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(71) Applicant(s)
Amtcor Flexibles Europe A/S

(72) Inventor(s)
Adams, Michael Kenneth John; Fairweather, John

(74) Agent / Attorney
Shelston IP, Level 21 60 Margaret Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **AMCOR FLEXIBLES EUROPE A/S** [DK/DK]; 10, Hattingvej, DK-8700 Horsens (DK).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **ADAMS, Michael, Kenneth, John** [GB/GB]; 16 Belmont Road, Winscombe, North Somerset, BS25 1LG (GB). **FAIRWEATHER, John** [GB/GB]; Stapledown, Hill Drive, Failand, Bristol, BS8 3UX (GB).

(74) Agents: **HOGG, Jeffery, Keith** et al.; Withers & Rogers LLP, Goldings House, 2 Hays Lane, London SE1 2HW (GB).

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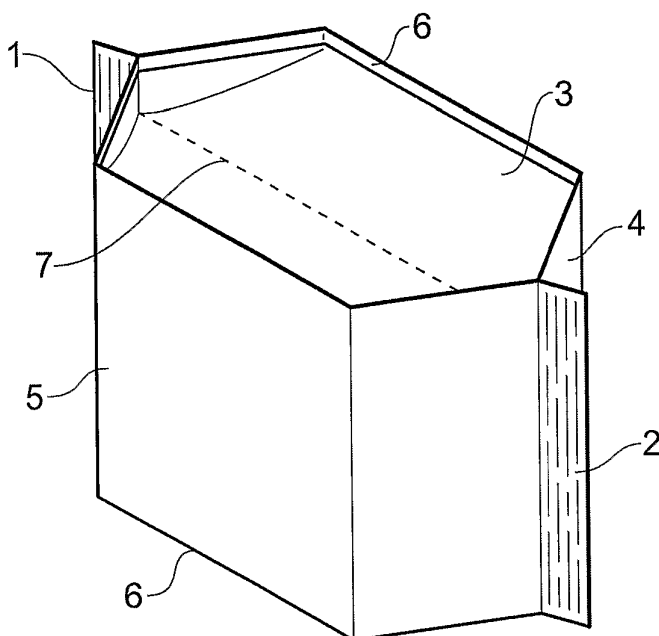
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(57) Abstract: A package has a flexible top wall (3) joined at its periphery (6) to flexible side walls (4, 5) to form an enclosure, the top wall (3) being formed with a line of weakness (7) which is adapted to be torn to create an opening, the tear being confined between the peripheral join (6). The side walls (4, 5) may have transverse seals (1, 2), and top and bottom walls (3) folded inwards as gussets, and the line of weakness (7) extends substantially centrally along the fold line of the gusseted top wall (3) between the two transverse seals (1, 2). The package is easily gripped in both hands, one either side of the line of weakness (7), with a thumb on each side to press downwards and create a tear along the line of weakness. Preferably, the upper edges of the side walls (4, 5) are sealed to the adjoining edges of the top wall (3) to form a peripheral upstanding rim (6).

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Packaging

This invention relates to packaging and packages, especially flexible packages, which are easily openable to allow the consumption of products contained therein.

Any discussion of the prior art throughout the specification should in no way be considered as an admission that such prior art is widely known or forms part of common general knowledge in the field.

A known type of flexible package is described in WO200058174 in the form of a stand up bag comprising two side walls joined by top and bottom walls formed with gussets so that they each fold inwards of the package when in the flattened form. In manufacture, the side walls and top and bottom walls are formed as a tube which is closed each end by transverse seals which run the full width of the side walls to form an enclosure. Furthermore, the edges of the side walls where they join the top and bottom walls along fold lines are sealed to the adjoining edges of the top and bottom walls to form upstanding peripheral walls or rims which increase rigidity of the package. When a pack of this type is filled with a product it maintains a rectangular shape that will stand unsupported and presents good side walls for the presentation of information relating to its contents.

It is an object of the present invention to overcome or ameliorate at least one of the disadvantages of the prior art, or to provide a useful alternative.

An object of the invention, in at least one preferred form, is to provide an improved package incorporating an easy open feature.

According to one aspect, the invention comprises a package having a flexible top wall joined at its peripheral edges to peripheral edges of flexible side walls to form an enclosure, peripheral edges of the top wall being sealed to peripheral edges of the side walls to form an upstanding peripheral rim, and the top wall being formed as a gusset that folds inwards of the enclosure with gusset panels extending inwards from said rim towards one another, wherein the top wall includes a line of weakness along which the top wall is adapted

to be opened and said gusset panels are folded inwards towards the side wall to form an opening.

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description and the claims, the words "comprise", "comprising", and the like are to be construed in an inclusive
5 sense as opposed to an exclusive or exhaustive sense; that is to say, in the sense of "including, but not limited to".

