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(54) Packaging arrangement for contact lenses

(57) A plurality of disposable hydrophilic contact lenses are contained in at least one array (30) of individual packaging arrangements housed in an upper compartment (60) of a box-like container or carton having a partition (50) therein forming upper and lower (62)

compartments. This will enable the carton which is designed for large quantities of packaging arrangements to store a limited or sample-sized supply of packaged contact lenses for use by a consumer over a relatively short period of time.

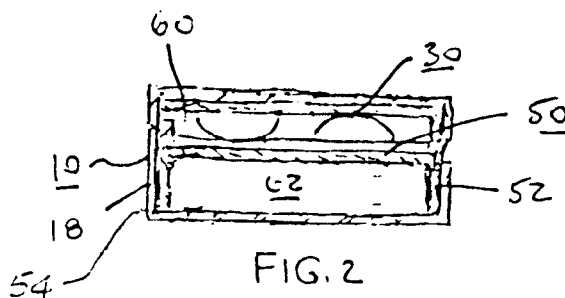


FIG. 2

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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a packaging arrangement for the containment of at least one hydrophilic contact lens in a sterile aqueous solution. More specifically, the invention pertains to a so-called trial-sized packaging arrangement wherein a plurality of disposable hydrophilic contact lenses are contained in a specific limited number of individual packaging arrangements collectively housed in a box-like container or carton so as to provide a specified or essentially measured sample or trial supply of contact lenses for use by a consumer over a predetermined relatively short period of time enabling the sampling and evaluation of the product packaged therein.

In particular, pursuant to the inventive concept, the box-like container or carton is designed to accommodate a smaller quantity of contact lenses while being designed and dimensioned for the receipt and storage of normally considerably larger quantities of contact lenses without the need for having to modify the external size and dimensions of the container, carton or packaging equipment. In essence, this will enable the thusly designed carton to be employed for the containment and packaging of such smaller quantities of contact lenses as to be adapted for the dispensing or distribution of so-called sample or "trial" sizes; in effect, the dispensing of free packages containing limited numbers of contact lenses to potential or prospective consumers.

The packaging of hydrophilic contact lenses in a sterile aqueous solution is well known in the contact lens manufacturing technology. In particular, such packaging arrangements generally consist of so-called blister packages which are employed for the storage and dispensing of the hydrophilic contact lenses by a medical practitioner or to consumer who intends to wear the contact lenses. Generally, such hydrophilic contact lenses, which may be disposable after a single wear or short-term use, are manufactured from suitable hydrophilic polymeric materials. These materials may be, amongst others, copolymers of hydroxyethyl methacrylate containing from about 20% to 90% or more of water, depending upon the polymer composition. Generally, such contact lenses must be stored in a sterile aqueous solution, usually in an isotonic saline solution in order to prevent dehydration and to maintain the lenses in a ready-to-wear condition.

2. Discussion of the Prior Art

Heretofore, contact lens manufacturers ordinarily utilized stoppered glass bottles containing sterile saline solutions in which the hydrophilic contact lenses were immersed as storage and shipping containers for indi-

vidual contact lenses. Each bottle was sealed with a suitable silicone stopper and provided with a metal closure as a safety seal in the configuration of an overcap. When the contact lens was intended to be removed from the bottle for use by a patient, the metal closure safety seal was required to be initially torn off the bottle, thereafter the stopper withdrawn and the contact lens lifted out from the bottle through the intermediary of a suitable plastic tweezer or by pouring the contents out. This entailed the implementation of an extremely complicated procedure, since the contact lens was difficult to grasp and remove from the saline solution contained in the bottle due to the transparent nature of the contact lens which rendered it practically invisible to the human eye.

More recently, containments in the form of blister packages have been developed for hydrophilic contact lenses, and which enable the storage and shipping of the hydrophilic contact lenses in a simple and inexpensive expedient manner, such as by being arranged within a secondary packing preferably constituted from a paperboard carton or the like, while concurrently facilitating the conveniently easy removal of the contact lens by a practitioner or a patient.

