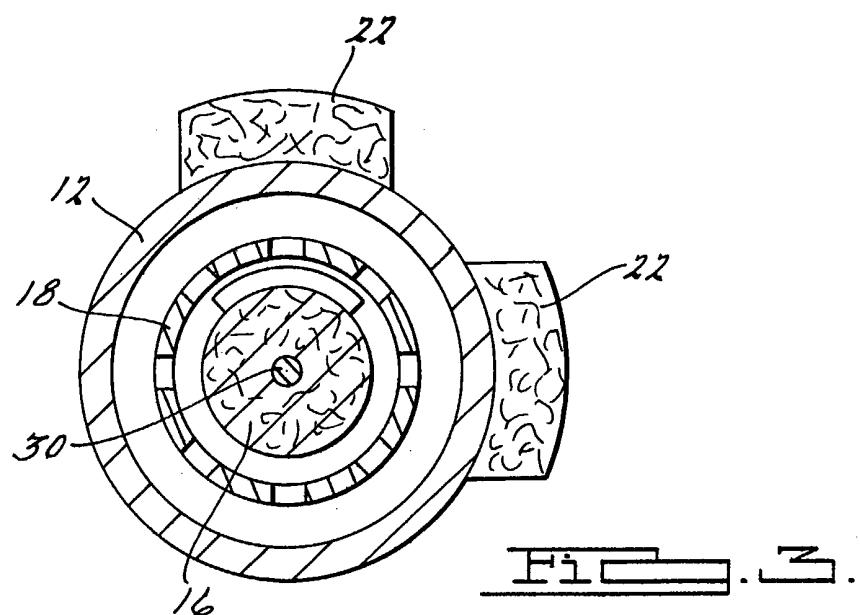
an elongated housing having a predetermined length and a plurality of gas exit orifices spaced along said length, said housing having a first end and a second end; a propellant chamber centrally disposed of said housing;

a propellant body contained within said chamber, said propellant body having a length at least substantially coextensive with said housing, and said propellant comprising a mixture of silicone as a fuel at about 10-25% by weight and an oxidizer at about 75-90% by weight, said percentages stated by weight of said propellant body; and

5 an ignition body at least substantially coextensive with said propellant, wherein said ignition body is in physical contact with said propellant for at least substantially the length of said propellant,

10 wherein ignition of said ignition body provides essentially uniform ignition and combustion of said propellant body along the entire length thereof.





INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/13918

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : B60R 21/22, 21/26, 21/28
US CL : 280/732, 736, 741

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)
U.S. : 280/732, 736, 741

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

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
EAST: airbag, inflator, generator, insulator, oxidizer, perchlorate, coolant, strontium carbonate

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,871,228 A (LINDSAY ET AL) 16 February 1999, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 5,845,933 A (WALKER ET AL) 08 December 1998, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 5,547,638 A (RINK ET AL) 20 August 1996, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 5,542,704 A (HAMILTON ET AL) 06 August 1996, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 12, 15
Y	US 4,878,690 A (CUNNINGHAM) 07 November 1989, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 4,200,615 A (HAMILTON ET AL) 29 April 1980, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 4,005,876 A (JORGENSEN ET AL) 01 February 1977, entire document.	1-4, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 6,051,158 A (TAYLOR ET AL) 18 April 2000, entire document.	8, 9, 14

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"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
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/13918

C (Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,743,556 A (LINDSEY ET AL) 28 April 1998, entire document.	1, 3, 6, 11, 15
Y	US 5,562,303 A (SCHLEICHER ET AL) 08 October 1996, entire document.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10-13, 15
A, P	US 6,077,371 A (LUNDSTROM ET AL) 20 June 2000.	6, 7, 11, 15
A	US 5,439,250 A (KOKEGUCHI ET AL) 08 August 1995, entire document.	1, 3, 6, 11, 15

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