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(54) **Flexible liner and bag-in-box container systems**

(57) The present invention provides a flexible liner and bag-in-box container system comprising a collapsible container having a liner attached to the collapsible container, such that when the container is expanded from a collapsed state, the attached liner similarly expands. When the collapsible container is expanded, the liner may expand to substantially conform to the shape of the collapsible container. The liner may further comprise a

filler fitting for receiving contents for filling the liner. The filler fitting may comprise one or more annular rings adapted to secure the filler fitting of the liner to an opening in the collapsible container. The collapsible container may be made of corrugated fiberboard. The collapsible container may further include tape having two adhesive sides for securing the collapsible container in an expanded state.

SHOWS BAG WITH BOTTOM SQUARED OUT AND FITTING LOCKED IN PLACE

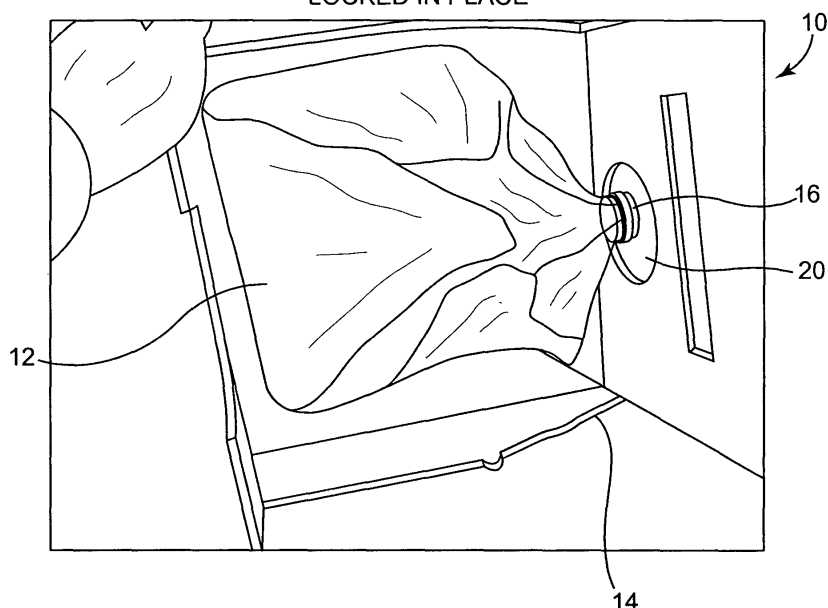


Fig. 5

Description

Cross-Reference to Related Applications

[0001] This application claims priority to U. S. Provisional Application No. 60/909,759 filed on April 3, 2007, the contents of which are incorporated in its entirety herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to flexible liners for use in containers such as those used in flexible intermediate bulk container ("FIBC") systems or bag-in-box container systems. More particularly, the present invention relates to systems and methods for a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system.

Background of the Invention

[0003] In recent years a number of industries have adopted the FIBC or bag-in-box concepts for storing and transporting liquid and particulate commodities in relatively large quantities. For example, the bag-in-box concept has been employed for transporting in bulk such diverse products as beverages, vegetable oils, salad dressings, syrups, soy sauce, peanut butter, pharmaceuticals, talc, motor oil, industrial chemicals, detergents in liquid or powder form, and toiletry products or ingredients, etc.

[0004] The FIBC concept includes a bulk container system comprising a flexible liner in a flexible or semi-flexible bag. In one embodiment, a FIBC bag is made of a woven material (e.g., woven polymer, TYVEX®, canvas, wire mesh or net). The flexible liner is typically chemically resistant and impermeable to water and air and serves as the container for a selected commodity. The FIBC bag serves as a protective container for the flexible liner and its contents. A FIBC bag is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,596,040 to LaFleur et al., which issued Jun 17, 1986, and is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0005] The bag-in-box concept comprises a flexible or foldable liner and a rigid or semi-rigid box as an outer container. The flexible liner is generally prepared by seal working plastic films or an integrated molding manufactured by blow-molding fused plastic into an integrated mold, etc. The flexible liner is typically chemically resistant and impermeable to water and air and serves as the container for a selected commodity. The box may be made of plywood or other materials, cardboard, fiberboard, metal, or plastic. The box serves as a protective container for the flexible liner and its contents. A box for a bag-in-box system is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,533,122 to Plunkett, which issued Mar. 18, 2003, and is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. A bag for use in a bag-in-box system is disclosed in US 2005-0220369 A1, entitled "Bag With Flap for Bag-In-

Box Container Systems," which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0006] In one embodiment, the liner may include at least a filler fitting near the top of the liner whereby the liner may be filled with, or drained of, its contents. The outer container usually comprises a cover or top panel that is removable to permit access to the liner and the filler fitting.

[0007] A financial consideration of the bag-in-box mode of shipment of materials in bulk is that the outer container can be a non-returnable or one-way container. For example, where the outer container is a box for a bag-in-box system and is generally made of a corrugated fiberboard or the like, the box can be discarded after use.

