(19) Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

(11) EP 1 747 909 A1

(12) EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
31.01.2007 Bulletin 2007/05

(51) Int Cl.:
B42F 15/00 *(2006.01)* ***B42F 21/06*** *(2006.01)*

(21) Application number: **06001239.0**

(22) Date of filing: **20.01.2006**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC NL PL PT RO SE SI SK TR
Designated Extension States:
AL BA HR MK YU

(30) Priority: **25.07.2005 GB 0515234**

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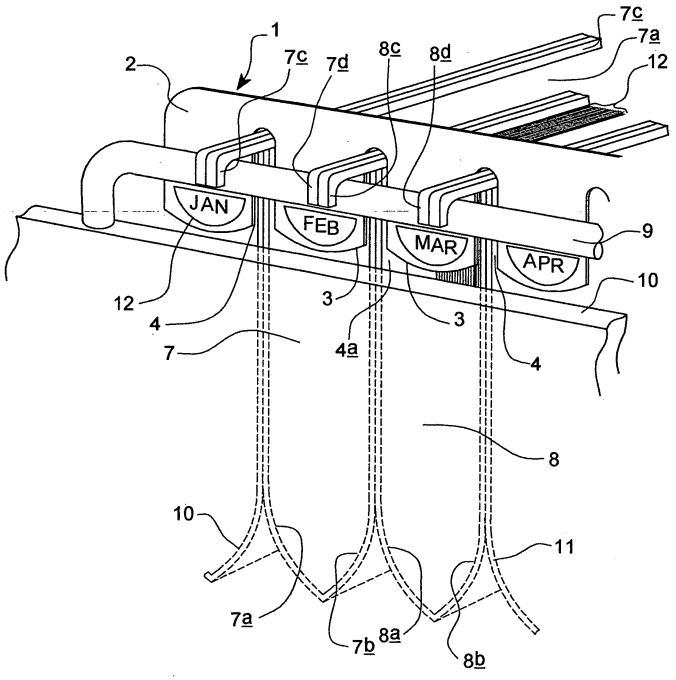
(54) A suspension-file spacer

(57) A file spacer (1) for positioning alongside one of a pair of spaced apart guide rails (9) in a filing cabinet or the like to regulate the spacing between the walls (10,11) of a plurality of suspension-files (7,8) suspended laterally between said guide rails, the file spacer (1) comprising: an elongate body (2) incorporating a plurality of slots (4), each slot configured to receive a suspension-file wall extending laterally of said elongate body, and a respective spacer portion (3) located between each pair of adjacent slots configured to restrict relative movement, along the body portion, of suspension-file walls retained in said slots.

FIG 2



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Description

[0001] **THE PRESENT INVENTION** relates to a file spacer for regulating the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files, and preferably to a file spacer for positioning alongside one of a pair of guide rails in a filing cabinet, drawer or the like to regulate the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between said guide rails.

[0002] A common way of storing documents, particularly within an office environment, is by means of suspension-files, usually located in a filing cabinet or the like.

[0003] A conventional suspension-file for use in a filing cabinet incorporates a v-shaped pouch formed from a single folded sheet of card or the like. The fold is essentially located between, and parallel to, two opposed side edges of the sheet, and thus the sheet forms two walls hingedly inter-connected by the fold.

[0004] Typically, each of the opposed side regions of the walls remote from the fold is provided with a suspension bar that grips the respective edge region of the wall. Each end of each suspension bar projects beyond the sheet and is provided with a recess which is directed downwardly towards the fold.

[0005] In a filing cabinet drawer, there are typically two parallel guide rails, one at each side, which run along the length of the drawer. In use, a suspension-file may be suspended laterally between the parallel guide rails, with the rails received in the recesses provided in the suspension bars. When a suspension-file is suspended from these guide rails, it may be slidably moved forwards or backwards along the rails. Thus, as documents are continually stored within a suspension-file over time, between the two walls of the suspension-file, a point is reached where the suspension-file walls move away from one another, along the parallel guide rails, to accommodate the increased combined thickness of the documents being stored in the suspension-file; thus, the distance between the suspension-file walls will ordinarily depend upon the combined thickness of the documents stored within that suspension-file.

[0006] A problem associated with conventional suspension-files, such as those described above, is that there is a tendency for a user of the suspension-file arrangement to over-fill one or more of the suspension-files with documents. Thus, whilst initially the walls of an individual suspension-file may move along the guide rails to accommodate the increasing thickness of documents within the file, as successive documents are added to the file, there comes a point where the walls of the suspension-file are no longer able easily to move away from one another (due to their being attached to one another along the fold line of the suspension-file) with the result that a user will then often forcibly "stuff' further documents into the suspension-file, forcing the walls further away from one another. It will be appreciated that, as documents continue to be added to the full suspension-file in this manner, the combined thickness of the documents will then begin to place stress upon the walls of the suspension-file; furthermore, as it becomes increasingly difficult to forcibly insert documents into a full suspension-file, it is often the case that a user will only insert new documents half-way into the suspension-file, which leads to a very untidy and disorganised appearance and, worse still, prevents a subsequent user from being readily able to retrieve a desired document from the correct suspension-file.

[0007] A further problem associated with conventional suspension-files is that when a series of suspension-files are hung within a filing cabinet or the like, it can often be difficult for a user to distinguish between the "dead" spaces existing between adjacent suspension-files, and the "operative" spaces defined by the walls of each individual suspension-file. As a result, when a user attempts to file a document within a suspension-file hanging within the filing cabinet or the like, there is often the risk that the person will accidentally file the document in a "dead" space between two adjacent suspension-files, erroneously believing that they have actually filed the document away within the desired suspension-file; in some cases, a document inserted into a "dead" space between two suspension files may actually slide down beneath the series of suspension-files and onto the floor of the filing cabinet drawer, where it will then be obscured from view by the suspension-files hanging above in the filing cabinet drawer. In such circumstances, there is a real risk that important documents may appear lost.

