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(54) **PRODUCT MANAGEMENT DISPLAY SYSTEM WITH TRACKLESS PUSHER MECHANISM**

PRODUKTVERWALTUNGSANZEIGESYSTEM MIT SCHIENENLOSEM SCHIEBEMECHANISMUS

**SYSTÈME POUR GÉRER LA PRÉSENTATION DE PRODUITS DOTÉ D'UN MÉCANISME
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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to a shelf assembly for use in merchandising product and more particularly to a shelf assembly having improved mechanisms for displaying and pushing product on the shelves.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] It is known that retail and wholesale stores, such as convenience stores, drug stores, grocery stores, discount stores, and the like, require a large amount of shelving both to store product and to display the product to consumers. In displaying product, it is desirable for the product on the shelves to be situated toward the front of the shelf so that the product is visible and accessible to consumers. In the case of coolers or refrigerators that are used to store and display such products as soft drinks, energy drinks, bottled water, and other bottled or canned beverages, it is desirable for these products to also be situated toward the front of the shelf and visible and accessible to the consumers.

[0003] To accomplish this placement of product, known systems may include inclined trays or floors that through gravity will cause the product to move toward the front of the shelf. Many of these systems include floors or shelves made of a plastic material such as polypropylene that due its low coefficient of friction permit the product to easily slide along the inclined floor or surface. However, over time, these surfaces can become obstructed with debris or sticky substances that inhibit the product from properly sliding, sometimes causing several products to tip over thus blocking additional product from moving to the front of the shelf.

[0004] Other systems include the use of a pusher system to push the product toward the front of the shelf as the product at the front of the shelf is removed. The known pusher systems are typically mounted to a track and include a pusher paddle and a coiled spring to urge the product forward. Occasionally, as the system is used, and over time, the track becomes obstructed with dirt or sticky materials that hinder the proper operation of the pusher system in the track. In addition, depending on the size, shape and weight of the product to be merchandised, the known pusher paddles may occasionally tip or bend backwards, thereby causing a binding of the pusher mechanism in the track. In those situations, the pusher mechanism may not properly push product toward the front of the shelf.

[0005] Certain examples discussed herein are directed at providing a trackless pusher system that works with gravity-fed merchandise systems (*i.e.*, inclined shelves or trays) and non-gravity-fed merchandise systems.

[0006] United States Patent Publication No. US 2007/272634 A1 discloses a merchandising system that

includes a platform movably coupled to a base member and that may include an advancement mechanism for automatically advancing multiple rows and/or stacks of products within a well display unit. United States Patent No. 7478731 discloses an assembly for securing to a shelf having products disposed thereon and connection points spaced apart by a fixed distance that includes an adjustable product display partition and a biasing device for biasing a row of products toward a front of the shelf.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention provides a pusher mechanism as claimed in claim 1 and a product management display system as claimed in claim 6.

[0008] A product management display system for merchandising product on a tray, which uses a trackless pusher mechanism that travels along a surface on which product is placed, is disclosed. The trackless system overcomes the known problems with the use of tracks to hold and guide the known pusher mechanisms.

[0009] The pusher mechanism includes a pusher surface and a pusher floor that extends forward of the pusher paddle. A coiled spring is operatively connected to the pusher surface and extend across the pusher floor of the pusher mechanism and to the front of the tray.

[0010] The merchandising of product may be on horizontal or non-inclined shelves or surfaces, or with gravity-fed systems, or systems that use gravity as a mechanism to urge product toward the front of the shelf.

[0011] The pusher surface may define a concave pushing surface for pushing cylindrical products, such as soft drink bottles or cans. Alternatively, the pusher surface may define a flat pushing surface that may further include at its upper edge a curved rib or similar structure that can also be used to push cylindrical products.

[0012] The trackless pusher system may be retrofitted into an existing shelf assembly. This allows for the placement of the trackless pusher system in an existing shelving system as a low cost alternative to purchasing the entire trackless pusher assembly.

[0013] A product management display system that can be arranged in a stackable arrangement is disclosed. The assembly can be provided with a first tray and a second tray each having a first wall and a second wall. The first and second trays are each adapted to receive a pusher mechanism, and a retainer mechanism. First and second spacers are mounted to the first and second trays for stacking the first and second trays on top of one another. The first and second spacer can be provided with a plurality of detents, and the first tray and the second tray can each be provided with a plurality of correspondingly shaped sockets for receiving the plurality of detents.

[0014] A pusher mechanism for a product management display system having a surface is disclosed that includes a pusher surface, a product retainer extending parallel to the pusher surface, a pusher floor extending forwardly from the pusher surface, the pusher floor con-

figured to permit at least one product to sit upon the pusher floor, the pusher floor positionable on and movable across at least a portion of the surface of the display system, and a coiled spring. The pusher mechanism is configured to sit on top of and not extend below the surface of the display system, is positionable on a surface of the display system, and is mounted to and held onto the display system by the coiled spring. The coiled spring includes a coiled end which is positioned behind the pusher surface. The pusher floor is substantially parallel to the surface of the display system. The pusher surface and the product retainer extend upwardly from the pusher floor, the product retainer being spaced apart from the pusher surface such that the pusher surface, the product retainer and the pusher floor define a space for receiving at least one product therein. The product can be a bottle and the bottle can be configured to fit between the pusher surface and the product retainer. Only one bottle can be permitted to fit between the pusher surface and the product retainer. The pusher surface can be concave shaped. The pusher floor defines channel for receiving a coiled spring. The coiled spring is extendable across at least a portion of the pusher floor and is positioned behind and operatively connected to the pusher surface. The pusher mechanism can be mounted to the surface of the display system only by the coiled spring.

[0015] Another product management display system is disclosed that may include a tray defining a surface configured to hold a row of products, a first product retainer configured to prevent product from falling off of the tray, a pusher mechanism having a pusher surface, a second product retainer extending parallel to the pusher surface. The pusher mechanism can be configured to slide across at least a portion of the surface of the tray and may have a coiled spring with a coiled end positioned behind the pusher surface and a front end, and at least one divider for maintaining the products in a row. The pusher mechanism can be configured to sit on top of and not extend below the surface of the tray. The pusher mechanism can be mounted to the surface of the display system by the coiled spring. The pusher surface and the second product retainer can be configured to extend upwardly from the pusher floor, and the product retainer can be spaced apart from the pusher surface for receiving at least one product therein. The pusher surface and the second product retainer can define a space that can be configured to receive a last one of the row products. In one example, the product is a bottle, and the pusher surface and the second retainer are configured to receive only one bottle, and the second product retainer can be configured to hold the last one of the plurality of products.

[0016] The pusher surface and the second product retainer can define a space that is configured to receive a product. The product can be a bottle and the space can be configured to receive only one bottle. The pusher mechanism can be mounted to the surface of the display system only by the coiled spring. The product management display system can further include a first divider

and a second divider, and the first product retainer and the second product retainer can be configured to extend between the first divider and the second divider. At least a portion of the coiled spring can be configured to extend across at least a portion of the tray surface to a front portion of the tray. The surface of the display system can be horizontal. The first product retainer and the second product retainer can be transparent.

[0017] Another product management display system is disclosed that may include a tray defining a surface, a first product retainer configured to prevent product from falling off of the tray, and a pusher mechanism. The pusher mechanism can include a pusher surface, a second product retainer, and a pusher floor extending forwardly from the pusher surface. The pusher floor can be configured to permit at least one product to sit upon the pusher floor between the pusher surface and the second product retainer, and the pusher floor can be positionable on and movable across the surface of the display system. The pusher mechanism can be configured to sit on top of and not extend below the surface of the display system, and can be configured to be mounted to and held onto the display system by the coiled spring and can be mounted to and held onto the display system only by the coiled spring. The second product retainer can be configured to hold the last one of the plurality of products. The pusher surface can be concave shaped. The pusher floor can define a plurality of apertures. The pusher floor and the second product retainer can be configured to hold a single bottle.

[0018] The present invention provides a pusher mechanism as defined in claim 1. Preferred features of the invention are set out in the dependent claims.

[0019] Figures 1-52 show illustrative examples of another pusher mechanism, which do not form part of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020]

Figure 1 depicts an isometric exploded view of an example of a product management display system.

Figure 2 depicts an isometric view of an example pusher mechanism mounted to an example tray or product channel.

Figure 3 depicts another isometric view of the system of Figure 2 with product placed in the system.

Figure 4 depicts another isometric view of the system of Figure 2 with multiple product placed in the system.

Figure 5 depicts an isometric rear view of the system of Figure 4.

Figure 6 depicts an alternative example of a tray or product channel.

Figure 7 depicts an example of a tip for an end of a coiled spring that may be used with the product management display system.

Figure 8 depicts the example tip of Figure 7 being mounted to a surface of a tray or product channel.

Figure 9 depicts the example tip of Figure 7 being mounted to an end of a coiled spring.

Figure 10 depicts the example tip of Figure 7 mounted to an end of a coiled spring.

Figure 11 depicts an isometric view of an alternative example of a product management display system.

Figure 12 depicts another isometric view of the system of Figure 11.

Figure 13 depicts a front view of the system of Figure 11.

Figure 14 depicts a top view of the system of Figure 11.

Figure 15 depicts a back view of the system of Figure 11.

Figure 16 depicts an isometric view of an adaptor.

Figure 17 depicts a front view of the adaptor of Figure 16.

Figure 18 depicts an example installation of the adaptor.

Figure 19 depicts an isometric view of an installed adaptor.

Figure 20 depicts a front view of an installed adaptor.

Figure 21 depicts an isometric view of an alternative example of a product management display system.

Figure 22 depicts an isometric bottom view of an example of a mounting member that may be used to mount the end of the coiled spring to the floor of the display system.

Figure 23 depicts an isometric top view of the example mounting member of Figure 22.

Figure 24 depicts the example mounting member of Figure 22 mounted to the end of the coiled spring with the coiled spring mounted to an example pusher

paddle.

Figure 25 depicts another view of the example mounting member of Figure 22 mounted to the end of the coiled spring with the coiled spring mounted to an example pusher paddle.

Figure 26 depicts the example mounting member of Figure 22 with attached coiled spring being mounted to the floor of the system.

Figure 27 depicts the example mounting member of Figure 22 installed on the floor of the system.

Figure 28 depicts an isometric view of an alternative example of a product management display system.

Figure 29 depicts a close-up isometric view of the tray of the example of Figure 28.

Figure 29A depicts a cross-sectional view of the example of Figure 28 illustrating a first securing method.

Figure 29B depicts a cross-sectional view of the example of Figure 28 illustrating a second securing method.

Figure 30 depicts a close-up isometric view of the example of Figure 28 illustrating the rivet attaching the spring to the tray.

Figure 31 depicts an isometric view of the example of Figure 28 being assembled in a preexisting wire shelf.

Figure 32 depicts an isometric view of the example of Figure 28 assembled in a preexisting wire shelf.

Figure 33 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 34 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 35 depicts an isometric view of an example of an adapter.

Figure 36 depicts an isometric view of an example of a retainer.

Figure 37 depicts a side view of an example of a display system.

Figure 38 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 39 depicts an isometric view of an example

of a display system.

Figure 40 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 41A depicts a sectional side view of an example of a divider.

Figure 41B depicts a front view of an example of a display system.

Figure 41C depicts a close-up view of a section of Figure 41B.

Figure 41D depicts a front view of an example of a divider.

Figure 42 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 43 depicts an isometric view of an example of a display system.

Figure 44 depicts an isometric view of an example of a product management display system.

Figure 45 depicts another isometric view of an example of a product management display system with product in the system.

Figure 46 depicts a top view of another example of a product management display system with product in the system.

Figure 47 depicts an isometric-rear view of an example of a product management display system with product in the system.

Figure 48 depicts an isometric view of an example of a pusher mechanism mounted to a divider.

Figure 49 depicts another isometric view of a divider and pusher mechanism being assembled to a product management display system.

Figure 50 depicts an isometric view of yet another example of a product management display system.

Figure 51 depicts another isometric view of the example of a product management display system of Figure 50 without product.

Figure 52 depicts an exploded isometric view of the example of a product management display system of Figure 50.

Figures 53-55 depict an embodiment of a product management display system according to the

present invention.

[0021] Before embodiments of the invention are explained in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the drawings but by the scope of the appended claims. The invention is capable of other embodiments and of being practiced or being carried out in various ways falling within the scope of the appended claims. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology used herein are for the purpose of description and the use of "including" and "comprising" and variations thereof is meant to encompass at least the items listed thereafter. Further, the use of the term "mount," "mounted" or "mounting" is meant to broadly include any technique or method of mounting, attaching, joining or coupling one part to another, whether directly or indirectly.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] The invention may be embodied in various forms. Referring to the Figures wherein like numerals indicate like elements, there is depicted in Figure 1 an isometric exploded view of an example merchandise system 10 that includes a product dispensing tray 12 in which is mounted an example trackless pusher mechanism 14. As described in more detail below, the pusher mechanism 14 will fit in the tray 12 and will slide along the surface of the tray without the use of tracks, rails, or guides typically used to hold a conventional pusher mechanism to the tray or floor of the tray. The pusher mechanism defines a pusher paddle and a pusher floor that extends forward of the pusher paddle. A coiled spring may extend across the pusher floor and operatively connect to the tray at a forward position on the tray. In one example, product to be merchandised may be placed in the tray in front of the pusher paddle and may sit on the pusher floor as well as the coiled spring. With this configuration, the weight of the product will prevent the pusher paddle from tipping to ensure proper pushing of the product. In addition, the problems associated with debris or sticky materials hindering the effectiveness of known pusher systems that use tracks, rails or guides have been eliminated. Other features are set forth in more detail below.

[0023] The example tray 12 may define a surface 16 and one or more dividing panels or dividers 18 to separate the tray into numerous rows for placement of product. In an alternative example, the tray 12 may be a shelf or any other surface on which products may be placed for merchandising. The surface 16 may be a solid surface or a surface defining a plurality of spaced-apart apertures 20 separated by a plurality of support ribs 22. The apertures 20 and ribs 22 provide a surface that permits the slidable movement of product placed on this surface and also permits liquids and dirt to pass through the apertures 20 so that they do not collect on the surface 16. The surface

16 may be made of any suitable material that permits the slidable movement of product on the surface 16. Other surface or floor configurations are known and may be used.

[0024] As depicted in Figures 9 and 10, the surface 16 may define a rounded end portion 24 that includes a notch or cut-out portion 26. The end portion 24 may be rounded to match the shape of the product that is placed on the tray. For example, the depicted end portion 24 is rounded or defines a semi-circular shape to match the contour of a bottle or can that may be placed in the tray and on the end portion 24. Other shapes of the end portion may be used depending on the product to be merchandised.

[0025] The notch 26 may be used to receive and mount an end 29 of a coiled spring 30 or similar biasing element. The notch 26 may define opposing angled edge surfaces 32 that are joined by edge 34. The edge 34 is preferably centered across the width of the product row formed in the tray 12 and extends perpendicular to the length of the tray. This configuration will center the coiled spring 30 relative to the tray 12 and will permit the spring to extend in a substantially parallel manner relative to the length of the tray. In other words, the depicted edge 34 of the notch 26 will permit the spring 30 to extend along the length of the tray 12 at or near the center of the product row formed by the tray. One skilled in the art will appreciate that the location and configuration of the notch may vary depending on the desired placement of the spring.

[0026] The coiled spring 30 may define an end 29 that is configured to be placed across the notch 26 and onto the edge 34. In one example, the end 29 of the coiled spring may be V-shaped and function as a hook such that the end 29 will wrap around the edge 34 with a portion of the end 29 of the coiled spring extending beneath the end portion 24 of the surface 16. This configuration permits an easy installation of the coiled spring onto the tray.

[0027] In another example, and referring to Figure 7, a spring tip 60 may be added to the end 29 of the spring 30 to assist with the mounting of the spring to the system. The spring tip 60 may define numerous shapes and configurations depending on the configuration of the tray and the surface on which the spring end needs to attach. The spring tip 60 may be permanently attached to the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 or it may be detachable to permit the interchange or replacement of the spring tip 60. The spring tip 60 may be made of plastic and may define one or more apertures. Aperture 61 may be used to receive the end 29 of the coiled spring 30. A second aperture 63 may be used to receive a mating tongue or mounting member 65 extending from the surface 16 of the tray 12, as discussed below. With this configuration, the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 may be operatively connected to the tray 12.

[0028] In another example, the end 29 of the coiled spring may snap-fit into an aperture formed in the surface 16, or may be otherwise inserted and secured to an aperture or opening in the tray, thereby securing the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 in position.

[0029] Referring back to Figure 1, dividers 18 may also be used to separate product into rows. The dividers 18 extend substantially upwardly from the surface 16 and as illustrated in Figure 1, may be positioned on opposing sides of the surface 16. Alternatively, the dividers 18 may be positioned at any desired position on the tray 12 or to the surface 16. The dividers 18 may be formed as a unitary structure with the surface 16, or the dividers 18 may be detachable to provide added flexibility with the system. The dividers may be attached to a front or back rail depending on the system. The dividers 18 may define numerous configurations and may extend upwardly any desired distance to provide the desired height of the dividers between the rows of product to be merchandised. This height may be adjustable by adding divider extenders or the like.

[0030] Located at the front of the tray 12 and extending between the dividers 18 may be one or more product-retaining members 44. The product-retaining members 44 serve as a front retaining wall or bar to hold the product in the tray 12 and to prevent the product from falling out of the tray 12. These members are also configured to permit the easy removal of the forward-most product positioned in the tray 12. The product-retaining member 44 may be one or more curve-shaped retaining ribs as depicted in Figure 1. These illustrated retaining ribs may extend from one divider to another divider thereby joining the dividers. The retaining ribs may also extend part-way between the dividers, as also shown in Figure 1 as rib 46, to also assist in retaining the product in the tray. Alternatively, and as shown in Figure 6 the product-retaining member 44 may be a curve-shaped solid retaining wall 48 that extends between dividers. The retaining wall 48 may be transparent or semi-transparent to permit visualization of the product on the shelf. In another example, the retaining wall 48 may also extend part-way between the dividers 18. In yet another example depicted in Figures 11-15, the retaining wall 100 may be attached to the surface of the tray and not connect to the dividers. In this example, the retaining wall 100 may form an opening 102 defined by an upper member 104, opposing, curved side walls 106 that further define an angled edge 108, and a floor member 110. The side walls 106 may also be straight and not curved depending on the system. The end of the coiled spring may also snap-fit into the floor 110 or otherwise attached to the tray using any of the techniques described herein. One of skill in the art will readily appreciate that there are numerous shapes and configurations possible for the product-retaining member 44 and that the depicted configurations are merely examples of these numerous configurations.

[0031] Referring back to Figure 1, the example trackless pusher mechanism 14 defines a pusher paddle 50 and a pusher floor 52. The pusher paddle 50 and pusher floor 52 may be formed as a single, unitary structure or may be separate structures that are joined together using known techniques. In addition, the pusher paddle 50 and pusher floor 52 may be made of any known suitable plas-

tic or metal material. The pusher paddle and pusher floor may be reinforced using any known reinforcing techniques.

[0032] In one example, the pusher paddle 50 forms a curved-shape pusher surface or face 54 that is configured to match the shape of the product to be merchandised, such as plastic bottles or cans containing a beverage, as depicted in Figures 3-5. The curve-shaped pusher surface 54 permits the pusher to remain centrally aligned with the last product in the tray. This configuration reduces friction and drag between the pusher and the divider walls. In an alternative example, the pusher surface or face may be a flat surface. In yet another example, the flat pusher surface may be accompanied by a curved shaped rib that is positioned near or on the top of the pusher paddle and that may be used to center and align product in the tray, in a manner similar to the curve-shaped pusher surface 54 depicted in Figure 1. The curve shaped rib may define other shapes and configurations that permit cylindrical or similar shaped products to be properly pushed in the tray. Advertisement, product identification or other product information may be placed on the pusher surface 54.

[0033] Positioned behind the pusher surface or face 54 may be one or more support members 58, such as ribs, walls, or gussets. The support members 58 are configured to support the pusher surface 54 and further connect the pusher paddle 50 to the pusher floor 52. As can be seen in Figure 5, positioned between the support members 58 is the coiled spring 30, and more specifically the coiled end 57 that is used to urge the pusher paddle 50 forward and along the tray 12, as understood in the art. Any technique used to operatively connect the coiled spring to the pusher paddle 50 may be used.

[0034] As shown in Figure 1, the pusher floor 52 may be positioned below the pusher paddle 50 and may extend forward of the pusher surface 54 of the pusher paddle. The pusher floor 52 may extend any predetermined distance and at any predetermined angle. For example, the pusher floor 52 may extend substantially perpendicular to the pusher surface 54. In the example, the pusher floor 52 may extend a sufficient distance to permit one product, such as a single bottle or can, to be placed on the pusher floor. In another example, the pusher floor 52 may be configured to permit more than one product to be placed on the pusher floor. The pusher floor 52 may define any shape, including the depicted round shape and may define any product retaining features on the surface of the pusher floor, such as ribs, walls, or the like, to further hold the product on the pusher floor.

[0035] As can be seen in Figure 2, the pusher floor 52 may define an elongated channel, groove or recessed portion 59 that is sized, shaped and configured to seat the coiled spring 30. In the example, the channel or groove 59 may extend across the floor 52 and in a substantially perpendicular manner relative to the pusher paddle 50. In an alternative example, the groove or channel may extend part-way or across the entire pusher floor

52, as shown in Figure 19. Such configuration permits the proper alignment and positioning of the pusher paddle 50 in the tray. The groove 59 may define a depth that matches or exceeds the thickness of the coiled spring 30. With this configuration, the coiled spring 30 will seat at or below the pusher floor surface such that product will not sit directly on the coiled spring, rather, such product will sit on the pusher floor surface. As shown in Figure 19, the pusher floor may include apertures and openings through which debris or other items may pass. Alternatively, the floor may be a solid surface.

[0036] In an alternative example, as shown in Figures 16-20, an adaptor 180 may be positioned on the surface 16. Referring to Figures 16 and 17, the adaptor 180 may include one or more raised ribs 182 on which a product may sit. The raised ribs 182 may extend longitudinally along the length of the adaptor 180. The adaptor 180 may be a flat extrusion of plastic material (or any other suitable material) defining a planar surface 184 with the one or more ribs 182 extending outwardly from the planar surface 184. The adaptor 180 may define a rounded end 185 and include a notch or cut-away portion 186 through which or across which the coiled spring may extend. The rounded end 185 may be configured to match the shape of the product that is placed on the tray. Other shapes of the end 185, notch 186 and adaptor 180 may be used depending on the product to be merchandised. The adaptor 180 may be a separate, insertable piece or, alternatively, a piece formed integral with the surface 16.

[0037] Referring to Figure 18, the adaptor 180 may be easily insertable onto the surface 16 and between the dividers 18. Referring to Figure 19, once the adaptor 180 is installed, the pusher mechanism 14 may be positioned on top of the adaptor 180 and may slide freely across the ribs 182 of the adaptor 180. The coiled spring 30 may extend in a parallel manner between the ribs 182 and may seat at or below the top surface of the ribs 182, as more clearly shown in Figure 20. With this configuration, the product to be merchandised may sit on, and slide along, the ribs 182 and not on the coiled spring 30.

[0038] In an alternative example, the ribs 182 may be a raised bead or raised beads, or a series of fingers that may be used to facilitate the movement of the product on the surface 16. In yet another alternative example, the ribs 182 may be product moving members, such as runners or one or more rollers or rolling members that permit the product to roll across the rolling members and toward the front of the product display system. Example roller assemblies include those disclosed and described in United States Application Serial No. 11/257,718 filed October 25, 2005 and assigned to RTC Industries, Inc., granted as United States Patent No. 7,497,342. As should be appreciated by those skilled in the art, there are many possible techniques that may be used with the described pusher mechanisms for facilitating the movement of the product on the shelf or floor.

[0039] The underneath side of the pusher floor 52 may be a smooth planar surface that will slide freely along the

surface 16. Alternatively, and similar to above, the pusher floor 52 may include beads, runners, rollers or the like that will permit the pusher floor to slide along the surface yet raise the pusher floor up off of the surface 16. In another alternative example, the underneath side of the pusher floor may be configured with rail mounting members to permit the mounting of the pusher to a track or rail, as understood in the art.

[0040] The pusher floor further defines a notch or cut-out portion 62 through which will pass the coiled spring 30. The end 29 of the coiled spring 30 will pass through the notch 62 and through the notch 26 of the surface 16 and will mount to the tray using any of the techniques described above.

[0041] In use, as the pusher mechanism 14 is urged rearward in the tray 12, the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 will be held in position as described above and the coiled end 57 of the spring 30 will begin to uncoil behind the pusher paddle 50. If the pusher 14 is allowed to move forward in the tray 14, such as when product is removed from the front of the tray, the coiled end 57 of the spring 30 will coil and force the pusher paddle 50 forward in the tray 12, thereby urging product toward the front of the tray.

[0042] In an alternative example, the coiled spring 30 may extend below and underneath the pusher floor 52 as opposed to above and across the pusher floor, as depicted in the Figures. With this configuration, the groove 59 and notch 62 may not be necessary.