For instance, a blister package which is adapted to provide a sterile sealed storage environment for a disposable or single-use hydrophilic contact lens, wherein the lens is immersed in a sterile aqueous solution; for example, such as in an isotonic saline solution, is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,691,820 to Martinez; which is assigned to the common assignee for the present invention, and the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Thus, in the above-mentioned U.S. patent, the blister package for storing and dispensing a hydrophilic contact lens includes an injection-molded or thermoformed plastic base portion incorporating a molded cavity which is surrounded by an outstanding planar flange about the rim of the cavity. A flexible cover sheet is adhered to the surface of the flange so as to sealingly enclose the cavity in a generally liquid-tight mode. Within the cavity of the base portion, a hydrophilic contact lens is immersed in a sterile aqueous solution, such as an isotonic saline solution. A portion of the side wall of the cavity is inclined to form a ramp extending upwardly towards the flange from the bottom of the cavity, and the cover sheet is adapted to be stripped from the flange in order to expose the cavity and inclined side wall whereupon the lens may be readily manually removed by being slid upwardly and out of the cavity along the inclined ramp surface of the cavity.

Other configurations of blister packages are obtained by modifying the shape of the base member or base portion whereby rather than having a rectangular cavity which has an inclined bottom ramp portion, there is provided a semi-circular cavity which more closely conforms to the contact lens arranged therein immersed in an aqueous sterile solution. For example, blister packages of that type are disclosed in EP-A-0 650 676

wherein the base portions are interconnected in an array and covered by a single flexible cover sheet having lines of weakening provided therebetween to enable selective separation and removal of individual blister packages, each respectively containing one contact lens.

Such an improved and more recent blister package construction resides in that the cavity for the containment of the contact lens is essentially of a semi-spherical configuration dimensioned so as to be adapted to closely support the contact lens therein immersed in an aqueous solution for ease of removal and also to facilitate an inspection process. Moreover, the foregoing construction primarily considers the utilization of such blister packages for the dispensing of individual contact lenses, with such blister packages being ordinarily separate or single packagings, which may then be housed in larger quantities in a further container, such as a rigid cardboard or paperboard carton or other suitable rigidly constructed container employed for the retail sales of the lenses.

Various other configurations and structures for blister packages, both in individual or loose and also in interconnected arrayed relationships, can be readily ascertained from European patent applications Nos.

claiming priority from USSN 08 414 515 (VTN-170) and claiming priority from USSN 08 414 515 (VTN 171).

Generally, arrays of the blister packages are stored and packaged in secondary packagings normally consisting of rectangular carton structures, which may also be encompassed by a plastic shrinking film, so as to be sold in predetermined large quantities suitable for various types of retail operations and/or dispensing in conformance with specific user requirements.

An important aspect is to be able to furnish a user of such disposable hydrophilic contact lenses with a specific supply of contact lenses, the latter of which are each normally worn for only a single day; in essence, for ordinarily 8 to 18 hours within a 24-hour period and thereafter discarded. Hereby, the packaging of a supply of contact lenses should enable the user to store and provide indication for replenishing the supply of contact lenses at regular intervals; for example, at periods of 30 days, or possible shorter and preferably lengthier periods of time, such as weeks and even over periods of months; for instance, 60 or 90 days (3-month supply).

The present invention contemplates the provision of packaging arrangements for specified limited quantities of such hydrophilic contact lenses, wherein these packaging arrangements are boxed in a carton enabling a rapid and precise determination as to the quantity of hydrophilic contact lenses contained therein, and with such packaging arrangements being of a compact nature which is completely protective of the hydrophilic lenses.

In particular, at times it may be commercially expedient, such as for purposes of advertisement or introducing a particular product to a specific potential market,

that sample or introductory trial sizes of such products be dispensed at either reduced prices or even given away as free samples to prospective consumers or users.