[0008] It is an object of the present invention to seek to provide an improved file spacer.

[0009] According to the present invention there is provided a file spacer for positioning alongside one of a pair of spaced apart guide rails to regulate the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between said guide rails, the file spacer comprising: an elongate body incorporating a plurality of slots, each slot configured to receive a suspension-file wall extending laterally of said elongate body, and a respective spacer portion located between each pair of adjacent slots configured to restrict relative movement, along the body portion, of suspension-file walls retained in said slots.

[0010] Preferably, the slots are open at one end.

[0011] Conveniently, each said spacer portion is equal in length measured along said elongate body.

[0012] Preferably, the length of a spacer portion is 25 - 55mm.

[0013] In a particular preferred embodiment, the length of a spacer portion is 30mm.

[0014] In a alternative preferred embodiment, the length of a spacer portion is 50mm.

[0015] Conveniently, said spacer portions are provided with an area for receiving indicia thereon.

[0016] Advantageously, the elongate body is provided with one or more retaining elements for retaining a removable label for bearing info'rmation.

[0017] Preferably, the elongate body comprises a

spine portion, the elongate body comprises a spine portion, and said spacer portions are in the form of a set of spacer tabs extending from said spine portion, the spacer tabs defining said open-ended slots therebetween.

[0018] In a preferred embodiment, the elongate body comprises a further set of spacer tabs extending from said spine portion to define a second set of open-ended slots, the elongate body being foldable along a longitudinal fold axis of said spine portion between a first configuration, in which the file spacer is generally flat with the two sets of tabs positioned either side of the spine portion and being generally co-planar with one another and with the spine portion, and a second configuration in which the two sets of tabs depend from the spine portion so as to lie generally adjacent one another with respective slots being aligned generally opposite one another.

[0019] Conveniently, at least on tab in one of said sets of tabs is longer than the respective tab in the other said set of tabs, measured parallel to said slots.

[0020] Preferably, each tab in one of said sets of tabs is longer than the respective tab in the other said set of tabs.

[0021] In one embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a suspension-file arrangement comprising a plurality of suspension-files, suspended laterally between a pair of parallel guide rails, and a file spacer in accordance with the invention, the file spacer being positioned alongside one of the guide rails such that each wall of each individual suspension-file is received in slots in said file spacer.

[0022] Preferably, two suspension-files are arranged such that their adjacent walls share a single, common slot.

[0023] Advantageously, the guide rails are provided in a filing cabinet or drawer.

[0024] According to a yet further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of regulating the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between a pair of guide rails, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a file spacer in accordance with the invention;

(b) positioning the file spacer alongside one of said guide rails; and

(c) arranging said suspension-files such that the two walls of an individual suspension-file are received in a respective pair of slots in said file spacer.

[0025] Advantageously, the step of arranging said suspension-files comprises arranging the files such that each wall of an individual suspension-file shares a single, common slot of said spacer with a wall of an adjacent suspension-file.

[0026] So that the invention may be more readily understood and so that further features thereof may be appreciated, embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGURE 1 shows a schematic view of a file spacer according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

FIGURE 2 shows a perspective view of the file spacer of Figure 1 positioned alongside a guide rail of a filing cabinet or the like;

FIGURE 3 shows a schematic view of a file spacer according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

FIGURE 4 shows a perspective view of the file space of Figure 3 in use positioned alongside the guide rail of a filing cabinet or the like;

FIGURE 5 shows a schematic view of a file spacer according to a third embodiment of the present invention;

FIGURE 6 shows a perspective view of the file spacer of Figure 5 in use positioned alongside the guide rail of a filing cabinet or the like.

[0027] FIGURE 1 shows a file spacer 1 comprising a elongate body 2 incorporating a number of spacer portions in the form of spacer tabs 3. The spacer tabs 3 define a respective number of open ended slots 4 therebetween, each of which extend upwardly from their open ends to a point below the top edge 5 of the elongate body 2, thereby defining a spine portion 6 between the closed end of the slots 4 (indicated by the dotted line in Figure 1) and the top edge 5.

[0028] The elongate body 2 may be formed in one piece as a unitary body using any suitable conventional method such as, for example, stamping from a piece of sheet material.

[0029] Figure 2 shows the file spacer 1 in use to regulate the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between guide rails in a filing cabinet or the like. Thus, Figure 2 shows two adjacent suspension-files 7, 8, each comprising a respective pair of side walls 7a, 7b and 8a, 8b. Each wall 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b is provided with respective suspension bar 7c, 7d, 8c, 8d, one end of which engages with a guide rail 9 attached to a first side wall 10 of the filing cabinet drawer (not shown) and the other end of which engages with a corresponding second guide rail, running parallel to the guide rail 9, attached to a second wall of the filing cabinet drawer (not shown). Thus, the suspension files 7 and 8 are suspended laterally between a pair of spaced apart guide rails, in a manner known *per se*.

[0030] In use, as shown in Figure 2, the file spacer 1

is positioned alongside guide rail 9 with the suspension-file bars 7c, 7d, 8c, 8d each being received in one of the slots 4 so that they extend laterally of the elongate body 2 of the file spacer 1. In this position, the tabs 3 act to restrict relative movement of the suspension file walls 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b with respect to one another. Thus, the spacing between the walls 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b is regulated by the file spacer 1.

[0031] In the preferred suspension-file arrangement shown in Figure 2, the two suspension-files 7, 8 are arranged such that their adjacent walls 7b, 8a share a single, common slot 4a. Similarly, walls 7a, 8b share a respective single, common slot with the adjacent walls 10, 11 of neighbouring files respectively.

[0032] It will be appreciated that the material from which the file spacer 1 is fabricated is preferably sufficiently stiff (in a direction along the elongate body 2) to resist relative movement of the suspension file walls 7, 8; suitable materials include sufficiently rigid card or plastics.