[0008] With respect to the bag-in-box concept as applied to bulk shipment or commodities, the plastic flexible liners have taken various forms. One common form is the so-called "pillow" type, which consists of at least two sheets of plastic film sealed together at their edges. Another common form is the six-sided flexible liners (e.g., liners that take the shape of a cube or rectangular parallelepiped when filled) made from a plurality of sheets of plastic film.

[0009] Regardless of the type of liner in the outer container, it can be difficult to completely fill or empty the liner. This is especially the case when the content of the liner is a viscous liquid. During the discharge of the liner's contents, the evacuated portion of the liner has a tendency to collapse due to a vacuum effect. Similarly, when the liner is being filled, the liner again tends to collapse because the contents pull the sides of the liner downward. In either case, as the liner collapses, folds are created that entrap the contents of the liner.

[0010] The flexible liner is often inferior at conforming to an interior shape of the outer container. Thus, when the flexible liner is positioned within the outer container, there is wasted or dead space between the flexible liner and the outer container. When dead space is formed between the flexible liner and the outer container, the flexible liner moves easily within the outer container, which may lead to breakage of the flexible liner during shipping. Similarly, when the flexible liner does not conform to the interior shape of the outer container, undesired folds or bends can occur in the flexible liner. When a part of the flexible liner is folded or bent in an undesired location, the contents will remain in the folded or bent portions, such that it is difficult to completely empty the contents from the flexible liner.

[0011] Furthermore, flexible liners are often not self-supporting. It can be difficult and inconvenient to handle the flexible liners at the same time the flexible liner is being filled or emptied.

[0012] Therefore, there is a need for a system and method of supporting a liner off an outer container used in a bag-in-box system, thereby decreasing the tendency of the liner to collapse, or fold over on itself, during filling or emptying of the liner contents. There is a further need for a system and method providing the ability to fill a liner

of a bag-in-box system to capacity. There is also a need for a system and method of combining or incorporating the liner with an outer container used in a bag-in-box system. There is a need for a system and method for a collapsible liner and collapsible bag-in-box outer container.

Brief Summary of the Invention

[0013] The present invention, in one embodiment, is a collapsible container having a liner attached to the collapsible container, such that when the container is expanded from a collapsed state, the attached liner similarly expands. The liner may be impermeable to water and air. The liner may be securely attached to the collapsible container with glue. When the collapsible container is expanded, the liner may expand to substantially conform to the shape of the collapsible container. In some embodiments, the liner is substantially rectangular when the collapsible container is expanded.

[0014] The liner may further comprise a filler fitting for receiving contents for filling the liner. The filler fitting may comprise one or more annular rings adapted to secure the filler fitting of the liner to an opening in the collapsible container.

[0015] The collapsible container, in some embodiments, may be made of corrugated fiberboard, or cardboard. The collapsible container may further include tape having two adhesive sides for securing the collapsible container in an expanded state. In a further embodiment, the double-sided tape may secure two overlapping portions of the collapsible container.

[0016] While multiple embodiments are disclosed, still other embodiments of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, which shows and describes illustrative embodiments of the invention. As will be realized, the invention is capable of modifications in various obvious aspects, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the drawings and detailed description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not restrictive.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0017] While the specification concludes with claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter that is regarded as forming the present invention, it is believed that the invention will be better understood from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying Figures, in which:

[0018] FIG. 1 is a top perspective view of a liner and collapsible bag-in-box container as shown in a fully expanded state in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 2 is a top perspective view of a collapsible bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 with a cover or cap attached to the bag-in-box container.

[0020] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a collapsed liner and bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1.

[0021] FIG. 4 is a bottom view of a liner and collapsible bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 in an expanded state.

[0022] FIG. 5 is top view of a liner and collapsible bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 with the bottom of the bag-in-box container squared out and with the filler fitting of the liner positioned in the filler opening of the bag-in-box container.

[0023] FIG. 6 is a side view of a collapsible bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 having double-sided tape for securing the bag-in-box container in an expanded position.

[0024] FIG. 7 is a top perspective view of a liner and collapsible bag-in-box container of the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 having double-sided tape for securing the top of the bag-in-box container in a closed position.

Detailed Description

[0025] The present invention is a novel and advantageous flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system. While the description set forth below may refer to a liner, it is to be recognized that the liner may be a liner or an FIBC. Generally, the present invention may have a flexible liner that is attached to a bag-in-box container. The flexible liner and the bag-in-box container may be stored, shipped, etc. together in a collapsed, or folded, state. When the bag-in-box container is expanded, the flexible liner may expand correspondingly.

[0026] Figure 1 illustrates one embodiment of a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 of the present invention in an expanded and filled state. The system 10 may include a flexible liner 12 and a bag-in-box container 14. When expanded, the bag-in-box container 14 may form the shape of a rectangle, cube, or any other suitable shape for carrying a flexible liner 12 for transporting liquid and particulate commodities, such as those previously described.

