



(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
03.02.2021 Bulletin 2021/05

(51) Int Cl.:
B65D 85/10 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **19207098.5**

(22) Date of filing: **05.11.2019**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AL AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO PL PT RO RS SE SI SK SM TR
Designated Extension States:
BA ME
Designated Validation States:
KH MA MD TN

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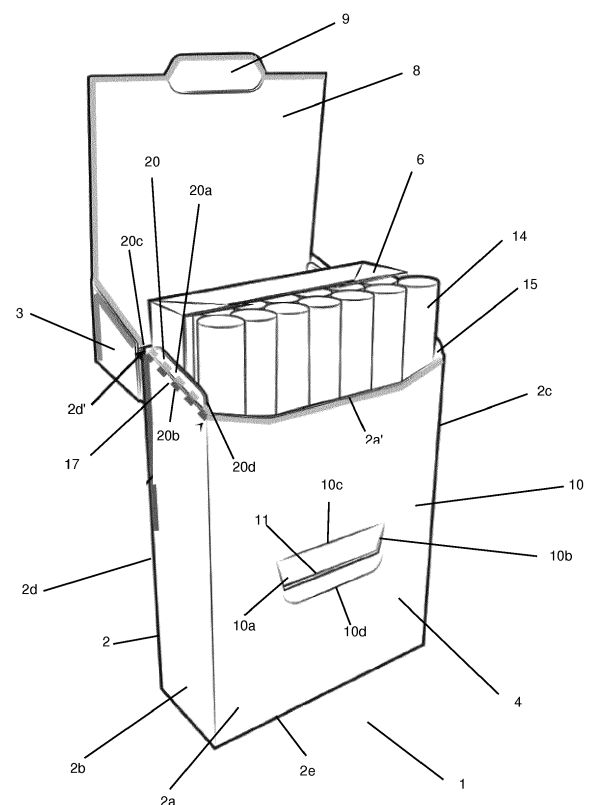
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(30) Priority: **31.07.2019 GB 201910950**
31.07.2019 GB 201910951

(54) **CONTAINER FOR CONSUMER GOODS**

(57) A container for consumer goods comprising: a box (2) having an access opening; a lid (3) pivotally attached to a wall of the box and moveable between an open position and a closed position, wherein the lid comprises a flap (8) that extends beyond the access opening in the box when the lid is in the closed position; and a pair of tabs (20), wherein a first tab is attached to a first side wall of the box and a second tab is attached to a second side wall of the box; wherein the lid (3) further comprises a first side portion and a second side portion and each of the first and second tabs is arranged to frictionally engage with the first and second side portions of the lid when the lid is moved between the open position and the closed position.

Figure 1



Description

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a container for consumer goods, in particular a container for smoking articles such as cigarettes.

Background

[0002] Some cigarette containers comprise a rigid outer housing and an inner package within which cigarettes are contained. These containers have a hinged lid so as to protect the cigarettes stored within the inner package when the lid is closed. The lid is usually attached to or formed in the outer housing of the container.

[0003] In such conventional containers, the lid covers an opening in the inner package of the container to protect the goods when the lid is closed. However, the lid may not provide sufficient protection if it is not properly closed or if it becomes loose due to frequent use. In such cases, the consumer goods such as cigarettes stored inside in the container may be exposed to the external environment and deteriorate over time.

[0004] Providing a secure closing mechanism for the container that is complex or fiddly is not ideal as it leads to user inconvenience. Therefore, it is desirable that the closing of the container is smooth and intuitive as well as secure.

[0005] In addition, the front surface of the container, which is not covered by the lid in the closed position, may contain some messaging for consumers. However, the visual impact of the messaging may be limited as it is provided below the lid, in the closed position, and may not be necessarily noticed by the consumers.

[0006] To solve these problems there have been attempts to use more complex, and therefore costly, construction of the cigarette container. These solutions are unsatisfactory as they are more costly and increase manufacturing complexity.

[0007] Therefore, it is an object of the invention to provide an improved container for consumer goods with a secure lid.

Summary of the Invention

[0008] According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a container for consumer goods, comprising a box having an access opening, and a lid pivotally attached to a wall of the box and moveable between an open position and a closed position, wherein the lid comprises a flap that extends beyond the access opening in the box when the lid is in the closed position. The container also comprises a pair of tabs, wherein a first tab is attached to a first side wall of the box and a second tab is attached to a second side wall of the box. The lid further comprises a first side portion and a second side portion and each of the first and second tabs is arranged

to frictionally engage with the first and second side portions of the lid when the lid is moved between the open position and the closed position.