[0033] Referring again to Figure 2, each of the spacer tabs 3 is provided with area 12 for displaying information, such as information relating to the documents contained within the corresponding suspension-file such as, for example, the calendar month to which those documents refer. This information could be provided a self adhesive label or the like.

[0034] Turning now to Figure 3, a file spacer 21 is shown according to a second embodiment of the present invention, comprising an elongate body 22 incorporating spacer portions in the form of a first set of spacer tabs 23 and a second set of spacer tabs 24, the sets of spacer tabs 23 and 24 each defining a respective number of open ended slots 25 and 26 aligned opposite one-another. As can be seen in Figure 2, the slots 25 and 26 each extend part way towards the generally central longitudinal axis B of the elongate body 22, thus defining a spine portion 27, spanning the central longitudinal axis B and being bound by the closed ends of the slots 25 and 26 (as indicated by the dotted lines in Figure 3).

[0035] The file spacer 21 may be folded along a longitudinal axis of the spine portion, for example the central longitudinal axis B, whereby the file spacer 21 may be folded between a first configuration, shown in Figure 3, in which the file spacer is generally opened out, with the two sets of tabs 23 and 24 being positioned each side of the spine portion so as to be generally co-planer with one another and with the spine portion 27, and a second configuration, shown in Figure 4, in which the two sets of tabs 23 and 24 lie generally adjacent one another with respective slots 25 and 26 being aligned generally opposite one another.

[0036] Thus, referring to Figure 4, the file spacer 1 of Figure 3 is shown in use positioned alongside the guide rail 9 and side wall 10 so as to regulate the spacing between the walls of the suspension-files 7 and 8 in similar manner to the file spacer of Figures 1 and 2.

[0037] It will be appreciated that, in the second configuration shown in Figure 4, the stiffness of the file spacer 21, in a longitudinal direction along the elongate body, is increased as compared to when the file spacer is in the first configuration shown in Figure 3, due to the presence of the fold along the central spine.

[0038] In similar manner to the file spacer 1 of Figures 1 and 2, the file spacer 21 may, for example, be formed as a unitary body by stamping from a suitable sheet material. In the case of file spacer 21, it is preferable that the sheet material is a relatively cheap non-rigid material such as thin card or plastic which, on the one hand, will promote easy folding of the file spacer 21 along a longitudinal axis of the spine portion 27 whilst, on the other hand, still providing sufficient stiffness in the operative second configuration of the file spacer 21 shown in Figure 4.

[0039] Whilst in the specific example shown in Figures 3 and 4, the file spacer 21 is only folded along a single longitudinal fold axis of the spine portion 27, it is envisaged that the file spacer 21 might equally be folded along a plurality of longitudinal axes of the spine portion 27. Thus, the file spacer 21 may, for example, be folded along two, parallel, longitudinal fold lines of the spine portion 27, equidistant from the central longitudinal axis B (and parallel thereto). It will be appreciated that, in such an embodiment, the file spacer may be folded along each of the two parallel, longitudinal fold lines to define a central elongate portion therebetween, thus providing even more rigidity as compared to the embodiment where the file spacer is folded along a single longitudinal axis of the spine portion.

[0040] To further promote folding of the file spacer 21, along one or more longitudinal fold axes of the spine portion 27, the spine portion 27 may be deliberately weakened, for example by scoring or partially perforating, along the longitudinal fold lines, and this is particularly preferable where the file spacer 21 (specifically, the spine portion 27) is formed from a relatively rigid material which does not allow easy folding. Indeed, in the case where a relatively rigid material is used to form the file spacer 21, it is envisaged that the spine portion 27 may incorporate a hinge for example a living hinge, hingedly attaching the two sets of spacer tabs 23 and 24 to one another.

[0041] A third embodiment of a file spacer according to the present invention is shown in Figure 5, and this arrangement is particularly suitable for use in filing cabinets or the like which incorporate a pair of guide rails attached directly to the base of a drawer, absent any side walls to the drawer. Thus, the file spacer 31 shown in Figure 5 has a structure similar to the file spacer of Figure 3, except that the file spacer 31 is asymmetrical about the longitudinal axis C (Figure 5) comprising spacer portions in the form of a first set of spacer tabs 32 and a second set of spacer tabs 33, defining respective sets of slots 34 and 35, with each of the first set of spacer tabs 32 being longer than a respective tab in the second set of spacer tabs 33, measured in a direction parallel to the slots 34,35.

[0042] Figure 6 shows the file spacer of Figure 5 in use to regulate the spacing between the walls of suspension-files 36 and 37 contained within a filing cabinet drawer (not shown in its entirety) comprising a guide rail 38 attached directly to the base 39 of the drawer, absent any side wall to the drawer.

[0043] Thus, referring to Figure 6, the long spacer tabs 32 may also provide the function of a side wall to each of the suspension-files, preventing documents from projecting out laterally beyond the guide rail 38, thereby providing a neat appearance for the files. In addition, the long spacer tabs 32 provide a larger area for receiving indicia.

[0044] Referring again to Figure 6, one or more of the tabs 32 may be provided with a retaining element 40 for removably retaining a removable label 41 for receiving indicia thereon, thereby allowing information displayed in connection with a particular tab 32 to be updated easily.

[0045] Preferably, the spacer tabs 4,23, 24, 32, 33 have a width, measured longitudinally along the elongate body, in the range 25mm to 55mm, preferably 30mm or 50mm.

[0046] It will be appreciated that the embodiments shown in Figures 1 to 6 are merely examples of file spacers according to the present invention and that other specific configurations of file spacers may be envisaged in accordance with the present invention. In particular, it will be appreciated that certain features of the various embodiments shown in Figures 1 to 6 may be interchanged. In particular, any of the embodiments of Figures 1 to 6 may be provided with one or more removable labels 41 and retaining elements 40 shown in Figure 6, optionally in combination with the permanent designated areas for receiving indicia shown in Figures 1 and 2.