In a preferred embodiment, the invention is applied to a package of the known type described above comprising side walls with transverse seals, and a bottom wall folded inwards as a gusset. Prior to assembly of the package, that portion which forms the top wall
10 is formed with the line of weakness which extends across the top wall and allows it to be opened by inward pressure on the top wall to create a tear along the line of weakness. Preferably, the line of weakness extends substantially centrally along the fold line of the gusseted top wall between the two transverse seals that permanently close the package, and the package is easily gripped in both hands, one either side of the line of weakness, with a
15 thumb on each side to press downwards and create a tear along the line of weakness. Preferably, the upper edges of the side walls are sealed to the adjoining edges of the top wall to form the peripheral upstanding rim which, as well as adding rigidity to the package in the known manner, further facilitates gripping of the top portions of the package either side of the line of weakness.

20 Once opened, a package according to this embodiment of the invention, allows the two portions of the top wall either side of the tear along the line of weakness to be folded inwards and downwards against the surrounding side walls of the package so as to leave an unobstructed opening of maximum size corresponding to the outline defined by the upstanding peripheral rim, and the torn portions of the top wall serve to line and reinforce the
25 side walls below the upstanding rim. The folded sealed edges which form the upstanding rim serve to hold the torn portions of the top wall against the side walls. Therefore, in its open state, the package forms a container similar to a cup with an open top to allow maximum access to its contents and which is convenient to handle while the product is consumed. The packaging can then be disposed of in a tidy manner without having previously generated any

additional potential litter in the form of tear strips or other torn packaging created during the opening process.

Other aspects of the invention are defined in the accompanying claims.

The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a package according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 shows the package of Figure 1 in a partially open state; and

Figure 3 shows the package of Figure 1 in the fully open state.

In general terms, Figure 1 illustrates a stand up bag of the known type composed of flexible plastics film which is formed into a tubular shape in a continuous flow process, with gusseted side walls that fold inwards. A bag or package is formed by severing a length of the tubular film from a continuous length and closing the cut ends by seals extending laterally of the length of the tube. As shown in Figure 1, the seals are shown as sealed flaps 1 and 2, which are upright in the finished package. The gusseted side walls become the top and bottom walls of the package and are unfolded by the products deposited in the package during the packaging process before the second of the seals 1, 2 is formed to close the package. The gusseted side wall forming the top of the pack is shown as 3 in Figure 1.

Another known feature of this type of stand up bag is to heat seal peripheral portions of the top and bottom walls to the adjoining portions of the upright side walls 4, 5 so as to form an upstanding wall or rim 6 which gives a better definition to the shape of the package.

The easy open feature according to the invention essentially consists in providing a line of weakness 7 in the top wall 3 of the package, and, as shown in Figure 1, this extends substantially along the centre fold which forms the gusset in the wall production. The line of weakness is preferably formed as a continuous formation in the side wall 3 and therefore extends fully between the two seals 1 and 2.

The opening process of the package simply involves a consumer gripping the top of the pack either side of the line of weakness 7 and either pulling either side of the top wall 3 apart to create a tear along the line of weakness 7, or pressing downwards with thumbs either side of the line of weakness 7 so as to create the tear along the line of weakness, as shown in Figure 2. The two portions of the top wall either side of the tear can be further pushed inwards against the adjacent upright side walls 4, 5 of the package so as to leave a completely unobstructed opening defined by the upstanding rim 6 around the top of the package, as shown in Figure 3. The fact that the line of weakness 7 extends across the full width of the top wall 3 ensures that the opening created by the tear also extends the full width of the top wall to allow the maximum opening. With the two torn portions of the top wall 3 folded against the adjacent upright walls 4, 5, not only does this create the maximum possible opening, but also forms a double layer of material around the top of the package as an extension to the rim 6 which provides increased reinforcement or stiffness to make the open package more like a cup for convenience of use by the consumer when consuming the contents. The upstanding rim serves to help hold the two torn portions of the top wall 3 against the adjacent upright walls 4, 5. Without the upstanding rim, the natural lack of foldability of the plastics film would cause the torn portions to return to the closed position and obstruct the torn opening.

In one embodiment of the invention, the plastics film that forms the package is a two layer laminate comprising inner and outer layers suited to different purposes including allowing heat sealing of the film to itself, providing a suitable contact layer and protective film for the contents of the package, and providing a suitable external layer for printing and other packaging purposes. Typically, the outer layer may be orientated polypropylene OPP, orientated polyester OPET or orientated polyamide OPA, and the inner layer is polyethylene PE or non-orientated polypropylene PP. In other embodiments of the invention, a laminate film may be used having three or more layers.

