A multi-pack arrangement for cans includes upper and lower cans in axial alignment and a wrapper such as shrink wrap film covering the cans. A tear strip is provided to facilitate removal of the wrapper from the cans. A token such as a chip, coin, a piece of paper or a piece of plastic is positioned within the arrangement between the upper and lower cans. The presence of a token is only revealed after the wrapper has been removed and the cans separated from each other. Other embodiments include promotional information printed on a tear strip in a multi-container arrangement, and promotional information on the interior surface of a wrapper joining two containers together.
MULTI-PACK CONTAINER ARRANGEMENTS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] A. Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to the packaging arts and more particular to the field of packaging of containers in a multi-pack arrangement.

[0003] B. Description of Related Art

[0004] The art discloses several arrangements whereby two or more articles such as cans are packaged together. Shrink wrapping of two or more packages such as bottles and cans is generally described in Philpot, U.S. Pat. No. 4,940,141 (beverage cans); Kracht et al., U.S. Pat. No. 3,255,877 (fruit juice cans); French patent 2,615,490 (bottle and box together); and Whitt U.S. Pat. No. 5,117,976 (batteries). The early patent to Paulucci, U.S. Pat. No. 2,679,281, discloses two cans axially aligned and secured by an adhesive tape extending around the middle of the of the assembly and covering the bottom of one can and the top of the other can. Taylor, U.S. Pat. No. 3,113,668, discloses a packaging construction of two cans axially aligned with a wrapper covering the cans. A tear strip is provided for tearing off the wrapper and exposing the cans. Similarly, Nedblake, U.S. Pat. No. 5,664,671, discloses two containers axially aligned with a wrapper partially covering the two containers, with perforations forming a line of weakness for removing the wrapper.

[0005] Bjornsen, U.S. Pat. No. 6,296,137, discloses a variety of constructions of cans wrapped in a shrink wrap film axially aligned with each other. Other prior art of interest includes Simmons, U.S. Pat. No. 5,788,076 and Pavey et al., U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,191,695 and 5,316,166, which disclose pull tabs with tokens retained by the pull tab. See also Kirkland, U.S. Pat. No. 6,006,945, which discloses vendable containers.

SUMMARY

[0006] In a first aspect, a packaging arrangement for cans is disclosed comprising a wrapper surrounding first and second cans and maintaining the cans in substantially parallel alignment with the first can positioned above the second can. The wrapper can take the form of a paper or plastic material, such as shrink wrap plastic film. The packaging apparatus further comprises a tear strip incorporated into the wrapper for facilitating removal of the wrapper from the first and second cans, and a token placed between the first can and the second can, wherein removal of the wrapper and separation of the first can from the second can exposes the token. No special construction of the cans or ends thereof is required to accommodate the token.

[0007] In another aspect, a method of packaging cans is provided comprising the steps of: placing a token on the top of a first can; placing a second can on top of the first can in axial alignment therewith to thereby conceal the token; and applying a wrapper surrounding the first and second cans to thereby maintain the cans in the axial alignment and maintain the token in a concealed condition.

[0008] In one embodiment, the cans comprise beverage cans. Alternatively, the cans could contain human or animal food products, or the cans could contain non-food items such as tennis balls or other consumer products.

[0009] The token, which may take the form of a coin, chip (e.g., poker-chip sized device), piece of paper or plastic, or other form, is typically redeemable for a prize. For example, a multitude of cans may be assembled in a multi-pack arrangement but only a select few such multi-pack arrangements have a token. The token is normally concealed in the multi-pack arrangement since it is hidden by virtue of it being placed between the top of lower can and the bottom of the upper can. Only after the purchaser removes the wrapper and separates the cans will the purchaser know whether they have purchased a multi-pack arrangement with a winning token.

[0010] Other aspects of this disclosure include multi-pack container arrangements with the containers arranged side by side or in an axially aligned condition (with or without a token), in which both beverage and non-beverage containers are grouped together. The containers can be of mixed sizes.

[0011] In still further embodiments, a multi-pack container arrangement is provided which includes a wrapper and a tear strip. Promotional printing (e.g., a message “You have won!”) is placed on the tear strip, e.g., on the side of the tear strip facing the containers.

[0012] A variety of tear strip constructions are contemplated, such as (1) providing perforations in the wrapper enabling a strip of wrapper to be torn from the wrapper and release the wrapper from the cans, (2) a pull strip (e.g., string or plastic) with a free end extending circumferentially around the cans or arranged vertically and extending from the top of the wrapper to the bottom of the wrapper in a direction substantially parallel to the axial alignment of the cans, or (3) still other constructions or devices for tearing a wrapper either now known or later developed. The term “tear strip” is intended to cover all such constructions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] Exemplary embodiments are illustrated in referenced figures of the drawings. It is intended that the embodiments and figures disclosed herein are to be considered illustrative rather than restrictive.

[0014] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a multi-pack can arrangement showing two cans axially aligned and covered by a shrink wrap film, with the top of the lower can shown in dashed lines to show the placement of a token on top of the lower can.

