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(54) **Title:** AIR ADSORBING AND SOUND ABSORBING STRUCTURE

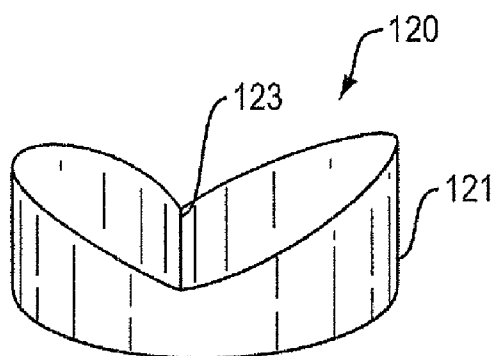


FIG. 2

(57) **Abstract:** A method of fabricating a three-dimensional air adsorbing structure comprises: providing a three-dimensional portion of an open-celled foam having a starting shape; forming the portion into a different shape than the starting shape, to create a structure; and either before or after the forming step, coupling an air-adsorbing material to the foam; wherein the result is the formation of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure.

Air Adsorbing and Sound Absorbing Structure

BACKGROUND

[0001] This disclosure relates to an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0002] Sound absorption is often accomplished with fiberglass or other fibrous materials that convert energy from pressure waves into heat. However, often a substantial thickness of the material is needed to achieve sufficient sound attenuation. It would be desirable to attenuate sound using less material.

[0003] Three-dimensional air adsorbing structures can be used to increase the apparent volume of a loudspeaker enclosure. However, the space available for the structure can be small and irregular.

SUMMARY

[0004] All examples and features mentioned below can be combined in any technically possible way.

[0005] In one aspect, an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure includes a first portion comprising a first material comprising an open-celled foam with an air-adsorbing material coupled to the foam, where the first portion has a first air adsorption capacity and a first density. There is a second portion fixed to or integral with the first portion, wherein the second portion comprises one or more of: a different material than the first material, a second air adsorption capacity that is different than the first air adsorption capacity, and a second density that is different than the first density.

[0006] Embodiments may include one of the following features, or any combination thereof. The foam can be made from materials such as open-cell polymers, or materials other than polymers such as metals or ceramics. The foam may comprise a skeletal, porous open-celled foam scaffold having scaffold openings distributed within the volume of the scaffold, where the scaffold openings make up at least about 50% of the volume of the scaffold. The foam may comprise a polymer foam, or a melamine-based foam, or a polyurethane-based foam, or a metal foam, or a

ceramic foam. The air-adsorbing material may comprise air-adsorbing material particles. The air-adsorbing material particles may be coupled to each other to form agglomerates, and the air-adsorbing material particles and agglomerates may be coupled to the foam, using a binder material. The air-adsorption capacity of the air-adsorbing structure may be variable, for example through a thickness of the first portion.

[0007] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The first and second portions may each comprise an open-cell foam, and the foams of the first and second portions may have different hydrophilicities. The first portion may comprise a hydrophilic foam skeleton and the second portion may be a more hydrophobic foam. The second portion may be located on an outside surface of the first portion or may be distributed in the volume of the first portion. The second portion may comprise a non-porous material located on a surface of the first portion.

[0008] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The foam of the first portion may have a surface, and the air adsorbing material may be coupled to this surface. The second portion may comprise a micro-perforated plate coupled to a surface of the first portion. The first portion may have a graded air adsorption capacity through its thickness or across its area. The foam of the first portion may have a different foam skeletal density or cell size than the foam of the second portion. A foam density difference may be created by compression molding. The first portion may have a varied surface structure that is constructed and arranged to diffuse sound.

[0009] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The air-adsorbing material may comprise particles, and the particles may be coupled to each other to form agglomerates, and the air-adsorbing material particles and agglomerates may be coupled to the foam. The structure may have structure openings in the agglomerates and structure openings between agglomerates. These structure openings may or may not be open to the outside environment. The openings in the structure may further comprise one or more channels in the structure. Channels may or may not be open to the environment. Channels may have diameters of greater than the apparent diameter of the structure openings between agglomerates. The channels may comprise one or more of through holes and blind holes.

Channels may have different diameters. Channels may have non-uniform diameters. There may be channels in one or in both portions. One or more channels in the first portion may differ from those in the second portion as to one or more of their: dimensions, shape and the directions of their longitudinal axes. The structure may have a varied thickness, and there may be more channel area in thicker locations as compared to thinner locations.

[0010] In another aspect, a method of fabricating an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure comprises providing a first foam layer that has a first thickness and a surface, and coating at least some of the surface of the first layer with a second layer comprising an air-adsorbing material. The second layer may have a second thickness that is less than the first thickness

[0011] In another aspect, a method of fabricating a three-dimensional air adsorbing structure includes providing a three-dimensional portion of an open-celled foam having a starting shape, and forming the portion into a different shape than the starting shape to create a structure. Either before or after the forming step, an air-adsorbing material is coupled to the foam. The result is the formation of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure. Also featured is an air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure made by this method.

[0012] Embodiments may include one of the following features, or any combination thereof. The forming step may comprise compression molding, heat setting, machining or cutting, as four non-limiting examples. The foam may comprise a skeletal, porous scaffold having scaffold openings distributed within the volume of the scaffold, where the scaffold openings make up at least about 50% of the volume of the scaffold, and more preferably they may make up at least about 90% of the volume of the scaffold. The foam may comprise an open-celled hydrophilic foam. The foam can be made of materials such as polymers, metals or ceramics.

[0013] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The air-adsorbing material may comprise air-adsorbing material particles. The coupling step may comprise providing a binder that couples air-adsorbing material particles to each other to form agglomerates and couples particles and agglomerates to the foam. The binder may comprise a thermoplastic or thermosetting material. The air-adsorbing material and the agglomerates may be coupled to the foam by creating a water-based emulsion of air-adsorbing

material, agglomerates of the material, and binder, and then impregnating the foam with this emulsion. The emulsion-impregnated foam may be treated (e.g., dried) at least in part at a temperature below the freezing point of the emulsion. The binder may in certain non-limiting examples comprise an acrylic material or a polyurethane material or a polyacrylate material.

[0014] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure may have structure openings in the agglomerates and structure openings between agglomerates. These structure openings may be but need not be open to the outside environment. The openings in the structure may further comprise a plurality of channels in the structure. Channels may or may not be open to the environment. The channels have diameters of greater than the apparent diameter of the structure openings between agglomerates. The channels may be created before or after the air-adsorbing material is coupled to the foam. The channels may comprise through-holes and/or blind holes. The three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure may have a varied thickness, and there may be but need not be more channels (or, more channel area) in thicker locations as compared to thinner locations. The channels may have non-uniform diameters. Some of the channels may have different diameters than other channels.

[0015] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The shape that the material is formed to may be any shape; as one non-limiting example it can be a flat shape with a thickness of no more than about 3 mm. The structure may comprise a plurality of separate pieces of foam with air-adsorbing material coupled to it. The separate pieces may be formed such that they interlock or otherwise interfit with each other, so as to create a larger structure comprising a plurality of interlocked/interfitted pieces of foam with air-adsorbing material coupled to it.

[0016] Embodiments may include one of the above and/or below features, or any combination thereof. The method may further comprise placing a strengthening insert into the air adsorbing structure. The strengthening insert may be placed either before or after the air adsorbing material is coupled to the foam. The strengthening insert may be located in part in the air adsorbing structure and in part outside of the air adsorbing structure. The strengthening insert may be insert molded along with the foam.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] Fig. 1 shows a three-dimensional portion of an open-celled polymer foam.

[0018] Fig. 2 illustrates a final air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure shape formed from the portion of fig. 1.

[0019] Fig. 3 is a side view of another air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0020] Fig. 4 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure made from interlocked/interfitted pieces.

[0021] Fig. 5 illustrates a three-dimensional air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure coupled to a surface.

[0022] Fig. 6 illustrates a three-dimensional air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure with an internal support, coupled to a surface.

[0023] Fig. 7 illustrates a three-dimensional air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure with an internal support.

[0024] Fig. 8 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0025] Fig. 9 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0026] Fig. 10 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0027] Fig. 11 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0028] Fig. 12 conceptually illustrates an air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure with channels.

[0029] Fig. 13 conceptually illustrates an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure with channels.

[0030] Fig. 14 is a side view of an air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure with channels.

[0031] Fig. 15 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

[0032] Fig. 16 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing and diffusing structure.

[0033] Fig. 17 is a plot of frequency vs. percent of sound absorbed comparing an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure of the present disclosure to two prior art fiberglass mats.

[0034] Fig. 18 is a plot of frequency vs. percent of sound absorbed comparing an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure of the present disclosure to a prior art micro perforated plate.

[0035] Fig. 19 is a plot of frequency vs. percent of sound absorbed comparing three different air adsorbing and sound absorbing structures of the present disclosure.

[0036] Fig. 20 is a plot of frequency vs. percent of sound absorbed comparing four different air adsorbing and sound absorbing structures of the present disclosure.

[0037] Fig. 21 is a plot of frequency vs. percent of sound absorbed comparing an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure of the present disclosure to a foam material.

[0038] Fig. 22 is a scanning electron micrograph of a polymer foam scaffold (skeleton) for an air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0039] Disclosed herein are air adsorbing and sound absorbing structures, and methods of fabricating these structures. In particular, a three-dimensional portion of a skeletal open-celled foam has a starting shape and is formed into a different shape than the starting shape to create a structure. Either before or after the forming step an air-adsorbing material is coupled to the foam.

The result is the creation of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure. The forming step can create a desired size and shape of the final structure. This allows the structure to be tailored to the particular needs of the situation in which it is going to be used. For example, the air adsorbing structure can be used to increase the apparent volume of a loudspeaker enclosure. In this case the air adsorbing structure should be sized and shaped to fit into available spaces in the enclosure. The structure can also be used for air adsorption or sound absorption in other situations, for example in a speaker port or a waveguide. In such situations it may be desirable to form the air adsorbing structure into a very thin sheet with a thickness of perhaps 2-3 mm so that it can be placed into a port or waveguide and still leave sufficient open volume for the transmission of sound.