The line of weakness 7 in the top wall 3 may be formed by perforations in the outer layer of the laminate film, these perforations being formed before the lamination of the inner and outer layers. The perforations are therefore sealed by the inner layer until the line of weakness is torn in opening the package. The plastics composition of the inner layer and its

thickness are selected to facilitate the tearing process, and the composition of the material of the outer layer is also selected to ensure that the applied tension during the opening process is generally withstood until the line of weakness fails. In a typical example using polyethylene film, the inner layer may be 20-70 micron thick. Preferably, the polyethylene film is formulated to enable the laminate to be split more readily. For example, polyethylene films which are blends of different polyethylene grades containing a proportion of medium or high density polyethylene have been found to be particularly suitable for this purpose.

The perforations in the line of weakness 7 may be formed by any suitable means including mechanical or laser means. Laser perforation means may be used to form the perforations in a laminate film after lamination.

In an alternative embodiment of the invention, instead of providing perforations, a continuous slit may be provided in the outer layer.

Furthermore, instead of a single line of weakness 7 as shown in Figure 1, multiple parallel lines of weakness may be formed in the region of the centrefold of the top wall so as to allow for variation in the positioning of the centrefold of the package during the manufacturing process. That is, the multiple lines of weakness are preformed in the web that is eventually folded to form the side wall, and any lateral change in the position of the centre fold will then be accommodated by substantial alignment with at least one of the lines of weakness. The lines of weakness would typically be spaced 1mm apart.

In an alternative embodiment of the invention, a monolayer film may be used for the packaging, and the line of weakness may be formed by means which still preserves the barrier properties of the top wall, for example, by local thinning of the thickness of the film along the line of weakness, or, if suitable for the contents, the line of weakness may involve perforations which penetrate the film and break the barrier properties of the top wall.

In yet another embodiment of the invention, the line of weakness or parallel lines of weakness are offset from the centre fold of the gusset towards the junction of the top wall 3 with a side wall 4 or 5 so that a folded portion of the top wall 3 folds back against the opposite side wall 5 or 4.

In yet another embodiment of the invention, an opening may be provided in the top wall 3 by a line of weakness defining a portion of the wall which is to be displaced or removed on opening of the package. The line of weakness would then include portions that extend substantially laterally of the fold line of the top wall 3.

5 In yet another embodiment of the invention, the line of weakness may be a cut in the top wall which is covered by a pressure sensitive adhesive label, the label being removed in order to create an opening in the top wall. The line of weakness may be formed by a die-cutting process.

10 In any of the above embodiments of the invention, a reclose device such as a pressure sensitive adhesive label may be provided that can be used to close the opening after it has been formed by tearing the line of weakness. This label may be attached to the top wall 3 to cover the line of weakness before it is torn, the label first being removed to allow the opening. Alternatively, the label may be attached to the packet elsewhere.

15 In yet another embodiment of the invention, the top wall may be composed of an easy tear film which tears easily in a preferred direction, which direction would be aligned to extend between the two upright seals 1 and 2 of the package in Figure 1.

20 It will be appreciated that the terminology "top", "bottom" and "side" as used in this application is not intended to be limitative, and that a package according to the invention may assume any orientation in use. However, it is a common practice to stack packages upright and to provide for them to be opened at the top as a matter of convenience.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. A package having a flexible top wall joined at its peripheral edges to peripheral edges of flexible side walls to form an enclosure, peripheral edges of the top wall being sealed to peripheral edges of the side walls to form an upstanding peripheral rim, and the top wall being formed as a gusset that folds inwards of the enclosure with gusset panels extending inwards from said rim towards one another, wherein the top wall includes a line of weakness along which the top wall is adapted to be opened and said gusset panels are folded inwards towards the side wall to form an opening.
5
2. A package as claimed in claim 1 in which the line of weakness is formed along or parallel to a fold line of the top wall between the gusset panels.
10
3. A package as claimed in claim 1 or 2 comprising two side walls joined by upright seals on opposite sides of the package with the line of weakness extending continuously between the seals across the mid-region of the top wall.
4. A package as claimed in any one of the preceding claims comprising a bottom wall with a peripheral edge sealed to peripheral edges of the side walls to form a lower rim.
15
5. A package as claimed in claim 4 in which the bottom wall is formed as a gusset that folds inwards of the enclosure with gusset panels that extend inwards from said lower rim towards one another.
6. A package as claimed in any of the preceding claims in which the top wall is formed by a laminated sheet with an inner layer to suit products to be packed, and an outer layer in which the line of weakness is formed.
20
7. A package as claimed in claim 6 in which the line of weakness is formed by perforations or a cut or a thinned portion of the outer layer.
8. A package as claimed in claim 6 or 7 in which the inner layer is composed of material which will more easily stretch and tear than the outer layer.
25