[0027] The flexible liner 12 may comprise of a flexible, heat-sealable packaging material in sheet form. For example, the packaging material may consist of polyethylene, polypropylene, or some other thermoplastic material, or be a laminate of two or more packaging materials bonded to one another. Each of the portions of the flexible liner 12 may comprise a single sheet of packaging material (i.e., single ply) or two or more sheets of packaging material (i.e., multiply). Where more than a single sheet of packaging material is used, the individual sheets may be of like or different material and may be secured to one another only at selected areas. Certain embodiments of flexible liners or bags for bag-in-box systems are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,788,121 to Sasaki et al., which issued Jun 17, 1998, and US 2006-0023973 A1, entitled "Flexible Liner for FIBC or Bag-In-Box Container Systems," which are each hereby incorporated by reference

in their entirety.

[0028] The flexible liner 12 may include a filler fitting 16 through which the flexible liner 12 may be filled or emptied. The filler fitting may further comprise a cap 18, which may preferably be liquid-tight, for sealing the filler fitting 16. The filler fitting 16 may be located at a top, or upper, portion of the flexible liner 12, such that it may be accessed through a top portion of the bag-in-box container 14.

[0029] A typical example of the bag-in-box container 14 may be comprised of corrugated fiberboard or like material. In other embodiments, the bag-in-box container 14 may be comprised of plywood, metal, plastic, or any other suitable material or combination thereof. In one embodiment, a wall surface of the bag-in-box container may contain a filler opening 20 for accessing the filler fitting 16 of the flexible liner 12. Filler opening 20 may be any shape suitable for providing access to the flexible liner 12. In one embodiment, filler opening 20 may generally be in the shape of a circle. In a further embodiment, the filler opening 20 may comprise a slot, recess, indent, hole, or other suitable means 22 for positioning the filler fitting 16 of the flexible liner 12 in a temporary, locked position, as illustrated in Figure 1. In such an embodiment, the filler fitting 16 may comprise one or more protrusions or annular rings extending outward from the filler fitting for securing the filler fitting 16 in the filler opening slot 22. In the locked position, the filler fitting 16 may be easier to handle while filling the flexible liner 12 than would be without a means for securing the filler fitting 16 to the bag-in-box container 14 while filling.

[0030] Figure 2 illustrates an embodiment of a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 in an expanded and filled state and ready for shipping. In such a state, the filler fitting 16 may be removed from the filler opening slot 22 and moved to a position entirely within the bag-in-box container 14. In one embodiment, the bag-in-box container 14 may include a removable cover 24 for the filler opening 20. In one embodiment, the removable cover 24 is made of plastic or suitable material. In other embodiments, the removable cover 24 is made of metal, fiberboard or like material, fabric, paper, or any other suitable material or combination of materials. In a further embodiment, the removable cover 24 is shaped and adapted to fit within filler opening 20 and filler opening slot 22. In other embodiments, the removable cover 24 is adapted to fit over the filler opening 20, such that the removable cover 24 partially or entirely covers the filler opening 20 and filler opening slot 22.

[0031] In one embodiment, the dimensions or sizes of the collapsible bag-in-box container may be determined in consideration of the International Standard of a pallet. In a further embodiment, the collapsible bag-in-box container 14 may have any desired length, width, and height. For example, a length of from about 8 to 15 inches or from about 10 to 13 inches, a width of from about 8 to 15 inches or from about 10 to 13 inches, and a height from about 7 to 13 inches or from about 9 to 11 inches may

be used. In some embodiments, the bag-in-box container 14 may be rectangular-shaped. In a further embodiment, the bag-in-box container 14 may be cube-shaped. In yet other embodiments, the shape and dimensions or sizes of the collapsible bag-in-box container 14 may be pillow-shaped, or any other suitable shape or size. In some embodiments, the collapsible bag-in-box container 14 may be dimensioned and/or shaped to hold a flexible liner 12 designed to hold from about 1 to 5 gallons of contents therein.

[0032] Figure 3 illustrates an embodiment of a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 in a collapsed or folded state. In a collapsed state, the flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 may be easy to store, ship, etc.

[0033] Figure 4 illustrates a bottom view of an embodiment of a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 in an expanded state with the bottom flaps of the bag-in-box container 14 open. As can be seen from Figure 4, as the bag-in-box container 14 is expanded, the flexible liner 12 may expand with the bag-in-box. Thus, the flexible liner 12 may substantially conform to the shape of the expanded bag-in-box container 14. The flexible liner 12 may be attached to the bag-in-box container 14 using any suitable method for securely attaching the flexible liner 12 to the bag-in-box container 14, such as by gluing, taping, tying, mechanically securing, notching, etc. In one embodiment, the flexible liner 12 may be glued to the bag-in-box container 14. In further embodiments, the flexible liner 12 may be glued to the bag-in-box container 14 only at selected areas. For example, in one embodiment, the sides of the flexible liner 12 may be securely attached, or glued, to the sides of the bag-in-box container 14, leaving top and bottom flaps of the bag-in-box container 14 free to move in positions away from the flexible liner 12, such as when the flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 is in a collapsed or folded state. In yet other embodiments, the corners of the flexible liner 12 may be securely attached, or glued, to the corners of the bag-in-box container 14. In any case, the flexible liner 12 may be securely attached to the bag-in-box container 14 in a manner that allows the flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 to be easily positioned in a collapsed or folded state.