[0043] The coiled spring 30 may be any biasing element including, without limitation, a flat coil spring commonly used with pusher systems. One or more coiled springs may be used to urge the pusher mechanism 14 forward depending on the desired application. The coil tension of the spring 30 may also vary depending on the particular application.

[0044] Referring to Figure 2, the trackless pusher mechanism 14 is shown mounted to the tray 12. As illustrated, the pusher mechanism 14 fits in the tray 12 between the dividers 18. End 29 of the coiled spring 30 extends through the notch in the pusher floor and mounts to the tray as described above. In use, the pusher mechanism 14 will slide along the surface 16 of the tray 12 without the use of tracks, rails, or guides. As depicted in Figure 2, the pusher mechanism 14 is shown in a forward position.

[0045] Referring to Figure 3, the pusher mechanism 14 is shown merchandising one product 70 in the merchandise system 10. The product is prevented from tipping out of the tray by the product-retaining member 44. The product 70 may be any product to be merchandised including the depicted soft drink bottle. As shown in this Figure, the product 70 sits on the pusher floor 52 and the coiled spring 30 that extends below the product. The weight of the product on the floor 52 and the positioning of the product across the spring 30 prevent the paddle 50 from tipping in the tray 12.

[0046] Referring to Figure 4, the pusher mechanism

14 is shown merchandising multiple products 70 in the merchandise system 10. As shown in this Figure, the product next to the pusher paddle 50 sits on the pusher floor 52 and the coiled spring 30 that extends below the product. The other products will sit on the coiled spring 30 that will extend below these products. Alternatively, the adaptor 180 may be positioned in the system in which case the product may sit on the ribs 182 of the adaptor as opposed to the coiled spring. Again, the weight of the product on the pusher floor 52 and the positioning of the products across the spring 30 prevent the paddle 50 from tipping in the tray. In use, as one product is removed from the front of the tray near the product-retaining member 44, the pusher mechanism 14 (through the urging of the coiled spring 30) will push the remaining product forward in the tray 12 until the forward-most product contacts the product-retaining member 44. As additional products are removed, the pusher mechanism 14 will continue to push the remaining product toward the product-retaining member 44.

[0047] Referring to Figure 5, a rear view of the pusher mechanism 14 shows the pusher mechanism 14 merchandising multiple products 70 in the merchandise system 10. Again, the product next to the pusher paddle 50 sits on the pusher floor 52 and the coiled spring 30 that extends below the product. The other products will sit on the coiled spring that will extend below these products. Alternatively, the adaptor 180 may be positioned in the system in which case the product may sit on the ribs 182 of the adaptor as opposed to the coiled spring. As one product is removed from the front of the tray near the product-retaining member 44, the coiled end 57 of the spring 30 will urge the pusher paddle 50 of the pusher mechanism 14 forward in the tray 12 until the forward-most product contacts the product-retaining member 44. As can be seen in this Figure, the coiled end 57 may be positioned between two support members 58. The support members will retain the coiled spring between these members. As can be seen in this Figure, the pusher floor 52 may also extend below the support members 58.

[0048] Referring to Figure 6, an alternative example of the pusher tray is depicted. With this example, multiple trays 12 may be formed into a single multi-tray assembly 80. The multi-trays may have a common floor with dividers 18 extending upwardly from the floor to create the multiple trays or rows. In this example, the product-retaining member 44 may be a solid member that extends between two dividers, as discussed above. One or more of the multi-tray assemblies 80 may be coupled or joined together in a side-by-side manner using any known technique, including clips, dovetailing, fasteners, or the like. With this configuration, numerous rows of product can be provided for the merchandising of numerous products.

[0049] As stated above, the trackless pusher mechanism 14 may be used with gravity-fed systems, that is, systems having trays or product channels that are mounted on an incline to permit gravity to assist with the merchandising of the product. Alternatively, the trackless

pusher mechanism 14 may be used with systems that are mounted in a non-inclined or in a horizontal manner where gravity will provide little or no assistance with the merchandising of the product. The trackless pusher mechanism 14 may also be used to push various shaped products.

[0050] Figure 7 depicts an example tip 60 for the end 29 of a coiled spring 30 that may be used with the merchandise system 10. As illustrated, the tip 60 defines an aperture 61 for receiving the end 29 of the coiled spring and an aperture 63 for mounting to the surface 16 of the tray. As can be seen in Figure 7, in one alternative example, extending beneath the surface 16 may be a tongue or mounting member 65 that may be configured to mate with the aperture 63 and to snap-fit the tip 60 onto the tongue 65 and thus to the surface 16.

[0051] Referring to Figure 8, the example tip 60 of Figure 7 is shown being mounted to the tongue or mounting member 65. The tongue 65 may include an elongated outwardly extending rib 67 that is used to snap-fit the tip 60 onto the tongue 65. One skilled in the art will appreciate that other techniques may be used to mount the tip 60 to the surface 16 and that the depicted technique is merely an example of one such technique.

[0052] Referring to Figure 9, the example tip 60 is shown fully mounted in a snap-fit manner to the surface 16, and more specifically to the end portion 24 of the surface 16 of the tray 12. Also depicted is the mounting of the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 to the aperture 61 of the tip 60. As shown in Figure 9, the end 29 of the coiled spring may be inserted into the aperture 61. The aperture 61 is configured to receive the end 29 of the coiled spring and hold the end 29 in position, and to also permit the removal of the end 29 of the coiled spring from the aperture 61 in those circumstances where it is desirable to disconnect the coiled spring from the tip to permit the removal of the pusher mechanism 14 from the system.

[0053] Referring to Figure 10 there is shown the end 29 of the coiled spring fully mounted to the example tip 60. As illustrated in this Figure, the coiled spring 30 is now operatively connected to the surface 16 of the tray 12. As a result, the pusher mechanism 14 is now mounted to the tray 12.

[0054] Referring to Figures 21-27 there is shown an alternative technique for mounting the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 to the merchandise display system. A mounting member 130 may be used to mount the end 29 of the coiled spring to the floor 131 of the system. For those systems that include spaced-apart glide rails 132 that are joined together by connecting ribs 134 (Figures 26-27), the mounting member 130 may be snap-fit to or otherwise mounted on the floor 131 and between the glide rails 132. The mounting member will thus hold the end of the coiled spring in position and to the floor of the system.

[0055] Referring to Figures 22-23, the mounting member 130 may include one or more legs 136 on one or

more sides of the member 130. The legs may be configured to snap-fit to the underside of the rails 132 to thereby hold the mounting member 130 to the floor of the system. The legs 136 may include legs ends 137 defining an L-shape or angled surfaces that are configured to contact the underside of the rail 132 and prevent the mounting member 130 from being lifted up from the floor, except by the intentional flexing of the legs out from the underside of the rail 132. The legs 136 may contact the connecting ribs 134 which will prevent slidable movement of the mounting member 130 relative to the floor. Referring to Figure 26, the mounting member 130 is shown being mounted to the floor of the system and more specifically to the rails. Figure 27 illustrates that the mounting member 130 remains in position as the pusher paddle 141 is pulled away from the front of the system. The mounting member 130 may be connected to this type of system floor 131 using other techniques. For example, a separate mounting clip, one or more fasteners, adhesives, or other techniques may be used to secure the mounting member 130 to the floor 131.

[0056] Referring to Figures 22-23, the mounting member 130 may also include an aperture or opening or slot 138 that will receive the end 29 of the spring. The spring may be mounted using any of the techniques described herein, or other techniques. The configuration of the aperture 138 and mounting member 130 will hold the spring in position on the mounting member 130, similar to the technique described above.

[0057] The mounting member 130 may also include glide ribs 139 on a top surface that allow product placed thereon to slide more easily across the mounting member after the mounting member is installed to the floor of the system. The mounting member 130 may also include an elongated flat body 140 that extends forward of the location of the legs 136 to provide stability to the mounting member 130 after it is mounted to the floor of the system.

[0058] Referring to Figures 24-25 and 27, the pusher paddle or pusher mechanism 141 may include a pusher face 143 configured to match the shape of the product against which it pushes. As illustrated, the pusher face 143 may be curve shaped to match the shape of a bottle or other cylindrical object. The pusher paddle 141 may also include a pusher floor 145 similar to the pusher floor configurations described above. The pusher floor 145 may further include a spring sleeve 147 that receives the coiled spring 30 to shield and protect the spring. The spring sleeve 147 may extend partly or fully across the pusher floor 145 and in the direction of the spring 30. The spring sleeve 147 may have a relatively short height and a flat surface 149 to permit product to sit thereon without significant tipping or leaning of the product.

[0059] The pusher paddle 141 may be positioned on top of the floor 131 to glide on top of the surface, as describe above. The pusher paddle may be positioned between two product divider walls 153 that are joined together by a product retaining member 155. Additional product retaining members 157 may extend outwardly

from the product dividers.

[0060] Referring to Figures 28 and 29 there is shown yet another alternative technique for mounting the end 29 of the coiled spring 30 to the merchandise display system. In this example, the end 29 is riveted to the tray 216.

[0061] Referring to Figures 28-32 in an alternative example, the trackless pusher system may be retrofitted to an existing shelf assembly 230, which may have product dividers already built in. For example, in one example, the trackless pusher system may be retrofitted to an existing wire shelf assembly. Referring to Figures 30-32, a tray or adaptor 216 may have a glide floor 222 that may be sized to a single lane of the shelf 234 or sized to an entire shelf width. The glide floor 222 may include several raised ribs 224, which help to reduce friction for the products merchandised on the tray 216. It should be understood that one or more raised ribs 224 may be used with the glide floor 222. Alternatively, the glide floor 222 may be a flat, planar surface without raised ribs. The tray or adaptor 216 may be configured similar to the adaptor 180 of Figure 16.

[0062] As shown in Figures 28 and 30, the end 29 of coiled spring 30 may be riveted, via a rivet 229, to the front end 228 of the tray 216, or may be attached by any other attachment technique. The tray 216 can be retained to the shelf by any attachment technique suitable for the particular shelf. In one example, and as illustrated in Figures 29-32, the tray 216 may include one or more outwardly extending fingers or snaps 220, which may engage one or more individual wires 232 of the shelf 234 to retain the tray 216 on the shelf 234. The fingers or snaps 220 may extend longitudinally along the length of the tray 216, or may be spaced apart along the length of the tray. The snaps 220 may be used to snap-fit the tray 216 to the existing wire shelf. As depicted in Figures 29A and 29B, the snaps 220A and 220B may define numerous configurations that permit the tray 216 to be snap fit to the shelf. The example depicted in Figures 28-32 allows for the placement of the trackless pusher system in an existing shelving system, such as a wire shelf system, as a low cost alternative to the entire trackless pusher assembly. It should be understood that with this example, any pusher mechanism described herein may be used.

[0063] As depicted in Figures 33 and 44, in another example, the display management system comprises one or more pusher mechanisms 286, one or more dividers 266, one or more trays 306, and one or more retainers 250. The pusher mechanisms 286 can be formed of a pusher paddle 287 and a pusher floor 288. Product is placed on the pusher floor 288 and guided to the front of the display management system via the dividers 266 and the pusher paddle 287. The coiled spring 30 biases the pusher mechanism 286 toward the retainer 250 such that product moves to the front of the system.

[0064] In one example, depicted in Figure 33, the coiled spring 30 can be mounted to the retainer 250. Alternatively, the coiled spring 30 can be mounted to a di-

vider 266 (also shown in Figures 48 and 49). The coiled spring 30 can be directly mounted to the retainer 250, as depicted in Figure 33, or can be mounted to the retainer 250 via a separate adapter 252, as depicted in Figure 34.

[0065] As depicted in Figure 35, the adapter 252 has a wall 254 proximate a first end 256. The first end 256 has a curved portion 262, which curves upwardly. The middle portion of the adapter 252 may be provided with a curved slot 260, which is adapted to receive a correspondingly shaped spring end (not shown).

[0066] The coiled spring 30 at one end can be secured to the middle portion of the adapter 252. In an example, the curved slot 260 corresponds in shape and size of the first spring end. Additionally, the first spring end of the coiled spring 30 can be crimped or bent to provide for additional fastening. Nevertheless, any sufficient fastening method can be used to fix the first spring end of the coiled spring 30 to the adapter 252.

[0067] In an example, shown in Figures 36 and 37, the retainer 250 has a curved slot 284 corresponding in shape and size to the curved portion 262 of the adapter 252. The curved slot 284 extends the length of the retainer to allow for unlimited positioning of the adapter 252 along the length of the retainer 250.

[0068] To secure the first spring end of the coiled spring 30 to the retainer 250, the curved portion 262 of the adapter 252 is placed into the curved slot 284 of the retainer 250. The curved slot 284 secures the adapter 252 and the first spring end of the coiled spring 30 to the retainer 250 and provides for a quick and easy assembly of the display system. The wall 254 provides additional stability in the connection between the retainer 250 and the adapter 252. Other methods, however, can be used to secure the adapter 252 and/or the first spring end of the coiled spring 30 to the retainer 250.

[0069] Alternatively, as depicted in Figures 33 and 44 the coiled spring 30 of the pusher paddle 287 can be mounted directly to the front of the tray 306. The first spring end 290 of the coiled spring 30 is provided with a curved portion. The curved portion curves downwardly from the pusher floor 288 and is adapted to be received in a recess 316 (shown in Figure 33) defined by a lip 318 of the front surface of the dispensing tray 306 and the retainer 250. A vertically oriented surface of the retainer 250 and the lip 318 are spaced such that a gap is formed between the vertically oriented surface and a front edge of the lip 250. To secure the coiled spring 30 and the pusher mechanism 286 to the assembly, the first spring end 290 is inserted into the gap formed between the vertically oriented surface of the retainer 250 and the front edge of the lip 318 and placed into the recess 316 formed by the lip 318 of the dispensing tray 306 and the retainer 250.

[0070] In another example depicted in Figures 38, 39, 48 and 49, the coiled spring 30 can be directly mounted to a divider 266. In addition, in this example the coiled spring 30 can be mounted perpendicular to the pusher floor 288 such that the axis, about which the coiled spring

30 is coiled, is perpendicular to the pusher floor 288. The first spring end 290 can be provided with an angled portion 292 and a tip portion 296. In one example, the angled portion 292 can be bent perpendicular to the coiled spring body 294. The divider can be provided with a slot 298, which is adapted to receive the tip portion 296 of the first spring end 290.

[0071] To secure the coiled spring to the divider, the tip portion 296 is inserted into the slot 298. Once the tip portion 296 is fully inserted into the slot 298, the angled portion 292 engages the slot 298 so as to secure the first spring end 290 to the divider 266.

[0072] As depicted in Figure 33, various pusher mechanism designs can be implemented. The pusher paddle 287 can be formed flat to accommodate correspondingly shaped product. Alternatively, the pusher paddle 286 can have a curved first end and a flat second end. This serves to accommodate a variety of cylindrical products having a variety of different sized diameters and to facilitate the operation of the pusher mechanism 286. During operation, the product in the pusher mechanism 286 and the curved first end together force the pusher mechanism against the divider 266, such that the coil spring 30 remains flat against the divider 266 holding the first spring end 290, while in tension or in operation. This allows for a smoother operation of the pusher mechanism and ensures that the product is properly dispensed as users remove the product from the system.

[0073] In another example depicted in Figures 40-41D, the distance between the dividers 266 can be adjusted to accommodate different sized containers. The dividers 266 can be provided with connecting portions 272. The connecting portions 272 can be provided with a first elongated angled surface 268 and a second elongated angled surface 270. Additionally, the connecting portions 272 can be provided with a plurality of projections 274. As depicted in Figure 41B, the rails can be formed of teeth 278 having face surfaces 280 and flank surfaces 282.

[0074] When assembled, as depicted in Figure 41C, the connecting portions 272 are received between the teeth 278 of the rails. Additionally, the elongated angled surfaces 268 and 270 and the projections 274 are wedged between the teeth 278. Also as shown in Figure 41C, the elongated angled surfaces 268 and 270 engage the face surfaces 280 and the projections 274 engage the flank surfaces 282 of the teeth 278 to secure the connecting portions 272 between the rails.

[0075] In an example depicted in Figure 42, the trays 306 are provided with dovetail connections. A first side 308 of the trays 306 is provided with tongues 312 adapted to fit within grooves 314 located on a second side 310 of the trays 306. To connect the trays, the grooves 314 are aligned with tongues 312 such that the tongues 312 are firmly secured within the grooves 314.

[0076] In an example depicted in Figure 43, the trays 306 are configured to receive the retainer 250 at a front end. The retainer can be provided with rectangular holes 300, and the retainer is provided with correspondingly

shaped and sized projections 302. To secure the retainer 250 to the tray 306, the projections 302 fit into holes 300 to lock the retainer into place on the tray 306.

[0077] As depicted in Figures 45-47, after the product management display system is assembled, product is loaded into the system. By adjusting the dividers 266 a wide variety of product sizes and shapes can be loaded into the system. As shown in Figures 46 and 47, the coil spring 30 in conjunction with the pusher paddle 287 push the product toward the retainer 250. As a user takes product out of the system, the pusher paddle 287 pushes the remaining product such that the product slides along the floor 264 to the retainer 250. This assures that all product remains at the front of the display system.

[0078] As depicted in Figures 50-52, the product management display system 400 can be arranged such that trays 402, 404 can be stacked on top of one another. This example can consist generally of a first tray 402, a second tray 404, a first spacer 406, and a second spacer 408.

[0079] The trays 402, 404 are each arranged to house product to be dispensed. The first tray 402 and the second tray 404 can be each provided with a clear retainer 410, a pusher mechanism 412, first and second guiding walls, and a coil spring 414.

[0080] The pusher mechanism 414 is arranged in a similar fashion as the examples discussed above, such that it slides product along the surface of the trays 402, 404, while product is removed. Additionally, any of the alternative arrangements of the pusher mechanism discussed above may be implemented in a stackable tray arrangement.

[0081] To provide for an easy assembly and disassembly, the stackable product management display system can be provided with a dovetail connection or any other suitable connection, such as a snap-fit connection, screw-thread connection, or a rivet connection. The first and second trays are provided with detents 416 for assembling the first and second spacers 406, 408 to the first and second trays 402, 404. Each of the first and second trays 402, 404 can be provided with sockets 418 on their respective outside surfaces for receiving the correspondingly shaped detents 416 located on the first and second spacers 406, 408.

[0082] To assemble the stackable product management display system, the detents 416 located on the first and second spacers 406, 408 are placed into the correspondingly shaped sockets 418 on the outside surfaces of the first and second trays 402, 404 in a locking arrangement. This provides for a stackable arrangement that can be implemented in conjunction with any of the examples discussed above.

[0083] Figures 53-55 depict an example embodiment of a merchandise display system according to the present invention, which is similar to the examples discussed herein, where similar reference numbers are used to identify similar components. However, an additional product-retaining member 544b is provided to limit the

movement of the last product P in a product row.

[0084] The tray 512 defines a surface 516 and, similar to the examples above, the tray 512 may define one or more dividing portions, panels, or dividers 518 to guide product therein. The surface 516 may be a solid surface or may be a surface defining a plurality of spaced-apart apertures separated by a plurality of support ribs as discussed herein. The surface 516 may be made of any suitable material that permits the slidable movement of product on the surface 516.

[0085] In this example embodiment, the surface 516 provides a single row for the positioning of a plurality of products. In an alternative example embodiment, the tray 512 may be a shelf or any other surface on which singular or multiple rows of products may be placed for merchandising. For example, multiple dividers may be provided to separate the tray into numerous rows for placement of products. Other surface or floor configurations are known and may be used.

[0086] In this example embodiment, the surface 516 may define a rounded end portion 524 that includes a slot 526 for receiving an end of the coiled spring 530. The end portion 524 may be rounded to match the shape of the product that is placed on the tray. For example, the depicted end portion 524 is rounded or defines a semi-circular shape to match the contour of a container, bottle, or can that may be placed in the tray and on the end portion 524. Other shapes of the end portion may be used depending on the product to be merchandised.

[0087] The slot 526 may be used to receive and mount an end 529 of a coiled spring 530 or similar biasing element. This configuration will center the coiled spring 530 relative to the tray 512 and will permit the spring to extend in a substantially parallel manner relative to the length of the tray. One skilled in the art will appreciate that the location and configuration of the slot 526 may vary depending on the desired placement of the spring.

[0088] The coiled spring 530 may define an end 529 that is configured to be placed in the slot 526. In one example embodiment, the end 529 of the coiled spring may be L-shaped and function as a hook such that the end 529 will extend downward and engage the slot to retain the end 529 of the coiled spring. This configuration permits an easy installation of the coiled spring onto the tray.

[0089] The dividers 518 may be used to guide products disposed therein. The dividers 518 extend substantially upwardly from the surface 516 and as illustrated in Figure 53, may be positioned on opposing sides of the surface 516. However, the dividers 518 may be positioned at any desired position on the tray 512 or to the surface 516 to accommodate various product types. The dividers 518 may be formed as a unitary structure with the surface 516, or the dividers 518 may be detachable to provide added flexibility with the system. The dividers 518 may be attached to a front or back rail depending on the system. The dividers 518 may define numerous configurations and may extend upwardly any desired distance to

provide the desired height of the dividers between the rows of product to be merchandised. This height may be adjustable by adding divider extenders or the like.

[0090] A first product-retaining member 544a may be located at the front of the tray 512, which can extend between the dividers 518. In this example embodiment, the product retaining member 544a serves as a front retaining wall or bar to hold the product in the tray 512 and to prevent the product from falling out of the tray 512. The product retaining member 544a is also configured to permit the easy removal of the forward-most product positioned in the tray 512. Additionally, the first product-retaining member 544a can be a curve-shaped solid retaining wall 548a or any another retaining member as discussed herein. The retaining wall 548a may be transparent or semi-transparent to permit visualization of the product on the shelf. In another example embodiment, the retaining wall 548a may also extend part-way between the dividers 518 so as to not connect the dividers 518. Also as shown in this example embodiment, the dividers 518 may have curved portions in the front so as to provide additional product retention in the forward direction of the tray.

[0091] Similar to the examples discussed above, the merchandise display system includes a pusher mechanism 514, which in this example embodiment defines a pusher paddle or pusher surface 550, a pusher floor 552, and a second product-retaining member or product retainer 544b. The pusher paddle 550, pusher floor 552, and the second product retaining member 544b may be formed as a single, unitary structure or may be separate structures that are joined together using known techniques such as any known permanent or removable connection methods. In addition, the pusher paddle 550, pusher floor 552, and the second product retaining member 544b may be made of any known suitable plastic or metal material. The pusher paddle 550, pusher floor 552, and the second product retaining member 544b can be formed of a colored or clear plastic material. Also, the pusher paddle 550, pusher floor 552, and the second product retaining member 544b may be reinforced using any known reinforcing techniques.

[0092] In one example embodiment, the pusher paddle 550 forms a curved-shape pusher surface or face 554 that is configured to match the shape of the product to be merchandised, such as plastic bottles or cans containing a beverage. Also the second product retaining member 544b can be curved shaped and can be configured to match the shape of the product to be merchandised. The curve-shaped pusher surface 554 and the correspondingly curve-shaped second product-retaining member 544b permit the pusher to remain centrally aligned with the last product in the tray. Advertisement, product identification or other product information may be placed on the pusher surface 554 or on the second product retaining member 544b.

[0093] The pusher floor 552 may be positioned below the pusher paddle 550 and extends forward of the pusher

surface 554 of the pusher paddle. The pusher floor 552 may extend any predetermined distance and at any predetermined angle. For example, the pusher floor 552 may extend substantially perpendicular to the pusher surface 554. In an example embodiment, the pusher floor 552 may extend a sufficient distance to permit one product, such as a single bottle or can, to be placed on the pusher floor. In another example embodiment, the pusher floor 552 may be configured to permit more than one product to be placed on the pusher floor. The pusher floor 552 may define any shape, including the depicted round shape and may define any product retaining features on the surface of the pusher floor, such as ribs, walls, or the like, to further hold the product on the pusher floor.

[0094] The pusher floor 552 may define an elongated channel, groove or recessed portion 559 that is sized, shaped and configured to seat the coiled spring 530. In the example embodiment, the channel or groove 559 may extend part of the way across the floor 552 and in a substantially perpendicular manner relative to the pusher paddle 550. Such configuration permits the proper alignment and positioning of the pusher paddle 550 in the tray 512. The groove 559 may define a depth that matches or exceeds the thickness of the coiled spring 530. With this configuration, the coiled spring 530 will seat at or below the pusher floor surface such that product will not sit directly on the coiled spring, rather, such product will sit on the pusher floor surface. The pusher floor 552 may include apertures and openings through which debris or other items may pass. Alternatively, the floor may be a solid surface.

[0095] The second product-retaining member 544b can be formed as a curve-shaped solid retaining wall 548b and can be formed integral with the pusher mechanism 514. As shown in Figure 53, the second product-retaining member 544b extends parallel to the pusher surface 554. The pusher surface 554 and the second product-retaining member 544b extend upwardly from the pusher floor. Also the second product-retaining member 544b is spaced apart from the pusher surface 544 such that the pusher surface 544, the second product-retaining member 544b, and the pusher floor 552 define a space for receiving at least one product therein.