In connection with the foregoing, it is expedient that the product be packaged in a secondary containment, such as a carton or rigid container in which the latter contains limited numbers and quantities of blister packages or arrays of blister packages containing contact lenses so as to enable a potential consumer to utilize these for a limited or introductory trial period to ascertain whether the contact lenses are really comfortable and satisfactory and meet the consumer's expectations, thereby forming an inducement for the purchase of larger quantities for lengthier periods of time.

However, for example, the currently utilized secondary packages or cartons each may contain 30 blister packages, or essentially a month's supply for one eye, each containing a contact lens and with arrays of each five blister packages being superimposed and interleaved with each other to form a plurality of layers within the carton in a substantially protected state, as disclosed in EP-A-0 650 676.

In order to maintain mass-production packaging costs for the contact lenses at a minimum level, rather than developing a smaller introductory or trial-sized carton containing, for example, ten contact lenses in two arrays of five contact lens packages each, or in only a single array of five packages, which would necessitate the provision of a new packaging production line or modified cartoner machines for such smaller sample or trial-sized carton packages, it is economically more expedient to maintain the external dimensions of the secondary packaging, such as the carton, at the same size as is employed for the packaging of; for example, 30 or a month's supply of contact lenses, but to modify the internal structure of the carton to be able to protectively store ten contact lenses rather than normally 30 lenses, and to thereby avoid having to significantly modify the packaging line of the facilities employed for the secondary packaging of the introductory arrays of contact lenses. This will considerably reduce secondary packaging costs and thereby render the entire packaging expenditures economically viable and expedient to implement.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In this connection, pursuant to the invention, in order to meet the foregoing requirements, there is utilized the basic carton structure or secondary packaging as disclosed in EP-A-0 650 676 in essence, to permit the external dimensions thereof to remain unchanged, but to incorporate partition or spacer structure within the confines of the carton forming a so-called "false bottom" which will support a single array or superimposed arrays of five blister packages, each in the narrower or more confined space above the carton partition supported on the "false bottom" structure formed thereby. This spacer

or partition structure will provide for a suitable contact lens array supporting feature internally in the upper region of the carton, while concurrently enabling maintaining the exterior dimensions of the carton as would be normally employed for the larger quantity of contact lenses without having to modify the external carton configurations to any extent, and thus facilitating utilizing the same and essentially unaltered basic packaging or secondary packaging equipment or machinery for identical or similarly dimensioned cartons containing larger quantities or arrays of blister packages.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a novel carton or secondary packaging arrangement for the packaging of sample or introductory trial quantities of contact lenses.

It is a more specific object of the present invention to provide a carton or secondary packaging arrangement of the type described whereby the interior of a carton may be partitioned to form a "false bottom" in order to protectively accommodate reduced quantities of contact lenses within a confined area without the need for modifying the exterior size and configurations of the carton.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Reference may now be had to the following detailed description of an exemplary embodiment of the invention, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings; in which:

- Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a rectangular carton for the containment of a limited or sample quantity of blister packages containing contact lenses;
- Fig. 2 illustrates a sectional view taken along line 2-2 in Fig. 1;
- Fig. 3 illustrates an exemplary array of detachably interconnected blister packages adapted to be contained in the carton of Fig. 1; and
- Fig. 4 illustrates another embodiment of a blister package structure adapted to be contained in the carton of Fig. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now in more specific detail to the drawings, and in particular to Figs. 1 and 2, there is illustrated a generally rectangular carton 10 which is adapted to receive a plurality of planar arrays of packaging arrangements for the sealed containment of contact lenses, especially disposable hydrophilic contact lenses, as elucidated in more specific detail hereinbelow; and as is also described in EP-A-0 650 676.