[0034] Figure 5 illustrates a top view of one embodiment of a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10, wherein the flexible liner 12 is expanded to conform to the shape of the bag-in-box container 14. As can be seen from Figure 5, not all portions of the flexible liner 12 need be securely attached to the bag-in-box container 14. In some embodiments, the flexible liner 12 is not securely attached to the bag-in-box container 14 at, or near, the top portion(s) of the flexible liner 12, such that the filler fitting 16 may be freely moved throughout a range of motion that allows easy handling, filling, etc. of the flexible liner 12.

[0035] As can be seen from Figures 6 and 7, a bag-in-

box container 14 for a flexible liner and collapsible bag-in-box container system 10 of the present invention may further include means for securely closing the bag-in-box container 14 or otherwise securing the bag-in-box container 14 in an expanded state. In one embodiment, the means for closing or securing the bag-in-box container 14 in an expanded state includes double-sided tape 26. The double-sided tape 26 may be located at any suitable location for securing two or more portions of the bag-in-box container 14 together. In other embodiments, the means for closing or securing the bag-in-box container 14 in an expanded state may include any suitable means now known or hereafter created for closing or securing the bag-in-box container in an expanded, ready-for-shipping state as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. For example, the means for closing or securing may include, gluing, tacking, notching, etc. As can be seen in Figure 7, double-sided tape 26 may be used for securing two top portions of a bag-in-box container 14 together, thereby enclosing the flexible liner 12 in the bag-in-box container 14. As previously mentioned, any suitable means may be used for securing two top portions of a bag-in-box container 14 together.

[0036] Although the present invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments, persons skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

Claims

1. A collapsible container comprising:

a liner attached to the collapsible container such that the liner expands when the collapsible container is expanded.

2. The collapsible container of claim 1, wherein the liner further comprises a filler fitting for receiving contents for filling the liner.

3. The collapsible container of claim 2, further comprising a filler opening for receiving the filler fitting of the liner.

4. The collapsible container of claim 3, further comprising a removable cover component adapted to fit in the filler opening.

5. The collapsible container of claim 3, wherein the filler opening comprises a slot adapted to receive the filler fitting of the liner.

6. The collapsible container of claim 5, wherein the filler fitting of the liner further comprises an annular ring extending away from the filler fitting, the annular ring adapted to secure the filler fitting in the slot of the

filler opening.

7. The collapsible container of claim 1, further comprising at least one attachment feature adapted to facilitate the closure of the collapsible container in an expanded state.

8. The collapsible container of claim 7, wherein the at least one attachment feature is a piece of tape affixed to a first portion of two overlapping portions of the collapsible container.

9. The collapsible container of claim 8, wherein the tape comprises two adhesive sides and facilitates the attachment of a second portion of the two overlapping portions of the collapsible container to the first portion.

10. The collapsible container of claim 1, wherein the liner is impermeable to water and air.

11. The collapsible container of claim 1, wherein the liner substantially conforms to the shape of the collapsible container when the collapsible container is expanded.

12. The collapsible container of claim 11, wherein the liner is substantially rectangular when the collapsible container is expanded.

13. The collapsible container of claim 1, wherein the collapsible container is made of a corrugated fiberboard.

14. The collapsible container of claim 1, wherein the liner is securely attached to the collapsible container.

15. The collapsible container of claim 14, wherein the liner is securely attached to the collapsible container with glue.