[0096] The second product-retaining member 544b is configured to hold at least one product against the pusher surface 554 so that the last product is held in between the pusher surface 554 and the second product-retaining member 554b. For example, the product can be a bottle, can or container and can be configured to fit between the pusher surface 544 and the product-retaining member 544b. In one example embodiment, the second product-retaining member 544b can be configured to hold a single container, bottle, or can against the pusher surface 554, or only one container, bottle, or can fits between the pusher surface 544 and the product retaining member 544b. For example, the tray 512 can hold a number of products therein, and the second product-retaining member 554b can be configured to hold the last product of the number

of products against the pusher surface 554 or the second product-retainer member 554b is configured to hold the last one of the row products. In this way, the second product-retaining member 554b can prevent the last product on the tray or the shelf from being pushed by the pusher mechanism over the first retainer 554a and onto another shelf or floor. Additionally, the second product-retaining member 554b maintains the last product in an upright position on the tray or the shelf.

[0097] The second product-retaining member 544b can be configured to extend between the dividers 552 and can abut the dividers 552 or the dividers 552 and the second product retaining member 554b can define a gap on either side of the tray 512. In one example embodiment, the second product retaining member 554b can be formed transparent such that customers can see the product through the retainer 554b.

[0098] Additionally, the second product-retaining member 544b can be a curve-shaped solid retaining wall 548b or any another retaining member as discussed herein. The retaining wall 548b may be transparent or semi-transparent to permit visualization of the product on the shelf. In another example embodiment, the retaining wall 548b may also extend part-way between the dividers 518 so as to not connect the dividers 518.

[0099] As in the previous examples, in use, as the pusher mechanism 514 is urged rearward in the tray 512, the end 529 of the coiled spring 530 will be held in position as described above and the coiled end of the spring 530 will begin to uncoil behind the pusher paddle 550. If the pusher 514 is allowed to move forward in the tray 514, such as when product is removed from the front of the tray, the coiled end of the spring 530 will coil and force the pusher paddle 550 forward in the tray 512, thereby urging product toward the front of the tray.

[0100] As in certain examples discussed herein, the trackless pusher mechanism 514 is shown mounted to the tray 512. As illustrated, the pusher mechanism 514 fits in the tray 512 between the dividers 518. In use, the pusher mechanism 514 will slide along the surface 516 of the tray 512 without the use of tracks, rails, or guides.

[0101] As in certain examples discussed herein, the weight of the product on the pusher floor 552, and the positioning of the products across the spring 530 prevent the paddle 550 from tipping in the tray. In use, as one product is removed from the front of the tray near the product-retaining member 544, the pusher mechanism 514 (through the urging of the coiled spring 530) will push the remaining product forward in the tray 512 until the forward-most product contacts the product-retaining member 544. As additional products are removed, the pusher mechanism 514 will continue to push the remaining product toward the product-retaining member 544a.

[0102] Additionally, the last product in the product row can be held between the second product-retaining member 544b and the pusher surface 554 such that the last product in the product row is maintained in the pusher mechanism 514 and prevented from falling off of the tray

512. In certain instances, a larger product-retaining member 544a may be needed to prevent the last container or bottle from falling over the product-retaining member 544a. However, it may, in certain instances, be desirable to have a smaller product-retaining member 544a. However, when using smaller product-retaining members, the last container may fall over the product-retaining member 544a. Therefore, securing the last bottle with a second product-retaining member 544b may help to prevent last container from being pushed over the product-retaining member while being able to use a smaller product-retaining member 544a.

[0103] Variations and modifications of the foregoing are within the scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims. For example, one of skill in the art will understand that multiples of the described components may be used in stores and in various configurations. The present invention is therefore not to be limited to a single system, nor the upright pusher configuration, depicted in the Figures but by the scope of the appended claims.

Claims

1. A pusher mechanism (514) for a product management display system having a tray (512) defining a surface (516) configured to hold products, the pusher mechanism (514) comprising:

a pusher surface (554);
 a first product retainer (544b) extending parallel to the pusher surface (554);
 a pusher floor (552) extending forwardly from the pusher surface (554), the pusher floor (552) configured to permit at least one product to sit upon the pusher floor (552), the pusher floor (552) configured to be positionable on and movable across at least a portion of the surface (516) of the tray (512); and
 a coiled spring (530) extendable across at least a portion of the pusher floor (552), the coiled spring (530) including a coiled end which is positioned behind and operatively connected to the pusher surface (554);
 wherein the pusher mechanism (514) is configured to sit on top of and not extend below the surface (516) of the tray (512), is configured to be positionable on the surface (516) of the tray (512), and is configured to be mounted to and held onto the tray (512) by the coiled spring (530);
 wherein the pusher floor (552) is substantially parallel to the surface (516) of the tray (512) and defines a channel (559) for receiving the coiled spring (530);
 wherein the pusher surface (554) and the first product retainer (544b) extend upwardly from

the pusher floor (552), the first product retainer (544b) being spaced apart from the pusher surface (554) such that the pusher surface (554), the first product retainer (544b) and the pusher floor (552) define a space for receiving at least one product therein.

2. The pusher mechanism (514) of claim 1 wherein the product is a bottle and the pusher surface (554) and the first product retainer (544b) are positioned to receive the bottle in a space defined by the pusher surface (554) and the first product retainer (544b).
3. The pusher mechanism (514) of claim 2, wherein the space is configured to receive only one bottle.
4. The pusher mechanism (514) of claim 1, wherein the pusher surface (554) is concave shaped.
5. The pusher mechanism (514) of claim 1, wherein the pusher mechanism (514) is configured to be mounted to the surface (516) of the tray (512) only by the coiled spring (530).
6. A product management display system comprising:
 - a tray (512) defining a surface (516) configured to hold a row of products;
 - a pusher mechanism (514) as defined in claim 1 mounted to the surface (516) of the tray (512) by the coiled spring (530), the coiled spring having a front end, and the pusher mechanism (514) configured to slide across at least a portion of the surface (516) of the tray (512); a second product retainer (544a) configured to prevent product from falling off of the tray (512); and
 - at least one divider (518) for maintaining the products in a row;
 - wherein at least a portion of the coiled spring (530) extends across at least a portion of the surface (516) of the tray (512) to a front portion of the tray (512).
7. The product management display system of claim 6, wherein the pusher surface (554) and the first product retainer (544b) define a space that is configured to receive a last one of a row of the products.
8. The product management display system of claim 7, wherein the product is a bottle and the space is configured to receive only one bottle.
9. The product management display system of claim 7, wherein the pusher mechanism (514) is mounted to the surface (516) of the tray (512) only by the coiled spring (530).

Patentansprüche

1. Schiebemechanismus (514) für ein Produktverwaltungsanzeigesystem, welches eine Ablage (512) aufweist, welche eine Oberfläche (516) definiert, welche konfiguriert ist, um Produkte zu tragen, wobei der Schiebemechanismus (514) umfasst:

eine Schiebeoberfläche (554);
 einen ersten Produkthalter (544b), welcher sich parallel zu der Schiebeoberfläche (554) erstreckt;
 einen Schiebeboden (552), welcher sich vor der Schiebeoberfläche (554) erstreckt, wobei der Schiebeboden (552) konfiguriert ist, um es zumindest einem Produkt zu erlauben, auf dem Schiebeboden (552) zu sitzen, wobei der Schiebeboden (552) konfiguriert ist, um positionierbar auf und bewegbar über zumindest einen Abschnitt von der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) zu sein; und
 eine Schraubenfeder (530), welche über zumindest einen Abschnitt von dem Schiebeboden (552) verlängerbar ist, wobei die Schraubenfeder (530) ein gewickeltes Ende enthält, welches positioniert ist hinter und operativ verbunden ist mit der Schiebeoberfläche (554);
 wobei der Schiebemechanismus (514) konfiguriert ist, um oben auf der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) zu sitzen und sich nicht darunter zu erstrecken, konfiguriert ist, um auf der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) positionierbar zu sein, und konfiguriert ist, um montiert zu sein an und gehalten zu werden auf der Ablage (512) durch die Schraubenfeder (530);
 wobei der Schiebeboden (552) im Wesentlichen parallel zu der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) ist und einen Kanal (559) zum Aufnehmen der Schraubenfeder (530) definiert;
 wobei die Schiebeoberfläche (554) und der erste Produkthalter (544b) sich nach oben von dem Schiebeboden (552) erstrecken, wobei der erste Produkthalter (544b) von der Schiebeoberfläche (554) beanstandet ist, so dass die Schiebeoberfläche (554), der erste Produkthalter (544b) und der Schiebeboden (552) einen Raum zum Aufnehmen von zumindest einem Produkt darin definieren.

2. Schiebemechanismus (514) gemäß Anspruch 1, wobei das Produkt eine Flasche ist und die Schiebeoberfläche (554) und der erste Produkthalter (544b) positioniert sind, um die Flasche in einem Raum aufzunehmen, welcher durch die Schiebeoberfläche (554) und den ersten Produkthalter (544b) definiert wird.

3. Schiebemechanismus (514) gemäß Anspruch 2,

wobei der Raum konfiguriert ist, um nur eine Flasche aufzunehmen.

4. Schiebemechanismus (514) gemäß Anspruch 1, wobei die Schiebeoberfläche (554) konkav geformt ist.

5. Schiebemechanismus (514) gemäß Anspruch 1, wobei der Schiebemechanismus (514) konfiguriert ist, um nur durch die Schraubenfeder (530) auf der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) montiert zu werden.

6. Produktverwaltungsanzeigesystem, umfassend:

eine Ablage (512), welche eine Oberfläche (516) definiert, welche konfiguriert ist, um eine Reihe von Produkten zu tragen;
 einen Schiebemechanismus (514), wie in Anspruch 1 definiert, welcher nur durch Schraubenfeder (530) auf der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) montiert ist, wobei die Schraubenfeder ein vorderes Ende aufweist, und wobei der Schiebemechanismus (514) konfiguriert ist, um entlang von zumindest einem Abschnitt der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) zu gleiten; einen zweiten Produkthalter (544), welcher konfiguriert ist, um zu verhindern, dass das Produkt von der Ablage (512) herunterfällt; und
 zumindest einen Teiler (518) zum in einer Reihe Halten der Produkte;
 wobei zumindest ein Abschnitt von der Schraubenfeder (530) sich über zumindest einen Abschnitt von der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) zu einem vorderen Abschnitt von der Ablage (512) erstreckt.

7. Produktverwaltungsanzeigesystem gemäß Anspruch 6, wobei die Schiebeoberfläche (554) und der erste Produkthalter (544b) einen Raum definieren, welcher konfiguriert ist, um eine Letzte von einer Reihe der Produkte aufzunehmen.

8. Produktverwaltungsanzeigesystem gemäß Anspruch 7, wobei das Produkt eine Flasche ist, und wobei der Raum konfiguriert ist, um nur eine Flasche aufzunehmen.

9. Produktverwaltungsanzeigesystem gemäß Anspruch 7, wobei der Schiebemechanismus (514) auf der Oberfläche (516) von der Ablage (512) nur mittels der Schraubenfeder (530) montiert ist.

Revendications

1. Mécanisme de poussoir (514) destiné à un système de gestion de présentation de produits présentant

un compartiment (512) définissant une surface (516) configurée pour maintenir des produits, le mécanisme de poussoir (514) comprenant :

une surface de poussoir (554) ;
 un premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) s'étendant parallèlement à la surface de poussoir (554) ;
 un plancher de poussoir (552) s'étendant vers l'avant depuis la surface de poussoir (554), le plancher de poussoir (552) étant configuré pour permettre à au moins un produit de reposer sur le plancher de poussoir (552), le plancher de poussoir (552) étant configuré pour pouvoir être positionné sur au moins une partie de la surface (516) du compartiment (512) et pour pouvoir être déplacé le long de celle-ci ; et
 un ressort enroulé (530) pouvant se déployer le long d'au moins une partie du plancher de poussoir (552), le ressort enroulé (530) incluant une extrémité enroulée laquelle est positionnée derrière la surface de poussoir (554) et est reliée de manière fonctionnelle à celle-ci ;
 où le mécanisme de poussoir (514) est configuré pour reposer sur la surface (516) du compartiment (512) et ne pas s'étendre sous celle-ci, est configuré pour pouvoir être positionné sur la surface (516) du compartiment (512), et est configuré pour être monté et être maintenu sur le compartiment (512) par le ressort enroulé (530) ;
 où le plancher de poussoir (552) est sensiblement parallèle à la surface (516) du compartiment (512) et définit un canal (559) destiné à recevoir le ressort enroulé (530) ;
 où la surface de poussoir (554) et le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) s'étendent vers le haut depuis le plancher de poussoir (552), le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) étant espacé de la surface de poussoir (554) de telle sorte que la surface de poussoir (554), le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) et le plancher de poussoir (552) définissent un espace destiné à recevoir au moins un produit en son sein.

2. Mécanisme de poussoir (514) selon la revendication 1, où le produit est une bouteille et la surface de poussoir (554) et le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) sont positionnés pour recevoir la bouteille dans un espace défini par la surface de poussoir (554) et le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b).
3. Mécanisme de poussoir (514) selon la revendication 2, dans lequel l'espace est configuré pour ne recevoir qu'une seule bouteille.

4. Mécanisme de poussoir (514) selon la revendication 1, dans lequel la surface de poussoir (554) est de forme concave.

5. Mécanisme de poussoir (514) selon la revendication 1, où le mécanisme de poussoir (514) est configuré pour être monté sur la surface (516) du compartiment (512) uniquement par le biais du ressort enroulé (530).

6. Système de gestion de présentation de produits comprenant :

un compartiment (512) définissant une surface (516) configurée pour maintenir une rangée de produits ;
 un mécanisme de poussoir (514) selon la revendication 1 monté sur la surface (516) du compartiment (512) par le ressort enroulé (530), le ressort enroulé présentant une extrémité avant, et le mécanisme de poussoir (514) étant configuré pour coulisser le long d'au moins une partie de la surface (516) du compartiment (512) ; un deuxième élément de retenue de produit (544a) configuré pour empêcher qu'un produit ne tombe du compartiment (512) ; et
 au moins un séparateur (518) destiné à maintenir les produits en une rangée ;
 où au moins une partie du ressort enroulé (530) s'étend le long d'au moins une partie de la surface (516) du compartiment (512) vers une partie avant du compartiment (512).

7. Système de gestion de présentation de produits selon la revendication 7, dans lequel la surface de poussoir (554) et le premier élément de retenue de produit (544b) définissent un espace qui est configuré pour recevoir le dernier produit d'une rangée des produits.
8. Système de gestion de présentation de produits selon la revendication 8, où le produit est une bouteille et l'espace est configuré pour ne recevoir qu'une seule bouteille.
9. Système de gestion de présentation de produits selon la revendication 7, dans lequel le mécanisme de poussoir (514) est monté sur la surface (516) du compartiment (512) uniquement par le biais du ressort enroulé (530).

FIG.1

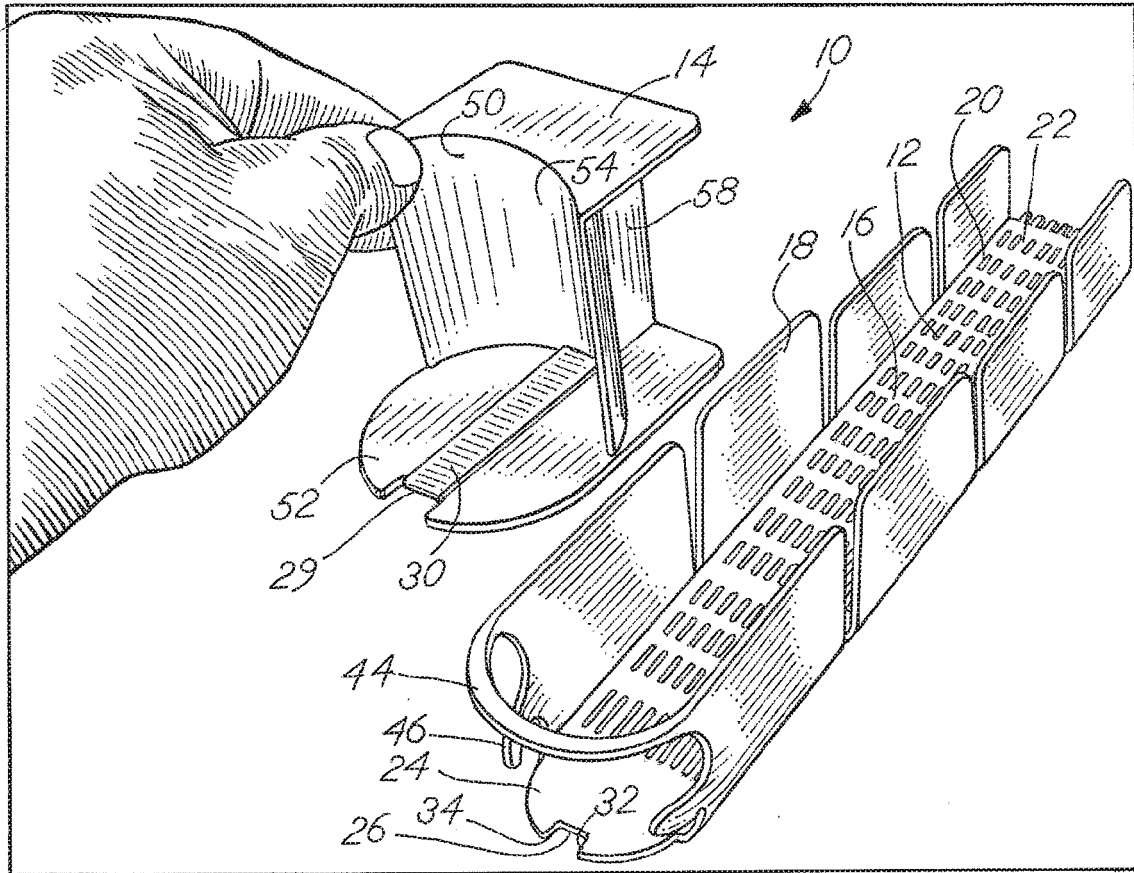
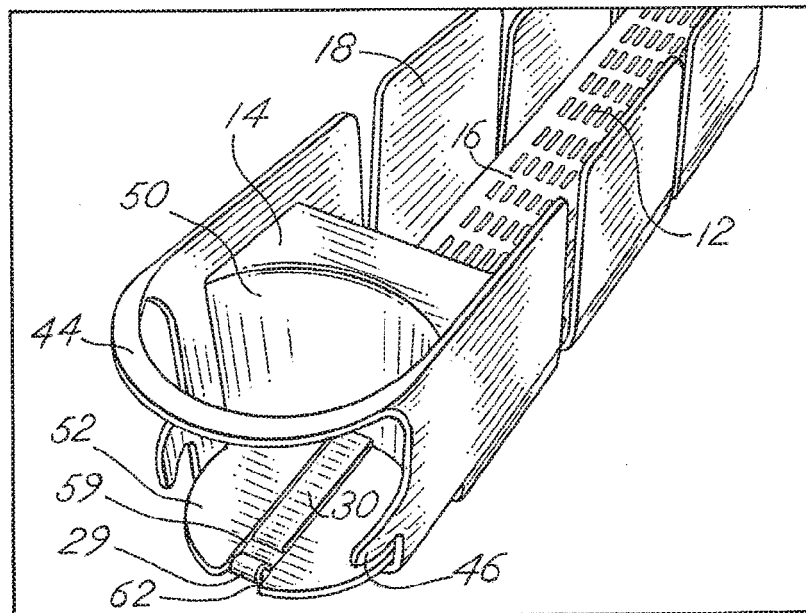
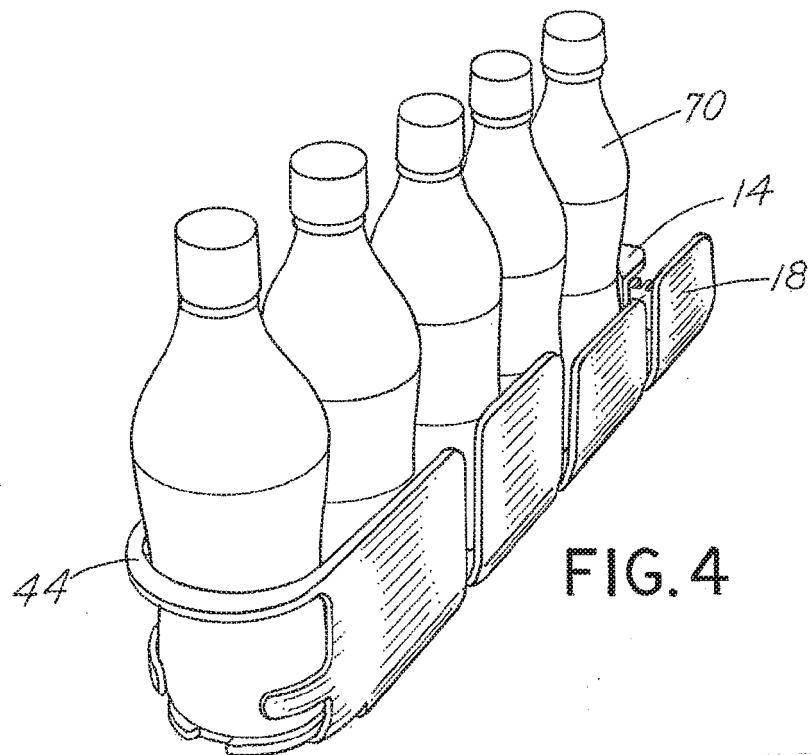
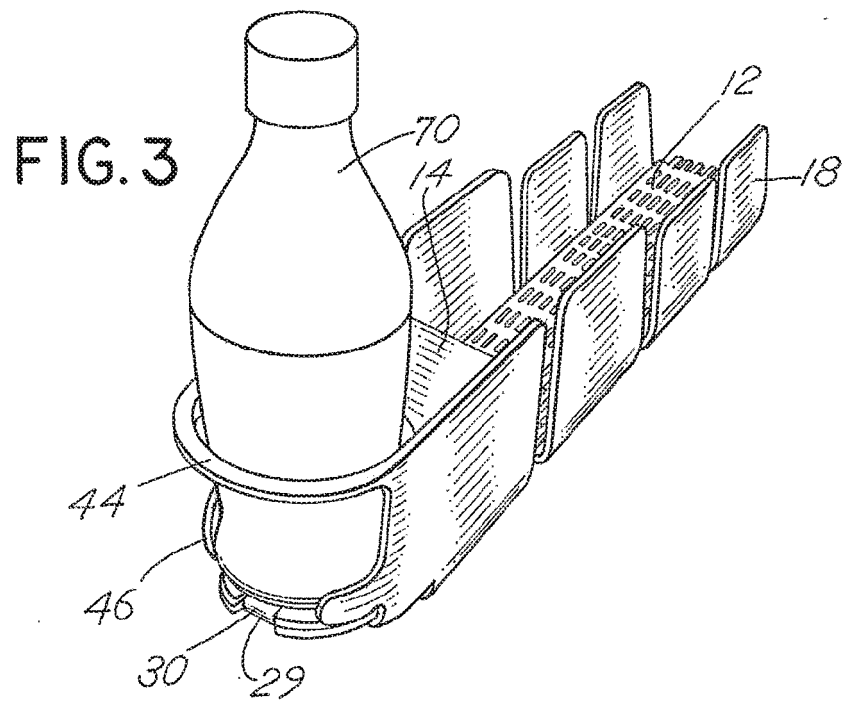