[0009] As a result of the frictional engagement between the lid side portions and the tabs, there is an increase in friction between these two surfaces, reducing movement between the tabs and the lid. Reducing the chance of unwanted motion of the lid helps prevent the lid from accidentally moving from the closed position to the open position. Thus, the tabs help to provide a more secure closure by helping reduce the likelihood of unwanted movement of the lid. This may help preserve the contents of the container.

[0010] Each tab preferably extends beyond a free edge of each side wall. In some examples each tab has an extension of at least 3 mm. It is important to ensure that the tabs have sufficient length, or extension, to ensure a sufficient surface area is provided for the lid side walls to engage with.

[0011] The pair of tabs may be integrally formed with the first and second side walls of the box.

[0012] The tabs may therefore be considered as part of the box side walls and so movement between the lid and the box is reduced as a result of the friction created by the tabs during movement of the lid. Reducing motion between the lid and the box reduces the likelihood of the lid from accidentally opening. The tabs therefore increase the strength and security of the closure, in the form of the lid, by preventing unwanted movement between the lid and the box.

[0013] In some examples, each tab in the pair of tabs has a substantially trapezoidal shape. However, any other suitable shape may be used to form the tab, as long as a sufficient surface area of each tab is provided such that the first and second side portions of the lid can frictionally engage with each of the tabs during movement of the lid. Providing a suitable large surface area is important to ensure a secure lid. Preferably in the closed position, the first and second side portions of the lid overlap with the first and second tabs. This ensures that the effect of the frictional engagement is maintained when the lid is in the closed position, rather than only when the lid is moved from the closed to the open position. The lid is therefore held more firmly in the closed position which helps secure the container and its contents.

[0014] The tabs may be arranged to guide the lid into the closed position. This may be achieved by having upwardly extending tabs, when the container is held upright. The upward extension of the tabs may limit unwanted lateral movement of the lid while the lid is being moved between the open and closed positions. This may ensure that the lid remains aligned with the box during movement of the lid and so secure closing of the lid can be achieved, helping protect the contents of the container from damage. Furthermore, reducing lateral motion of the lid when the lid is pivoted prevents unnecessary wear and tear about the pivot point, prolonging the life of the lid and thus the overall container. The tabs may therefore help

to provide a more robust container. Furthermore, the tabs help ensure the lid remains aligned and stable in the closed position, increasing the security of the closure provided by the lid.

[0015] Preferably the tabs may extend along a portion of a length of the free edge of each side wall. More preferably, the tabs may extend along the whole length of the free edge of each side wall. A larger extension along the free edge of the side walls provides a larger surface area for the lid side walls to engage with during movement of the lid. A more secure lid is therefore provided as a result of the large contact area between the tabs and the lid side portions.

[0016] In some developments, the lid is attached to a wall of the box by a hinge joint. This limits the motion of the lid to movement about a single axis, for example a horizontal axis. The hinge joint therefore prevents unwanted lateral movement of the lid. Reducing lateral motion of the lid when the lid is moved about the hinge joint prevents the connection between the lid and the box from experiencing unnecessary wear. For example, rotation of the lid about a vertical axis could cause wear and potential tearing at the hinge joint, because the lid may twist around a vertical axis as it is being moved. Preventing this twisting, or lateral movement, of the lid by limiting the rotation of the lid about a horizontal axis therefore prolongs the life of the hinge joint and thus the overall container, and so a more robust container is provided.

[0017] The container may be used for storing smoking articles, for example cigarettes.

[0018] According to another aspect there is provided a kit comprising a container as described previously, and at least one smoking article.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0019] The invention(s) will be further described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 shows a perspective view of a first example of a container in an open position;

Fig. 2 shows a perspective view of the container of Fig. 1 in a closed position;

Fig. 3 shows a perspective view of a second example of a container in an open position;

Fig. 4 shows a perspective view of the container of Fig. 3 in a closed position;

Fig. 5 shows a perspective view of a third example of a container in an open position;

Fig. 6 shows a perspective view of the container of Fig. 5 in a closed position;

Fig. 7 shows a perspective view of a fourth example of a container in an open position; and

Fig. 8 shows a perspective view of the container of Fig. 7 in a closed position.