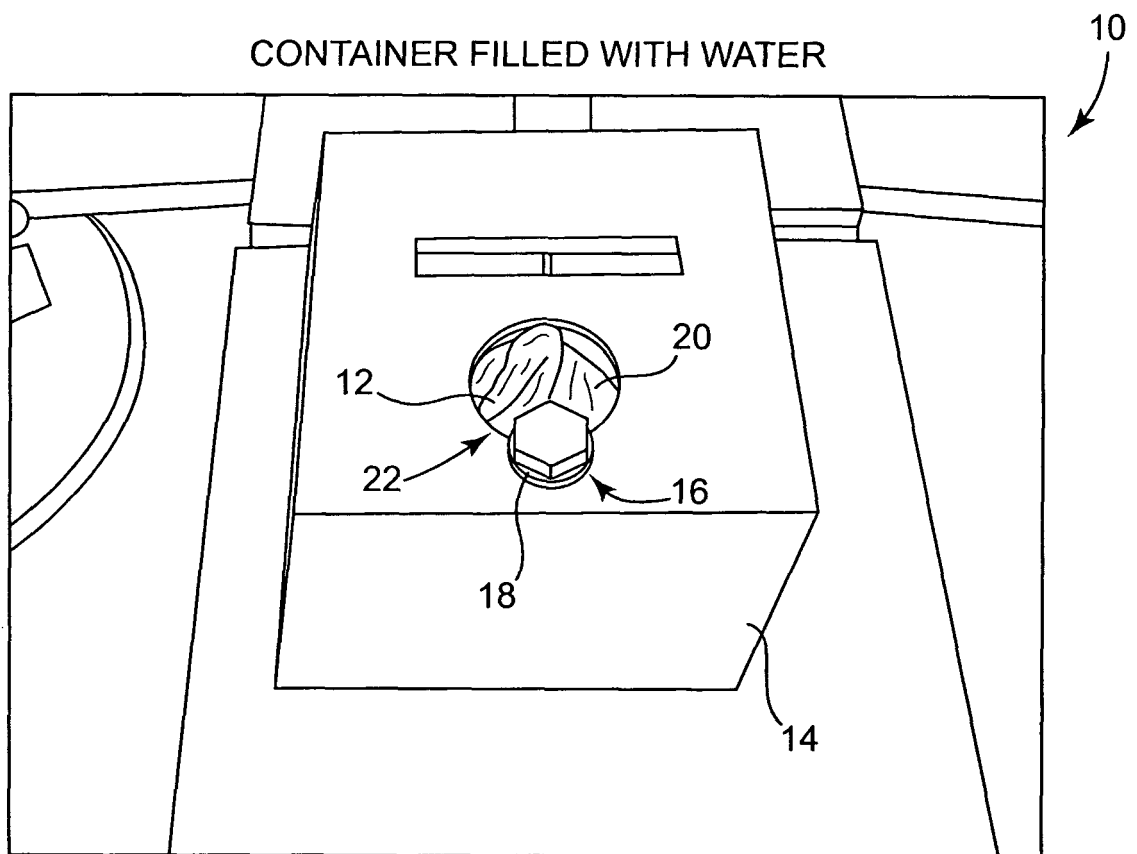


Fig. 1

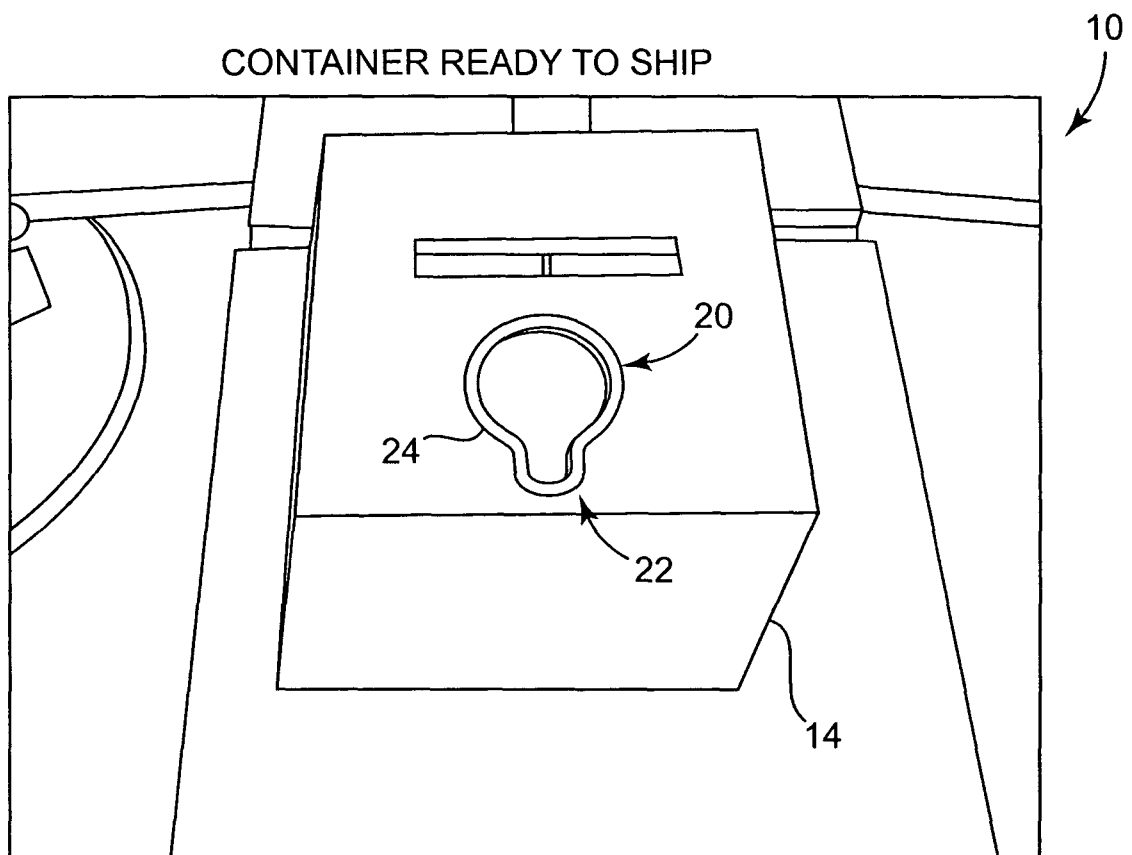


Fig. 2

STORES AND SHIPS FLAT

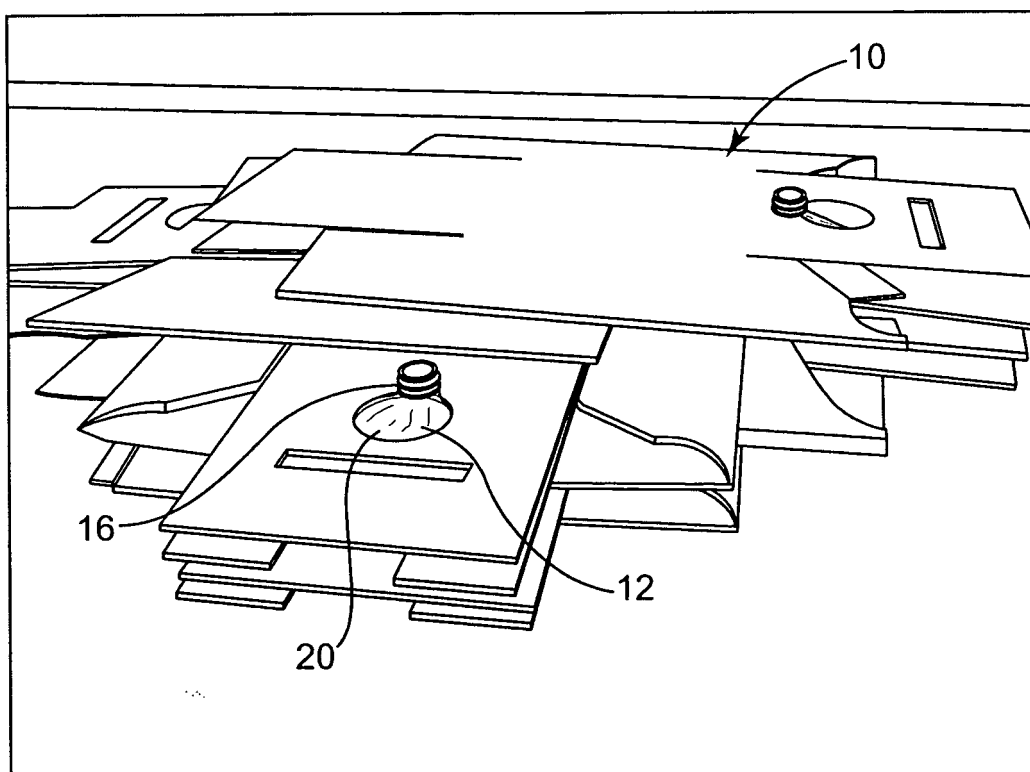