FIG.2





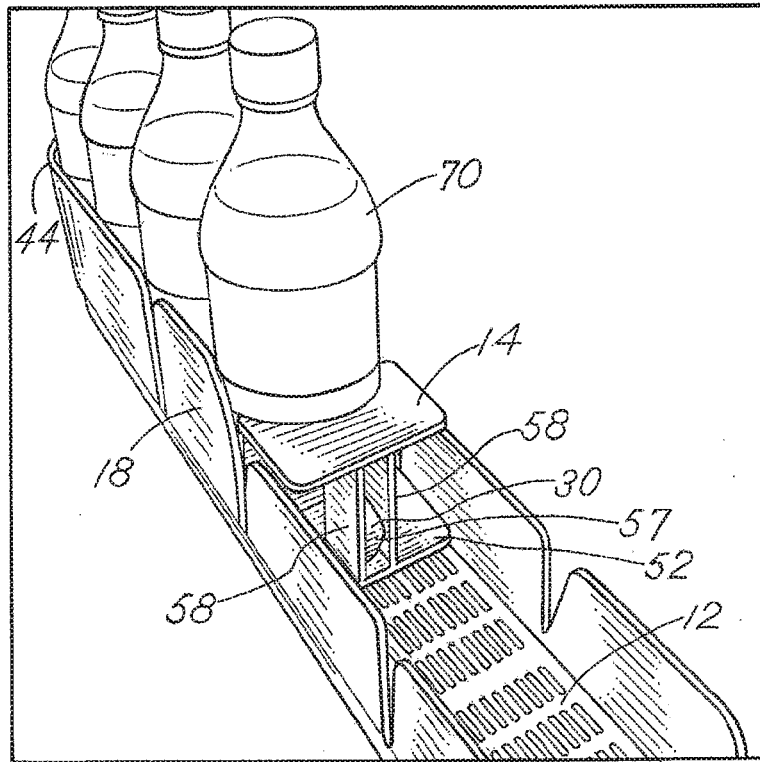


FIG. 5

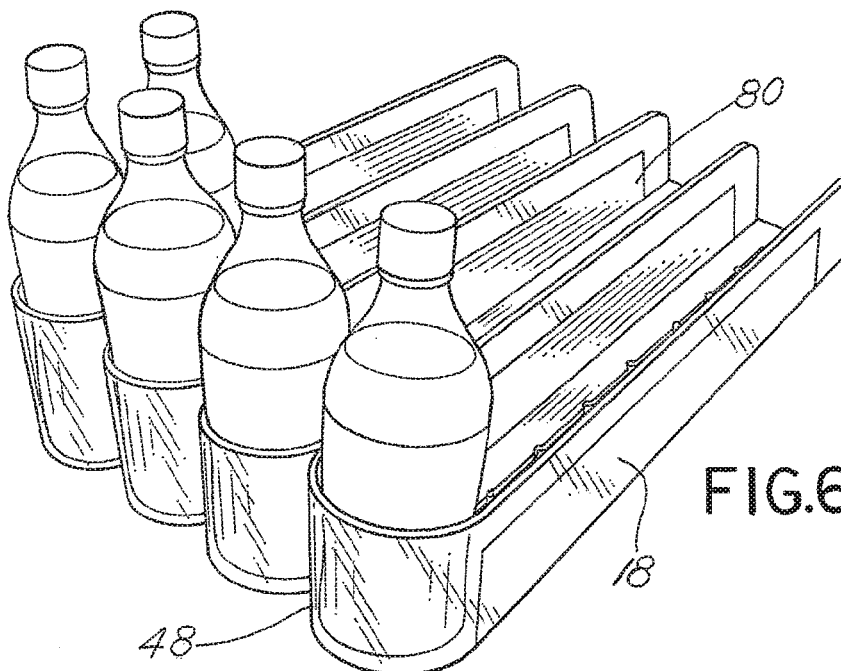


FIG. 6

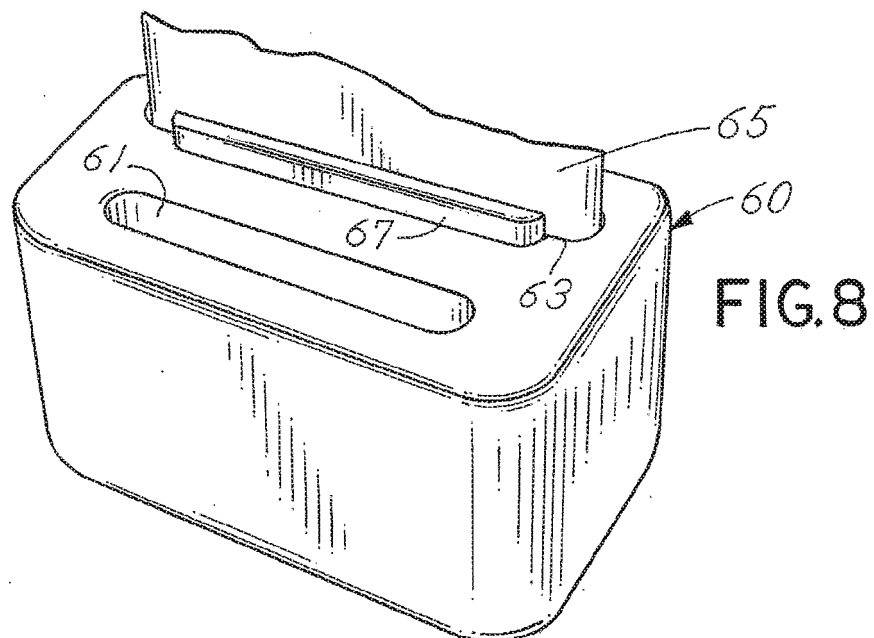
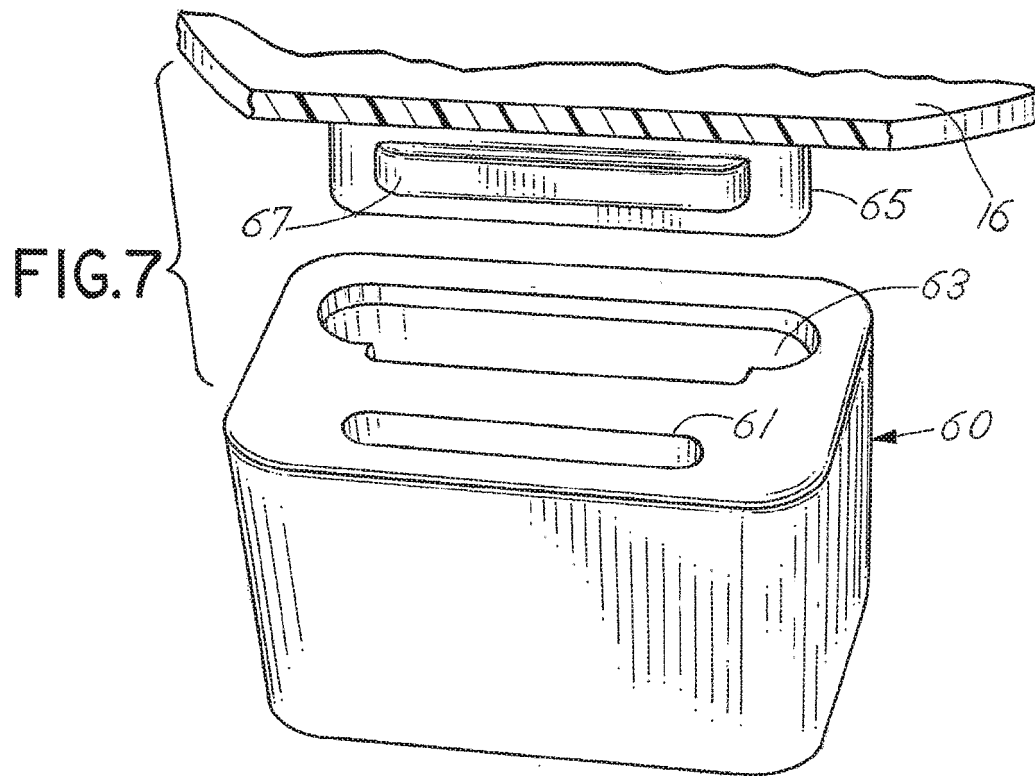


FIG.9

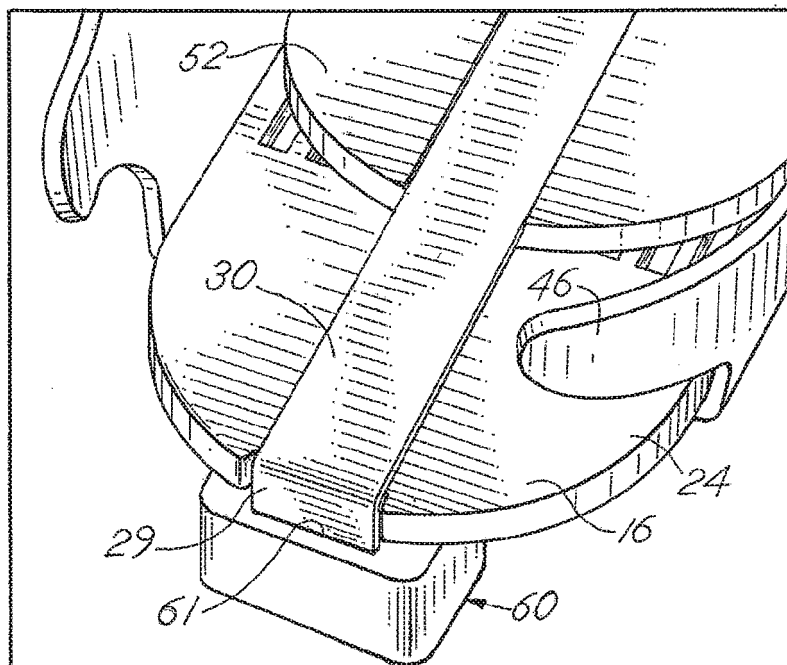
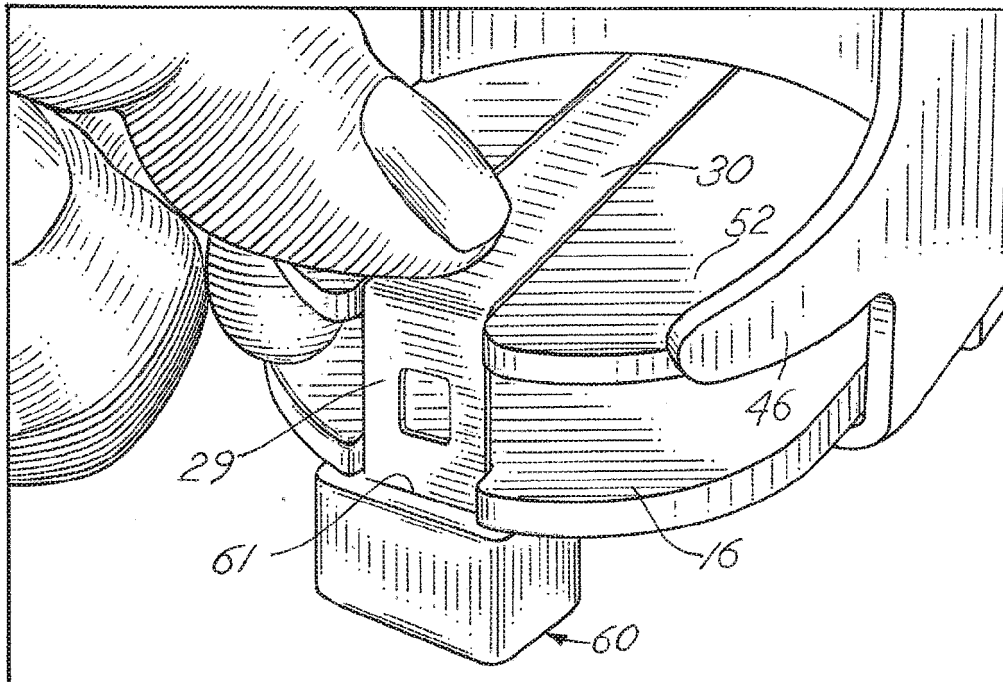


FIG.10

FIG.11

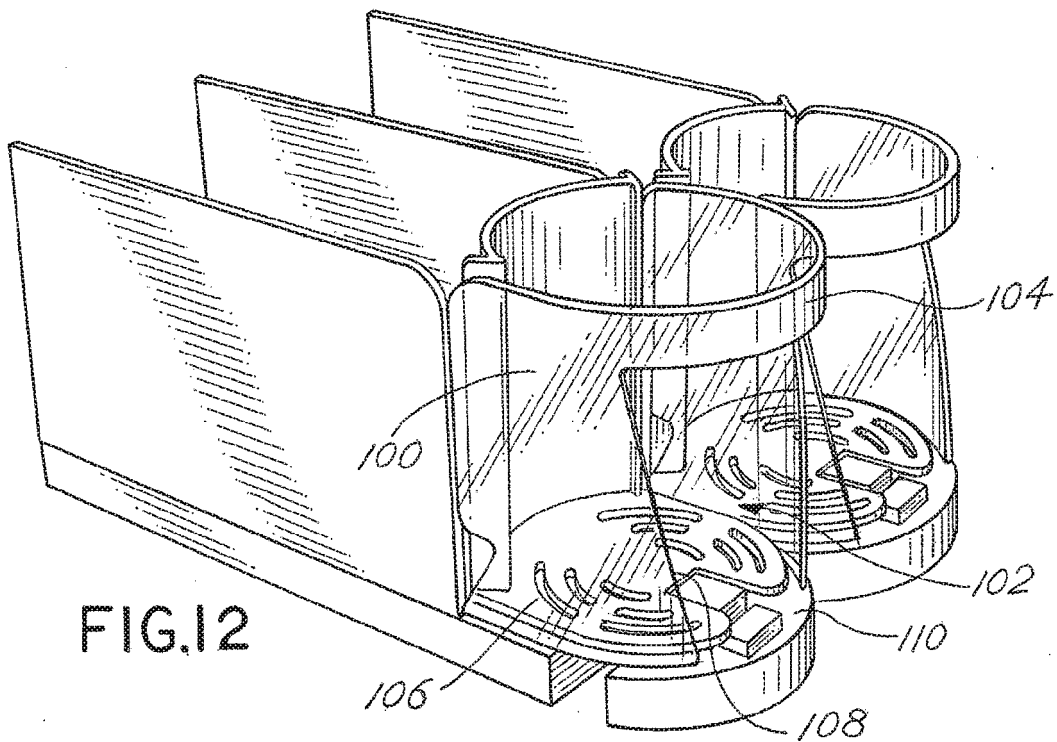
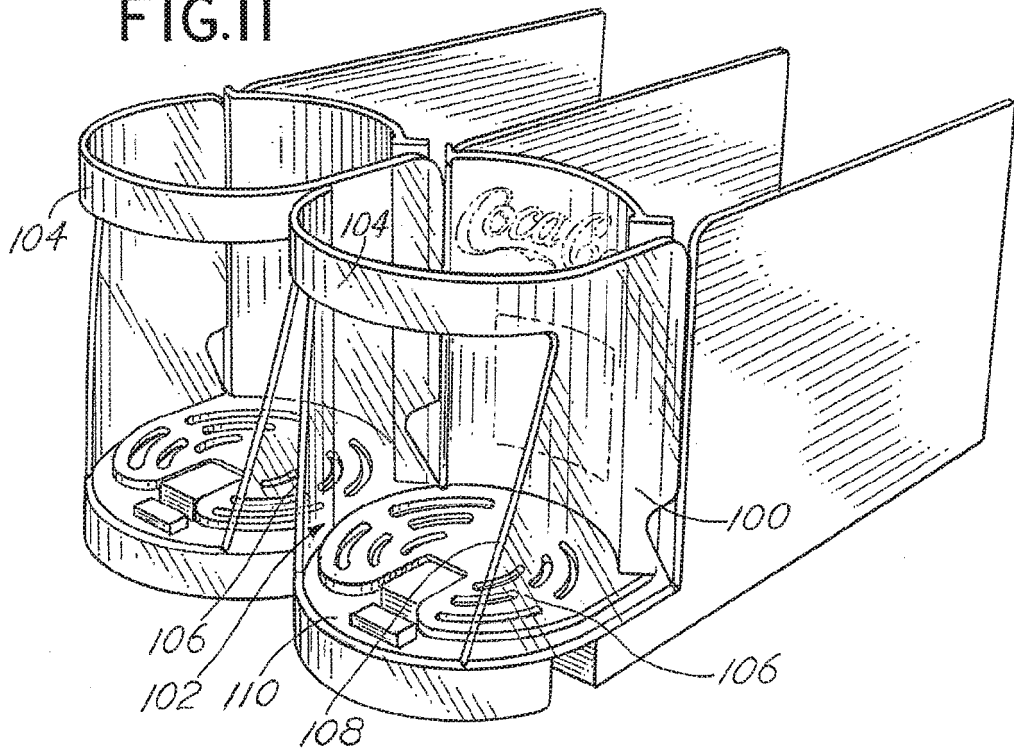