Detailed Description

[0020] A container 1 shown in Fig. 1 comprises a box 2 and a lid 3 that is hinged to the box 2 along a hinge line. Fig. 1 shows the container 1 with the lid 3 in an open position. The box 2 has a rigid outer frame 4 in the form of a plurality of planar surfaces which form the main body of the box 2. A bundle of cigarettes 14 is housed in the box 2 of the container 1.

[0021] The box 2 has a box front wall 2a, a box left side wall 2b, a box right side wall 2c, a box back wall 2d, and a box bottom wall 2e. An upper side of the box 2, opposite the box bottom wall 2e, is open i.e. there is no box top wall to provide an access opening 6 through which the cigarettes can be inserted and removed.

[0022] The box front wall 2a and the box back wall 2d of the outer frame 4 each comprise top edges 2a' 2d'. The back wall top edge 2d' corresponds to the hinge line. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the box front wall 2a has a length that is less than a length of the box back wall 2d. In some cases, "length" may also be referred to as "height". In both cases, the terms "length" and "height" correspond to the longest dimension of the box. Said another way, the distance between the box bottom wall 2e and the back wall top edge 2d' is greater than the distance between the box bottom wall 2e and the front wall top edge 2a'. This has the effect that the box front wall 2a comprises a recess or cut-out portion 15 at the top edge 2a', in order to facilitate removal of the cigarettes from the box 2 through the access opening 6. As a result of the difference in length between the box front wall 2a and the box back wall 2d, both the left and right side walls 2b, 2c comprise inclined, or sloping, top edges 17. These inclined top side edges 17 join the back wall top edge 2d' to the front wall top edge 2a'.

[0023] The lid 3 has a lid top wall 3a, a lid left side wall 3b, a lid right side wall 3c, and a lid back wall 3d. The lid back wall 3a is attached to the box back wall 2d at the hinge line.

[0024] The lid 3 also has a flap 8 extending from the lid top wall 3a. The flap 8 extends away from the lid top wall 3a, parallel to the lid back wall 3d. In some examples, the flap 8 is resiliently deformable. The flap 8 is connected to the lid left side wall 3b and the lid right side wall 3c, as shown in Fig. 2. Typically, the flap 8 formed integrally into the lid 3. However, in some cases the flap 8 may be a separate component and in this case is then attached to the lid top wall 3a. The flap 8 is preferably made of the same material as the lid 3. The flap 8 may also extend and fold back onto itself to provide added rigidity.

[0025] In the example shown in Fig. 2, the lid left and right side walls 3b, 3c are substantially trapezoidal in

shape, having an inclined edge that slopes downwards from the lid back wall 2d to the flap 8 when the box 2 is held in an upright, operative position with the access opening 6 at the top of the box 2. The inclined edges have a slope which corresponds to the same slope as the inclined top edges 17 of the box 2. Thus, when the lid 3 is in the closed position, the inclined edges of the lid abut against the inclined edges of the side of the box 2, and the two corresponding sloping or inclined edges lie against each other. Said another way, when the container 1 is closed, the free side edges of the left and right side walls 3b, 3c of the lid 3 abut the top side edges 17 of the box 2 defining a line of abutment between them.

[0026] As can be seen in Figure 1, the box 2 comprises a pair of tabs 20. The tabs 20 extend from the box side walls 2b, 2c away from the box bottom wall 2e. Thus, when the box 2 is held upright, in its operative configuration, the tabs 20 extend substantially upwards. In general, the tabs 20 are integrally formed with the side walls 2b, 2c of the box. However, in some examples the tabs 20 may be formed separately and attached to the side walls 2b, 2c of the box 2.

[0027] As shown in Fig. 1 the tabs 20 have a generally trapezoidal shape, having an upper edge 20a, a lower edge 20b, and two side edges 20c, 20d. The side edges 20c, 20d are angled towards each other so that the upper edge 20a is shorter in length than the lower edge 20b. The connection, or join, between the box side walls and the tabs is formed at the lower edge 20b. In general, the tabs 20 have a width of substantially 3 mm. Here, width is defined as the distance between the upper and lower edges 20a, 20b of the tab.

[0028] As shown in Fig. 1, the front wall 2a of the box 2 comprises a front surface of the outer frame 4. When the container 1 is closed, the flap 8 abuts the surface of the front wall 2a of the box 2. Preferably, when the lid 3 is closed, the flap 8 extends beyond the access opening 6 to cover at least half of the surface of the front wall 2a of the box 2. More preferably, the flap 8 covers two-thirds or between substantially 60 to 70 percent of the surface of the front wall 2a of the box 2.