[0040] Some possible but non-limiting methods that can be used to create desirably sized and shaped air adsorbing structures include creating a 3D open-cell-foam skeletal form by thermally forming a foam skeleton structure or machining an open-cell-foam skeleton to the desired shape and size, followed by impregnating the skeleton structure with the air adsorption material. This sequence of fabrication is a preferred, but not necessary, process to create air adsorbing structures with complicated shapes, since it minimizes waste of air adsorption material. There are cases where the complicated 3D air adsorbing structure is easier to make by first creating an air adsorption structure and then forming or machining it to the final shape.

[0041] Some regions inside a product may have more air exposure than the others. Hence, it may be desirable to vary the regional density or air absorbing capacity of the air adsorption material in a 3D air-absorbing structure. The density of a 3D air-absorbing structure is defined as the weight of adsorption material per unit volume of the 3D air-absorbing structure. A 3D air-absorbing structure having different density/capacity in different regions has a distributed density/capacity in the 3D air-absorbing structure.

[0042] The air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structures described herein can be used to increase the compliance of a volume such as a loudspeaker enclosure, or a loudspeaker port, or an acoustic waveguide. The box compliance increases associated with the air-adsorbing structure can be gauged by measuring the increase in the apparent volume of a sealed loudspeaker enclosure with and without the air-adsorbing structure (or in some cases, with and without the

air-adsorbing material per se, (that is the material not bound to a scaffold)). Box compliance data can be obtained by simultaneously measuring the transducer cone displacement and the pressure inside a sealed acoustic box, when signals are applied to transducer. Box compliance is calculated as cone displacement x cone area / pressure.

[0043] When a loudspeaker enclosure or box contains air adsorption material/structure, the measured box compliance will increase. When a fixed amount/volume of air adsorption material/structure is present in a box, the more the box compliance increases, the greater the air adsorption capacity of the air adsorption material/structure.

[0044] There are various methods to achieve a distributed density/capacity of air adsorption material. Following are non-limiting examples. One method is to use an open-cell-foam skeleton having different hydrophilicity in different regions. A 3D air-absorbing structure is fabricated by first making a water-based mixture of air adsorption material and binders. Then the water-based mixture is impregnated into the skeleton structure. The hydrophilic region(s) of the open-cell-foam skeleton will retain more water-based mixture to create a region with higher density in the resulting 3D air-absorbing structure. The hydrophobic region(s) of the open-cell-foam skeleton, on the other hand, will retain less water-based mixture and result in a region of lower density in the 3D air-absorbing structure.

[0045] The open-cell-foam skeleton may comprise different materials, which may be accomplished by lamination/forming. Different materials will hold different amounts of air adsorption material and create a distributed density/capacity in the 3D air-absorbing structure. In the extreme case, a thermally formed open-cell-substrate can contain inserts which are made of solids that will not retain air-adsorption material. The air-adsorption-material-free inserts can then be used as the sites to attach the 3D air-absorbing structure to the product or to another structure such as a wall.

[0046] The air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structures may have two or more portions with different properties that are fixed or coupled together, or the two (or more) portions may be portions of an integral structure. This allows more fine-grained control of both the air adsorbing

and the sound absorbing properties of the combined structure to meet a particular need. The structures may have more than two portions of the types described herein.

[0047] Illustrative, non-limiting examples of structures according to this disclosure are shown in figures 1-16. Three-dimensional portion 100 made from a skeletal open-celled foam is depicted in figure 1. Portion 100 has an arbitrary shape. Portion 100 could become one portion of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure. The shape of portion 100 can be changed by forming (e.g., compression molding) portion 100 into structure 120, figure 2. Forming can be used to form thin structures (for example foam structures with thicknesses of less than about 3 mm, e.g., around 2-3mm, or less) that can be difficult to create by machining or cutting of foam due to the fragility of the skeletal open-cell foams described herein. If forming is accomplished by compression molding, structure 120 has a greater skeletal density than portion 100. And, where different portions are compressed to different extent, the density of the skeletal foam is different. For example, portion 123 is compressed substantially more than portion 121, thus the density of the skeletal foam of portion 123 is substantially greater than its density in portion 121. Compression can be used to form the structure, or one or more portions of the structure. Forming of structure 120 can alternatively be accomplished with other known operations such as machining, cutting or heat setting, for example.

[0048] Figure 2 also illustrates that the final structure shape can be arbitrary. It can be non-uniform as shown, or it can be a flat sheet, for example, as schematically depicted by the side view of flat sheet structure 140, figure 3. Any other shape could be made; this disclosure is not limited to any starting or final shape or any method of creating the final shape from the starting shape.

[0049] Any forming of a foam into a final shape can be accomplished in different ways depending on the foam materials involved. For foams that can be softened and formed (e.g., polymer foams), compression molding (i.e., applying heat and pressure) may be used. Heat setting, where the foam is heated so as to be pliable, held in the final shape and then allowed to cool so as to set to this final shape (with or without compression of the foam), can also be used. The foam could also be machined or cut in another manner such as with a saw blade. Other manners of changing the shape (and potentially but not necessarily compressing (i.e., increasing

the foam skeletal density)) of the foam are known by those skilled in the art, and are within the scope of this disclosure. Compression molding is the presently preferred forming method as the tooling is simple and many shapes and sizes can be formed from larger pieces of the open-celled foam.

[0050] Figure 4 illustrates air-adsorbing structure 70 that comprises two separate but interfitted or interlocked pieces or portions 72 and 76 of the impregnated foam described herein. In this example, pieces 72 and 76 are formed such that they interlock with each other, in this example with mating parts in a manner similar to the manner that jigsaw puzzle pieces fit together. This interfitting is one non-limiting manner in which to create a larger three-dimensional structure comprising a plurality of interfitted or interlocked pieces of foam with air-adsorbing material coupled to it. Interlocking can be accomplished by including recess 74 in piece 72 and projection 78 on piece 76 that has a complementary shape to recess 74. Interfitting could be alternatively accomplished in other ways, such as by sliding engagement of pieces (with or without interlocking of the pieces). The interfitted pieces could be permanently coupled together (e.g., using an insert (described below) or an adhesive, for example), or the coupling could be releasable. The foam can be impregnated before or after the pieces are interfitted. The pieces can have different air adsorption capacities. In some cases a region can comprise an un-impregnated foam scaffold which is used to protect the air-adsorption structure.

[0051] One or more inserts may also be included in the air adsorbing structure. See figures 5-7. The inserts can provide strength and/or can assist with mounting the air adsorbing structure, for example. Air-adsorbing structure 82, figure 5, is meant to be coupled/attached to surface 84. An adhesive or a mechanical fastener can potentially be used. However, some skeletal polymer foams do not have sufficient strength to carry a mechanical fastener, and some foams are so open that they are difficult to adhere to surfaces. Coupling to a surface can be accomplished or enhanced with an insert that is embedded or otherwise coupled to the foam. The insert can be stronger or easier to couple to a surface via adhesive than the foam per se. Coupled air-adsorbing structure 90, figure 6, includes insert 94 that is coupled to or located in part within the body of foam piece 93. Insert 94 can be coupled to separate surface 96 via mechanical fastener (e.g., screw or bolt) 98. The strengthening insert can be placed in the foam either before or after the

foam is impregnated with air-adsorbing material. As shown by air-adsorbing structure 100, figure 7, strengthening insert 104 may be located in part in the air adsorbing structure 102 and in part outside of the air adsorbing structure. This can facilitate attachment to another surface. The strengthening insert may be insert molded, in other words placed into the mold within which the foam is formed, before the foam is formed in the mold. Or, the insert can be placed after the foam is created via molding.

[0052] The air adsorbing structure herein created from open-celled foam serves to both increase the apparent volume of a space and also absorb sound, i.e., to damp sound. It has been demonstrated that the melamine based foam with zeolite-based air adsorbing material coupled to the foam described elsewhere herein is also an effective sound absorber. As noted above, an integral sound adsorbing structure can have multiple portions that differ in some material manner. Such differences can include but are not limited to the air adsorption capacity and/or the sound absorption capacity. This provides greater flexibility in designing a structure to meet a particular need in an acoustic application. In some examples, one portion of the structure has an open-cell foam (e.g., a polymer foam) with an air-adsorbing material coupled to the foam. This portion has a first air adsorption capacity and a first density. The second portion of the structure can be made from a different material (or the same material) than the first portion. The second portion may have a different air adsorption capacity than the first portion. The second portion may have a different density than the first portion. The resulting structure can be used, for example, to accomplish one or both of increased apparent volume of an enclosure, and effective sound absorption.

[0053] One or both portions of the structure can be arranged to absorb sound. The structure turns energy from the sound pressure waves to heat and thereby attenuates or absorbs sound. Fiberglass is an example of a material that is commonly used for sound absorption. The air adsorption capacity of the structures disclosed herein is effective to provide sound absorption at lower frequencies, which are typically but not necessarily frequencies below about 1000 Hz. A skeletal open-cell foam as described herein that can be used for either or both of the first and second portions is itself an effective sound absorber even at higher frequencies, for example frequencies greater than 1000 Hz, but their performance at low frequency is poor unless very thick foam is used. The air adsorbing structure of this invention can be used in any situation in

which fiberglass is currently used to absorb sound. This material can achieve the same sound absorption results, or better results, with less thickness than can be achieved with a fiberglass mat. Thus, the structures described herein can be used to replace fiberglass mats in any sound absorption application in which fiberglass is currently used.