FIG.12

FIG.13

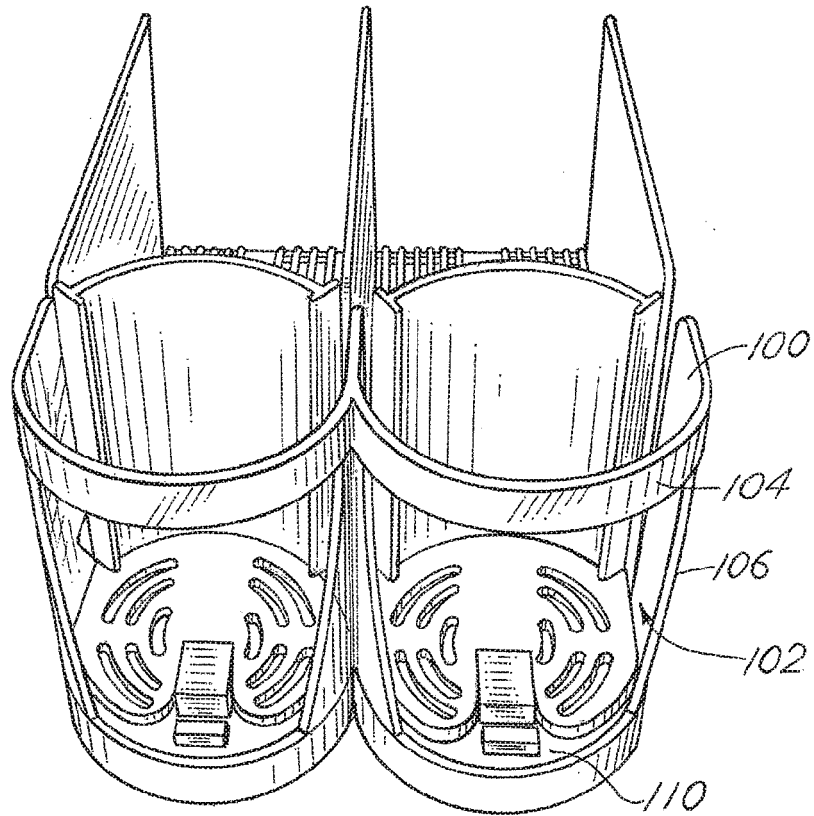


FIG.14

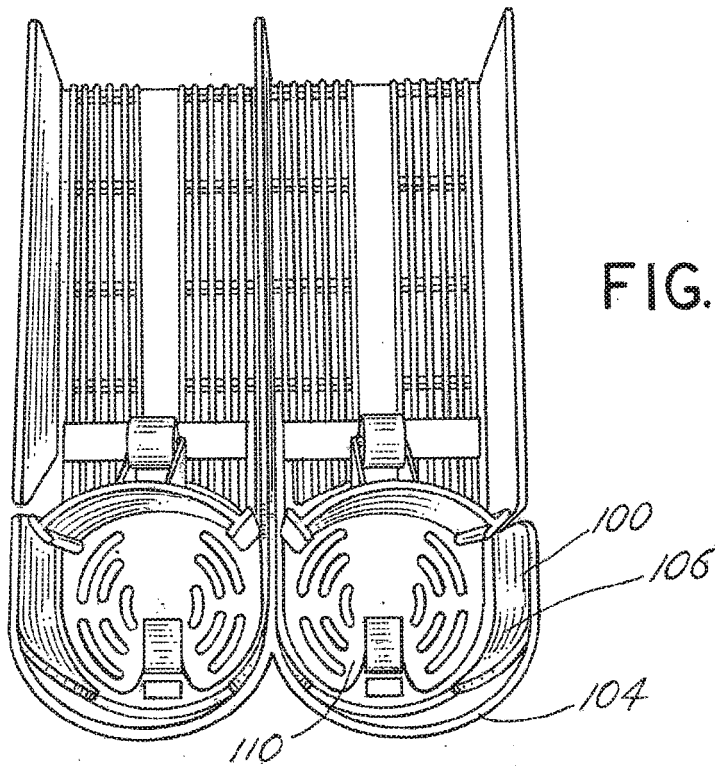


FIG.15

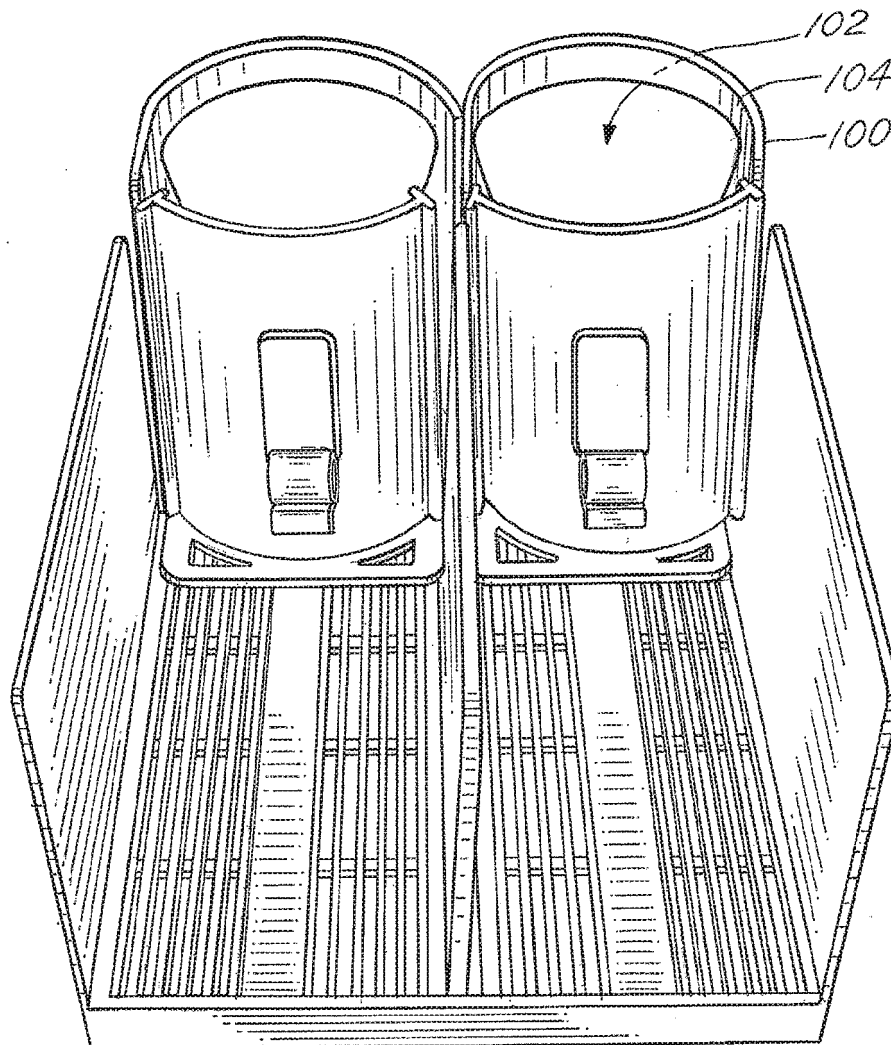


FIG.16

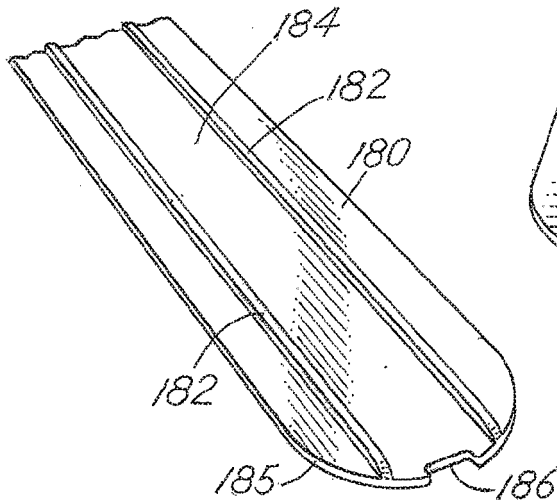


FIG.17

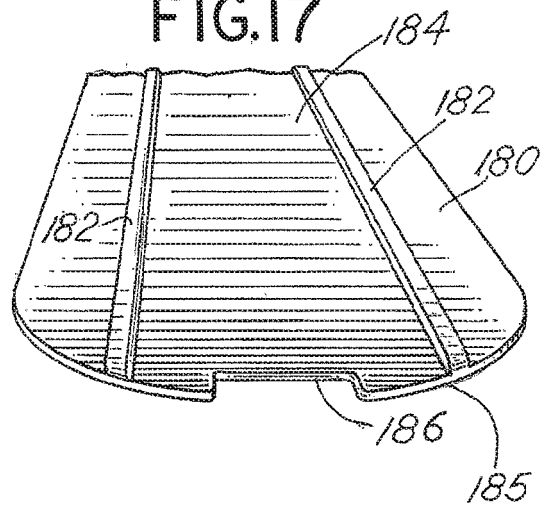


FIG.18

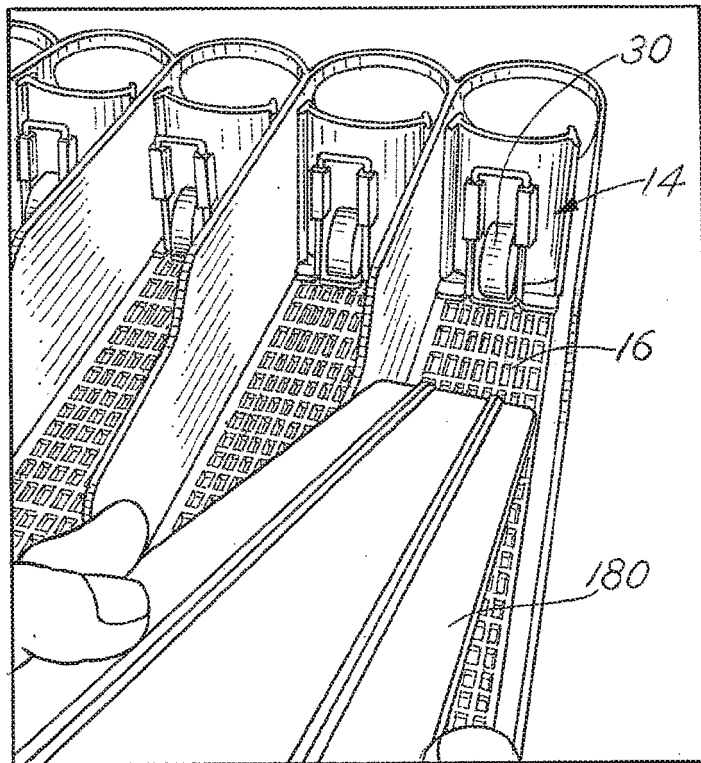


FIG.19

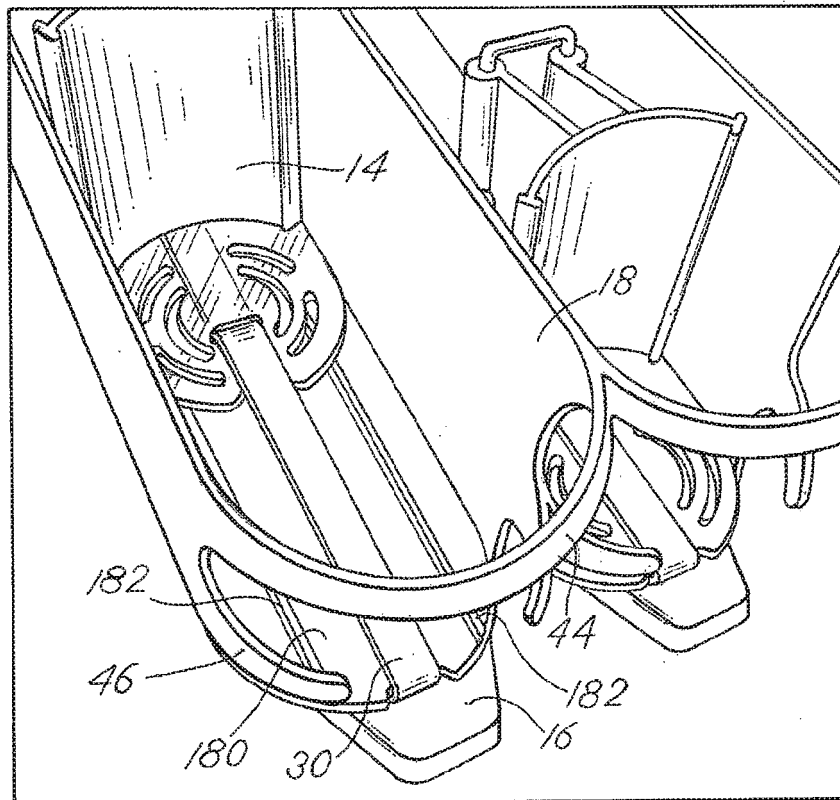


FIG.20

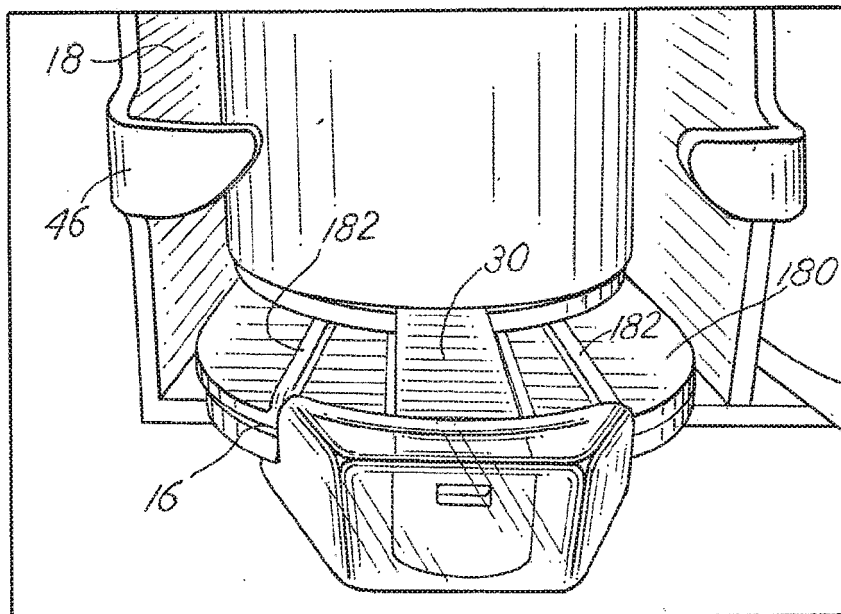


FIG.21

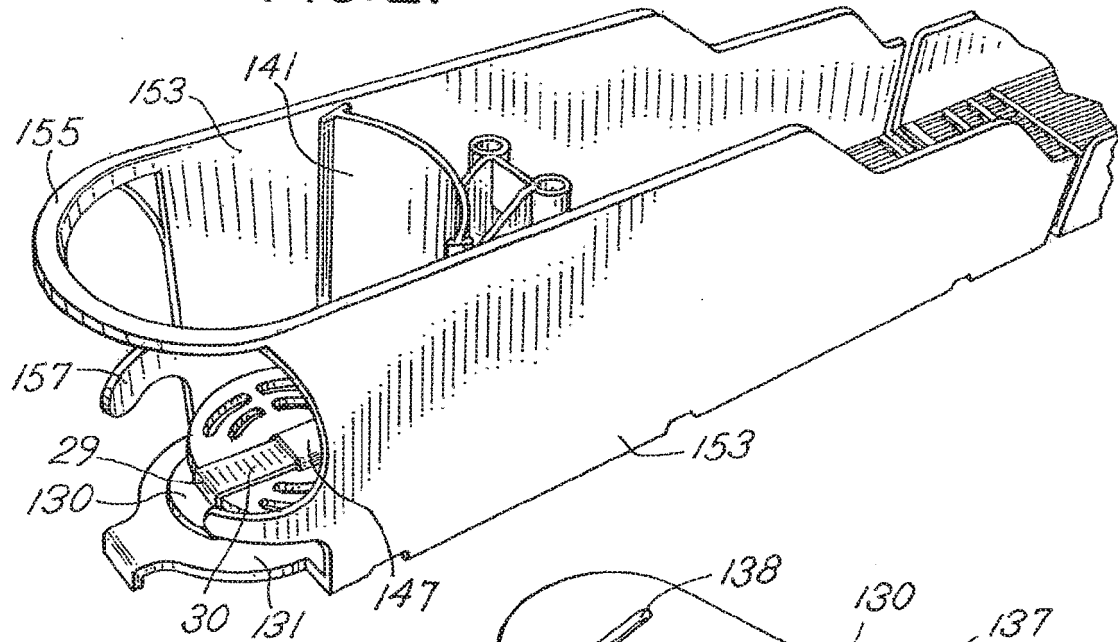


FIG.22

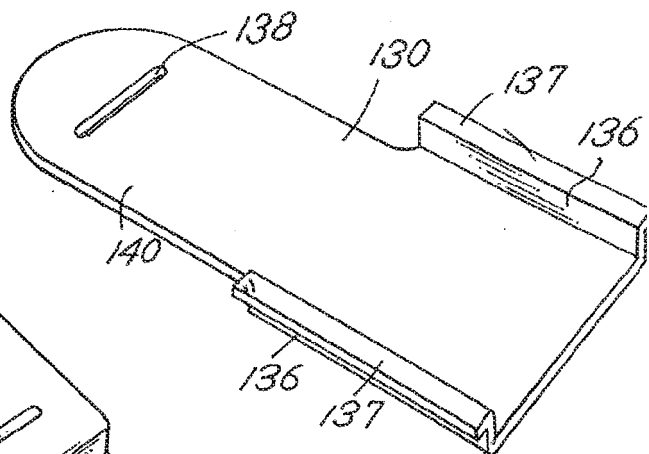


FIG.23

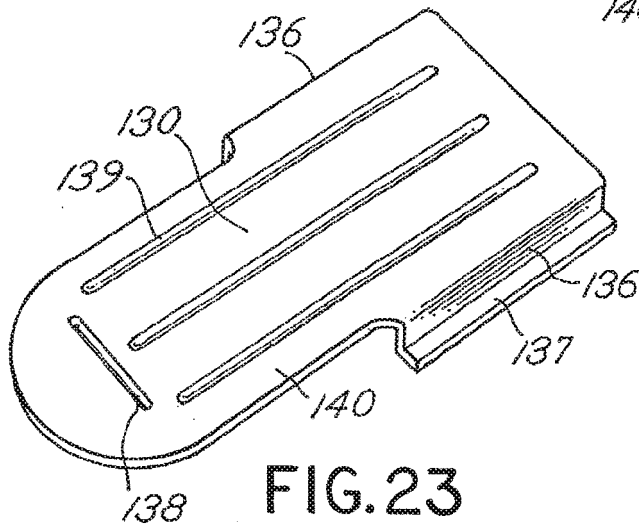


FIG.24

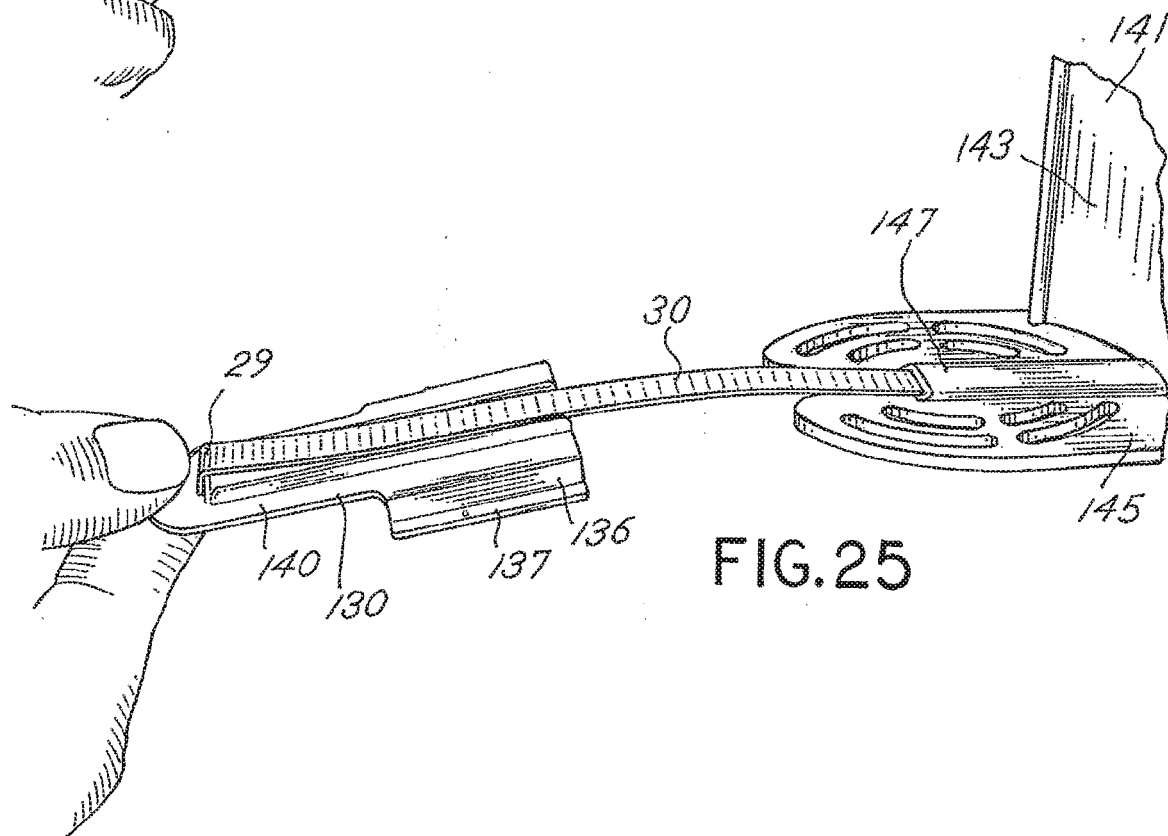
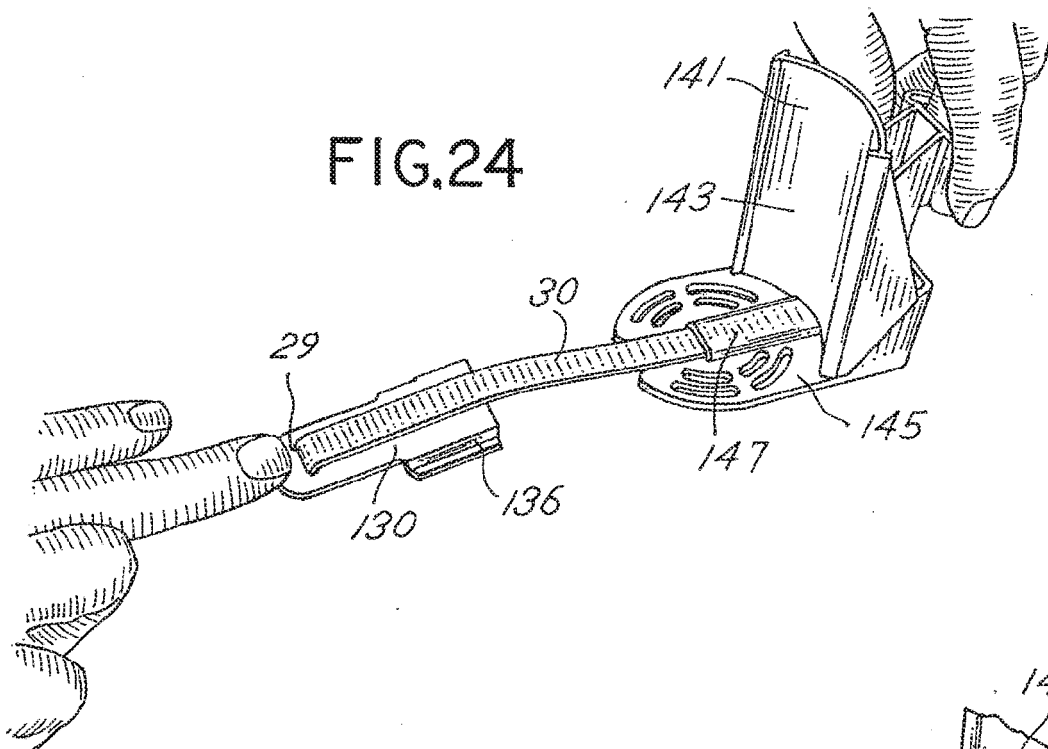


FIG.25

FIG.26

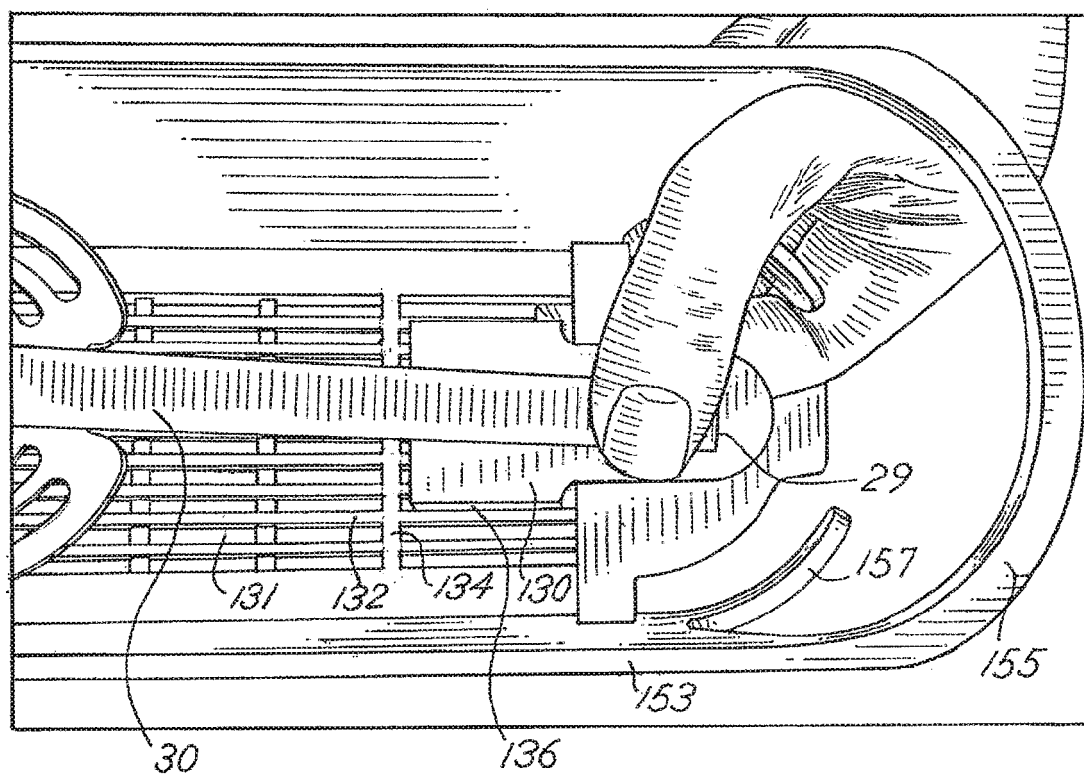
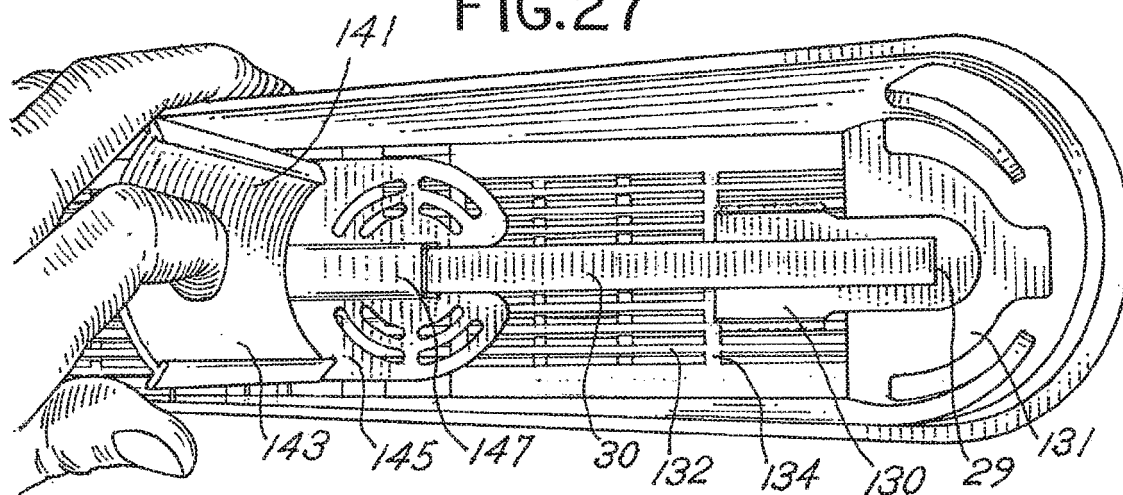


FIG.27



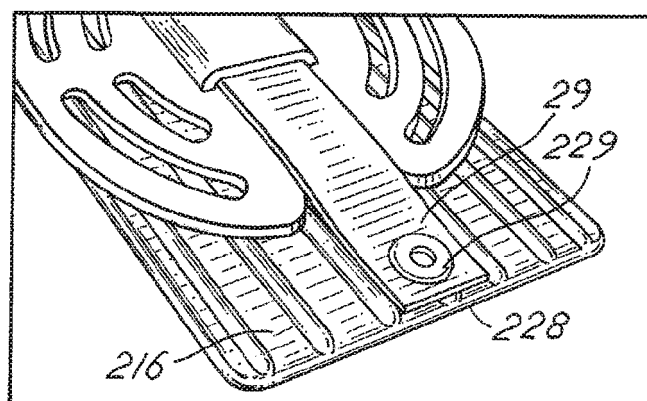
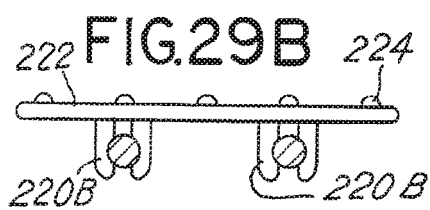
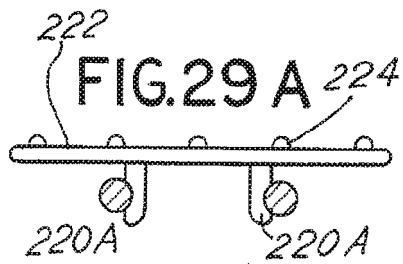
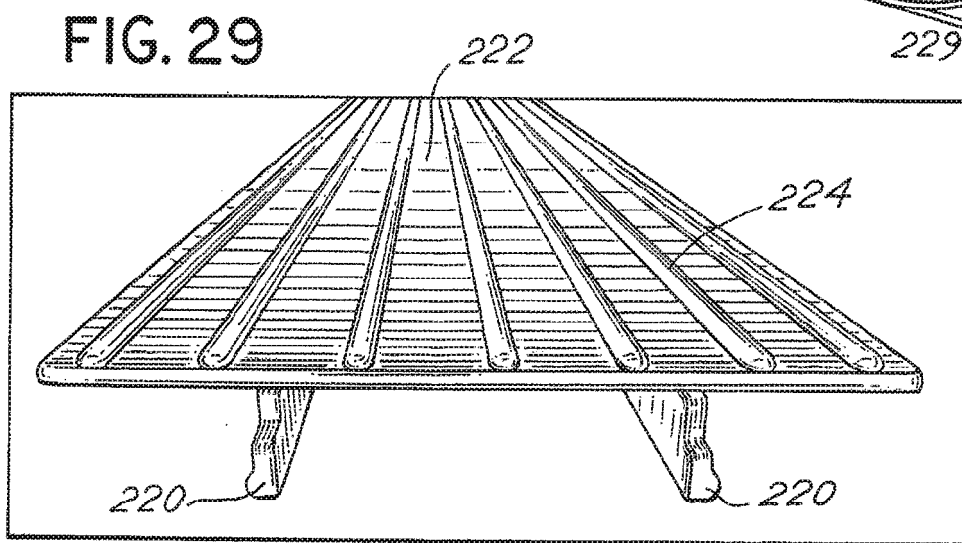
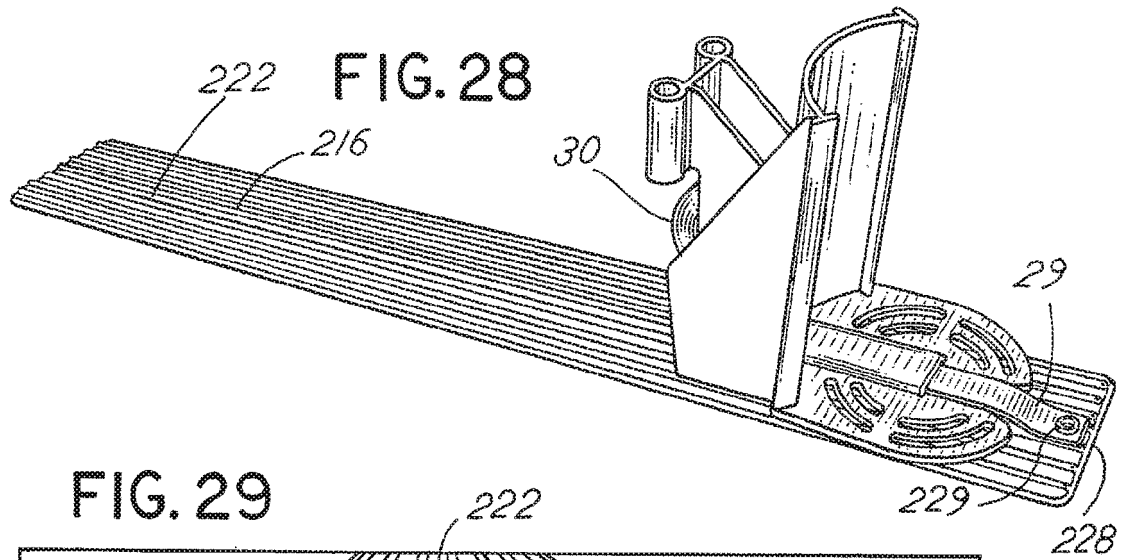