The rectangular carton 10, which is preferably formed from a blank constituted of paperboard, although numerous other materials may be employed such as pressed cardboard, plastic and the like, includes flat top

and bottom wall panels 12 and 14, and front and rear walls or panels 16 and, respectively, 18 which are adapted to be closed by being folded from a carton blank along suitable fold lines, and opposite ends 20; (only one shown) through an adhesive or glued construction as is known in the carton forming technology. The top wall panel 12 is adapted to be swung upwardly about a rear hinge line, as shown by the phantom illustration, to open the carton 10, and includes side flaps 12a, 12b which may be tucked within the confines of the carton beneath the end walls 20. The front wall panel 16 includes a lower portion 16a which is adapted to be glued to the end walls 20 by means of end flaps (not shown). The upper wall panel 12 includes a downwardly depending front flap 22 having a centrally located latching tab 24 at a lower edge thereof which is adapted to be tucked into a cooperating latching slit 26 centrally formed in the lower front wall panel 16 to facilitate reclosing of the carton, as shown in Fig. 2. The back hinge of the top wall-panel 12 is adapted to be attached to the carton by means of perforations. This provides a practitioner with the option of easily removing the top wall panel of the carton by tearing along the rear hinge line, and thereafter using the carton as a dispensing tray.

The carton 10, as is known in the art, may be equipped with a decorative glossy or semi-glossy exterior surface, which may be imparted with suitable single or multi-colored imprinting and/or embossing representative of the product contained therein, identifying legends and logos pertaining to the company manufacturing and/or marketing the product, instructions pertaining to the use of the product packaged in the carton, and other suitable legends, decorative indicia and the like.

The blister packages may also be stored in a plastic container of more durable construction, having a lid or cover which is openable or closeable by means of a so-called living hinge structure.

Within the carton 10 there is adapted to be housed a pair of interleaved and inverted arrays of packaging arrangements, of which one is more specifically illustrated in Fig. 3 of the drawings, and wherein each array essentially consists of five blister packages, each respectively containing one hydrophilic contact lens immersed in aqueous sterile solution.

As illustrated in Fig. 3 of the drawings, each array of blister packages comprises five such packages interconnected by a single flexible cover sheet, as is described in detail in EP-A-0 650 676.

In essence, Fig. 3 illustrates the array of packaging arrangements 30 as consisting of a plurality of interconnected blister packages 32, wherein each blister package 32 includes a base member 34 consisting of a planar essentially rectangularly-shaped flange 36 having an integral depending wall portion 38 at one edge thereof. Offset towards an edge 39 of the flange 36 a cavity 40 is formed therein which is of an essentially semi-spherical configuration, generally in conformance with the curvilinear shape of a contact lens (not shown),

adapted to be stored therein in a sealed condition while immersed in a suitable sterile aqueous solution. However, other cavity configurations also readily lend themselves to the invention, such as semi-spherical, oval, or the like. The height of the wall portion 38 depending from the planar flange 36 is somewhat analogous to the height or depth of the cavity 40 containing the contact lens. Similarly, the edge of the flange 36 opposite that possessing the depending wall portion is also provided with depending protuberances 43 which will also aid in positioning the blister packages in the carton, as described in detail hereinbelow.

The base member 34 of each so-called blister package is preferably constituted from an injection-molded or thermoformed plastic sheet material; for instance, such as polypropylene.

Positioned to extend over the base members 34 of the plurality of blister packages 32, in this case forming an array of five, is a continuous flexible cover sheet 44, having a series of parallel spaced weakening lines 46, such as perforations, discontinuous slits or the like, provided between each of the adjacently located base members 34, to enable suitable detachment from the array of individual or single blister packages 32 each containing a single contact lens in accordance with the need of a user. The flexible cover sheet 44 is adhesively fastened to suitable regions of the surface of the flanges 36 facing the cover sheet, such as by heat sealing, ultrasonic sealing, adhesives or other acceptable methods, so as to at least encompass each cavity 40 containing a contact lens immersed in the sterile aqueous solution, and to provide a sealing containment for each contact lens in its respective cavity. Other sealing locations may also be provided at locations as desired between the surface of the flexible cover sheet 44 facing the surface of the flange 36 so as to provide adequate regions of adherence therewith, while permitting various edge portions between these components 36, 44 to remain unattached to facilitate a finger-gripping engagement for separating the severed cover sheet portion from the detached base member 34 in order to gain access to the contact lens which is contained in the applicable cavity 40 thereof.