[0047] Moreover, although the embodiments shown in Figures 1 to 4 are shown in use in connection with a drawer comprising a side wall, it will nevertheless be appreciated that the file spacers of Figures 1 to 4 could equally be used in conjunction with a drawer not having a side wall, but comprising a guide rail and base similar to guide rail 38 and base 39 shown in Figure 6.

[0048] In a further envisaged embodiment (not shown), the spacer tabs 4 shown in Figure 1 may actually be angularly offset with respect to one another around the axis of the spine portion (looking in the direction A shown in Figure 1), thus providing greater stability and further preventing relative movement of suspension-file walls when the file spacer 1 is in use positioned alongside a guide rail.

[0049] In a yet further envisaged alternative embodiment (not shown), one or more of the first set of spacer tabs may be provided with attachment means to attach to a respective tab in a second set of spacer tabs when the file spacer 1b or 1c is in an operative second configuration. Preferably, the attachment means is in the form of an adhesive layer located on the inner surface of the relevant tab when the file spacer is in its operative second configuration.

[0050] When used in this specification and claims, the terms "comprises" and "comprising" and variations thereof mean that the specified features, steps or integers are included. The terms are not to be interpreted to exclude the presence of other features, steps or components.

[0051] The features disclosed in the foregoing description, or the following claims, or the accompanying drawings, expressed in their specific forms or in terms of a means for performing the disclosed function, or a method or process for attaining the disclosed result, as appropriate, may, separately, or in any combination of such features, be utilised for realising the invention in diverse forms thereof.

Claims

1. A file spacer for positioning alongside one of a pair of spaced apart guide rails to regulate the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between said guide rails, the file spacer comprising: an elongate body incorporating a plurality of slots, each slot configured to receive a suspension-file wall extending laterally of said elongate body, and a respective spacer portion located between each pair of adjacent slots configured to restrict relative movement, along the body portion, of suspension-file walls retained in said slots.

2. A file spacer according to claim 1, wherein the slots are open at one end.

3. A file spacer according to claims 1 or 2, wherein each said spacer portion is equal in length measured along said elongate body.

4. A file spacer according to any preceding claim, wherein the length of at least one said spacer portion is 25 - 55mm.

5. A file spacer according to claim 4, wherein the length of at least one said spacer portion is 30mm.

6. A file spacer according to claim 4, wherein the length of at least one said spacer portion is 50mm.

7. A file spacer according to any preceding claim wherein said spacer portions are provided with an area for receiving indicia thereon.

8. A file spacer according to any of claims 1 to 6, wherein the elongate body is provided with one or more retaining elements for retaining a removable label for bearing information.

9. A file spacer according to any of claims 2 to 6, wherein the elongate body comprises a spine portion, and said spacer portions are in the form of a set of spacer

tabs extending from said spine portion, the spacer tabs defining said open-ended slots therebetween.

10. A file spacer according to claim 9, wherein the elongate body comprises a further set of spacer tabs extending from said spine portion to define a second set of open-ended slots, the elongate body being foldable along a longitudinal fold axis of said spine portion between a first configuration, in which the file spacer is generally flat with the two sets of tabs positioned either side of the spine portion and being generally co-planar with one another and with the spine portion, and a second configuration in which the two sets of tabs depend from the spine portion so as to lie generally adjacent one another with respective slots being aligned generally opposite one another.

11. A file spacer according to claim 10, wherein at least on tab in one of said sets of tabs is longer than the respective tab in the other said set of tabs, measured parallel to said slots.

12. A file spacer according to claim 11, wherein each tab in one of said sets of tabs is longer than the respective tab in the other said sets of tabs.

13. A suspension-file arrangement comprising a plurality of suspension-files, suspended laterally between a pair of parallel guide rails, and a file spacer according to any preceding claim, the file spacer being positioned alongside one of the guide rails such that each wall of each individual suspension-file is received in slots in said file spacer.

14. A suspension-file arrangement according to claim 13, wherein two said suspension-files are arranged such that their adjacent walls share a single, common slot.

15. A suspension file arrangement according to claim 13 or 14, wherein said guide rails are provided in a filing cabinet or drawer.

16. A method of regulating the spacing between the walls of a plurality of suspension-files suspended laterally between a pair of guide rails, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a file spacer according to any of claims 1 to 14;
(b) positioning the file spacer alongside one of said guide rails; and
(c) arranging said suspension-files such that each wall of each suspension-file is received in a slot.

17. A method according to claim 16, wherein the step of arranging said suspension-files comprises arranging at least two of the files such that their adjacent walls share a single, common slot.