9. A package as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5 in which the top wall is formed by a monolayer sheet which is thinned locally along the line of weakness.
10. A package as claimed in claim 1 in which the top wall is formed by a film of material which has the property of tearing preferentially in a particular direction, this direction being aligned with the line of weakness.
11. A package as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 in which the line of weakness is formed by a cut in the top wall which is closed by an adhesive label to allow the opening to be opened along the line of weakness.
12. A package as claimed in any of claims 1 to 11 which includes a reclose device adapted to reclose the opening once it has been opened.
13. A package as claimed in claim 12 in which the reclose device comprises an adhesive device.
14. A package, substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

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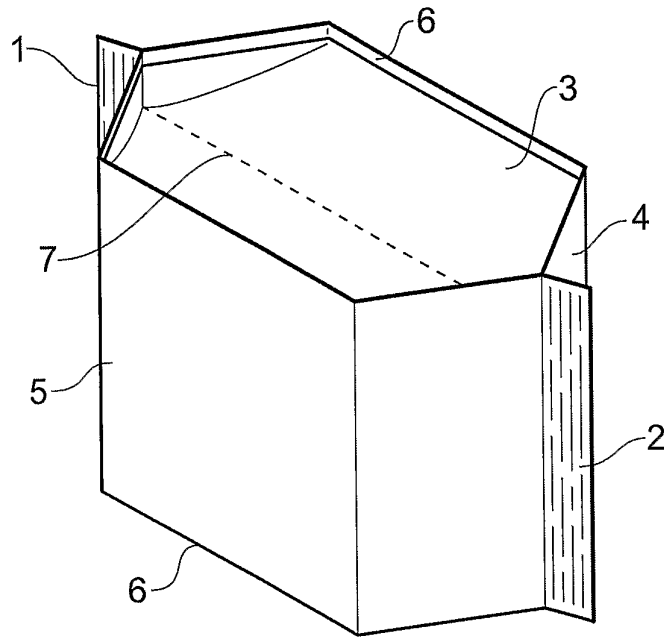


Fig. 1

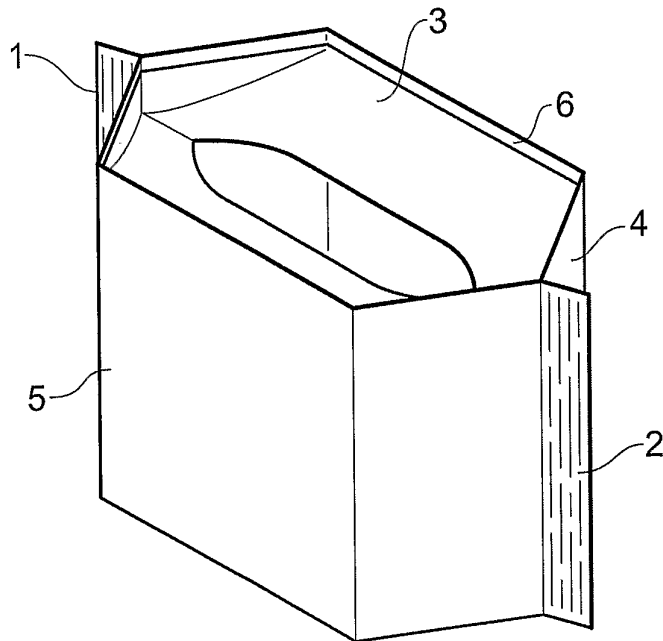


Fig. 2

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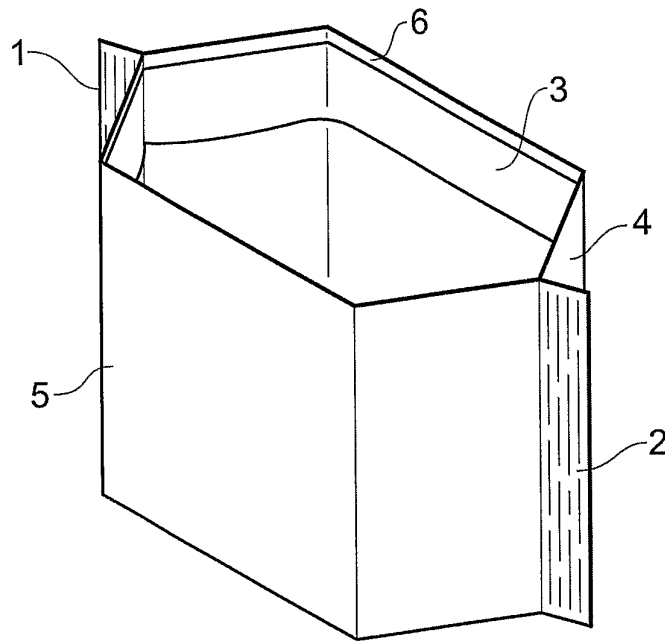


Fig. 3