The flexible cover sheet 44 is preferably constituted of a laminated foil, or other suitable material structure possessing a plastic film, such as for instance a polypropylene film, or possibly a PET film, on at least one external surface thereof adapted to contact the facing surface of the flange 36 so as to enable adhesive or heat-sealing therewith, as mentioned hereinabove; and which may incorporate a silicon dioxide layer as a barrier material. The laminated foil constituting the flexible cover sheet 32 may be of a multi-layered construction having suitable double-sided imprinting provided thereon, for example, as disclosed in EP-0 646 471.

In essence, the flexible cover sheet acts as a barrier, and the laminate structure thereof could incorporate foil material (Al), SiO₂ or other barrier material. The car-

ton may also be encompassed by a plastic shrinkwrap film material.

Inasmuch as the carton 10, as described above, was initially designed to contain six arrays of blister packages 30 superimposed and interleavingly inverted within the carton interior to form a nested structure of blister packages filling the carton interior, the containment of a lesser number of blister package arrays within a similarly or identically sized carton, necessitates the provision of interior carton partitioning structure forming blister package array supporting means.

In order to form an introductory trial or sample size internal carton structure housing, for example, either five (5) or ten (10) contact lenses in either one or two blister package arrays of five (5) blister packages each, as shown in Fig. 2 of the drawings, an interior partition and spacer member 50 oriented coplanarly with and intermediate the carton top and bottom walls extends centrally across the carton confines. The partition 50, which may be a flat paperboard or other rigid element, has a depending flange 52 at one edge proximate the inside of the carton wall 22, and another depending flange 54 at the other edge extending within the carton wall, thereby separating the interior of the carton 10 into an upper compartment 60 and a lower compartment 62, and in effect forming a bottom for the upper compartment 60 or a so-called "false bottom" for the carton 10. The upper compartment 60 of the carton is adapted to respectively receive two arrays 30 of contact lens blister packages, each such array comprising five (5) packages, as shown in detail in Fig. 3, and wherein the partition member 50 provides a bottom support surface for the arrays protectively housed within the carton structure, whereas the lower compartment 62 remains empty.

This structure; in effect, the partition member 50, and the supportive action of the depending flanges 52 and 54 on the lower carton surface with the therewith associated arrays 30 will position and protectively support the latter within the upper compartment 60 of the carton confines.

Upon opening of the carton by lifting up top wall 12 upon detaching the separating the flap 22 from the front wall panel 16, the upper array 30 of contact lenses is exposed, enabling a consumer or user to separate an individual contact lens for use thereof by separating along the weakening lines or perforations formed in the cover sheet of the array. Alternatively, when the blister packages are unconnected or loosely arranged on the partition member 50 in upper compartment 60, and may be readily lifted out individually from the opened carton 10, as required.

As illustrated in Fig. 4, there is shown an alternate type of blister package 70 having a planar flange 72 of narrowing dimensions, whereby a lens-receiving cavity 74 is formed in the flange proximate a wider end 76 thereof. The contact lens (not shown) housed in the cavity may be sealed therein through the superposition of a flexible sealing cover element, as described hereinbe-

fore. As mentioned, numerous types and shapes of blister packages may be housed in the upper compartment in either separably interconnected or loosely arranged arrays, as described in the previously referenced co-pending applications.

The foregoing thus provides a simple carton modification without having to change or reduce the exterior dimensions of the carton to accommodate a lesser quantity of arrays, by simply introducing the interior partition 50 dividing the carton into two separate compartments 60, 62, with the upper compartment 60 containing respectively one or two arrays of blister packages, and thus eliminates the necessity of having to provide new secondary or carton packaging equipment while only requiring a minor procedure for the insertion of the central partition member or so-called "false bottom" 50.