[0054] Air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure 10, figure 8, includes first portion 12 and second portion 14. First portion 12 comprises a first material comprising an open celled foam with an air adsorbing material coupled to the foam. The first portion has a first air adsorption capacity and a first density. Second portion 14 can be integral with or fixed to or coupled to first portion 12. Second portion 14 may (or may not) comprise a different material than first portion 12. Second portion 14 has a second air adsorption capacity that can be the same as or different than the air adsorption capacity of first portion 12. Second portion 14 has a density that can be the same as or different than the density of first portion 12. At least one of the material or acoustic properties of the two portions is different. Portions 12 and 14 are either integral (that is, they are different portions of a single structure), or they may be separate portions that are fixed or coupled together to form an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure 10. Structure 10 can comprise different portions that are created or coupled by forming or by lamination or adhesion, for example. The portions can be made of different materials that will hold different amounts of air adsorption material particles (as described elsewhere herein) so as to result in a structure with a distributed air adsorbing material density/capacity and thus a distributed air adsorption capacity. In one non-limiting case a thermally formed open-cell substrate can contain inserts; such inserts can have more or less air adsorption capacity than the substrate, and can be solid inserts that do not retain air adsorption material particles and thus may have no or little air adsorption capacity. Such inserts can be used as sites to attach the structure to a surface, such as a loudspeaker enclosure, a loudspeaker port, a waveguide, or a wall, for example. In one example (such as described below relative to figure 10) the second portion covers some or all of the outside of the first portion; this second portion may or may not be impervious to air. The second portion may contain the first portion, and/or it may protect the first portion.

[0055] The foam of the first portion 12 can be but need not be a polymer foam. The foam could be from made from another material such as metal or ceramic. Certain foams, and some of their

properties, are described further below. Preferably, the foam is a skeletal open-celled hydrophilic foam. One non-limiting example of such a foam is a melamine based foam. Another example is a polyurethane-based foam. Also as is further described below, the air adsorbing material preferably but not necessarily comprises small particles of air adsorbing material that are coupled to the foam, for example using a binder. Binders can include but are not limited to materials such as an acrylic material, a polyurethane material, or a polyacrylate material. The binder can be thermosetting or thermoplastic, for example.

[0056] As shown in figure 8, in one example second portion 14 is located on an outside surface of first portion 12. One alternative physical arrangement is illustrated by structure 20, figure 9, in which the second portion comprises distributed volumes 23, 24 and 25 that are located within and/or on an outside surface of first portion 22. Another of the many possible arrangements of the first and second portions is shown in figure 10 in which structure 30 comprises first portion 32 that is embedded within second portion 34. Alternatively, the second portion may be embedded in the first portion. Structure 40, figure 11, includes first portion 42 that is embedded within second portion 44, where second portion 44 also includes volumes 45, 46 and 47 which are located within and distributed within first portion 42. There are almost unlimited possibilities of physical arrangements of the first and second portions, depending on the design goals of the structure; these aspects are further described below.

[0057] Structures disclosed herein can have a second portion that has very little or no air adsorption capacity. One means by which this result can be accomplished is to make both portions of the same open celled foam but couple more air adsorbing material to the foam of the first portion than the foam of the second portion. Examples of how this can be accomplished are described elsewhere. The second portion with low adsorption can be used for various functions. Examples include its use as an air duct, its use as a region to allow the structure to be attached to another surface, physical protection of the structure, to prevent loose particles from leaving the structure and potentially contaminating other volumes, and its use as a sound partition or structure.

[0058] The second portion can be made from the same foam as the first portion, or not. The second portion can be a completely different material than the first portion. For example, a

second portion can be a non-porous material such as a plastic film or sheet, or a metal sheet or foil. The second portion could alternatively be a porous material such as a high damping or hydrophobic foam, for example a typical polyurethane foam. The second portion can be initially a separate portion that is then fixed to the first portion, for example by lamination, using an adhesive or another means of fixing the two portions together. The portions can be separate pieces of foam material that are coupled together in any convenient manner, such as with mating parts like jigsaw puzzle pieces (or otherwise interfitting two or more three-dimensional pieces). As non-limiting examples, if the second portion is a foil it can be adhered to one surface of an air adsorbing foam. An adhesive (e.g., a pressure sensitive adhesive or a liquid adhesive) could be used as the second portion instead of a foil or film.

[0059] The air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure may have structure openings in agglomerates of air-adsorbing particles, and structure openings between the agglomerates, where the structure openings are in some but not all cases open to the outside environment. The openings in the structure may also include one or more channels in the structure. The channels may or may not be open to the environment. The channels may have diameters of greater than the apparent diameter of the structure openings between agglomerates. Non-limiting examples of such channels are illustrated in figures 12-14. One reason for such channels is to allow air ingress and egress to the foam structure in such a manner that the air is able to penetrate the foam and reach the cells of the foam, as well as the air-adsorbing particles. If air does not reach air-adsorbing particles, such particles do not contribute to the air adsorption accomplished by the structure. The structure can thus be designed to include channels that are effective to expose most or preferably substantially all of the air-adsorbing material and foam cells to air, depending on the frequency of the sound. Channels or cavities that are not open to the outside environment can be useful for acoustic purposes, such as modifying a resonance of a cavity in which the structure is located.

[0060] As an example, an acoustic box with two types of adsorption structures was evaluated. Type 1 is an adsorption structure with channels (i.e., through holes). Type 2 is an adsorption structure without any channels. Both adsorption structures are disks of 29mm diameter and 13.5mm thick. Type 1 has six spaced channels of 3mm diameter through the thickness of the

disk. Type 2 does not have any channels. Both acoustic structures have the same external volume. Table 1 illustrates the ratio of the box apparent volume with the adsorption structure vs. the same box without adding acoustic-adsorption structure (referred as empty), at 100Hz and 200Hz. The channels increased the apparent volume of an enclosure.

Table 1

	100 Hz	200Hz
Box with type 1: empty	1.9	1.7
Box with type 2: empty	1.5	1

[0061] Three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure 200, figure 12, includes formed, generally cylindrical, open-cell polymer foam structure 220 that has air-adsorbing material coupled to it. Structure 220 includes a number of channels, 300, 340, 360, 380 and 420 embedded in structure 220; the channels illustrate various and non-limiting aspects of the channels that can be included in the present structures. The channels can be created either before or after the air-adsorbing material is coupled to the foam scaffold. Creating the channels in the foam before it includes the air-adsorbing particles can have the advantage of less waste of air-adsorbing particles, as the foam material is removed to form the channels before particle impregnation.

[0062] Channel 300 illustrates a channel with non-uniform diameter, in this case where the top opening of channel 300 in structure 200 top wall 240 is larger than the bottom opening 320 in structure bottom wall 260, and interior wall 310 is tapered. Also, some of the channels have different diameters than other channels. Channel 340 is a blind channel or hole, meaning that it is open to only one surface of the structure; this is illustrated by bottom 350 being located in the interior of structure 220. Channel 340 also illustrates that the channels can go in any direction; in other words, their longitudinal axes can follow any path within the foam, not just from top to bottom or side to side. Further, the channels need not be straight. Channel 360 has a uniform

diameter with the opening in top wall 240 the same size as opening 370 in bottom wall 260. Channel 380 illustrates a blind hole with embedded bottom 400, but of uniform diameter and orthogonal to top surface 240. Channel 420 is outwardly tapered from top to bottom, meaning that its top opening is smaller than its bottom opening 440.

[0063] Air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure 500, figure 13, includes first portion 520 comprising a skeletal open-celled foam structure that has air-adsorbing material coupled to the foam skeleton, and second portion 560 that is fixed to first portion 520. Aspects of the second portion of an air adsorbing and sound absorbing structure such as structure 500 are described elsewhere herein. Portion 520 includes a number of illustrative channels, 600, 620 and 640, which illustrate various aspects of the channels. The channels can be created either before or after the air-adsorbing material is coupled to the foam scaffold.

[0064] Channel 600 illustrates a tapered channel with non-uniform diameter, in this case where the top opening in top wall 530 is larger than the bottom opening in its bottom wall 540. Channel 620 includes interior walls that are more severely tapered than those of channel 600. Any taper can be from top to bottom, or bottom to top. Channel 640 has a uniform diameter, but the channels need not have a uniform diameter. Also, some of the channels can have different diameters than other channels. Channels may be blind holes, meaning that they are open to only one surface and thus air or another fluid cannot flow through the channel, but air can still diffuse into the material and be adsorbed. Channels also can go in any direction; in other words, their longitudinal axes can follow any path within the foam, not just from top to bottom or side to side. Further, the channels need not be straight.

[0065] Second portion 560 has channels 700, 720, 740 and 760. These channels can be aligned with or not aligned with channels in first portion 520. When they are aligned, pairs of channels can define holes through the entire thickness of structure 500. When they are not aligned (such as with channel 760), the channels become blind openings. Internal cavities can be created inside an air adsorption structure by aligning a blind hole in one portion with a blind hole in another portion and coupling the portions together.

[0066] Figure 14 illustrates impregnated foam structure 501. Through-channels 561, 571, 581, 591 and 601 are included. The through channels can have arbitrary cross-sectional shapes. The three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure 501 has a varied thickness, with end 521 thicker than end 541. There is more channel area in the thicker location as compared to the thinner location. Thus, channels 561 and 571 in the thickest part are closer together than channels 591 and 601 in the thinner part. Or, different channel area could be accomplished in other ways, such as with channels of different diameters, or non-uniform channels. A goal of this tailored channel area is to provide an overall air passage area that is sufficient to move the air into and out of the structure such that the air reaches the air adsorbing material at the operating frequencies. This goal can be accomplished in other manners, such as by using different shapes, sizes and configurations of channels.