[0015] FIG. 2 is a cross section of the arrangement of FIG. 1 in the location where the top of the lower can and the bottom of the upper can.

[0016] FIG. 3 is a perspective view showing a user manipulating a tear strip in order to remove the wrapper from the cans.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED AND ALTERNATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0017] Referring now to FIG. 1, a packaging apparatus for multiple cans is shown in a perspective view. The packaging apparatus includes a wrapper 30, which may take the form of shrink-wrap film, surrounding an upper or first can 10 and
a lower or second can 20. The film or wrapper 30 maintains the cans in a substantial axial alignment with the first can 10 positioned above the second can 20. The wrapper 30 includes printing on the exterior surface thereof, including trademarks 32 or other printing identifying the contents, product information 34, and a promotional tag line 36 to draw the purchaser's attention that the packaging arrangement may include a prize. The wrapper may surround the cans 10 and 20 and extend substantially the entire axial length of the cans 10 and 20.

[0018] The wrapper may include printing on both the exterior surface and the interior surface thereof. The wrapper may be transparent, or may be opaque.

[0019] The size of the cans may vary. They need not be the same size, for example one could be 6 oz. and the other could be 12 oz. The cans need not both contain the same type of product. For example, one can could contain a beverage and the other a snack item. As another example, one can could contain a food item and the other can contain a non-food item, such as a T-shirt, toy, etc. In one preferred embodiment, the assembled dual pack can arrangement is sized so as to be vendable from a standard vending machine, e.g., a vending machine adapted to vend standard 12 oz. aluminum beverage cans. Alternatively, the grouped containers could be vendable from a vending machine adapted to accommodate the physical dimensions of the grouped containers.

[0020] A tear strip 50 is incorporated into the wrapper 30 for facilitating removal of the wrapper from the first and second cans. The tear strip 50 includes a free end 52 which is grasped by the user and pulled downward to tear the wrapper and thereby separate the wrapper from the cans. The tear strip 50 can take a variety of forms, including a reinforced plastic strip, string, a strip of wrapper material bounded by perforations extending the length of the can, or other construction the details of which are not important and can vary widely.

[0021] In one embodiment, the tear strip 50 contains printing. The printing could be on the exterior surface or the interior surface. In one embodiment, the interior surface of the tear strip contains printing which is of a promotional nature. Such printing could for example indicate that the purchaser is a winner of a prize.

[0022] The top of the lower can 20 is shown in phantom in FIG. 1 as it is concealed by the upper can 10 and the wrapper 30 in the arrangement of FIG. 1. The top of the lower can 20 includes a pull tab 22 for opening the can. A token or prize 40 is placed between the two cans, and in particular is placed on the surface of the top of the lower can 20 and below the bottom (not shown in FIG. 1) of the upper can 10. When the user removes the wrapper and separates the upper can 10 from the lower can 20, the token is thus exposed.

[0023] FIG. 2 is a cross section of the arrangement of FIG. 1 in the location where the top of the lower can 20 and the bottom of the upper can 10. As can be seen in FIG. 2, the bottom of the upper can 10 includes a domed surface 14 (conventional in the art of beverage cans) which creates a space 16 for the token 40 placed on the top of the lower can 20.

[0024] The token 40, which may take the form of a coin or chip, piece of paper or plastic, or other form, in one possible embodiment is redeemable for a prize. For example, a multitude of cans may be assembled in a multi-pack arrangement but only a select few such multi-pack arrangements has a token 40. The token is normally concealed in the multi-pack arrangement of FIGS. 1 and 2 since it is hidden by virtue of it being placed between the top of lower can and the bottom of the upper can. Only after the purchaser removes the wrapper 30 and separates the cans 10 and 20 will the purchaser know whether they have purchased a multi-pack arrangement with a winning token.

[0025] In the event that the cans are not so configured with a dome 14 and the space between the top of the lower can and the bottom of the upper can is limited, the token can preferably take the form of sheet of paper or plastic with printing applied thereto to inform the purchaser that they have won a prize and providing instructions for redeeming the token. Thus, a token formed as a sheet of paper or plastic would not affect the ability of the cans to be stacked on top of each other in a stable relationship.

[0026] FIG. 3 is a perspective view showing a user grasping the tear strip 50 in their fingers 60 and pulling the tear strip 50 down in order to remove the wrapper 30 from the cans. The wrapper is not adhesive to the cans in the preferred embodiment. Thus, after the tear strip has been pulled to the bottom, the wrapper 30 is easily removed from the cans allowing the top can to be lifted off of the bottom can and the user gain access to the contents.

[0027] In one embodiment, the cans comprise beverage cans. Alternatively, the cans could contain other human or animal food products, or the cans could contain non-food items such as toys, game devices, clothing such as a T-shirt, or other consumer products. The cans need not contain the same type of product. For example, one can could include a snack food and a second can a T-shirt. As another example, one can could contain a beverage and a second can contain salted nuts or other snack food.