FIG.31

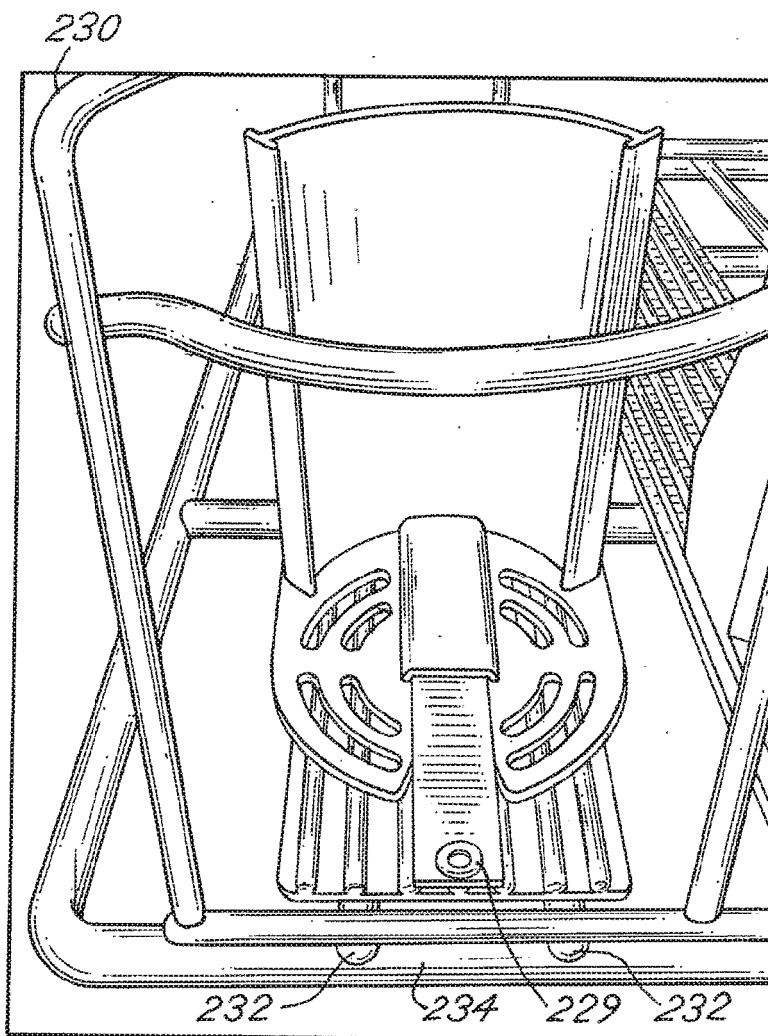
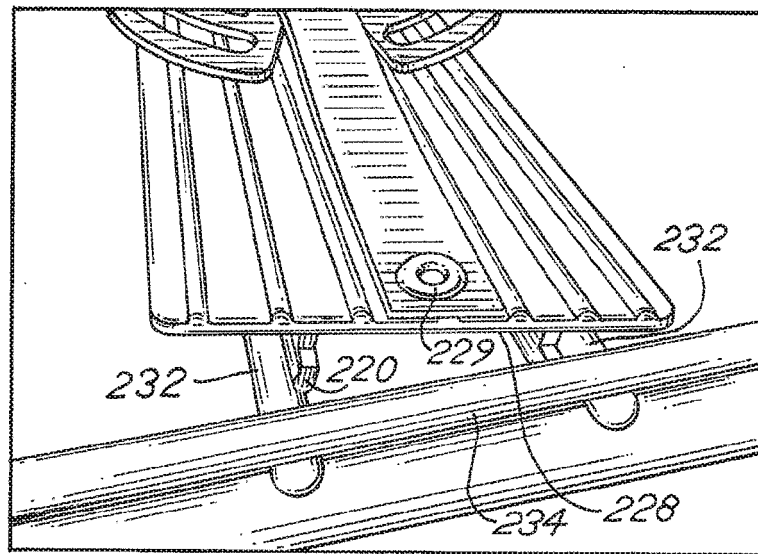


FIG.32

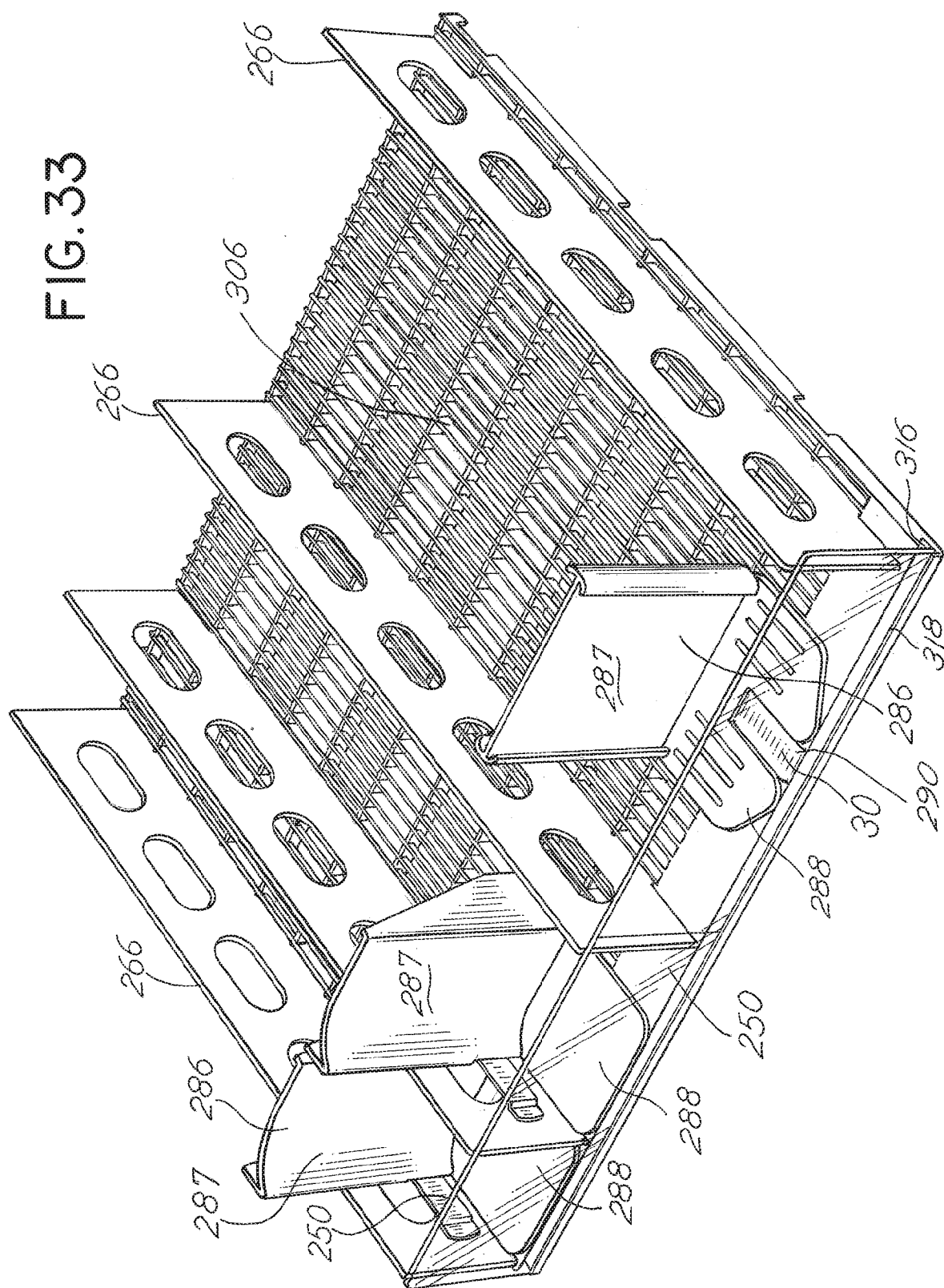
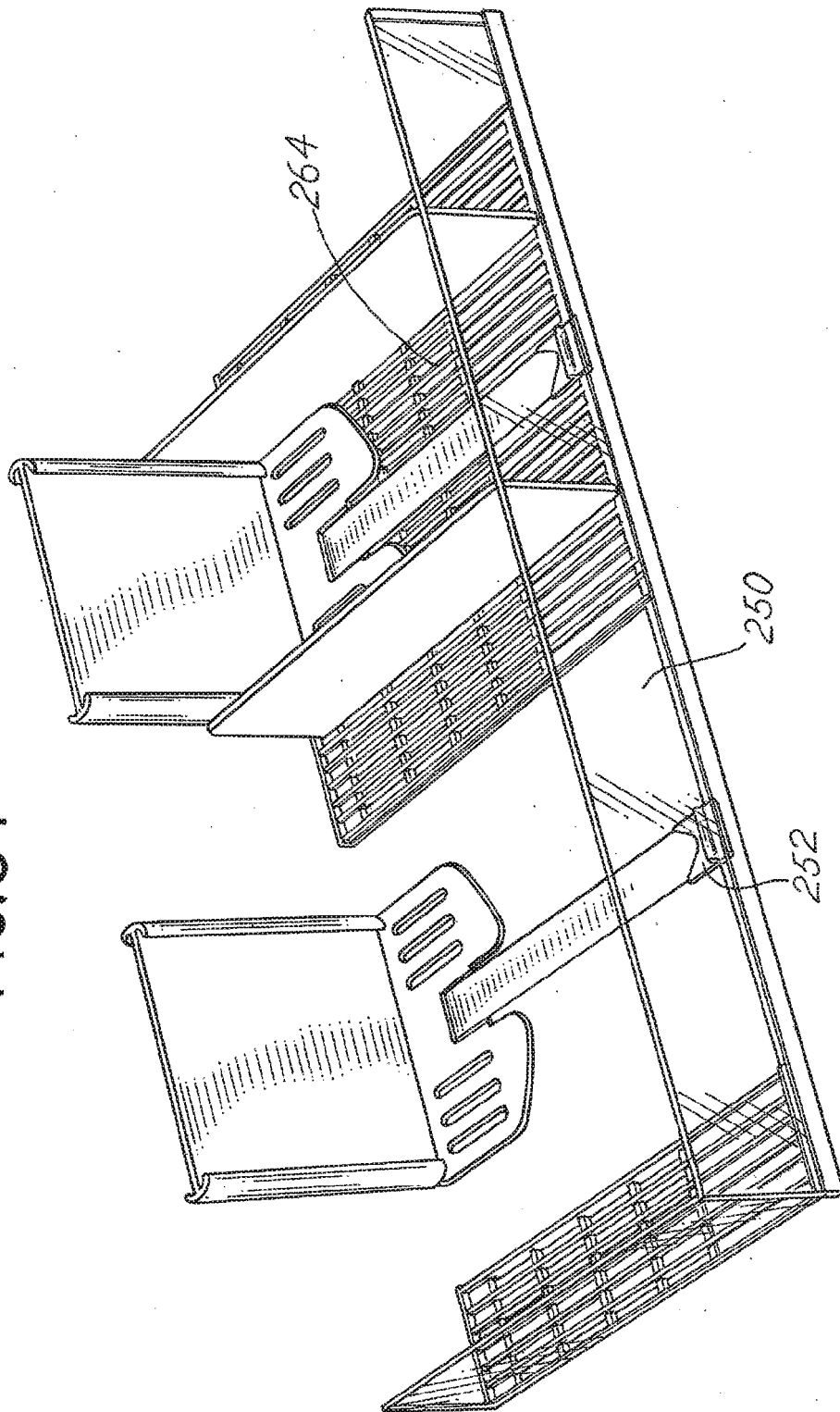
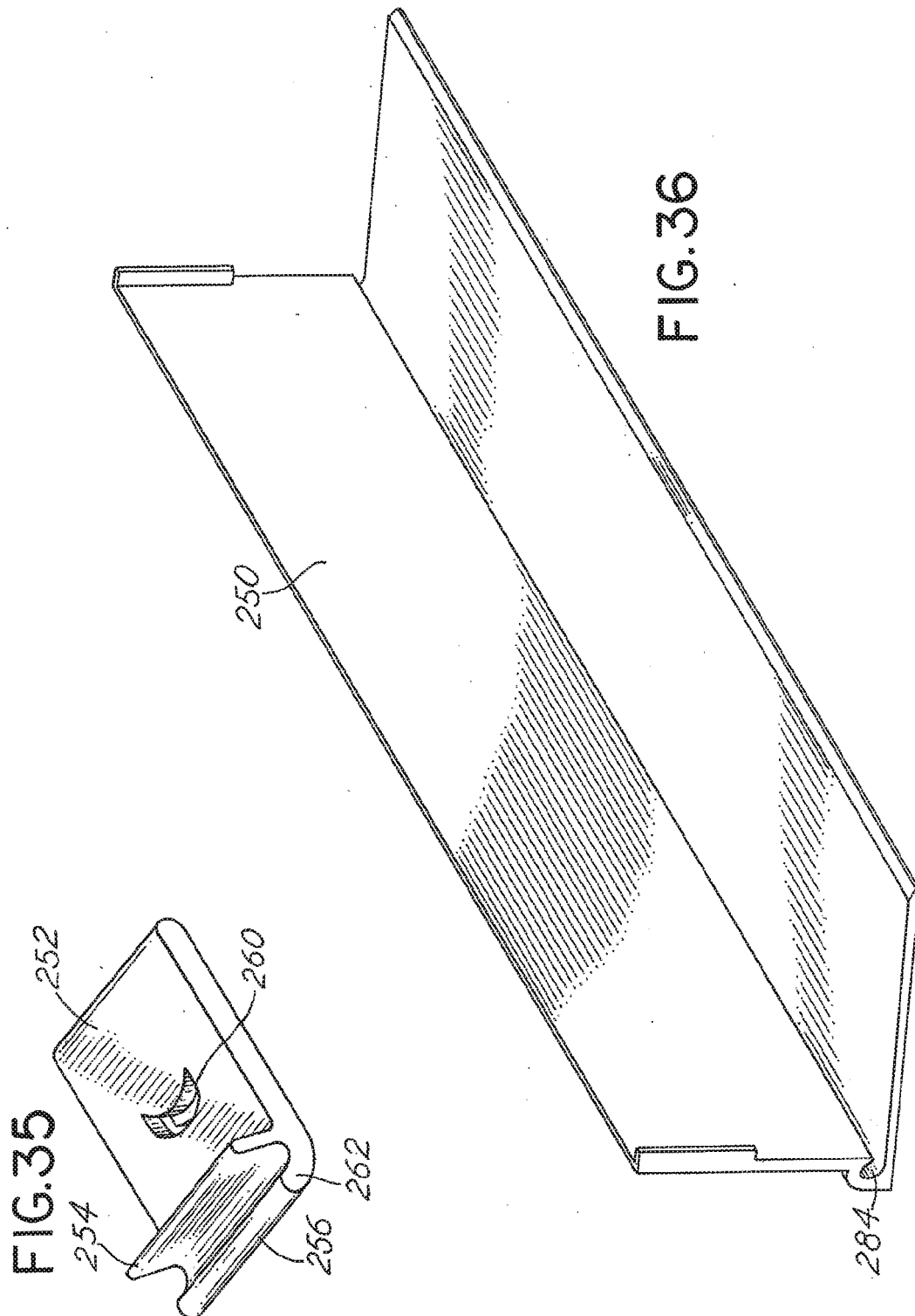
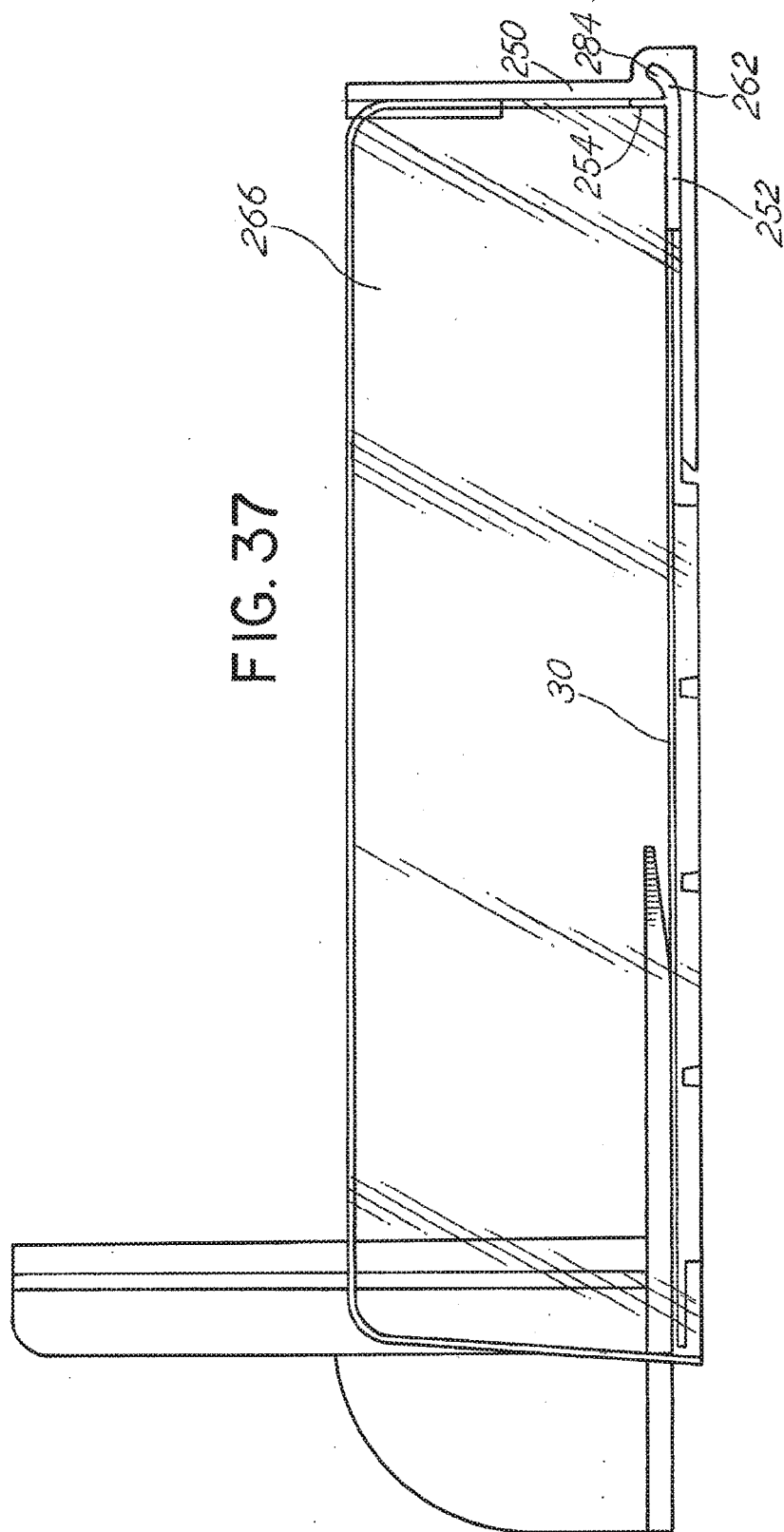
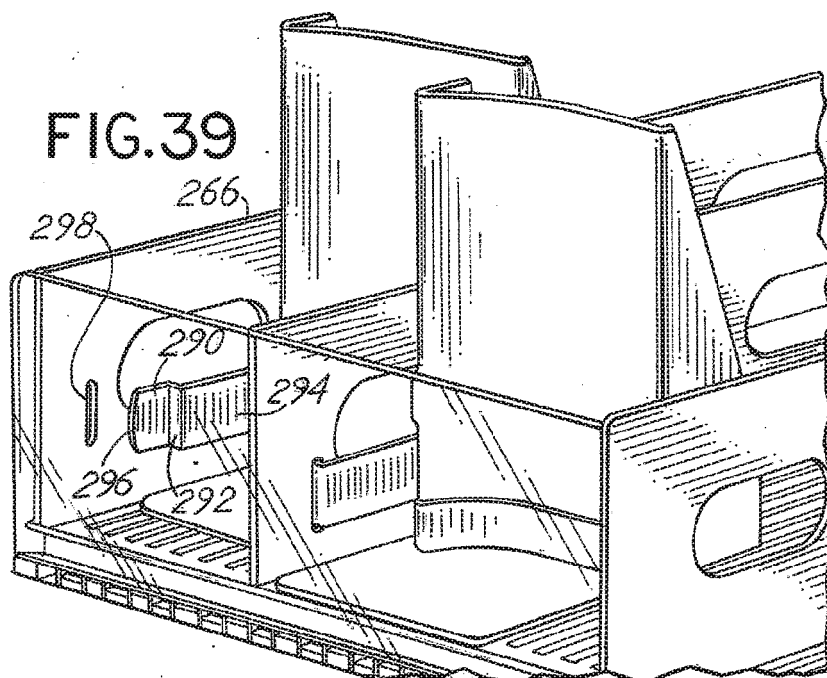
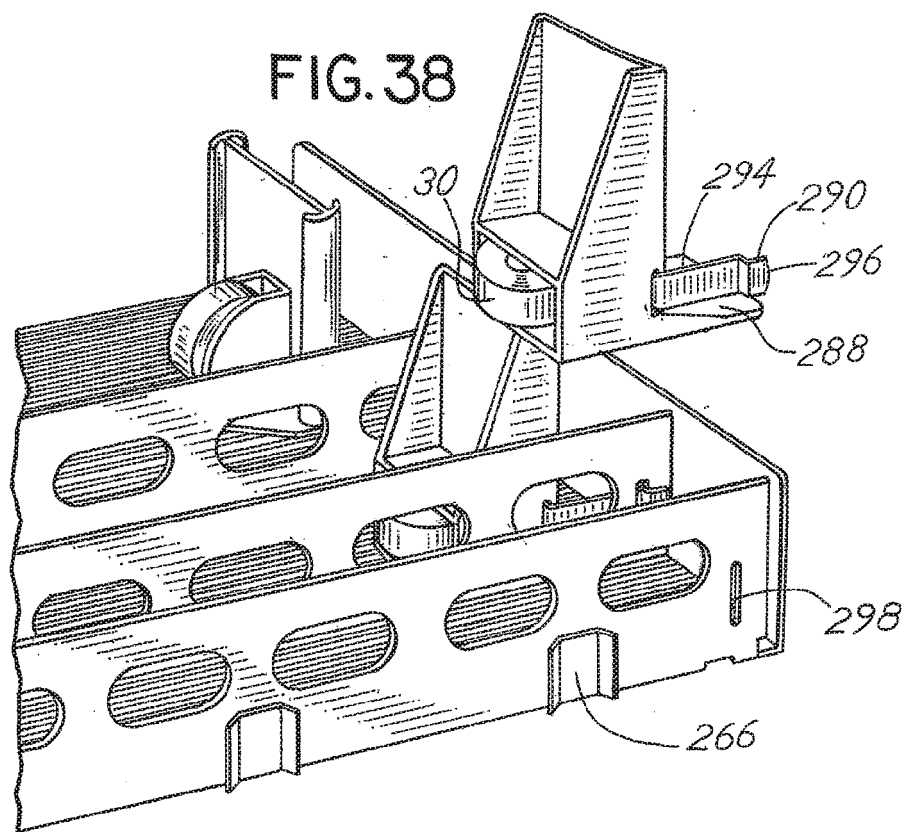