[0067] The structure herein can also be used along with (or in place of) a micro-perforated plate (MPP). MPP structures are known in the art. Structure 80, figure 15, includes a thin panel 84 with a number of micro-perforations 85 through its thickness. Panel 84 comprises the second portion of structure 80. There is a layer 82 of air adsorbing material (as described elsewhere herein) that comprises the first portion of structure 80. Depending on the application, an air gap between first portion 82 and second portion 84 can be included so as to achieve greater sound absorption. As an alternative, panel 82 is melamine foam and layer 84 is a thin layer of Zeolite sprayed on top of panel 82. Or, panel 82 is 3D air-adsorption structure, and layer 84 is a sprayed on porous layer. These configurations create a material that can behave like a Helmholtz resonator or a common MPP with an air pocket beneath the MPP. The performance of one example of structure 80 is illustrated in figure 21

[0068] Structure 90, figure 16, comprises air-adsorbing and sound absorbing first portion 92 that has a varied surface geometry (illustrated very conceptually in the drawing) that is effective to diffuse sound. Such diffusing surface geometries are well known in the art and so are not further described herein. The use of a material with high air adsorption and sound absorption capacity as portion 92 helps to further attenuate sound impinging on the exposed surface of portion 92. The result is a more effective diffuser. In this case second portion 94 can be used to couple structure 90 to a surface such as a wall. Examples of second portion 94 can include structural layers such

as wood or metal, or an adhesive layer, or an adhesive backed film that can be adhered to a surface on which it is desired to accomplish sound diffusion.

[0069] Figures 17-21 are plots that illustrate testing of various features of the air adsorbing and sound absorbing structures disclosed herein. Figure 17 illustrates the alpha at various frequencies for three materials. Alpha is measured using an impedance where an alpha of 1 equals 100% sound absorption. (see ISO 10534_2).

[0070] Since alpha is a function of frequency, it can be difficult to compare materials using alpha curves. The industry desires to have a single value to represent a material. According to ASTM C423, a single number rating is called Sound Absorption Average (SAA). SAA is obtained by averaging the absorption coefficients for the twelve one-third octave bands from 200 to 2500 Hz. Curve A is for a prior art fiberglass mat with a thickness of 23 mm and an SAA of 0.457. Curve B is for a different prior art fiberglass mat with a thickness of 50 mm and an SAA of 0.595. Curve C is for an inventive melamine foam with an air adsorbing material of the type described herein with a thickness of 13.5 mm and an SAA of 0.597. As can be seen the performance (the alpha) of the melamine foam with sound absorbing material is substantially better than a fiberglass mat of almost twice the thickness at frequencies up to about 2000 Hz.

[0071] Figure 18 is a similar plot comparing a 23 mm thick air adsorption structure made of melamine foam with air absorbing material (curve A) to a 51 mm thick prior art MPP sound absorption structure (2mm thick perforated plate plus 49mm of air cavity) (curve B). The performances (the alphas) of the two materials up to about 1000 Hz is very similar but at half the thickness for the inventive material.

[0072] Figure 19 illustrates performance (alpha) for three samples of the melamine foam with adsorbing material as described herein of the same size and thickness, with each sample having about the same total amount of air adsorbing material. Each sample is composed of two layers of 3-D air absorbing structure. The testing was conducted with one layer facing a sound source and the second layer behind or underneath the first layer, thus facing away from the sound source. The sample of curve A has a total air adsorption material weight of 3.102g; the layer facing the sound source has lower amount of air adsorption material (1.141g) and the layer behind the first

layer and thus farther away from the sound source has higher amount of air adsorption material (1.961g). Curve B is for a sample with total weight of 3.052g, both layers have same amount of air adsorption material (1.526g each). The sample of curve C has a total weight of 3.102g; the layer facing the sound has higher amount of air adsorption material (1.961g) and the layer farther away from the sound source has lower amount of air adsorption material (1.141g). These curves established that depending on the target noise frequency range, the 3-D air-absorption structure can be fine tuned to meet the application requirement based on the distributed density/capacity concept while keeping the total amount of air-adsorption material similar.

[0073] The density in above example in figure 19 has step change. The benefit can also be achieved by creating a graded (i.e., varied) density of air-adsorbing material particles. This can be accomplished by letting the air-adsorption material settle before drying. During settling some of the solid air adsorption material will sink toward the bottom of the foam. When the foam is fabricated, the regions near the top will have less air-adsorption material and thus less adsorption capacity than regions near the bottom. A similar result can be accomplished in other fashions, such as by pulling a vacuum on one side of the foam to create the gradient in concentration, before the slurry is dried. Alternatively, separate portions of foam with differing concentrations of air-adsorbing material particles (e.g., impregnated with slurries having different particle concentrations) can be coupled or fixed together to create a structure. Another way to accomplish graded concentration of air-adsorbing material particles in different regions of the structure is to create regions or portions of the foam skeleton with different hydrophilicities. Then when a water-based mixture that includes the air adsorbent particles is impregnated into the structure the different regions will retain different amounts of the mixture. After drying, the result will be differing concentrations of particles in the different regions.

[0074] Figure 20 also illustrates the effects of 3D air-adsorption structure density. The four pieces of melamine foam with adsorbing material as described herein that were tested were the same size and thickness, but had different weights (thus, different amounts of air adsorbing material), and thus different densities. Curve A had a weight of 2.298 g and an SAA of 0.507, curve B a weight of 2.749 g and an SAA of 0.548, curve C a weight of 3.176 g and an SAA of

0.567, and curve D a weight of 4.297 g and an SAA of 0.611. Increased density leads to higher alpha at frequencies up to about 900-1000Hz.

[0075] Figure 21 illustrates testing of a 13 mm thick layer of un-impregnated melamine foam, with a thin coating of adsorbent material (e.g., a mixture of binder, zeolite and water, or an activated carbon) sprayed onto the top (exposed) surface of the un-impregnated foam. This coating was applied to the level of about 0.062 g/cm². Curve A is a test of the foam material without the coating, and curve B is a test of the foam with the coating material. This establishes that at frequencies up to about 2800 Hz a very thin coating of the air adsorbing material very substantially increases sound absorption.

[0076] The air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structures according to this disclosure can include a three-dimensional, light-weight, unitary, skeletal, low-solid volume, porous open-celled foam scaffold having scaffold openings that are open to the environment. The scaffold is preferably an open-celled polymer foam. In one non-limiting example the scaffold openings make up at least about 50% of the volume of the foam; the scaffold openings preferably make up at least about 90% of the volume of the foam. The structure also includes air-adsorbing material particles. In one non-limiting example, a hydrophobic binder is used to couple air-adsorbing material particles to each other to form agglomerates and couples particles and agglomerates to the foam scaffold. Air adsorbing structures and their fabrication and uses are further known in the art, for example as disclosed in U.S. Patent 8,794,373, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0077] The air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure has structure openings in the agglomerates and structure openings between agglomerates. At least some of the structure openings are preferably open to the environment so that the air-adsorbing and sound absorbing material that is exposed to a structure opening is able to adsorb and desorb air as the structure is exposed to a time-varying acoustic field. The 3-D air adsorbing structure is also effective to attenuate pressure waves (i.e., absorb sound) via conversion to heat. The material can alter the resonance of the cavity. The air-adsorbing material is typically but not necessarily one or both of zeolite material (typically, a silicon-based zeolite) and powdered or granular activated carbon.

[0078] In non-limiting examples the scaffold can be an open-celled foam, e.g., a polymer foam. Un-compressed foams typically have at least about 10 cells per inch, and more preferably at least about 50 cells per inch. If the foam is compressed (e.g., by forming as described herein), the cell size will decrease and the number of cells per inch will increase. The scaffold openings may make up at least about 90% of the volume of the scaffold. The scaffold preferably has a density of less than about 0.1 g/cc. The scaffold is a very open, skeletal, unitary structure. One example of the scaffold is shown in fig. 22. This scaffold is an open-celled melamine foam consisting of a formaldehyde-melamine-sodium bisulfate copolymer, available as “Basotect” material from BASF, Germany. The scaffold can be made of other materials, including but not limited to other open-celled hydrophilic polymer foams such as a hydrophilic polyurethane foam, or foams of other materials such as metals or ceramics, for example. Open-cell metal and ceramic foams are available from ERG Materials and Aerospace Corp. of Oakland, CA under the brand name Duocel[®] foam.

[0079] The air-adsorbing material (and agglomerates of this material) can be coupled to the foam scaffold by a binder. The binder will act to bind some of the adsorption material powder into agglomerates, and to bind the adsorption material powder and the agglomerates to the foam scaffold. The air-adsorbing structure in some cases may need to be able to operate in humid environments. The binder in this case should preferably not absorb water vapor that would potentially block the openings in the structure and thus prevent air from reaching the material via the openings. Therefore, the binder should have certain minimum hydrophobicity. Non-limiting examples of the binder include an acrylic material, a polyurethane material, or a polyacrylate material. The binder can be thermoplastic or thermosetting. The air-adsorbing material can be added either before the portion of foam scaffold is formed into its final shape, or after the foam scaffold is formed to its final shape.

[0080] The air-adsorbing material can be coupled to a foam scaffold by using any appropriate methodology. In one non-limiting example, the coupling is accomplished by creating an emulsion of air-adsorbing material, agglomerates of air-adsorbing material, and binder. A foam scaffold is then impregnated with this emulsion. The binder is typically but not necessarily present at about 3-6 weight percent of the weight of the air-absorption structure. The emulsion-

impregnated foam scaffold may then be treated at a temperature below the freezing point of the emulsion; this helps to maintain the structure of the openings when the liquid phase is removed and thus prevents too much compacting of solid material. Alternatively or additionally, the foam scaffold can be dried at room temperature or in an oven.