Fig. 3

BAG OPENS WHEN BOX IS OPENED

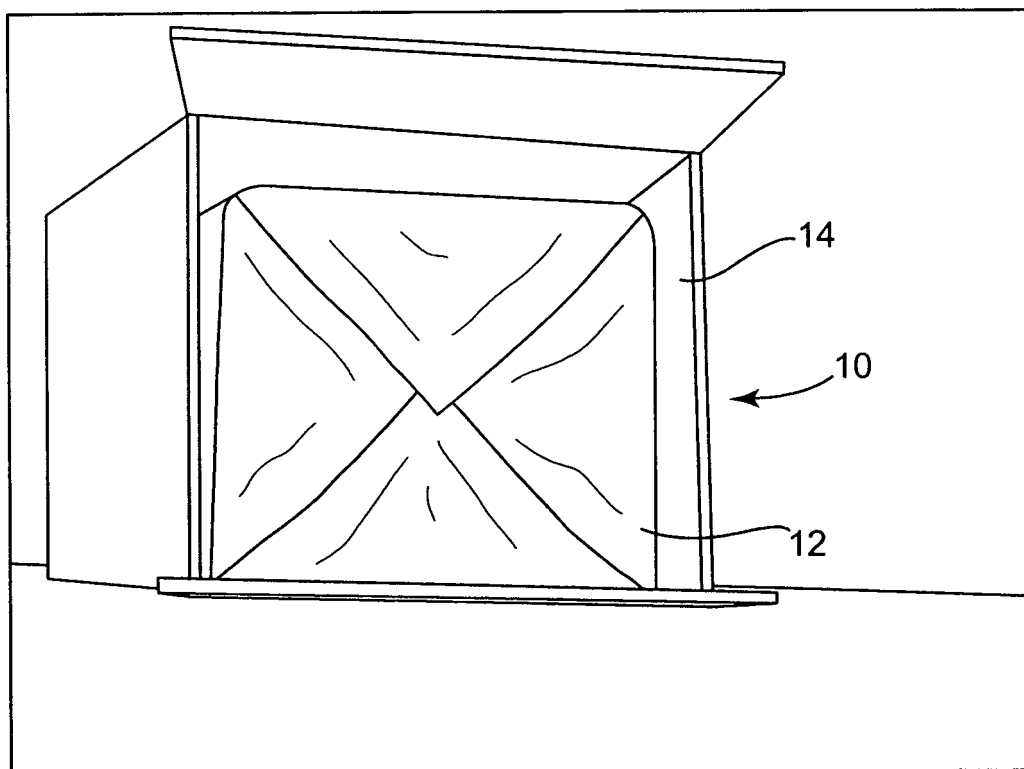


Fig. 4

SHOWS BAG WITH BOTTOM SQUARED OUT AND FITTING