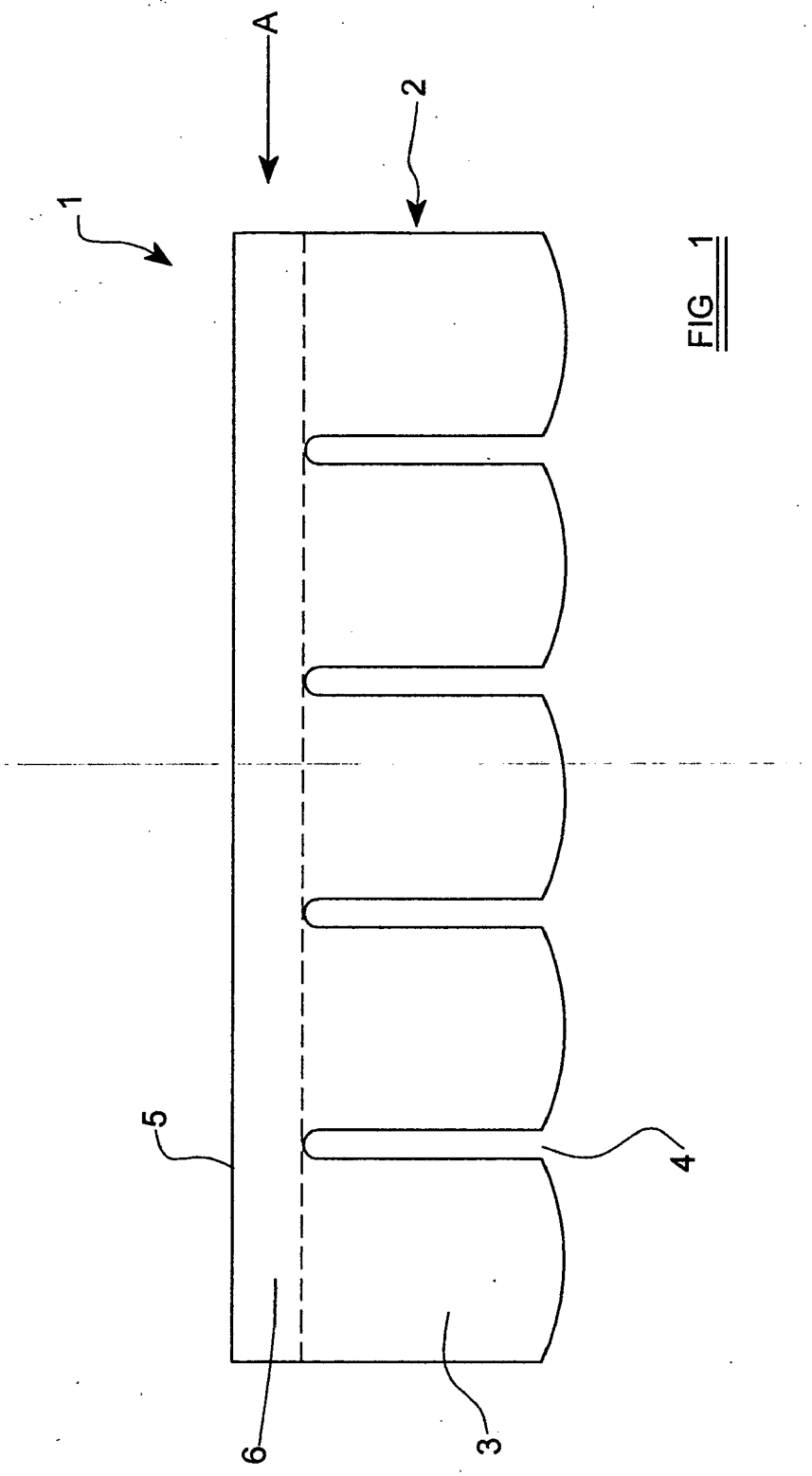
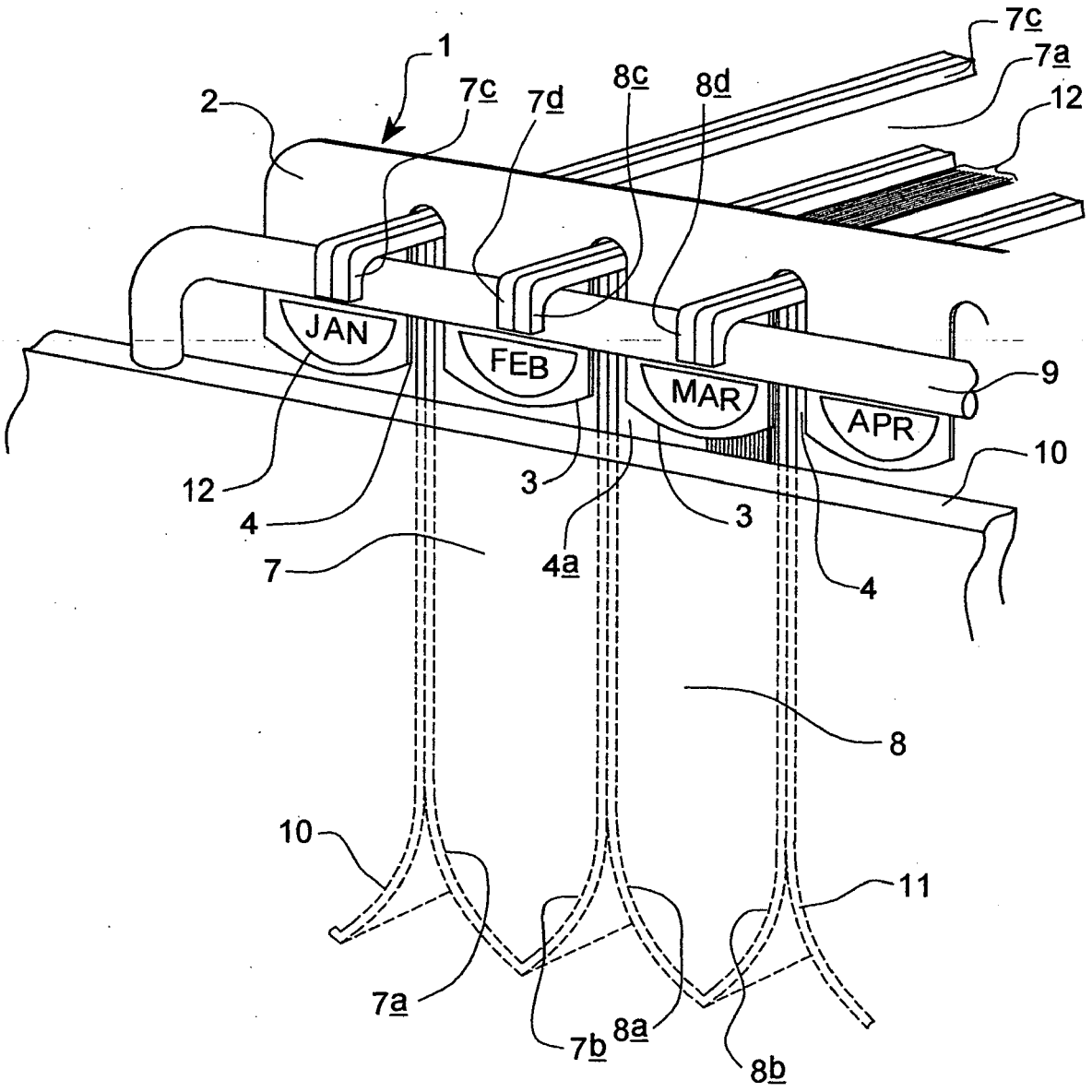