[0081] A number of implementations have been described. Nevertheless, it will be understood that additional modifications may be made without departing from the scope of the inventive concepts described herein, and, accordingly, other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of fabricating a three-dimensional air adsorbing structure, comprising:
providing a three-dimensional portion of an open-celled foam having a starting shape;
forming the portion into a different shape than the starting shape, to create a structure;
and
either before or after the forming step, coupling an air-adsorbing material to the foam;
wherein the result is the formation of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the forming step comprises compression molding.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the forming step comprises heat setting.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the forming step comprises cutting.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein the foam comprises a skeletal, porous scaffold having scaffold openings distributed within the volume of the scaffold, where the scaffold openings make up at least about 50% of the volume of the scaffold.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the foam comprises an open-celled hydrophilic foam.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the air-adsorbing material comprises air-adsorbing material particles.
8. The method of claim 7 wherein the coupling step comprises providing a binder that couples air-adsorbing material particles to each other to form agglomerates and couples particles and agglomerates to the foam.
9. The method of claim 8 wherein the air-adsorbing material and the agglomerates are coupled to the foam by creating a water-based emulsion of air-adsorbing material, agglomerates of the material, and binder, and then impregnating the foam with this emulsion.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein the emulsion-impregnated foam is treated at least in part at a temperature below the freezing point of the emulsion.
11. The method of claim 7 wherein the three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure has structure openings in the agglomerates and structure openings between agglomerates, at least some such structure openings being open to the outside environment, and wherein the openings

in the structure further comprise a plurality of channels in the structure that have diameters of greater than the apparent diameter of the structure openings between agglomerates.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the channels are created before the coupling step.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the channels comprise blind holes.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein the three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure has a varied thickness, and there are more channels in thicker locations as compared to thinner locations.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein some of the channels have different diameters than other channels.

16. The method of claim 11 wherein channels have non-uniform diameters.

17. The method of claim 1 wherein the foam comprises a melamine-based foam or a polyurethane-based foam or a metal foam or a ceramic foam.

18. The method of claim 1 wherein the structure comprises a plurality of separate pieces of foam with air-adsorbing material coupled to it.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the separate pieces are formed such that they interlock with each other, so as to create a larger structure comprising a plurality of interlocked pieces of foam with air-adsorbing material coupled to it.

20. The method of claim 1 wherein the different shape is a flat shape with a thickness of no more than about 3 mm.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising placing a strengthening insert into the air adsorbing structure.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the strengthening insert is placed either before or after the coupling step.

23. The method of claim 21 wherein the strengthening insert is located in part in the air adsorbing structure and in part outside of the air adsorbing structure.