FIG.34









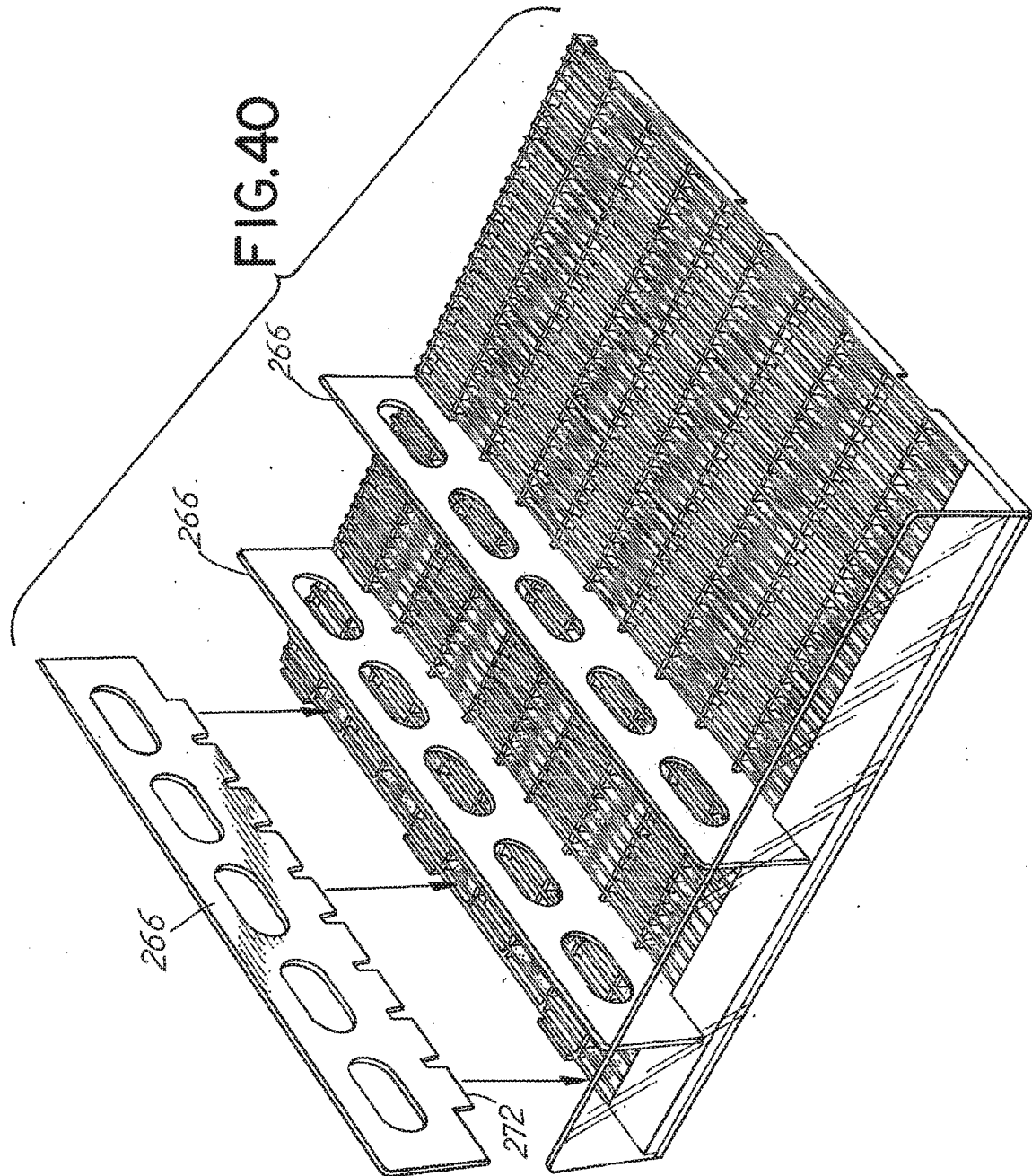


FIG.4IA

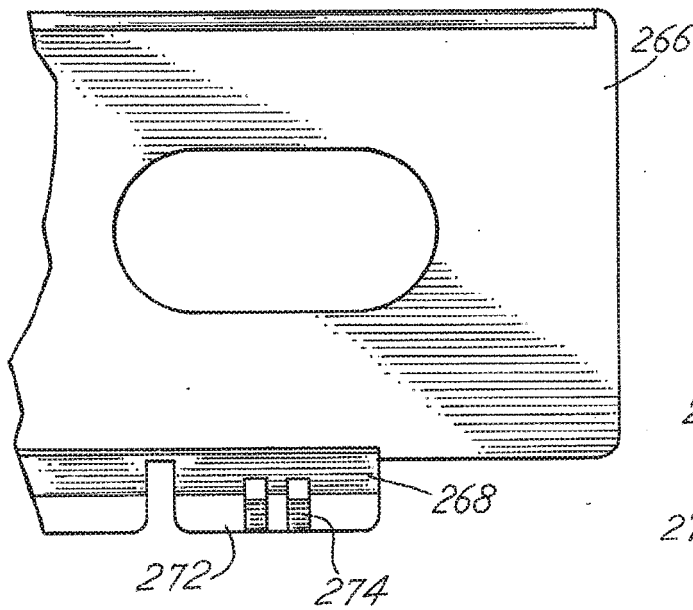


FIG.4ID

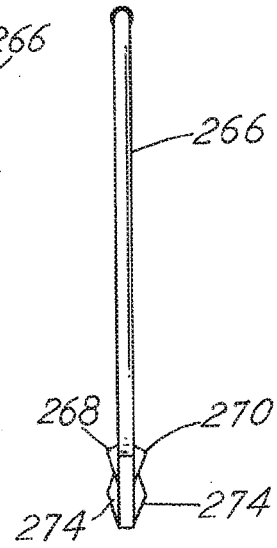
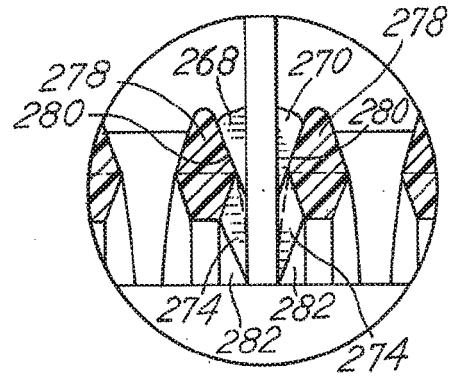
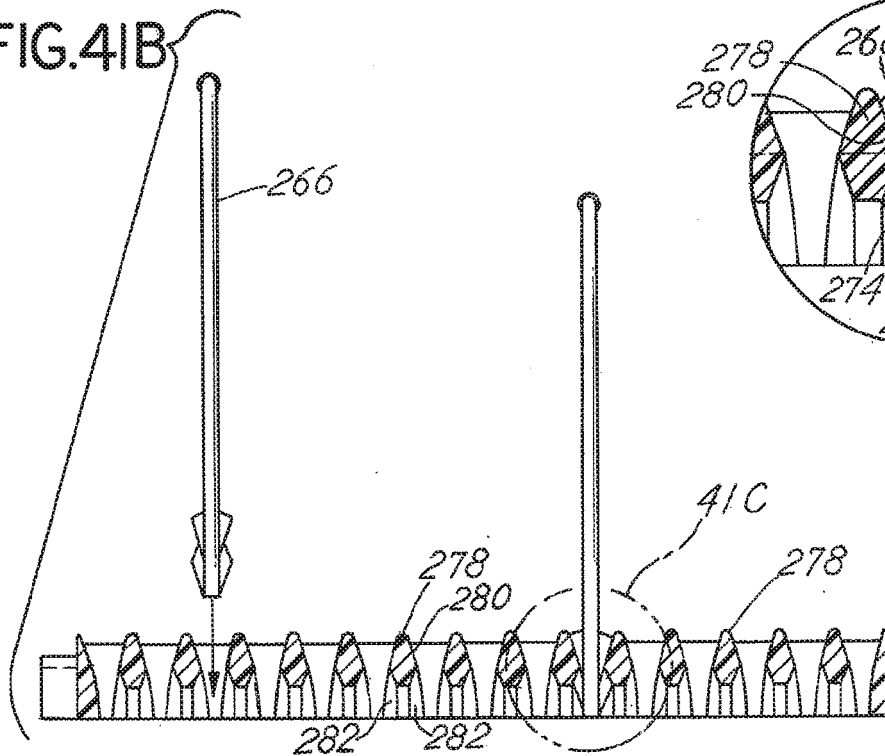
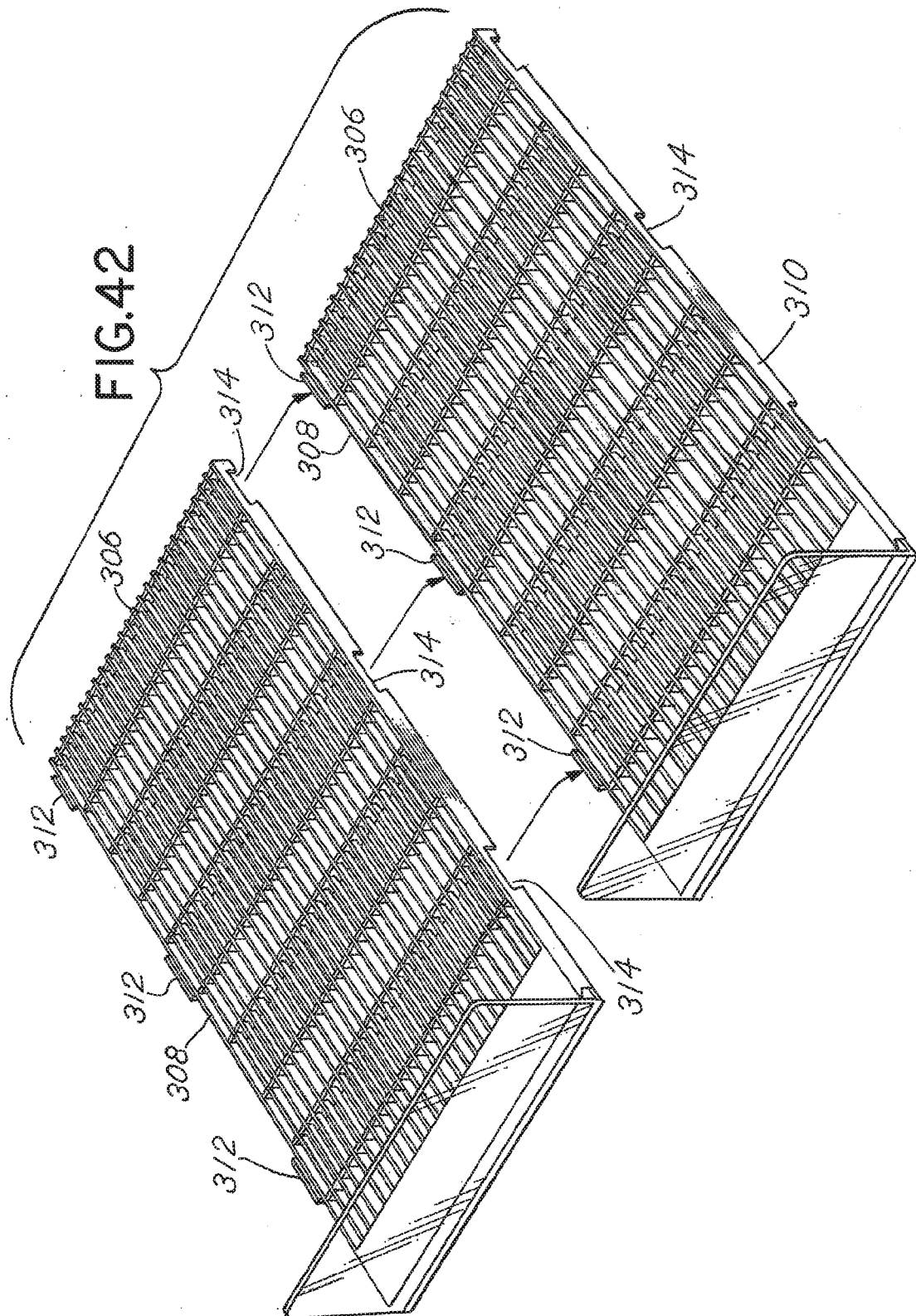
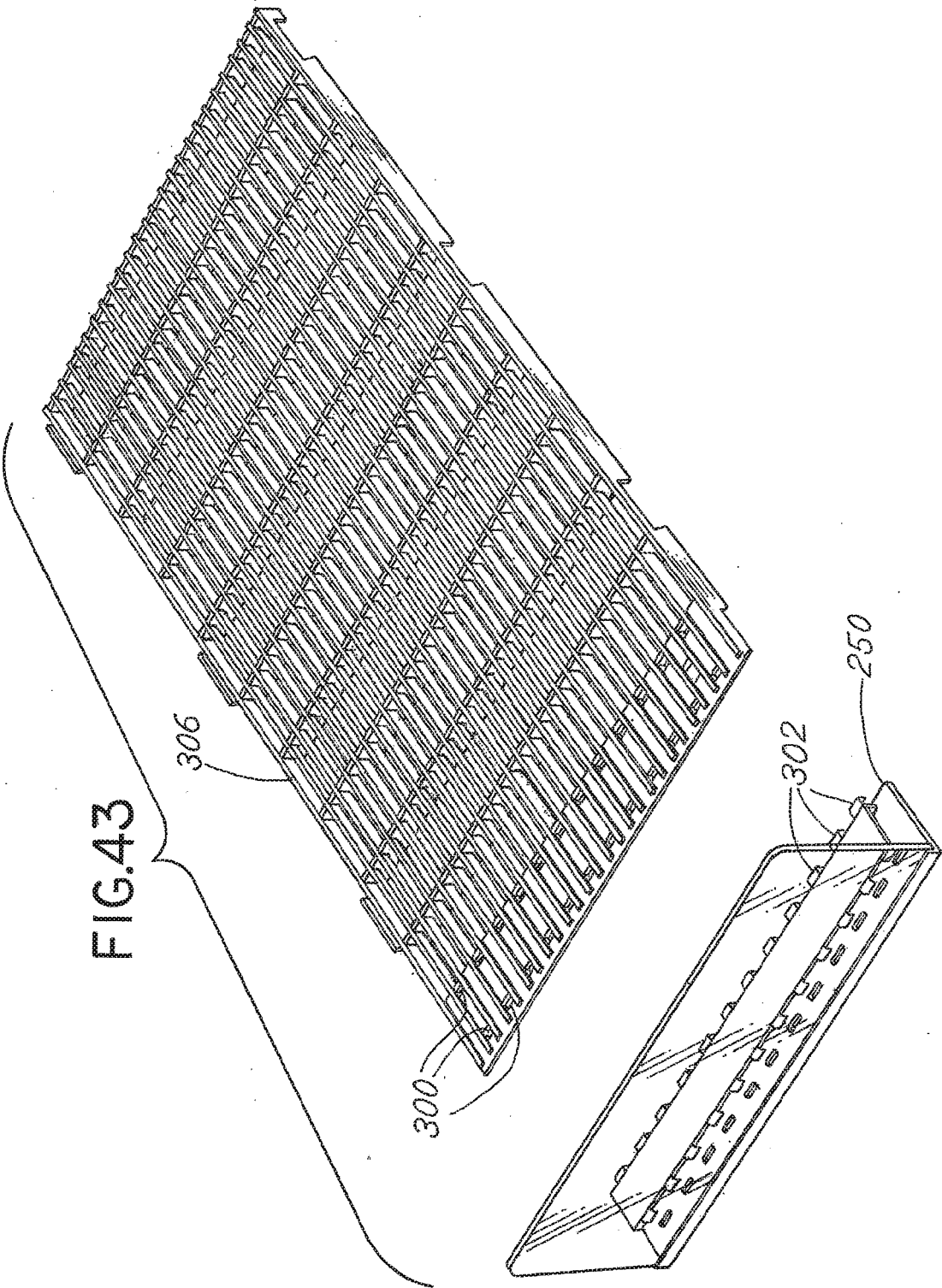


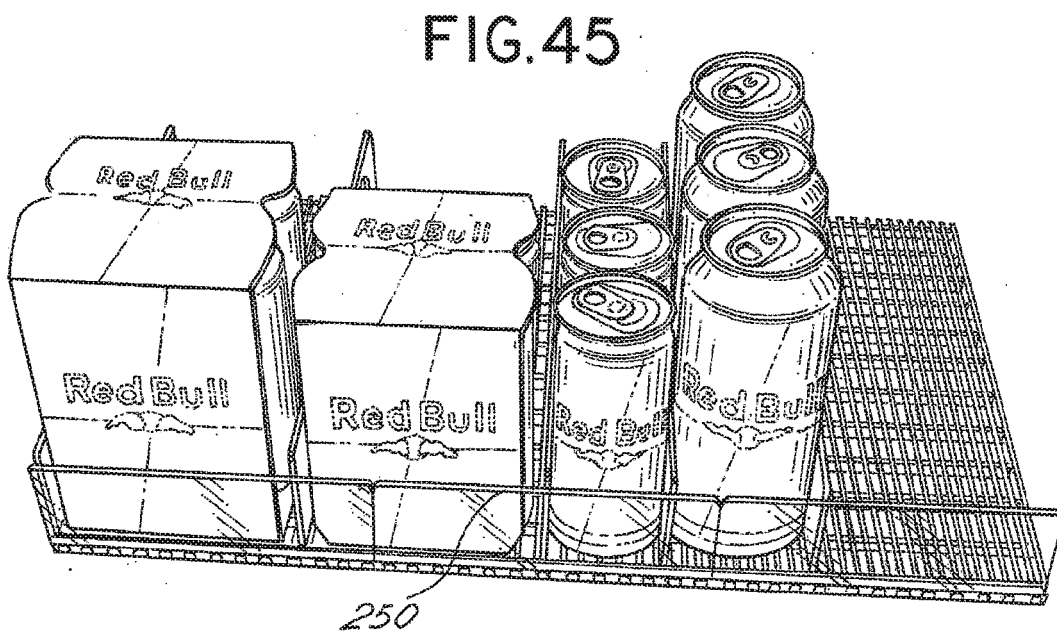
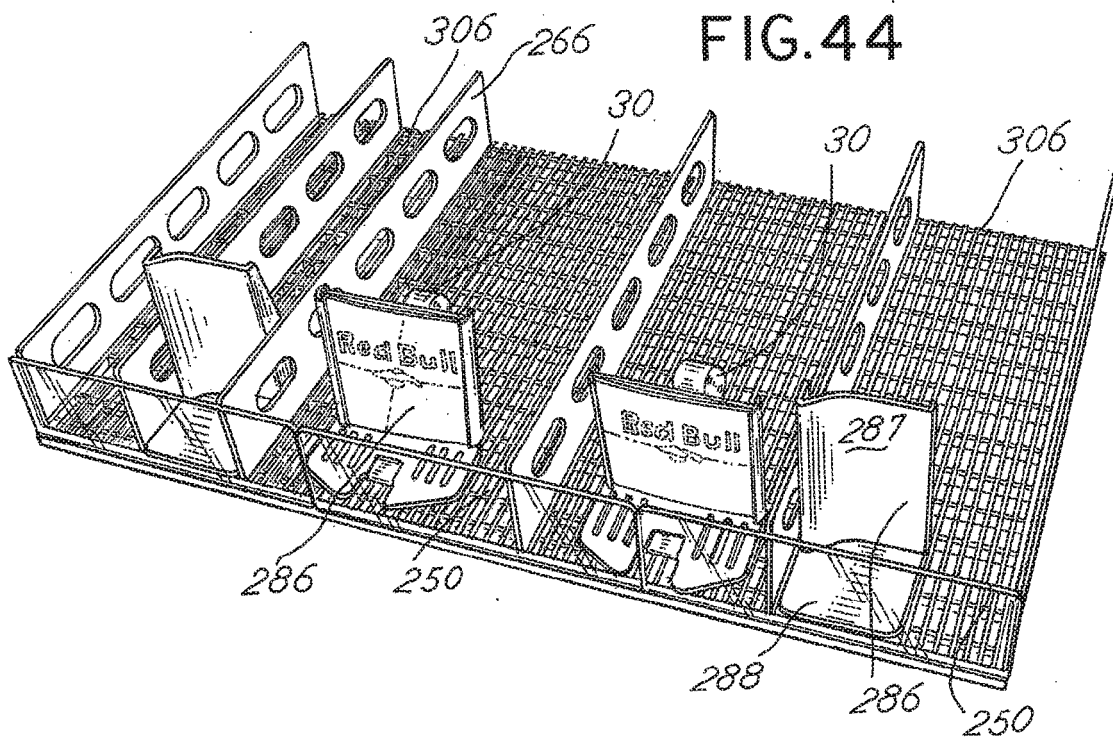
FIG.4IC

FIG.4IB









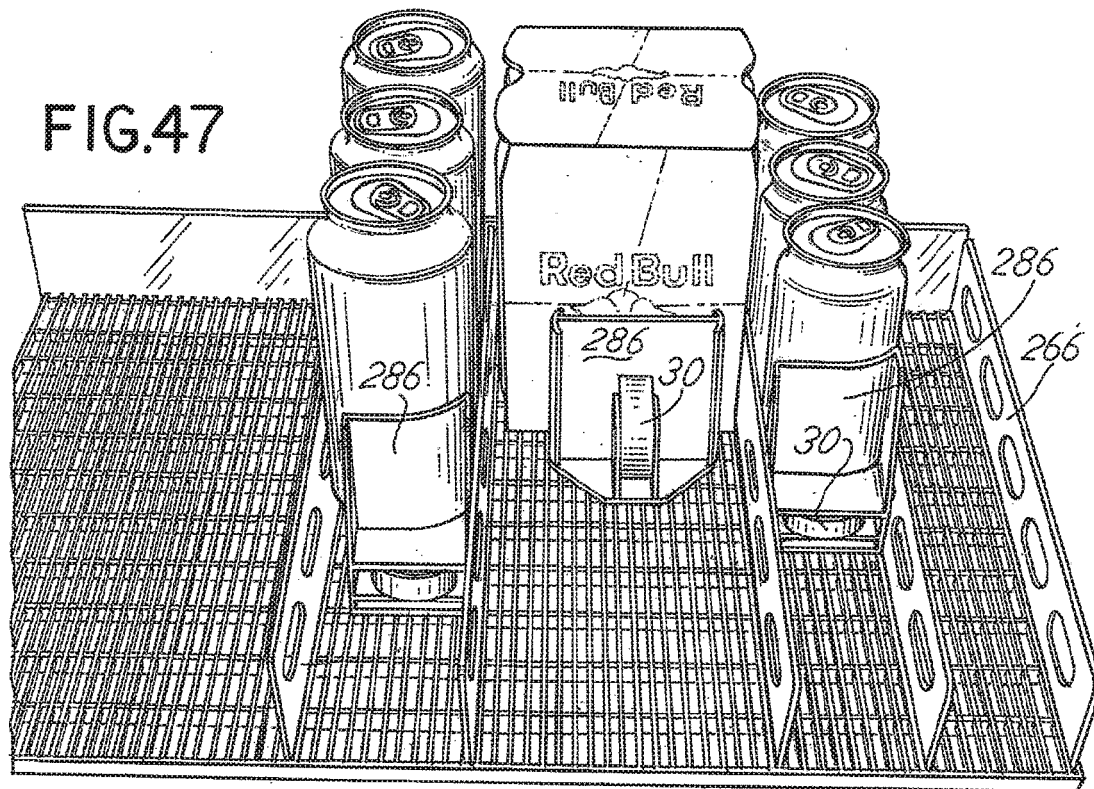
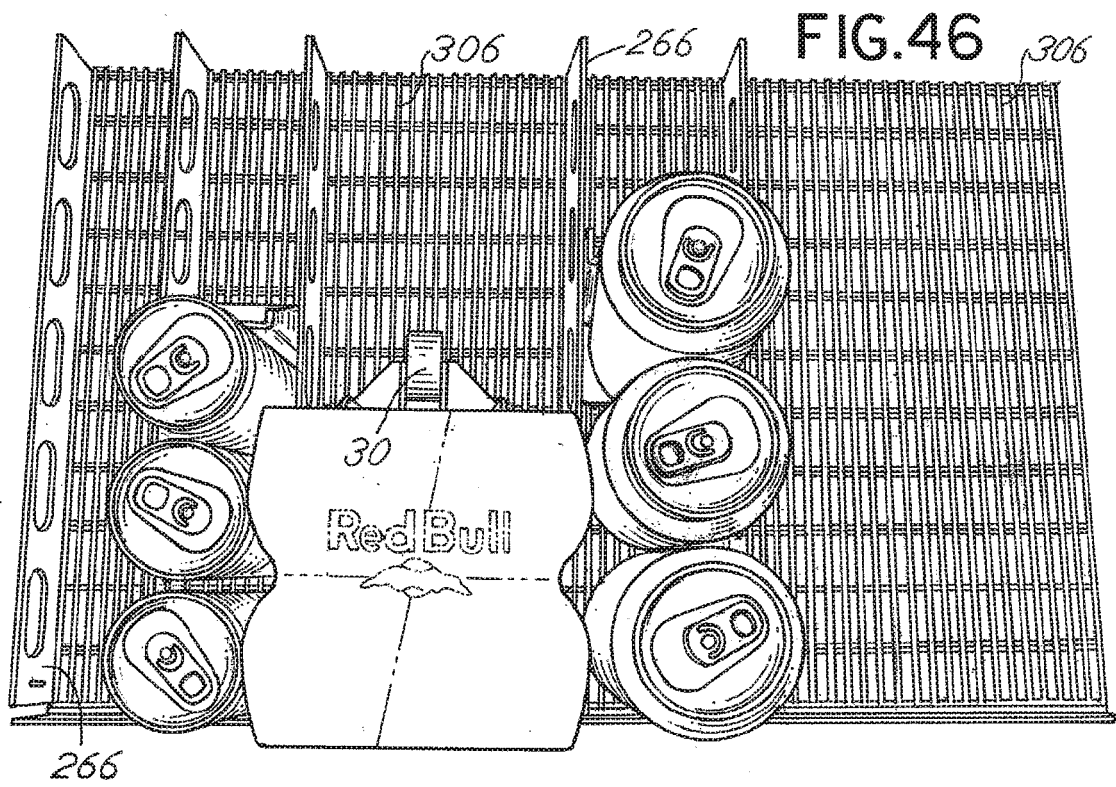