FIG 1

FIG 2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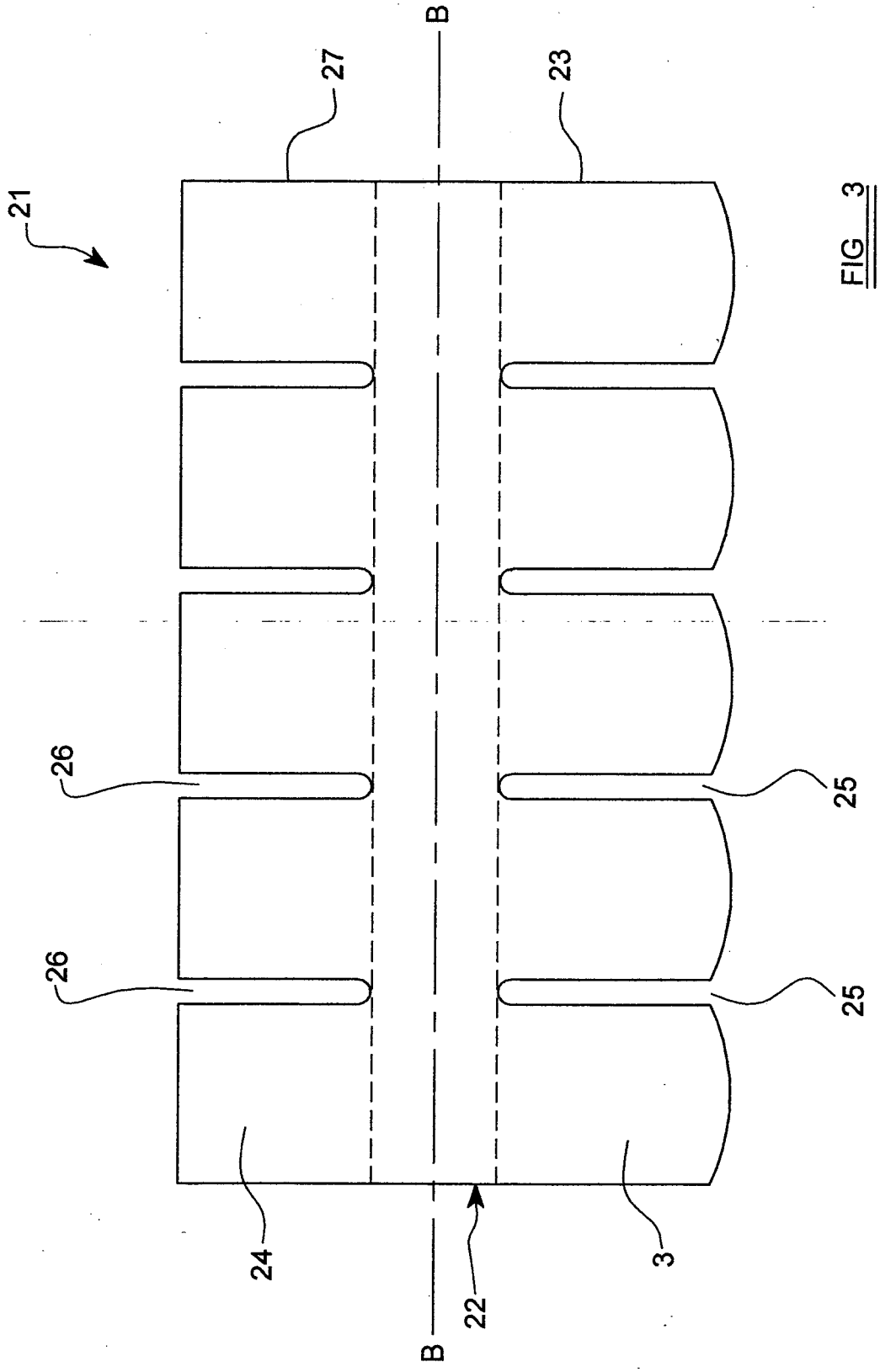