From the foregoing, it becomes readily apparent to one of skill in the art that the present invention provides for a simple packaging of predetermined lesser or sample quantities of blister packages provided in packaging arrangements and units adapted to be compactly stored within a carton which not only provides for a novel packaging but for added support and protection for each of the blister packages and the contact lenses contained in the cavities thereof, while eliminating the need for changing the basic dimensions of the carton, or having to modify the packaging machines.

While there has been shown and described what is considered to be a preferred embodiment of the invention, it will, of course, be understood that various modifications and changes in form or detail could readily be made without departing from the spirit of the invention. It is, therefore, intended that the invention be not limited to the exact form and detail herein shown and described, nor to anything less than the whole of the invention herein disclosed as hereinafter claimed.

Claims

1. A composite packaging including a generally rigid container for the containment of at least one array of packaging arrangements housing hydrophilic contact lenses in a sterile aqueous solution; said at least one array of packaging arrangements comprising a plurality of injection molded or thermoformed plastic base members each having a cavity for containing a contact lens immersed in said solution, each said base member including a flange extending outwardly about the periphery of said cavity, said cavity consisting of a concave indentation in said base member and having a shape to facilitate positioning therein of the contact lens intended to be contained therein; a flexible cover sheet means superimposed on each of said plurality of base members and dimensioned to be detachably sealed to the surface of each said flange, said cover sheet sealingly extending about each said cavity and hav-

ing unsealed edge portions providing gripping means for enabling separating said cover sheet from said flange so as to expose said cavity and facilitating external access to the contact lens; and partition means in said container forming first and second compartments, said at least one array being confined in and supported within one said compartment.

2. A composite packaging as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said partition means comprises a flat separator member extending across the confines of said carton so as to define an upper compartment and a lower compartment.

3. A composite packaging as claimed in Claim 2, wherein said at least one array of packaging arrangements is located in said upper compartment and said separator member forms a bottom supporting surface for said at least one array.

4. A composite packaging as claimed in Claim 2 or Claim 3, wherein said separator member includes a depending wall portion extending along one edge thereof, and a further depending wall portion extending along an opposite edge thereof, said depending wall portions contacting a bottom surface of said container and being of a height to closely confine said array within said upper compartment.

5. A composite packaging as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said depending wall portions of said separator member extend in close contact with inner surfaces of opposite sidewalls of said container.

6. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 5, wherein said separator member is constituted of a generally rigid material.

7. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 6, wherein said separator member has peripheral dimensions substantially commensurate with the internal horizontal expanse of said container.

8. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein said container comprises front and back wall panels, top and bottom wall panels connected to said front and back wall panels, and end wall panels and flap structure being fastened to respectively each other and to said front, back, top and bottom wall panels to form a closed carton structure, said front wall panel and top wall panel including openable upper and lower flap portions to enable opening said carton and mutually co-operable latching structure for relatching said carton in a closed position.

9. A composite packaging as claimed in claim 8, wherein said top wall panel is detachably connected to said back wall panel along a perforated hinge line to enable said top wall panel to be detached and said carton to be employed as an open tray for dispensing packaging arrangements therefrom. 5
10. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said container has a generally rectangular configuration. 10
11. A composite packaging as claimed in claim 8 when dependent on any one of claims 2 to 7, wherein the vertical spacing between the upper surface of said separator member and an inner surface of said top container wall panel is generally in conformance with the overall height of said at least one array. 15
12. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein said container is constituted of a rigid material. 20
13. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein said container is encompassed by a plastic shrinkwrap film material. 25
14. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein indicia and content-identifying legends are imprinted on at least one of the exterior surfaces of said container. 30
15. A composite packaging as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein a pair of said arrays of packaging arrangements are located in said compartment in superimposed relationship. 35
16. A composite packaging as claimed in claim 15, wherein said arrays are inverted and interleaved relative to each other. 40