[0029] The lid 3 is configured such that when the lid 3 is pushed towards the closed position, using the flap 8, the lid side walls 3b, 3c slide over the tabs 20, until the free side edges of the left and right side walls 3b, 3c of the lid 3 abut the top side edges 17 of the box 2 at the line of abutment, in the closed position. In this position, the side walls of the lid 3b, 3c overlap with the tabs 20. As the tabs 20 can be thought of as an extension of the box side walls 2b, 2c, the side walls 3b, 3c of the lid 3 can be thought of as overlapping the side walls 2b, 2c of the box 2. Due to the lid side walls 3b, 3c sliding over the tabs 20, there will be an increase in friction between these two surfaces. Thus, movement between the tabs 20 and the lid is hindered. Since the tabs can be thought of as part of the box side walls 2b, 2c it follows that movement between the lid 3 and the box 2 is hindered as a result of the friction created by the tabs 20 during movement

of the lid 3. Hindering motion between the lid 3 and the box 2 prevents the lid 3 from accidentally opening, when the lid 3 is initially in the closed position. Thus, the tabs 20 provide a more secure closure by helping reduce the likelihood of unwanted movement of the lid 3.

[0030] The tabs 20 act to guide the lid 3 into the closed position as the lid is rotated about the hinge line. Due to the upward protrusion, or extension, of the tabs 20 unwanted lateral movement of the lid 3 is prevented while the lid 3 is being moved between the open and closed positions. The lid 3 therefore remains aligned with the main body of the box 2 during movement of the lid 3. Thus, secure closing of the lid can be achieved, which helps protect the contents of the container 1 from damage. Furthermore, reducing lateral motion of the lid 3 when the lid 3 is moved about the hinge line prevents the connection between the lid 3 and the box 2 i.e. the hinge line from unnecessary wear. Rotation of the lid 3 around a vertical axis could cause wear and potential tearing of the connection at the edges of the hinge line. This is because the lid 3 may twist around the vertical axis as it is being moved about the hinge line, which defines a horizontal axis. Preventing this twisting, or lateral movement, of the lid 3 when the lid is rotated about a horizontal axis therefore prolongs the life of the hinge line and thus the overall container 1. The tabs 20 therefore provide a more robust container 1.

[0031] The flap 8 also comprises a locking tab 9 projecting away from the main body of the flap 8. The locking tab 9 is substantially continuous with the main body of the flap 8 and so it can be considered that the locking tab 9 extends outwards from the front edge of the flap 8. The locking tab 9 is configured to engage with a cut-out portion 10 provided in the surface of the inner frame 5. The cut-out portion 10 is formed as a trapezoid-shaped segment with partial cuts in the angled sides 10a, 10b and a full cut 11 substantially midway between the parallel sides 10c, 10d of the segment. The upper segment containing the side 10c is embossed and the lower segment containing the side 10d is debossed. By virtue of the cut-out portion 10, the locking tab 9 can be securely contained inside the cut-out portion or slot 10 when the lid 3 is closed, and the cigarettes stored in the container 1 are further well protected from accidental opening.

[0032] As shown in Fig. 2, when the lid 3 is closed, the flap 8 extends over the front wall 2a of the box 2. In order to access the cigarettes the lid 3 is moved from the closed position to the open position shown in Fig. 1. As the lid 3 is moved from the closed position, the tab 9 contained in the slot 10 is pulled out and the flap 8 is moved upwards away from the main body of the box 2 exposing the access opening 6. In order to close the container 1, the lid 3 is moved from the open position to the closed position.

[0033] The flap 8 may be provided with indicia such as health warnings, on its outer surface, which is the side that is visible when the lid 3 is closed. The indicia may be provided at multiple locations on the flap 8. In general, the indicia are provided on the front face of the flap 8 and

on one or both sides 2b, 2c of the box 2. As the flap 8 covers at least the half of the front face 2a of the box 2 from the top, visual impact of the indicia is more prominent.

[0034] In some examples, the indicia are text. However, any other type or combination of indication or marking could be provided including numerals, logos and images.

[0035] Indicia can also be provided on other parts of the flap 8, such as on the inside surface of the flap 8 or the front surface 2a of the outer frame 4. Indicia on such surfaces are selected such that they can be viewed effectively by the consumer when the container 1 is opened. Indicia could be in the form of any branding or promotional messages.