FIG.48

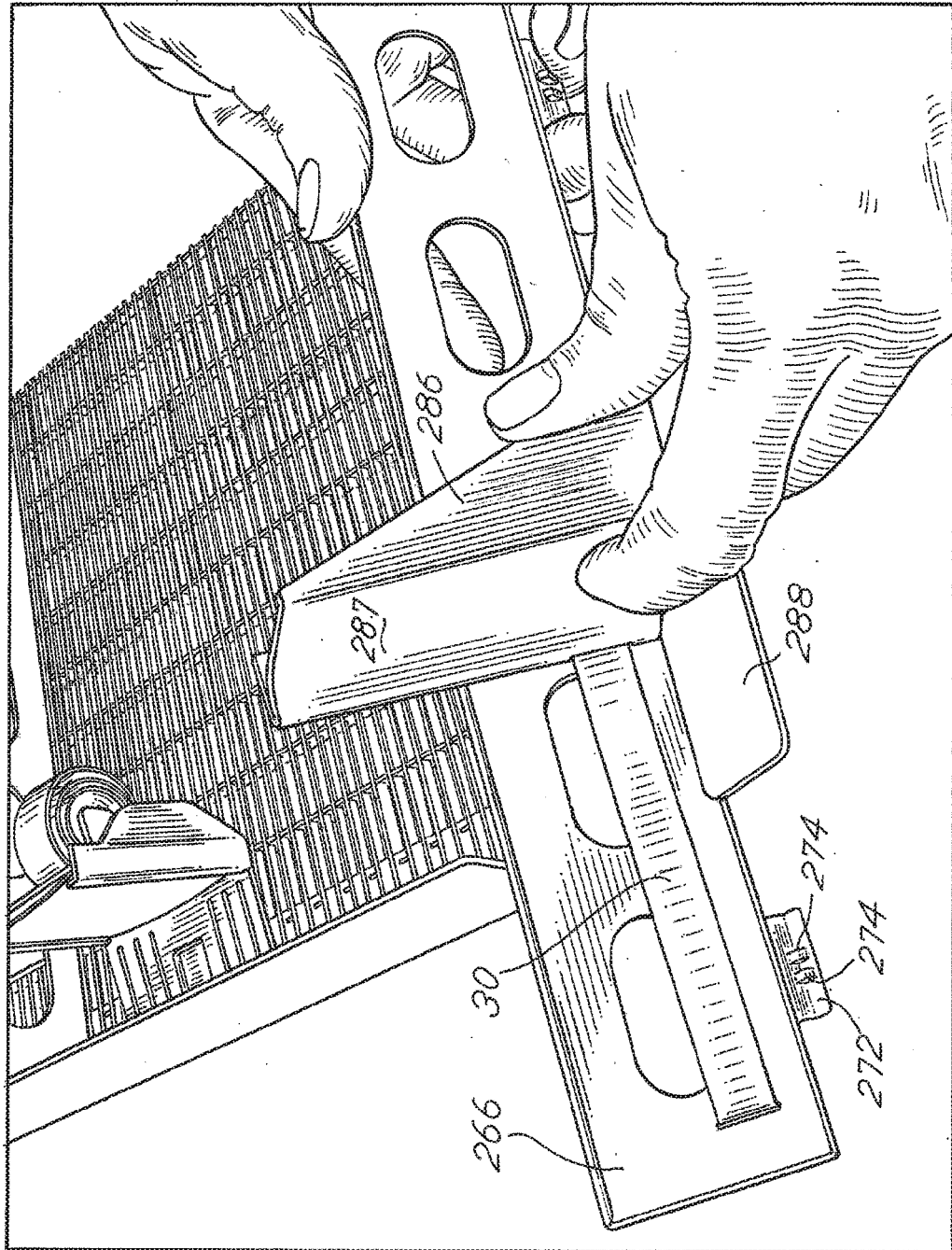
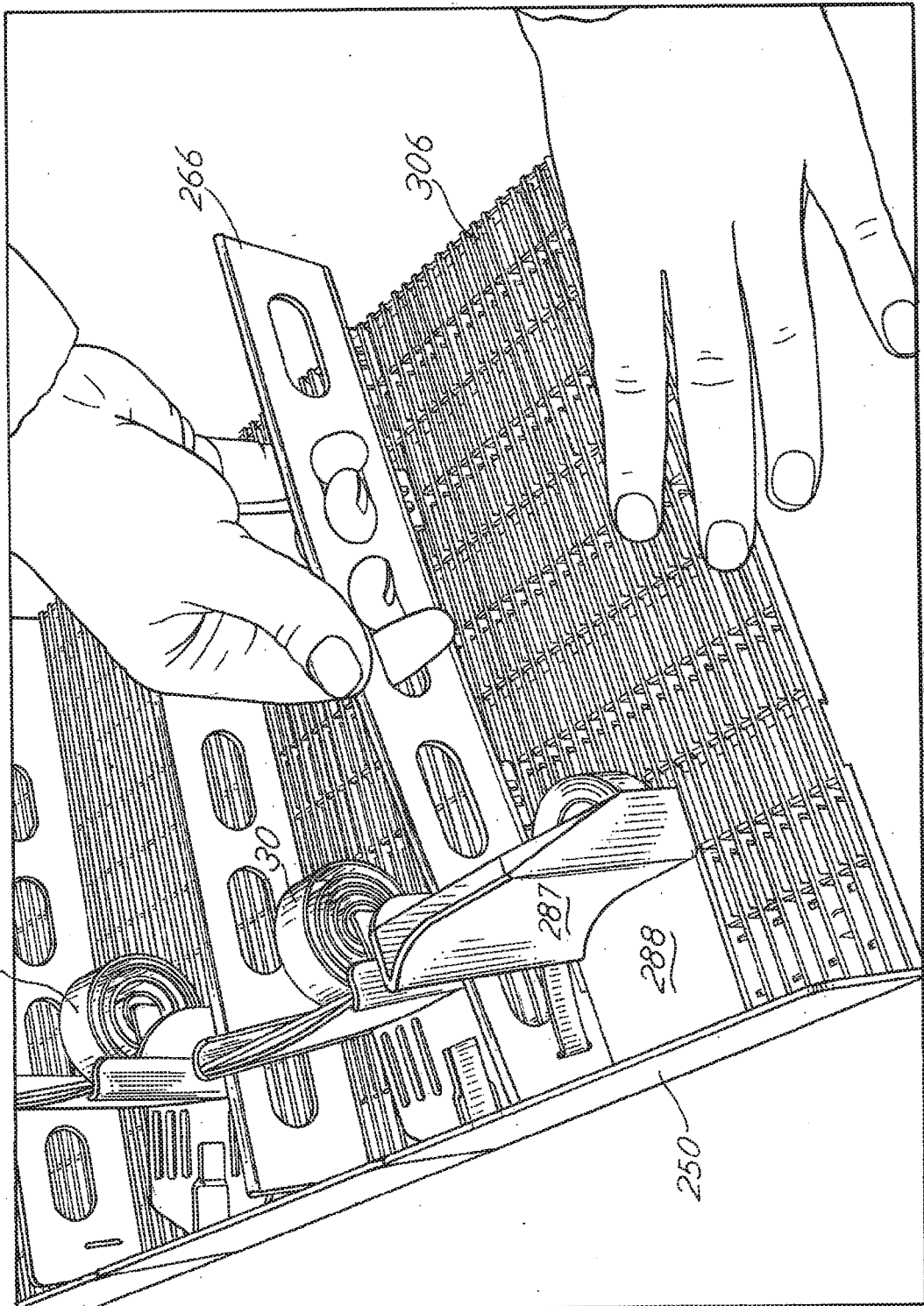
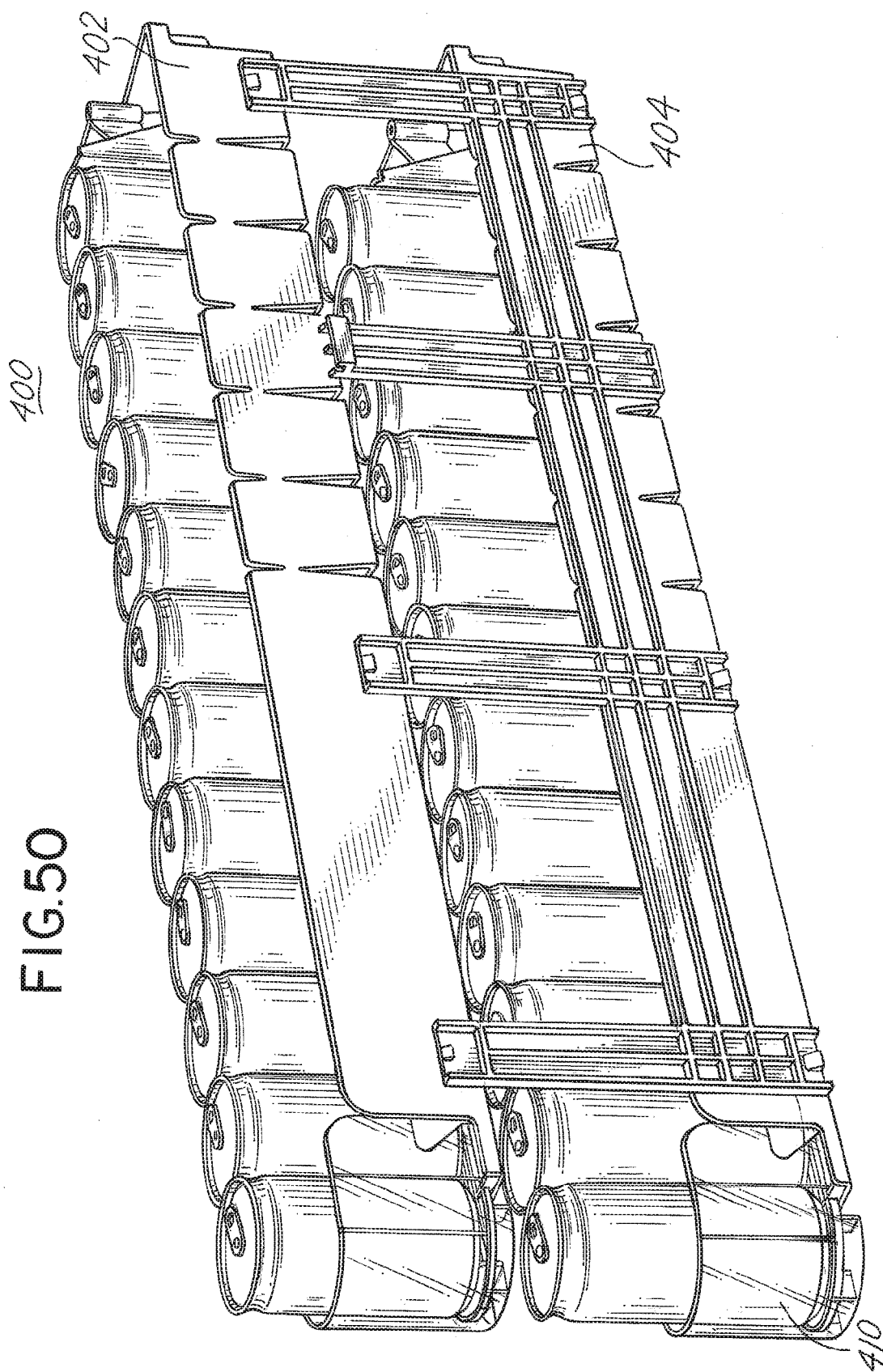
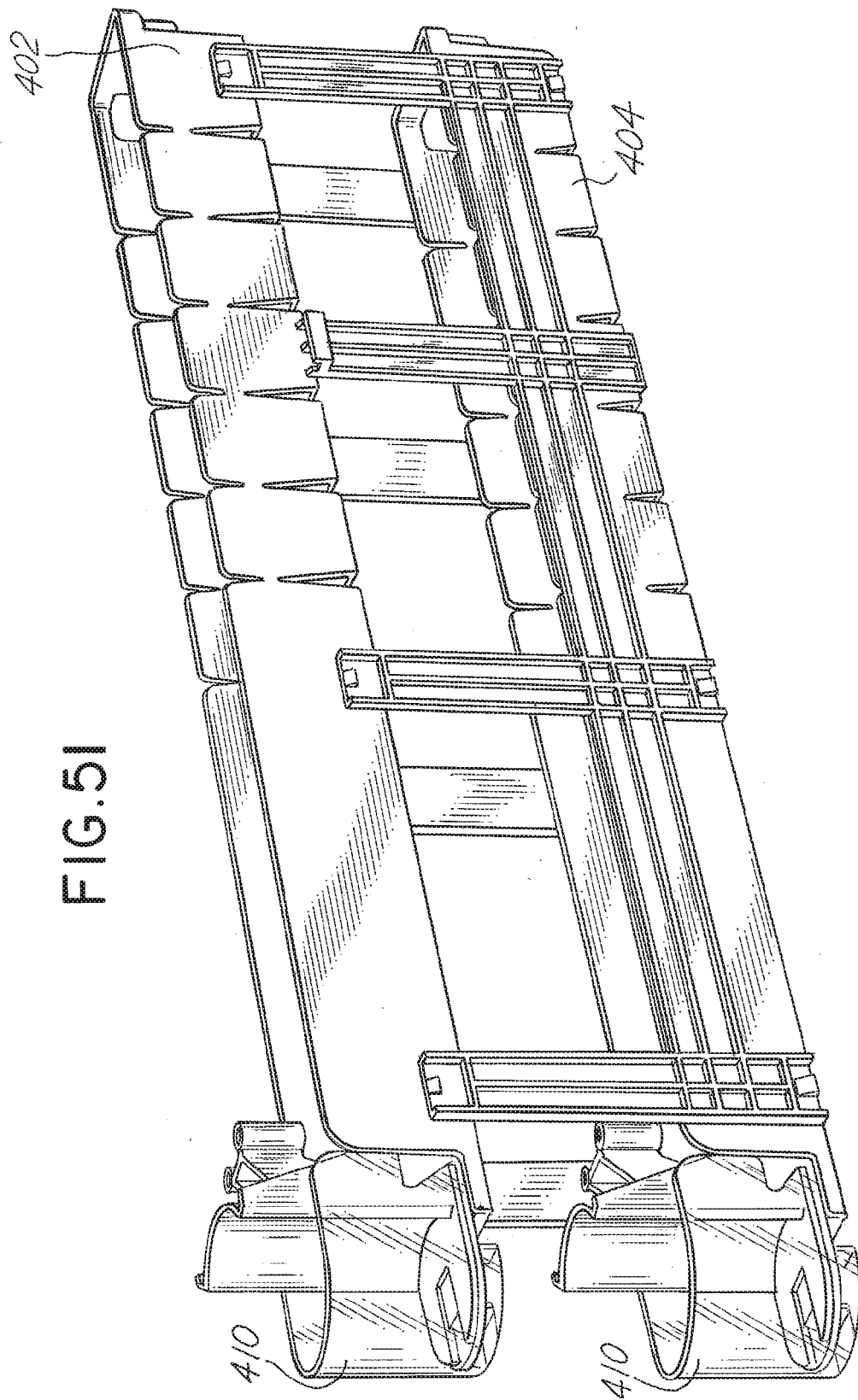
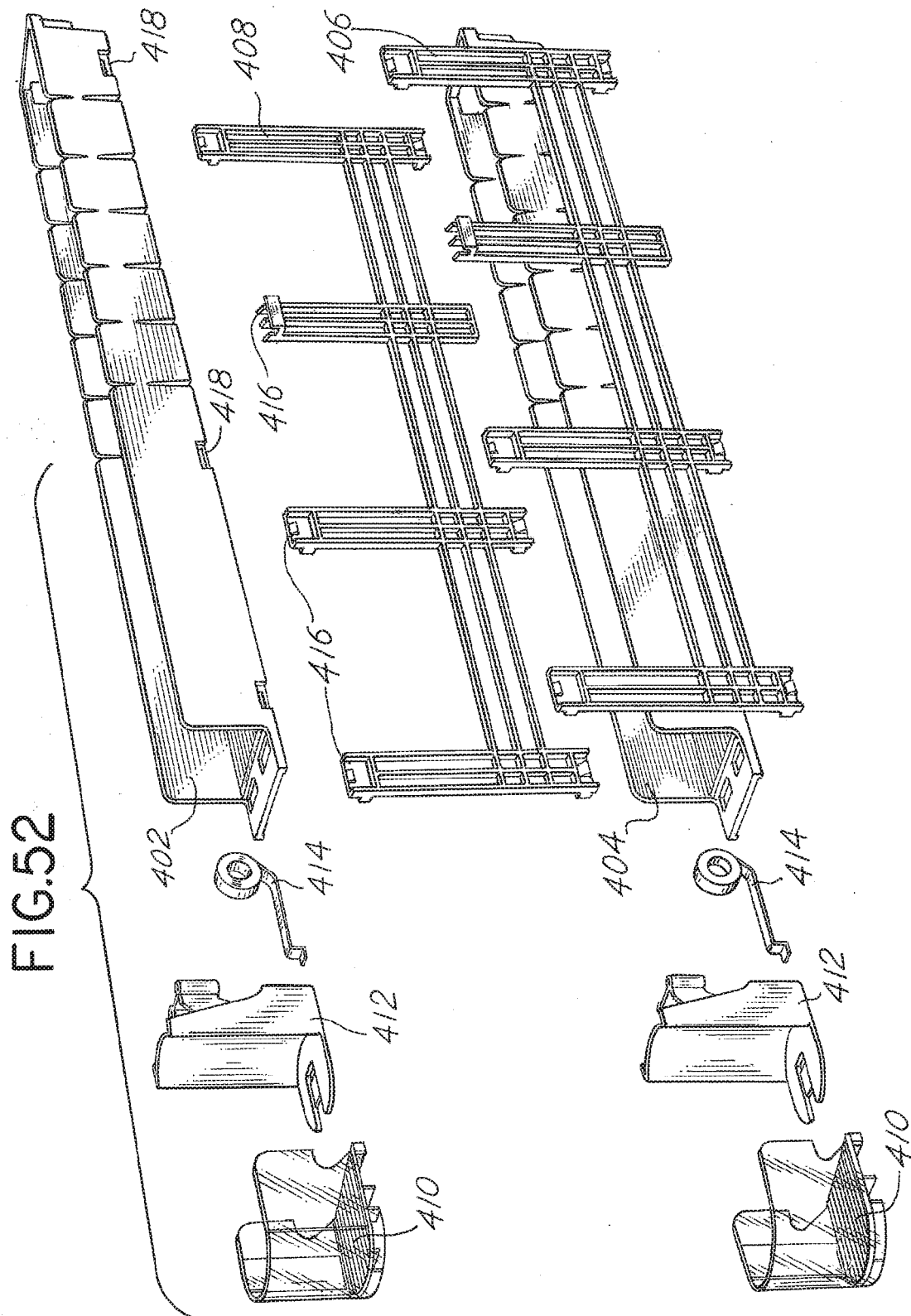


FIG.49









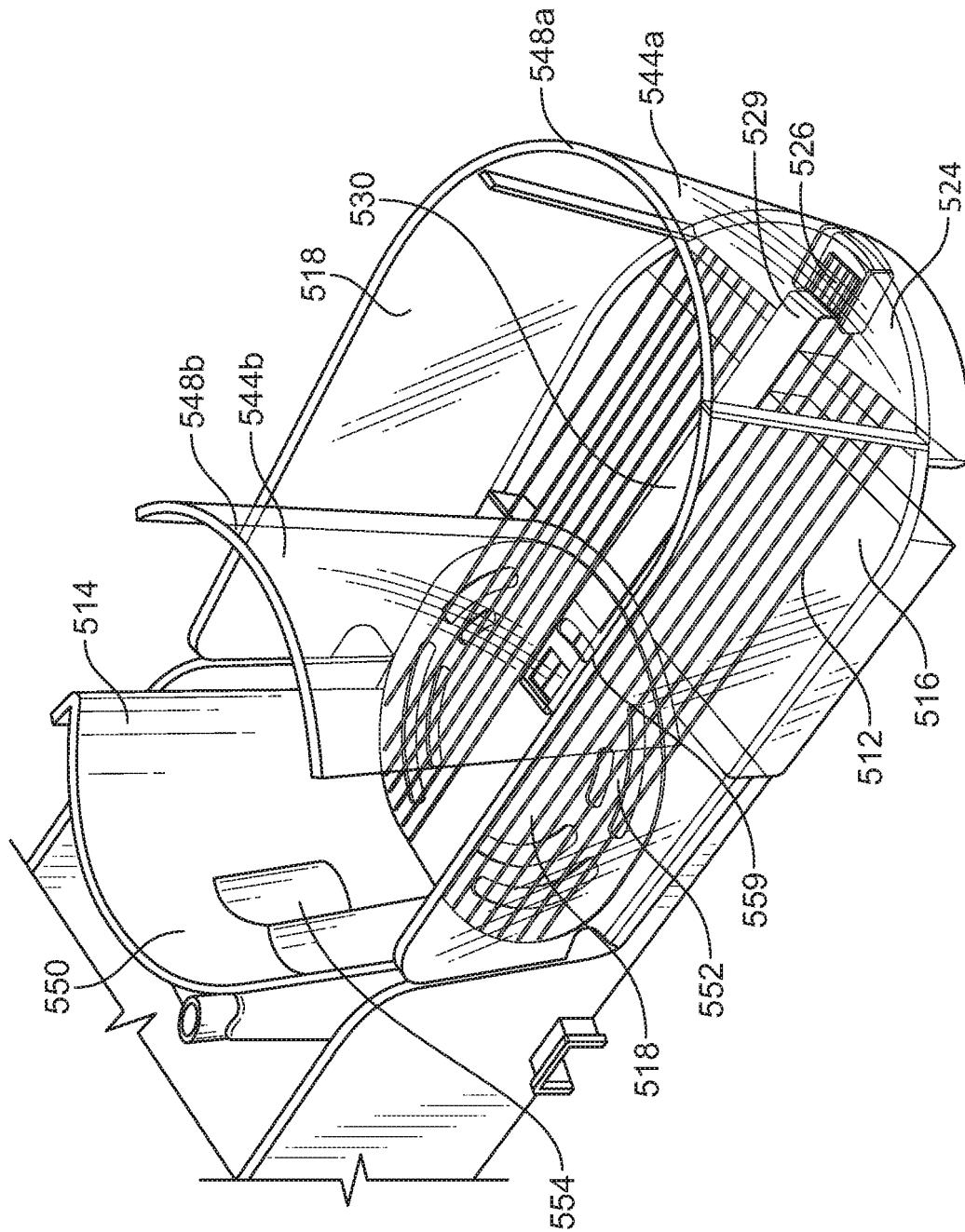


FIG. 53

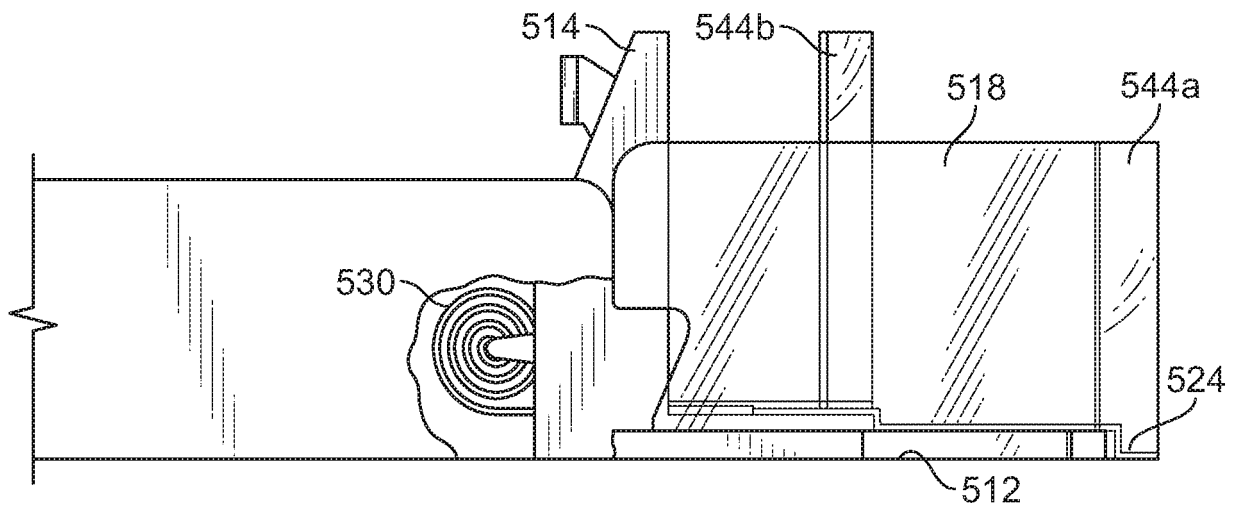


FIG. 54

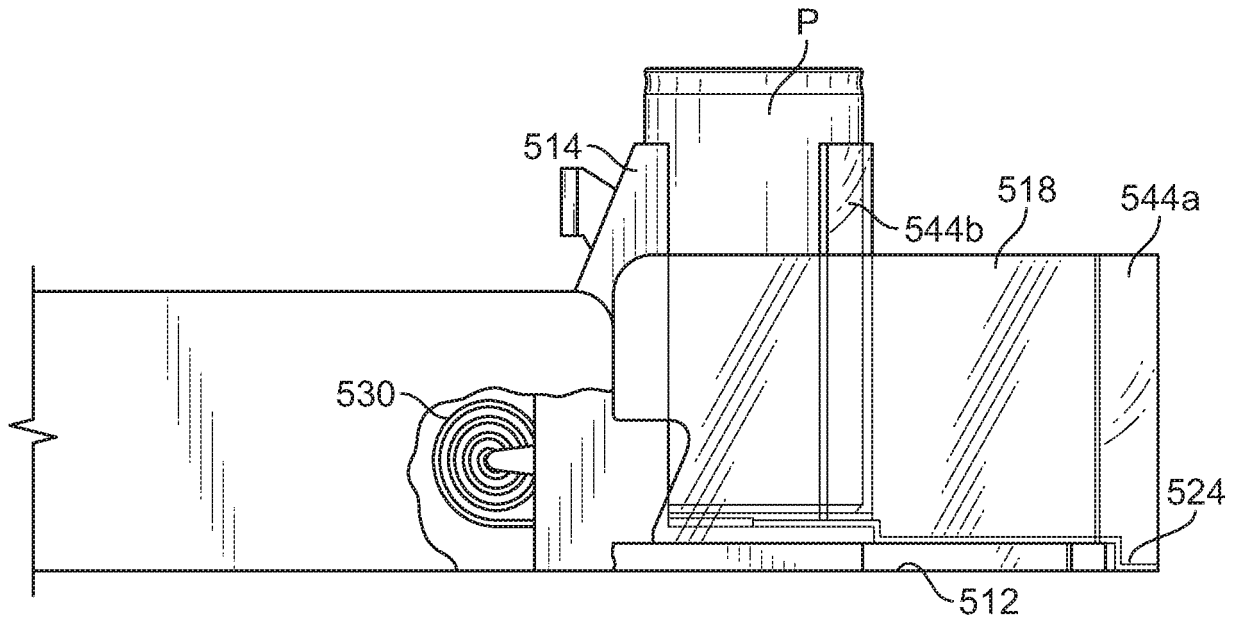


FIG. 55

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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