24. The method of claim 21 wherein the strengthening insert is insert molded along with the foam.

25. An air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure made by the method of claim 1.



1/11

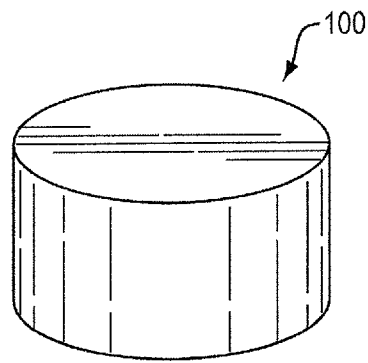


FIG. 1

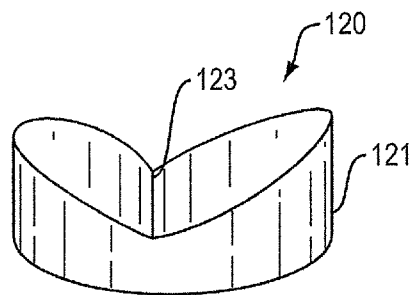


FIG. 2



FIG. 3

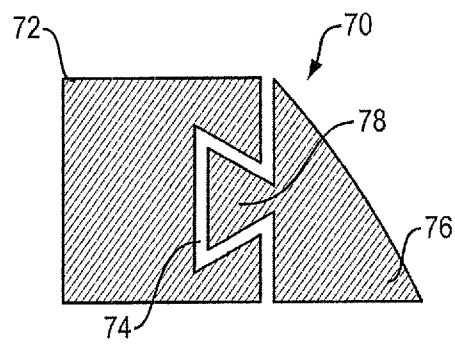


FIG. 4



2/11

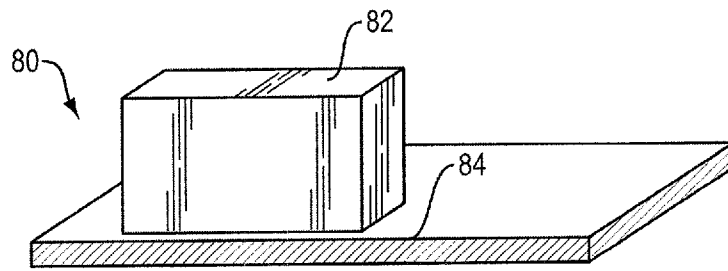


FIG. 5

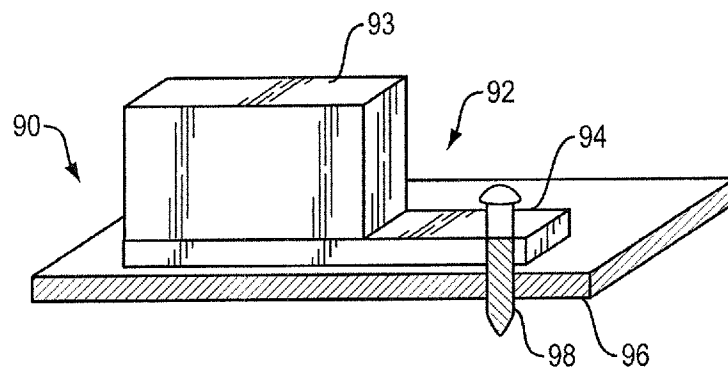


FIG. 6

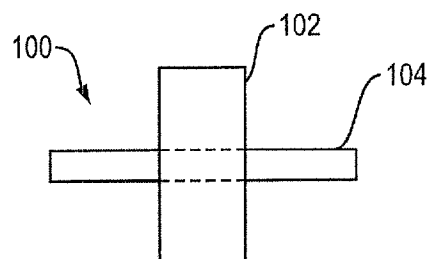


FIG. 7

3/11

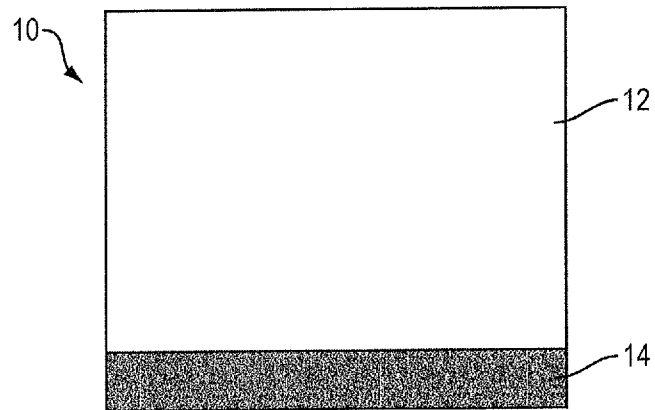


FIG. 8

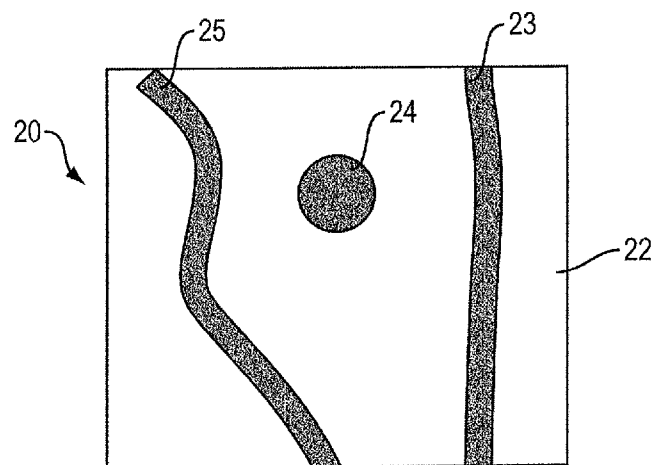


FIG. 9

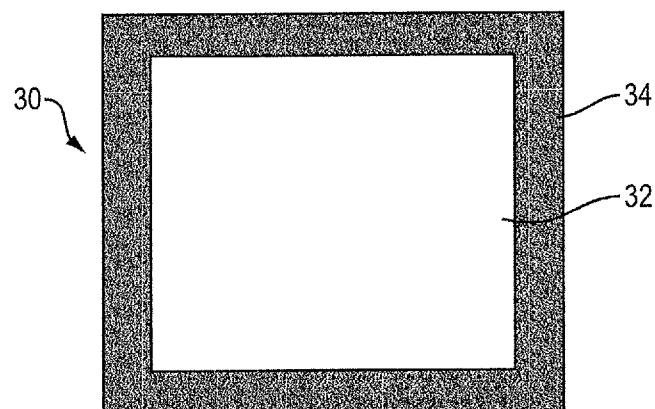


FIG. 10

4/11

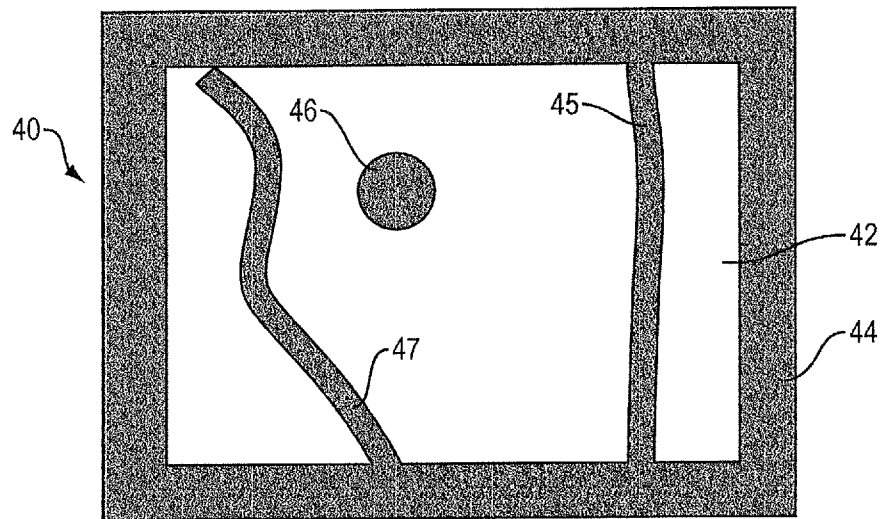


FIG. 11

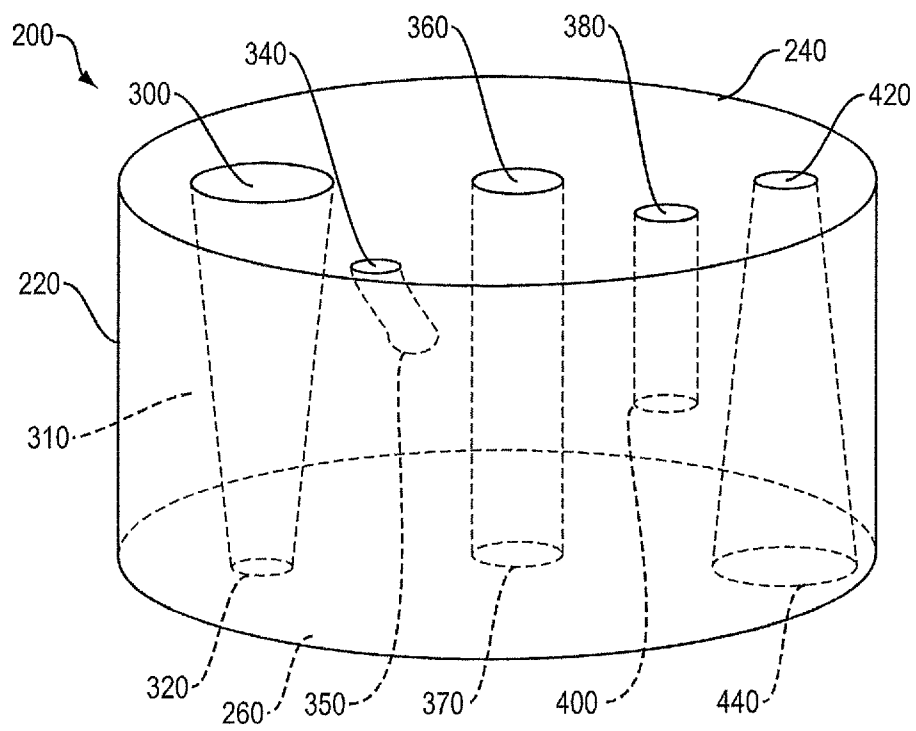


FIG. 12

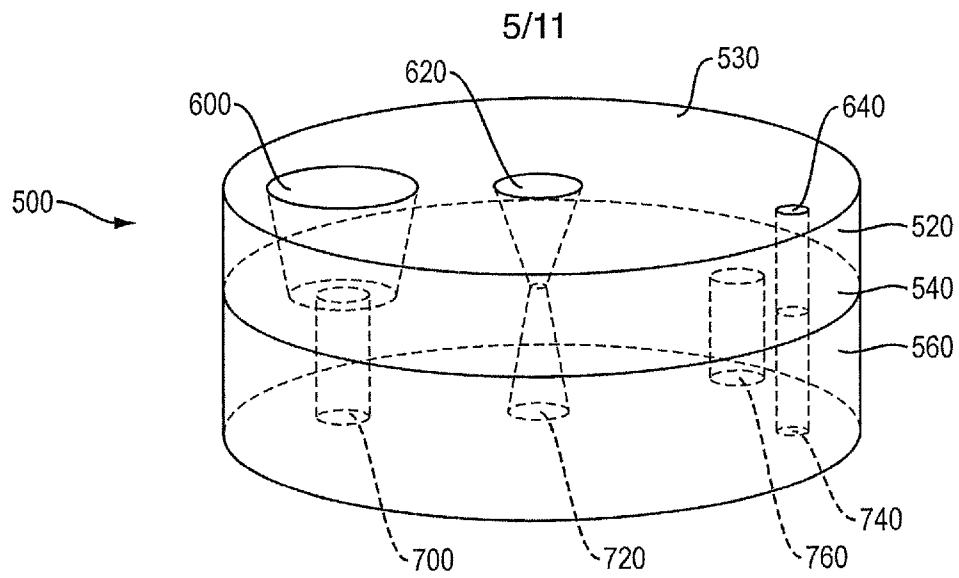


FIG. 13

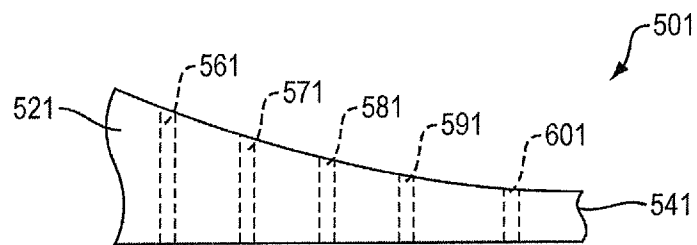


FIG. 14

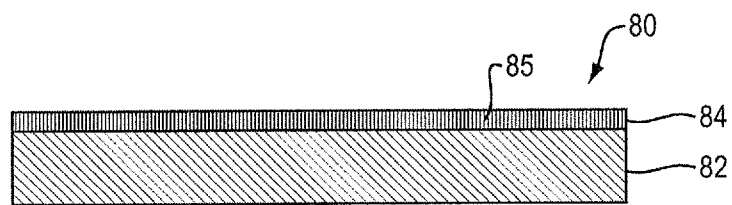


FIG. 15

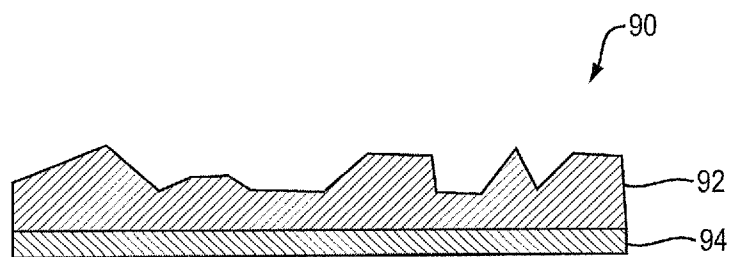


FIG. 16



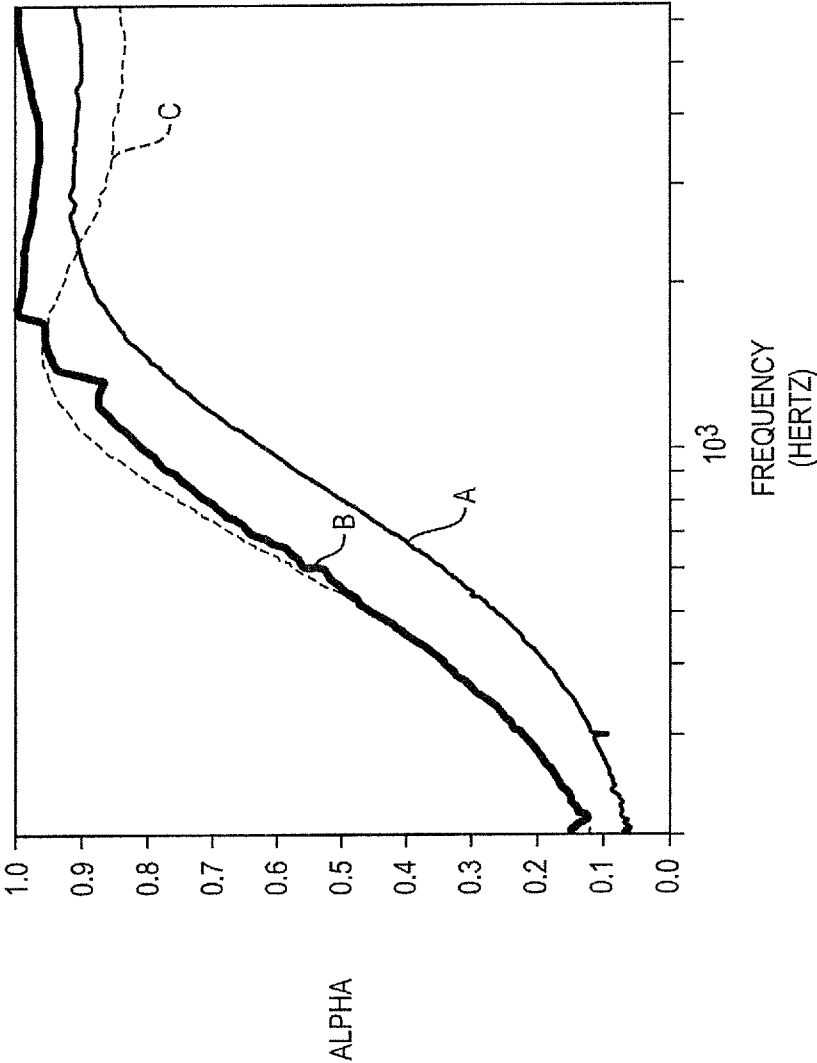


FIG. 17

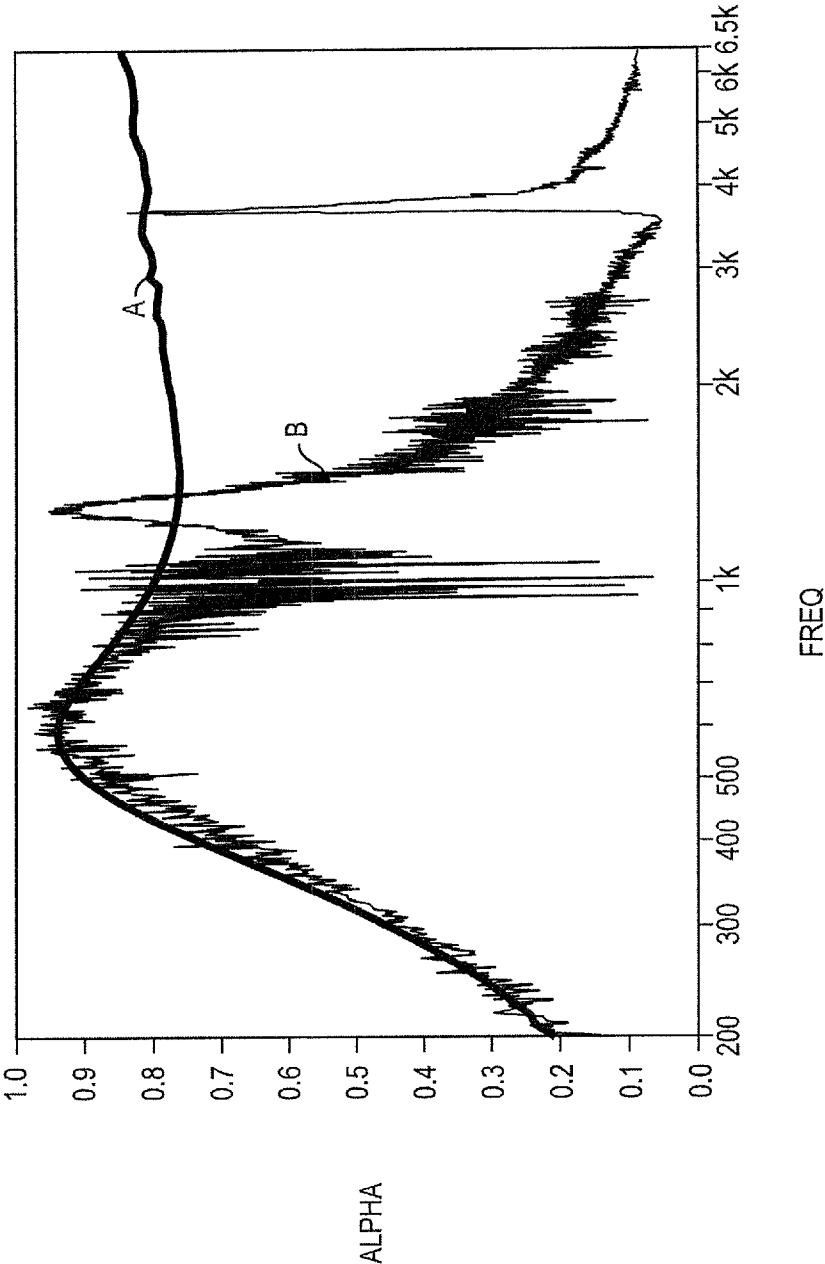


FIG. 18

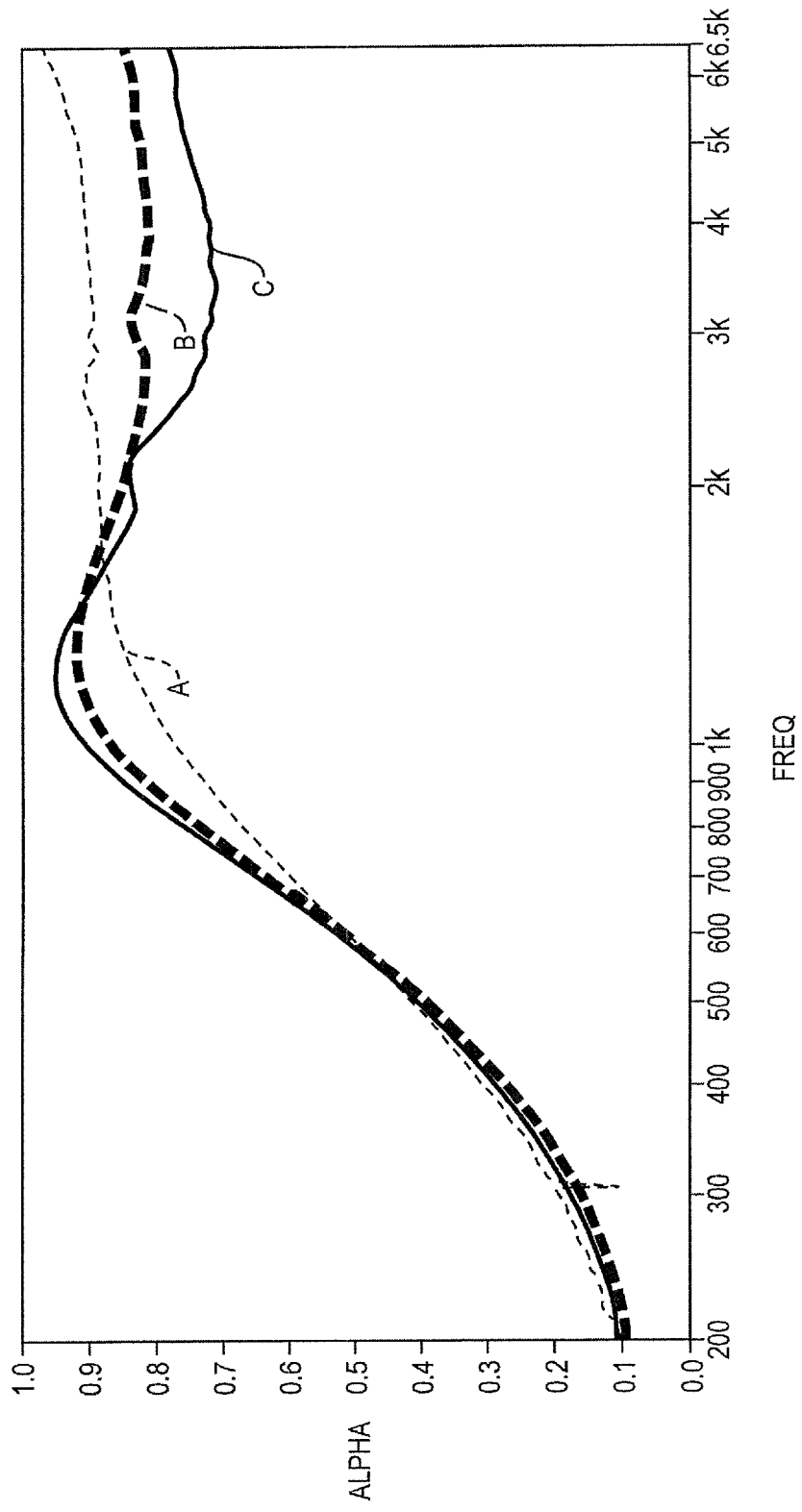


FIG. 19

9/11

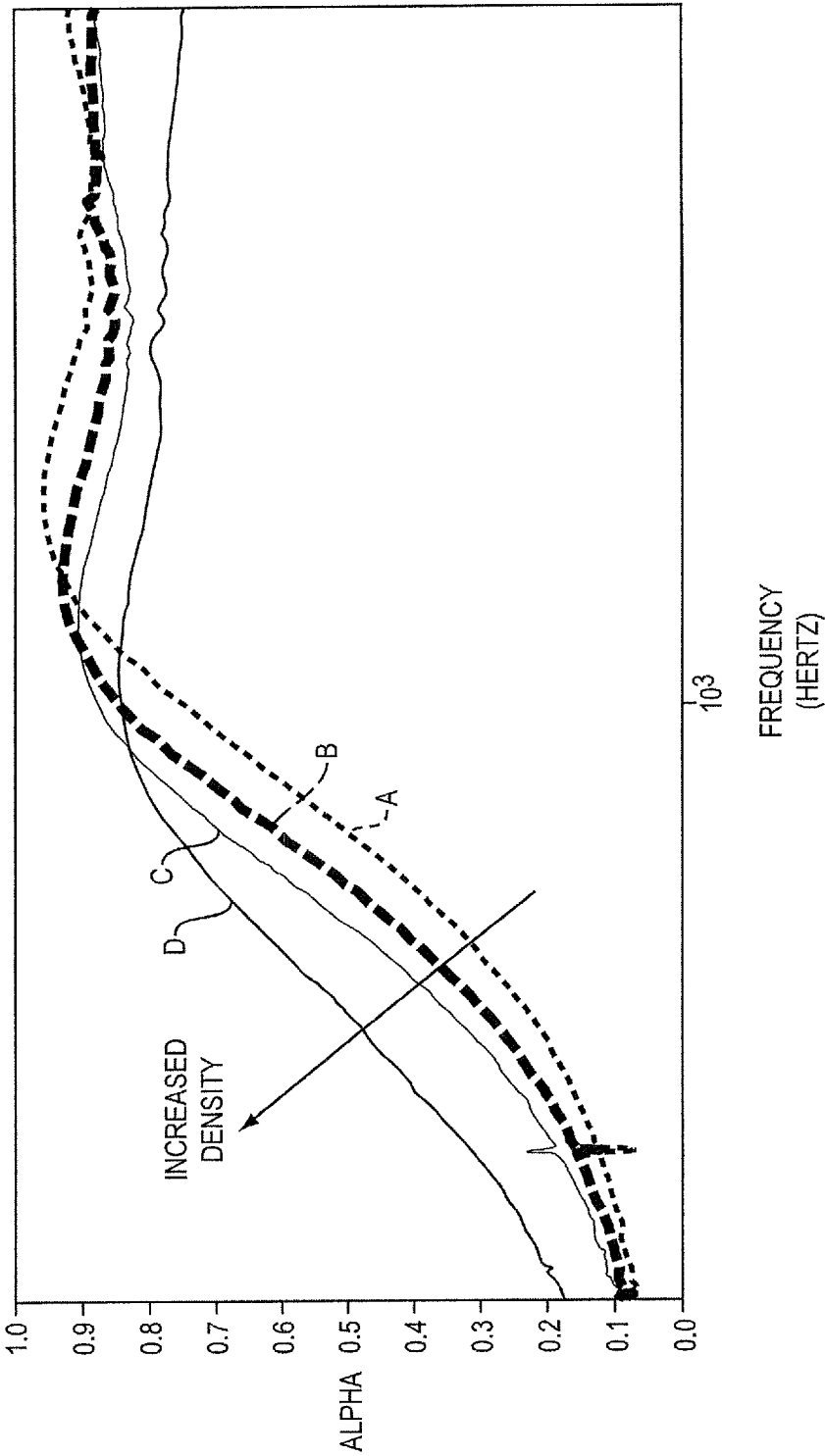


FIG. 20

10/11

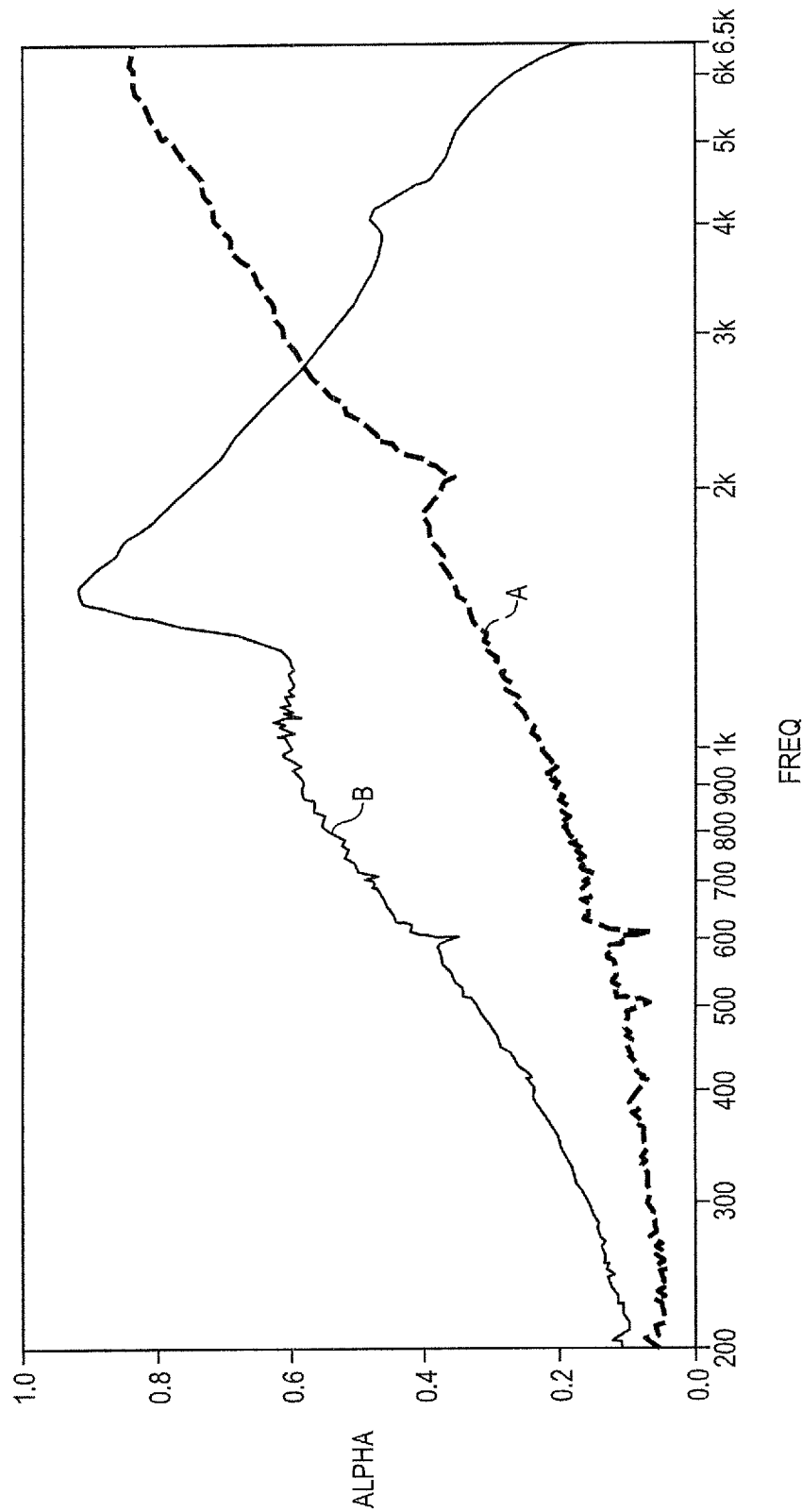


FIG. 21

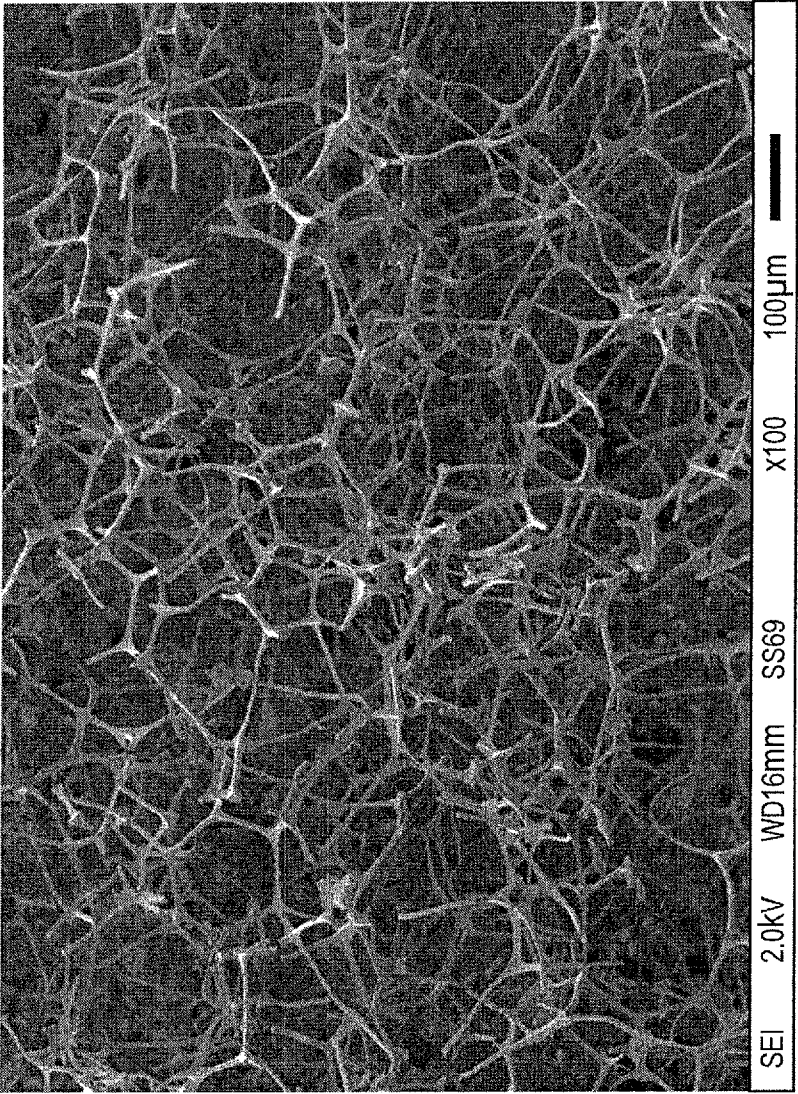


FIG. 22

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2016/064948

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
2. ☒ Claims Nos.: 1-25(partially)
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
see FURTHER INFORMATION sheet PCT/ISA/210
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of Item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2016/064948