[0036] The indicia can be provided by one or more of an ink, a varnish, a lacquer, embossing, debossing, and hot foil stamping. Where the indicia are provided by an ink they can be separated from the consumer goods in order to prevent any potential migration of compounds to the consumer goods. This may be achieved by providing the indicia at a position on the flap 8 that is offset from the access opening 6 when the lid 3 is in the closed position. Alternatively, or in addition, a coating (not shown) may be provided on the flap 8 in the vicinity of the indicia to prevent egression of compounds therefrom and into the consumer goods. In one arrangement a frame (not shown) can be provided on the flap 8 around the portion of the flap 8 that overlies the access opening 6 when the lid 3 is in the closed position.

[0037] Advantageously the indicia can be visible at all times when the lid 3 is moved from the closed position to the open position.

[0038] Figs. 3 and 4 show an alternative container 100. This example is similar to the example shown in Figs. 1 and 2 in that the box 102 has a frame 104 in the form of a plurality of planar surfaces which form the main body of the box 102. As before, the box 102 has a box front wall 102a, a box left side wall 102b, a box right side wall 102c, a box back wall 102d, and a box bottom wall 102e. Typically, the box front wall 102a, the left side wall 102b, and the right side wall 102c are all integrally formed with each other. That is to say, these walls are not separate components that are joined together to form the frame 104 but instead are formed using a single sheet of material, as with Fig. 1. This configuration may provide a stronger container 100 as there are fewer joints. Additionally, this configuration 100 may be easier to construct as there are fewer individual components.

[0039] In this example, the length of the top edges 117 of each of the left and right box side walls 102b, 102c is greater i.e. longer than the length of the top edges 17 of each of the left and right box side walls 2b, 2c of the box 2 in Fig. 1. This increase in length is achieved by creating a steeper angle between the top edge of the box side wall and a horizontal plane than was created in the box 2 in Fig. 1. Thus, the top edges 117 of this example have a greater incline, or are steeper, than the top edges 17 of the Fig. 1 example.

[0040] Similarly to Fig. 1, the tabs 120 extend along the top edge 117 of the side walls and, as before with reference to Fig. 1, the tabs 120 extend across the whole of the top edge 117 of the side walls. The tabs 120 in this example therefore have a greater length than the tabs 20 of the example shown in Fig. 1. Again, the tabs 120 in this example do not extend across the front wall 102a of the box 102. In all other aspects, the tabs 120 in this example are configured the same and operate in same way as those described with respect to Fig. 1.

[0041] The other components of the container 100 and their operation are the same as those described with respect to Figs. 1 and 2 and so will not be described again.

[0042] Figs. 5 and 6 show another alternative container 200. This example is similar to the example shown in Figs. 1 and 2 in that the box 202 has a frame 204 in the form of a plurality of substantially planar surfaces which form the main body of the box 202. As before, the box 202 has a box front wall 202a, a box left side wall 202b, a box right side wall 202c, a box back wall 202d, and a box bottom wall 202e. However, in this case, the join between the box front wall 202a and the left and right side walls 202b, 202c does not form a corner i.e. is not substantially right-angular. Instead, the join between the front wall 202a, and the two side walls 202b, 202c is substantially curved. The box 202 therefore comprises two curved portions 213 on the left and right front sides of the box 202, as shown in Fig. 5. Thus, the box front wall 202a, the left side wall 202b, and the right side wall 202c are all integrally formed with each other. That is to say, these three walls are not separate components that are joined together to form the frame 204. This design may increase the strength of the container 200 as there are fewer joints, and so fewer weak points, within the box design. In addition, this design may be provide a simpler construction process because there are fewer individual components.

[0043] As a result of the curved corner portions 213, rather than the right angles that were present in Fig. 1, the proportion of the box side walls 202b, 202c (and therefore also the top edges 217 of the side walls) which is straight is less than in Figs 1. In Fig 1, for example, the whole of the top edge 17 of the left side wall 202b is straight. However in Fig 5 only part of the top edge 217 of the left side wall 203b is straight, with the front end portion of the left side wall comprising part of the curved corner portion 213. The tabs 220 extend along the top edge of the side walls, as before with reference to Fig. 1, but in this case they only extend across the straight portion of the top edge 217 of the side walls. Thus, the tabs 220 in this example do not extend across the whole of the top edge 217 of the side walls because the tabs do not extend across the curved portions 213 or to the front wall 202a of the box 202. In all other aspects, the tabs 220 in this example are configured the same and operate in same way as those described with respect to Fig. 1.