FIG 3

FIG 4

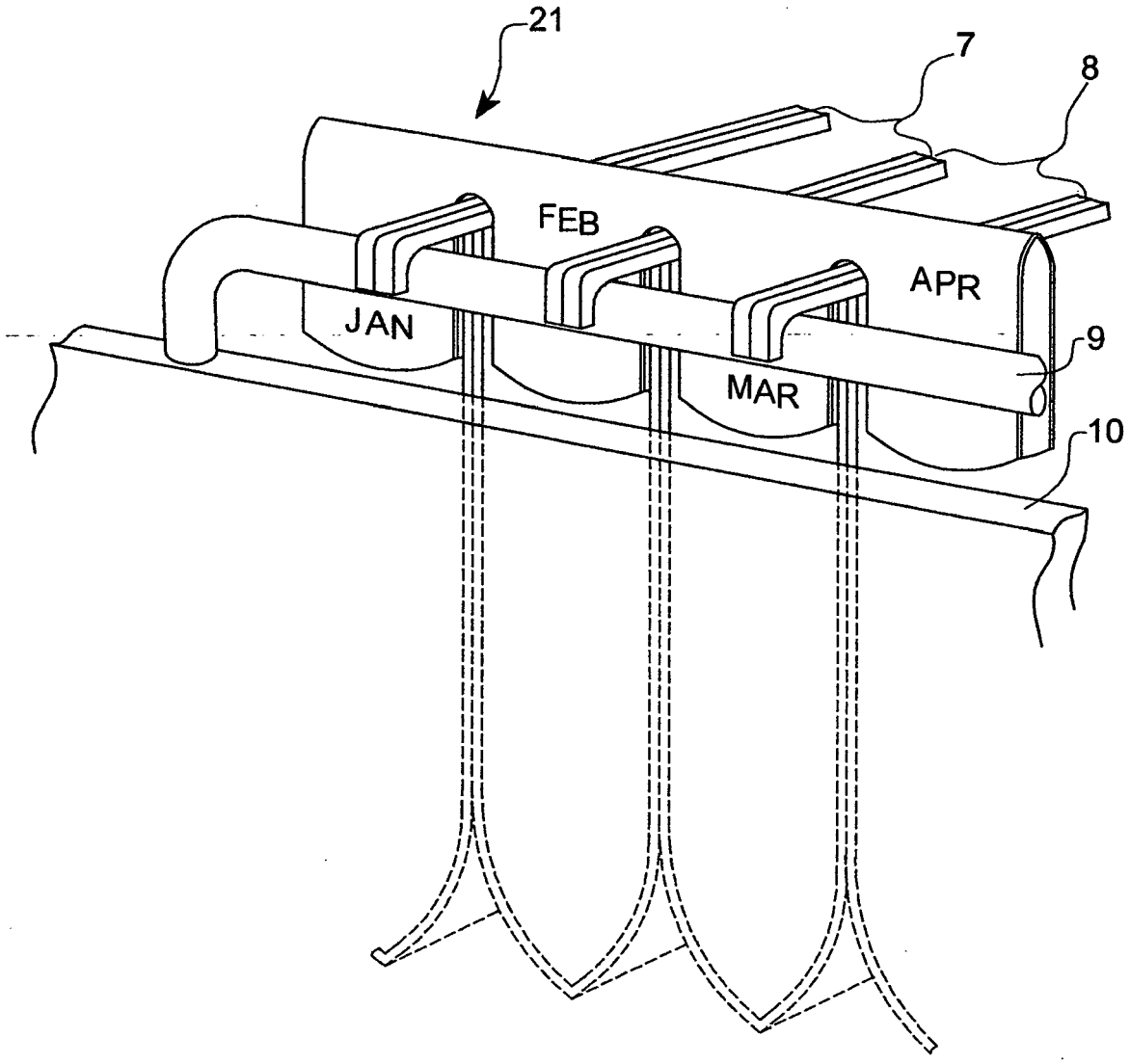
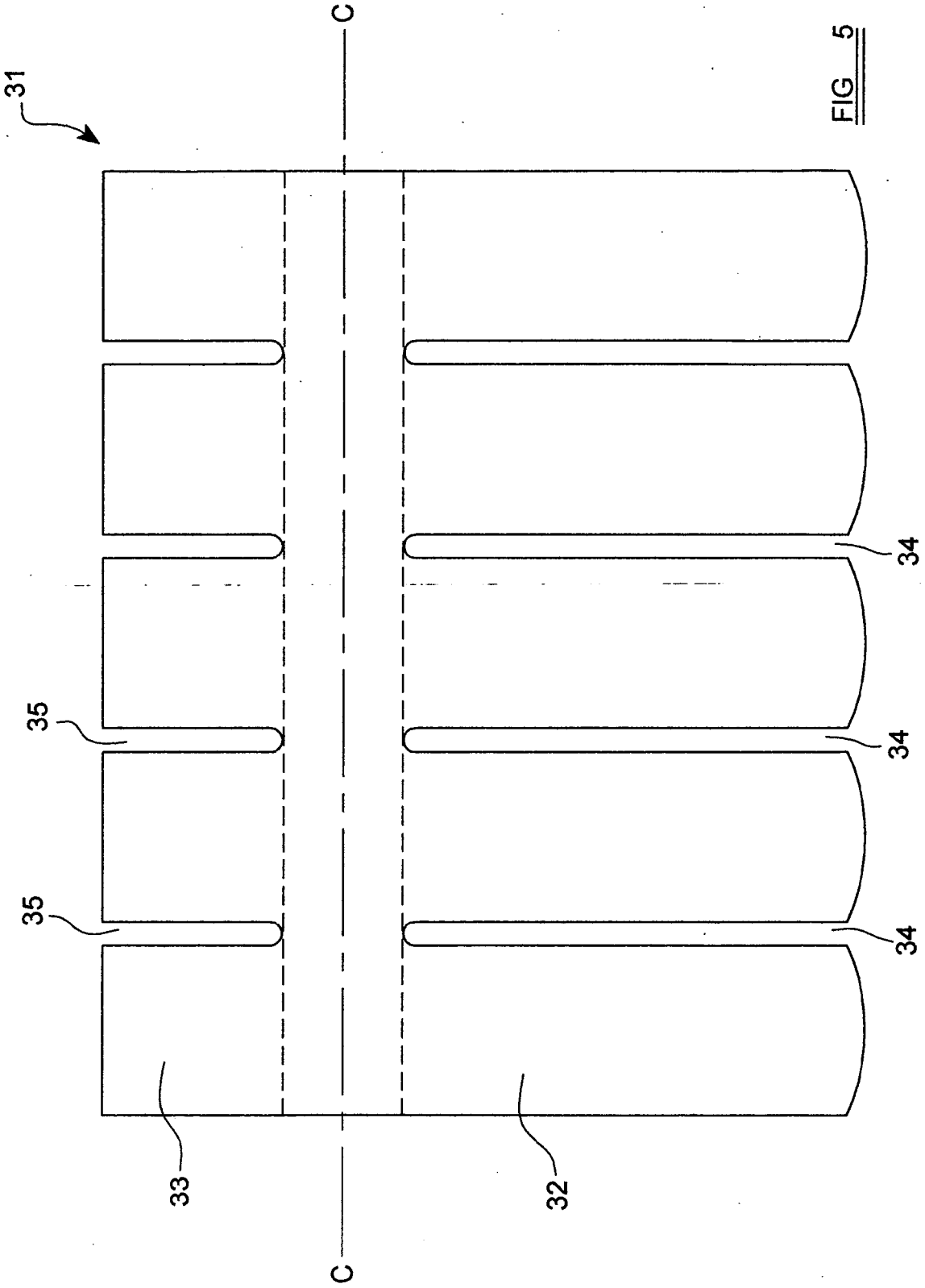