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. C08J9/40 H04R1/28
ADD.

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)
C08J H04R

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)

EP0-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 8 794 373 B1 (LIN LIFUN [US]) 5 August 2014 (2014-08-05) cited in the application column 4, line 18 - column 5, line 30 column 6, line 27 - line 43 column 7, line 3 - line 26 -----	1-24
X	DATABASE WPI Week 201377 Thomson Scientific, London, GB; AN 2013-E38195 XP002766088, -& CN 102 786 710 A (JI Q) 21 November 2012 (2012-11-21) abstract examples 1, 2 ----- -/--	1,4-9, 17,25

☒ 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

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"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

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

18 January 2017

Date of mailing of the international search report

09/02/2017

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Lichau, Holger

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2016/064948

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	DATABASE WPI Week 199734 Thomson Scientific, London, GB; AN 1997-369342 XP002766089, -& JP H09 157110 A (TOKYO PACKS KK) 17 June 1997 (1997-06-17) abstract paragraph [0007] - paragraph [0011] paragraph [0023] -----	1,4-9, 17,25

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2016/064948

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 8794373	B1	05-08-2014	CN 105189630 A	23-12-2015
			EP 2970623 A1	20-01-2016
			JP 6039129 B2	07-12-2016
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			US 2014311820 A1	23-10-2014
			US 2015068402 A1	12-03-2015
			US 2016080857 A1	17-03-2016
			WO 2014152292 A1	25-09-2014

CN 102786710	A	21-11-2012	NONE	

JP H09157110	A	17-06-1997	NONE	

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210

Continuation of Box II.2

Claims Nos.: 1-25(partially)

The present application was found not to comply with the requirements of Article 6 PCT to such an extent that pursuant to the provisions of Article 17(2) PCT, only an incomplete search has been carried out. Present independent (process-) claim 1 relates to a method of fabricating a three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure, comprising providing a three-dimensional portion of an open-celled foam having a starting shape, forming the portion into a different shape than the starting shape, to create a structure, and either before or after the forming step, coupling an air-adsorbing material to the foam, wherein the result is the formation of a three-dimensional air-adsorbing structure, while present independent (product-) claim 25 relates to an air-adsorbing and sound absorbing structure obtainable by said process. It however appears that strictly speaking, any material and any structure will inevitably be air-adsorbing to at least some extent, and it thus remains unclear what exactly the applicant is having in mind - see also PCT Guidelines 5.34. Against this background, the search had to be limited to those methods and structures in which zeolite or activated carbon are employed, which are mentioned in the present application as specific examples for air-adsorbing materials.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guidelines C-IV, 7.2), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.