[0044] Further as a result of the curved portions 213,

the shape of the lid 203 has been altered, or adapted. Whereas in Fig. 1 the access opening 6 had a substantially rectangular cross section, in this case the access opening 206 comprises two rounded portions. Thus, the shape of the lid 203 has been altered, or adapted, to correspond to the shape of the box 202 so that the lid 203 still closes the box 202. In particular, the lid 203 now also comprises two curved portions 213b located at the left and right front sides of the lid 203, as shown in Fig. 6. Said another way, the curved portions 213b on the lid 203 are located at the join between the flap 208 and the left and right side walls 203b, 203c of the lid 203. Thus, in some examples, the flap 308, the left lid side wall 203b, and the right lid side wall 203c are all integrally formed with each other. That is to say, these three walls are not separate components that are joined together to form the lid 203 but are instead formed using a single sheet of material.

[0045] The other components of the container 200 and their operation are the same as those described with respect to Figs. 1 and 2 and so will not be described again.

[0046] Figs. 7 and 8 show another alternative container 300. This example is similar to the example shown in Figs. 1 and 2 in that the box 302 has a frame 304 in the form of a plurality of planar surfaces which form the main body of the box 302. As before, the box 302 has a box front wall 302a, a box left side wall 302b, a box right side wall 302c, a box back wall 302d, and a box bottom wall 302e. However, in this case, the join between the box front wall 302a and the left and right side walls 302b, 302c does not form a corner i.e. is not substantially right-angular. Instead, the join between the front wall 302a, and the two side walls 302b, 302c is bevelled. The bevelled edge is formed by a substantially planar bevel portion 313 shown in Figure 7 which provides to join, or connection point, between the box side walls 302b, 302c and the box front wall 302a. This example box 300 therefore comprises two bevel portions 313, one on the front left side of the box 302 and one on the front right side of the box 302. Typically, the box front wall 302a, the left side wall 302b, the right side wall 302c, and the two bevel portions 313 are all integrally formed with each other. That is to say, these walls are not separate components that are joined together to form the frame 304 but instead are formed using a single sheet of material. As well as providing increased box strength, as a result of fewer potentially weak points in the box and joining locations, this arrangement may be simpler to assembly, during the manufacturing stage, as there are fewer separate components which need to be assembled together.

[0047] Similarly to Fig. 1, the tabs 320 extend along the top edge of the side walls and, as before with reference to Fig. 1, the tabs 320 extend across the whole of the top edge 317 of the side walls. However, the tabs 220 in this example do not extend across the bevel portions 313 or to the front wall 302a of the box 302. In all other aspects, the tabs 320 in this example are configured the same and operate in same way as those described

with respect to Fig. 1.

[0048] As a result of the bevel portions 313, the shape of the access opening 306 has been altered. Whereas in Fig. 1 the access opening 6 had a substantially rectangular cross section, in this case the access opening 306 comprises two bevelled portions. Thus, the shape of the lid 303 has been altered, or adapted, to correspond to the shape of the box 302. This ensures that the lid 303 still closes the box 302. In particular, the lid 203 now also comprises two bevelled portions 313b located at the left and right front sides of the lid 303, as shown in Fig. 8. Said another way, the bevelled portions 313b on the lid 203 are located at the join, or junction, between the flap 308 and the left and right side walls 303b, 303c of the lid 303. Thus, in some examples, the flap 308, the left lid side wall 303b, the right lid side wall 203c, and the two bevel portions 313b are all integrally formed with each other. That is to say, these walls are not separate components that are joined together to form the frame lid 303 but are instead formed using a single sheet of material

[0049] The other components of the container 300 and their operation are the same as those described with respect to Figs. 1 and 2 and so will not be described again.

Claims

1. A container for consumer goods comprising:

a box having an access opening;
a lid pivotally attached to a wall of the box and moveable between an open position and a closed position, wherein the lid comprises a flap that extends beyond the access opening in the box when the lid is in the closed position; and
a pair of tabs, wherein a first tab is attached to a first side wall of the box and a second tab is attached to a second side wall of the box;
wherein the lid further comprises a first side portion and a second side portion and each of the first and second tabs is arranged to frictionally engage with the first and second side portions of the lid when the lid is moved between the open position and the closed position.