[0028] The wrapper, token and tear strip concepts described above can be extended to an arrangement of three or more cans assembled together. Moreover, while FIG. 1 shows cans in an axially aligned condition, the cans could be shrink-wrapped in a side-by-side arrangement. In this embodiment, the promotional message (e.g., indicating the purchaser won a prize) could be printed on the inside of the wrapper or on the inside of the tear strip.

[0029] In another aspect, a method of packaging cans is provided. The method includes the steps of placing a token 40 on the top of a can 20; placing a second can 10 on top of the first can 20 in axial alignment therewith to thereby conceal the token, as shown in FIG. 2 and then applying a wrapper 30 surrounding the first and second cans to thereby maintain the cans in the axial alignment and maintain the token in a concealed condition. The wrapper is preferably a shrink wrap plastic film with a built-in tear strip, with printing applied to the exterior surface thereof as shown in FIG. 1. Methods for shrink wrapping articles such as cans are known in the art and therefore detailed discussion of the apparatus for shrink wrapping the cans is omitted for the sake of brevity.

[0030] In another aspect, a method of packaging containers is provided which includes a step of providing a wrapper having a tear strip, wherein printing is applied to the tear strip, and applying the wrapper to at least two containers so as to group or hold the containers in a group. The containers could be cans, bottles, boxes or other type of containers. The containers need not be axially aligned, e.g., they could be
held in a side by side arrangement. The printing applied to the tear strip is preferably applied to the wrapper on the side facing the containers, so that it is not visible when the grouped containers are placed on the store shelf. The user must remove the tear strip in order to read the printing on the tear strip. In an alternative arrangement, the printing is applied to the interior surface of the wrapper but not on the tear strip. Again, only after the wrapper is removed is the purchaser able to inspect the printing (e.g., to see if they wrapper is one indicating the purchaser won a prize.)

[0031] While a number of exemplary aspects and embodiments have been discussed above, those of skill in the art will recognize certain modifications, permutations, additions and sub-combinations thereof. It is therefore intended that the following appended claims and claims hereof introduced are interpreted to include all such modifications, permutations, additions and sub-combinations as are within their true spirit and scope. For example, many of the concepts of this disclosure could be applied to bottles instead of cans, e.g., a side by side arrangement of bottles with printing on the tear strip. The promotional nature of the printing applied to the tear strip, wrapper, or token could take a variety of forms designed to spur consumer interest or demand for the product. Example include a “cents off” coupon, a message indicating whether the purchaser won a prize (or did not win), and a simple promotional message such as “Try our new product X, you will like it!”

We claim:

1. Packaging apparatus for cans, comprising:
   a wrapper surrounding first and second cans and maintaining the cans in substantial axial alignment with the first can positioned above the second can;
   a tear strip incorporated into the wrapper for facilitating removal of the wrapper from the first and second cans; and
   a token placed between the first can and the second can wherein removal of the wrapper and separation of the first can from the second can exposes the token.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the cans comprise beverage cans.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the token is redeemable for a prize.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the token comprises a piece of paper or plastic.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the token comprises a chip.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the tear strip is incorporated into the wrapper so as to provide for tearing the wrapper in a direction substantially parallel to the axial alignment of the cans.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the wrapper is formed of a plastic material and further comprises printing on an exterior surface thereof.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the wrapper surrounds substantially the entire axial length of the first and second cans.

9. A method of packaging cans, comprising the steps of:
   placing a token on the top of a first can;
   placing a second can on top of the first can in axial alignment therewith to thereby conceal the token;
   applying a wrapper surrounding the first and second cans to thereby maintain the cans in the axial alignment and maintain the token in a concealed condition.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the cans comprise beverage cans.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein the wrapper comprises a printing applied to the exterior surface thereof.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein the wrapper further comprises a tear strip.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the tear strip is oriented substantially in an axial direction.

14. The method of claim 9, wherein at least the first can or the second can contains a non-beverage item.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the non-beverage item comprises a non-food item.

16. A method of packaging first and second containers comprising the step of:
   applying a wrapper to the first and second containers to hold the first and second containers together, the wrapper having a tear strip; and
   wherein the tear strip includes printing of a promotional nature.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the tear strip includes a first side facing the containers, and wherein the printing is applied to the first side.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein the containers comprise cans.

19. The method of claim 16, wherein the containers are held in an axially aligned condition by the wrapper.

20. The method of claim 16, wherein the containers are held in a side-by-side condition by the wrapper.

21. The method of claim 16, wherein the first container contains a beverage and the second container contains a non-beverage item.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein the containers are sized such that the combination of the first and second containers held by the wrapper is capable of being vended by a standard 12 oz. beverage can vending machine.

23. A method of packaging first and second containers comprising the step of:
   applying a wrapper to the first and second containers to hold the first and second containers together, the wrapper having a tear strip; and
   wherein the wrapper has an interior surface facing the containers, and
   wherein the interior surface includes printing of a promotional nature.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the wrapper is substantially opaque.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the wrapper is substantially transparent.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein the containers comprise cans.

27. The method of claim 23, wherein the printing indicates whether the purchaser has won a prize.

28. The method of claim 16, wherein the printing indicates whether the purchaser has won a prize.

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