LOCKED IN PLACE

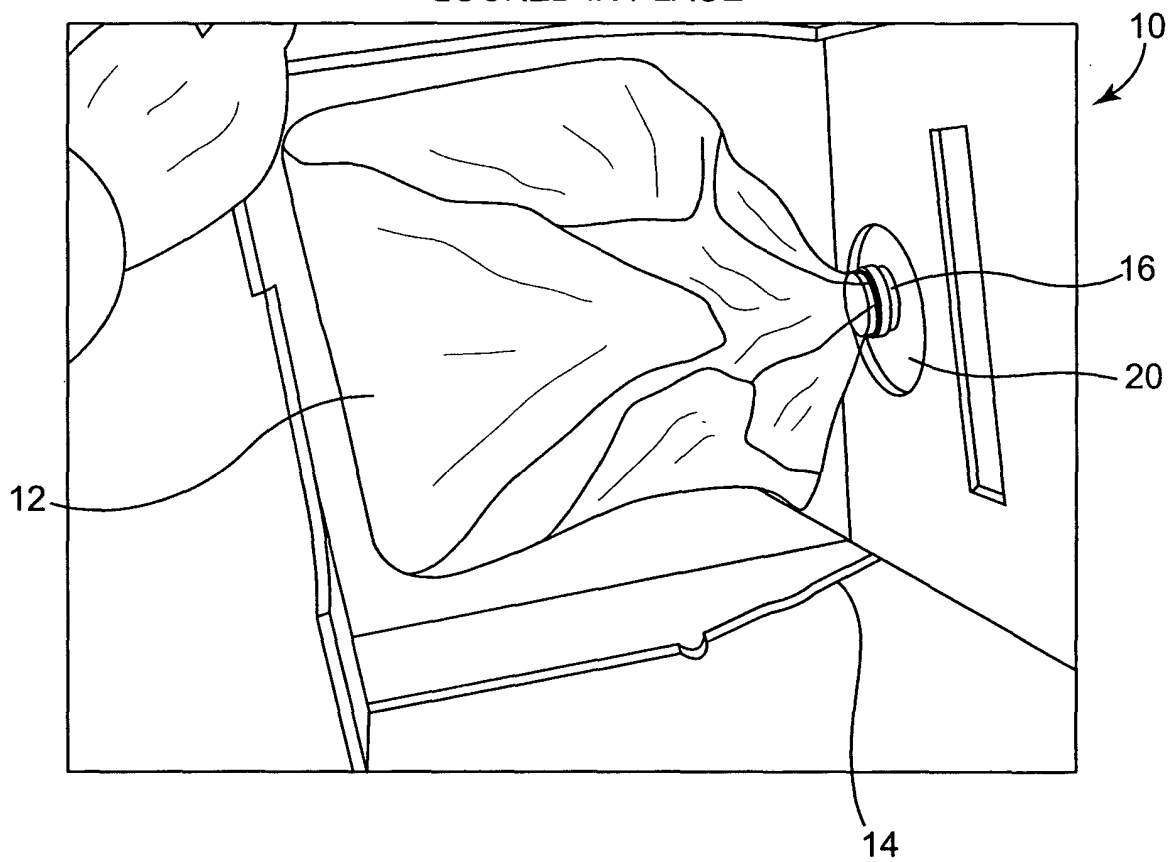


Fig. 5

DOUBLE SIDED TAPE FOR CLOSING BOX

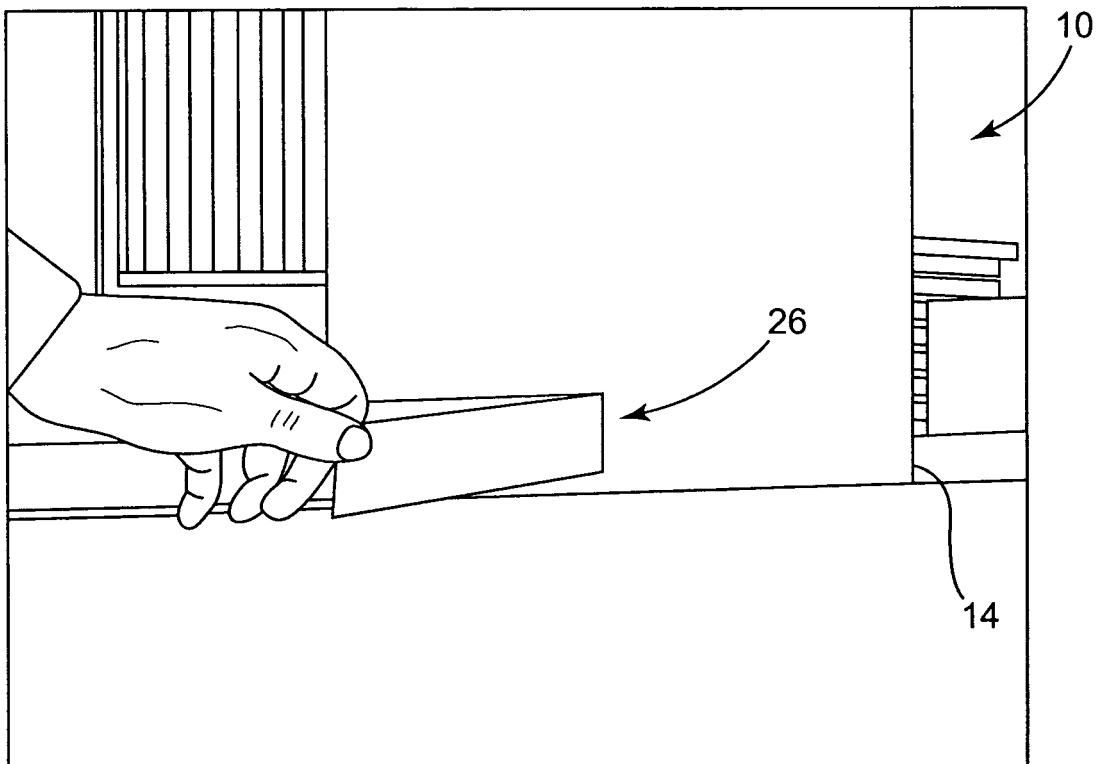


Fig. 6