FIG 5



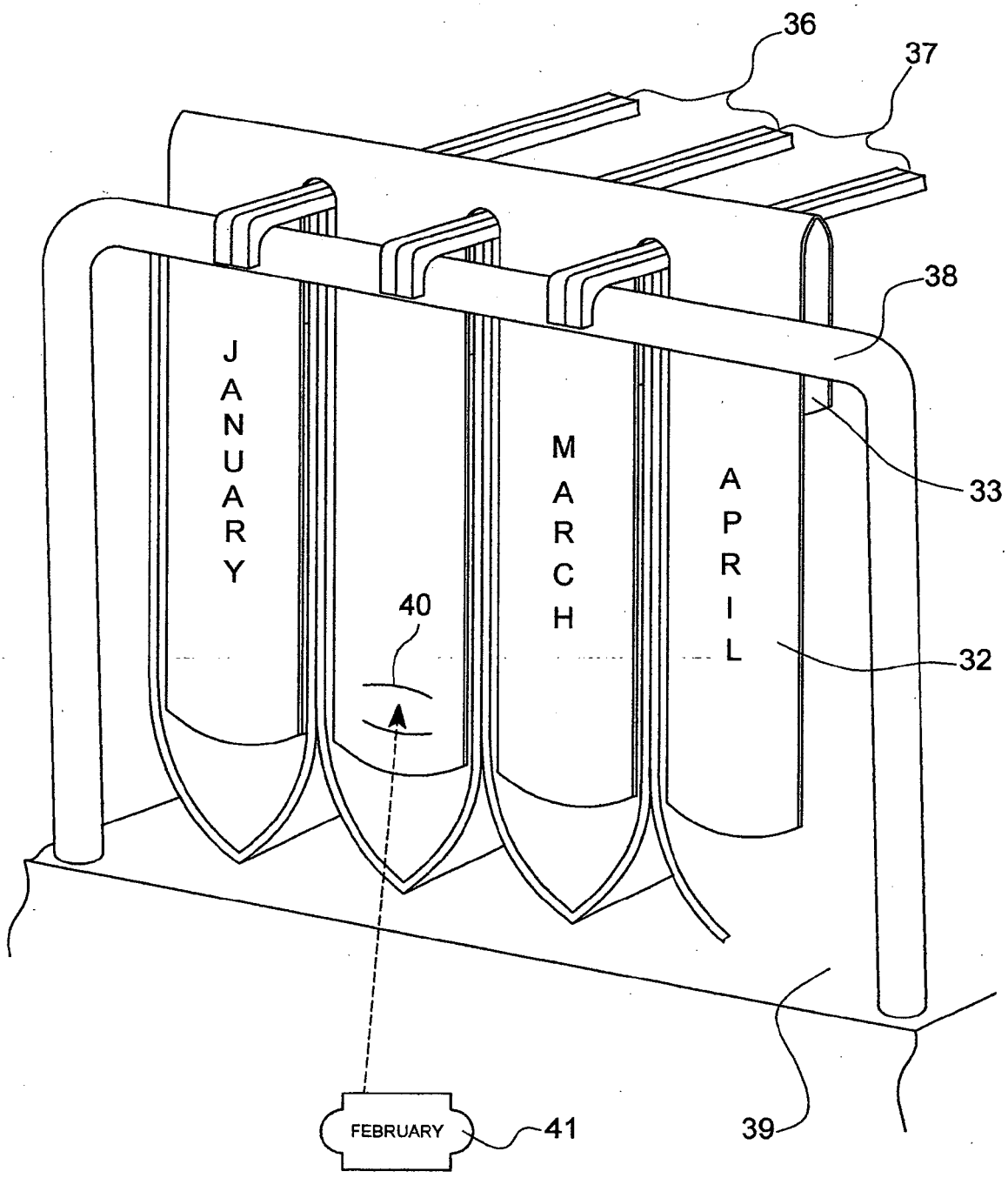


FIG 6

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 06 00 1239

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
X	US 5 165 534 A (KAUFMAN ET AL) 24 November 1992 (1992-11-24) * page 36, column 11, line 12, paragraph 2 - page 36, column 11, line 25, paragraph 3; figures Fig.3,9 * -----	1-7,9	INV. B42F15/00 B42F21/06
X	WO 98/31609 A (MARTIN, TIM, JR) 23 July 1998 (1998-07-23) * page 11, column 1, line 18, paragraph 4 - page 12, column 1, line 4, paragraph 1; figure 12 * -----	1-3,7	
A	GB 541 668 A (LIBRARY BUREAU LIMITED; ERNEST NORRELL WIMHURST) 5 December 1941 (1941-12-05) * the whole document * -----		
A	US 2 623 527 A (GUICHARD RAYMOND ARTHUR EUGENE) 30 December 1952 (1952-12-30) * the whole document * -----		

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (IPC)
A45C G11B B42F

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
Munich	1 June 2006	Kelliher, C

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP 06 00 1239

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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01-06-2006

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82