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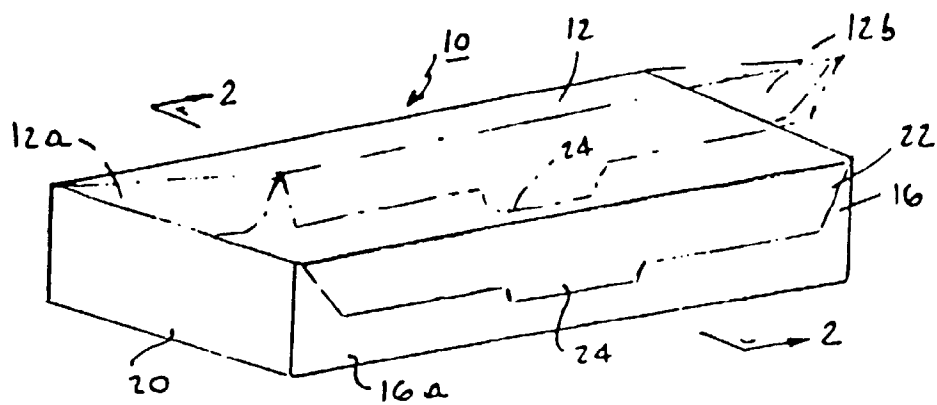


FIG. 1

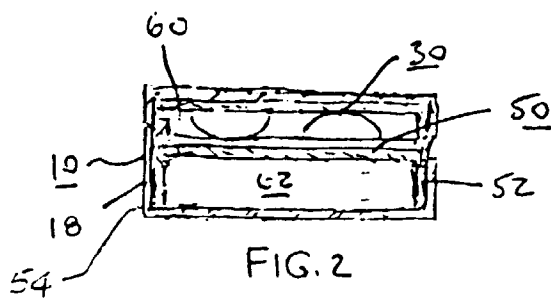


FIG. 2

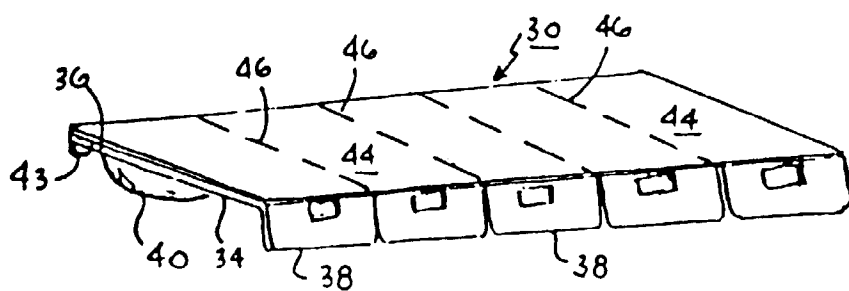


FIG. 3

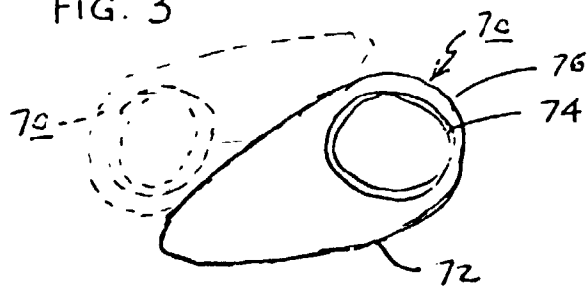


FIG. 4



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 96 30 2232

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Y	EP-A-0 604 177 (JOHNSON & JOHNSON VISION PRODUCTS, INC.) * abstract; figures * ---	1,2,6,7, 10-12	B65D5/48 B65D5/50 B65D75/34 B65D77/04
Y	US-A-2 948 454 (GILLMORE) * the whole document * ---	1,2,6,7, 10-12	A45C11/00 A61F2/16
A	GB-A-1 577 593 (MEIJA SEIKA) * figures * ---	1,8	
A	DE-A-29 23 106 (KLÖCKNER-WERKE AG) * figures * ---	1,15,16	
A	DE-A-29 30 417 (EURIM-PHARM) -----		
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
			B65D A45C A61F
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		24 June 1996	Smith, C
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