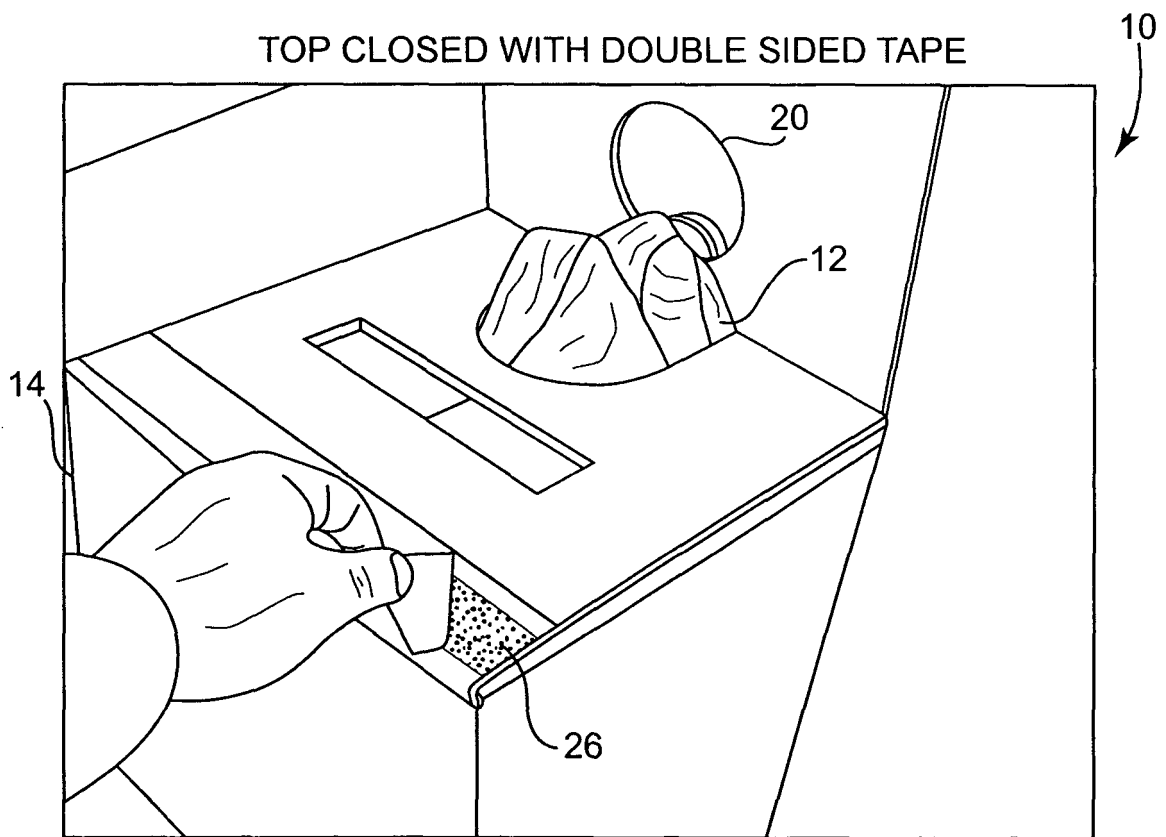


Fig. 7

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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