2. The container according to claim 1 wherein each tab extends beyond a free edge of each side wall.

3. The container according to claim 2 wherein each tab has an extension of at least 3 mm.

4. The container according to any preceding claim wherein the pair of tabs are integrally formed with the first and second side walls of the box.

5. The container according to any preceding claim wherein each tab in the pair of tabs has a substantially trapezoidal shape.

6. The container according to any preceding claim wherein, in the closed position, the first and second side portions of the lid overlap with the first and second tabs. 5
7. The container according to any preceding claim wherein the tabs are arranged to guide the lid into the closed position.
8. The container according to any preceding claim wherein the tabs extend along a portion of a length of the free edge of each side wall. 10
9. The container according to claim 8 wherein the tabs extend along the whole length of the free edge of each side wall. 15
10. The container according to any preceding claim wherein the lid is attached to a wall of the box by a hinge joint. 20
11. The container of any preceding claim, wherein the container is used for storing smoking articles.
12. A kit comprising: 25
- a container according to any of claims 1-11; and
- at least one smoking article.

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Figure 1

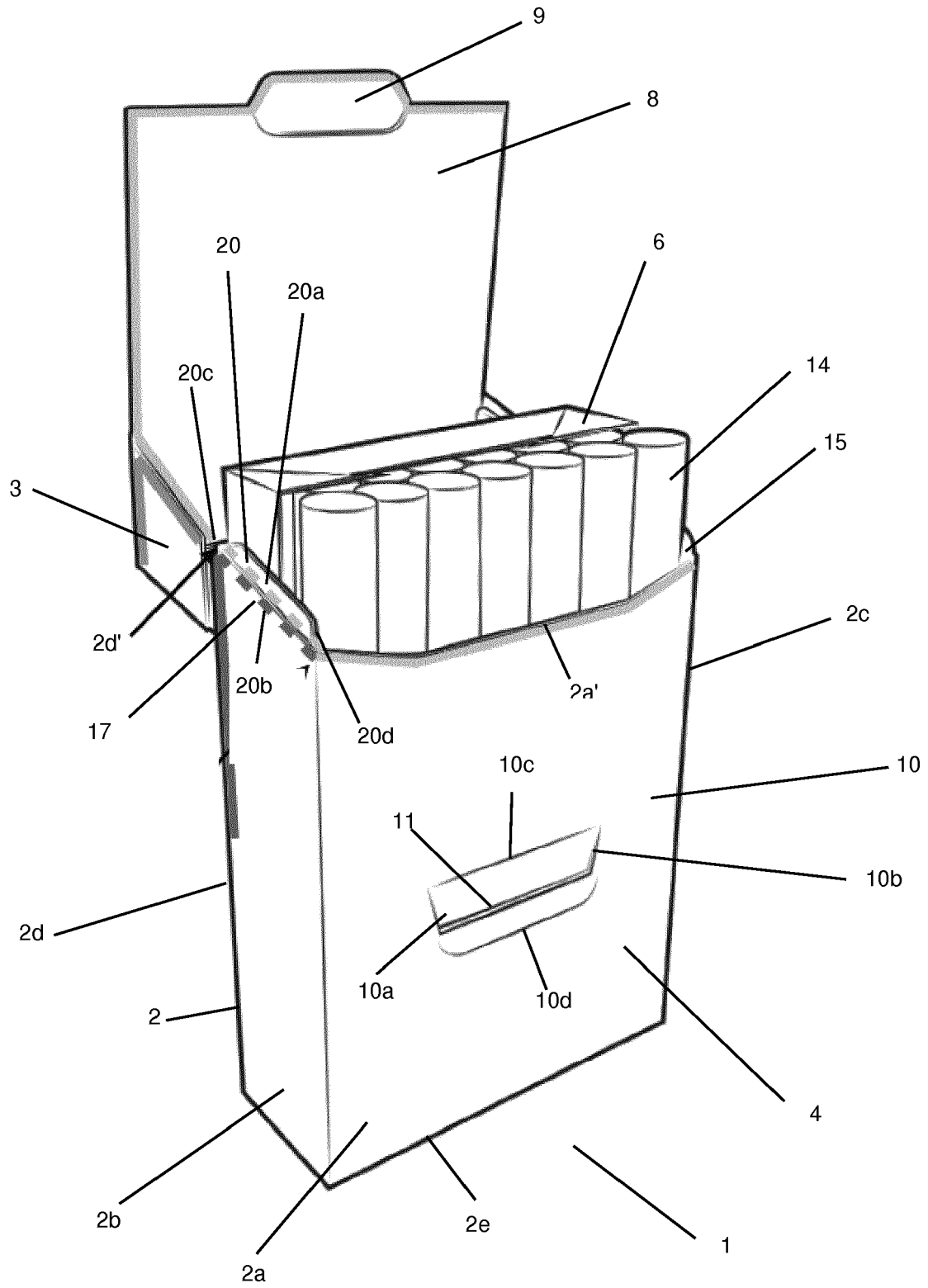


Figure 2

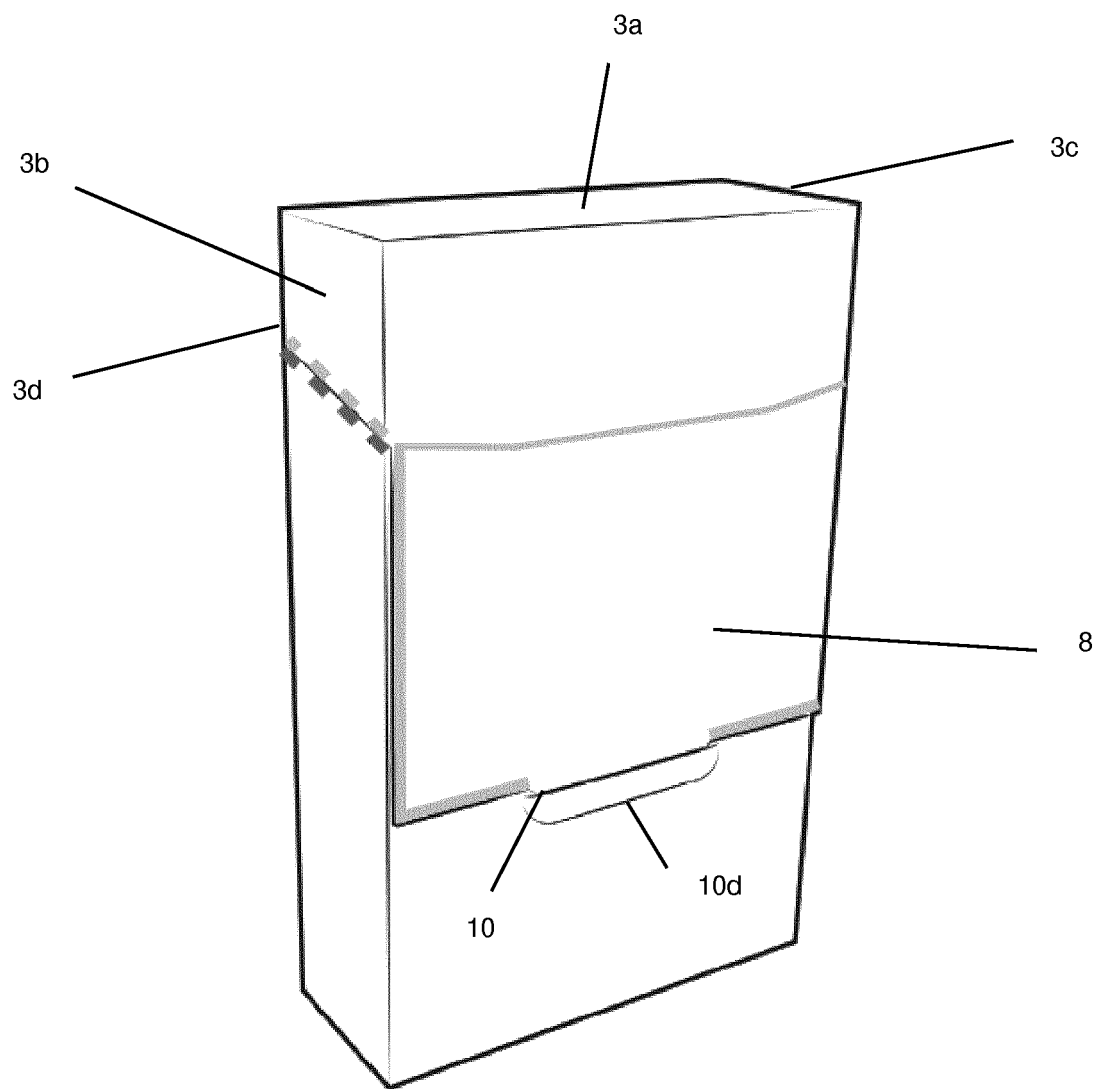


Figure 3

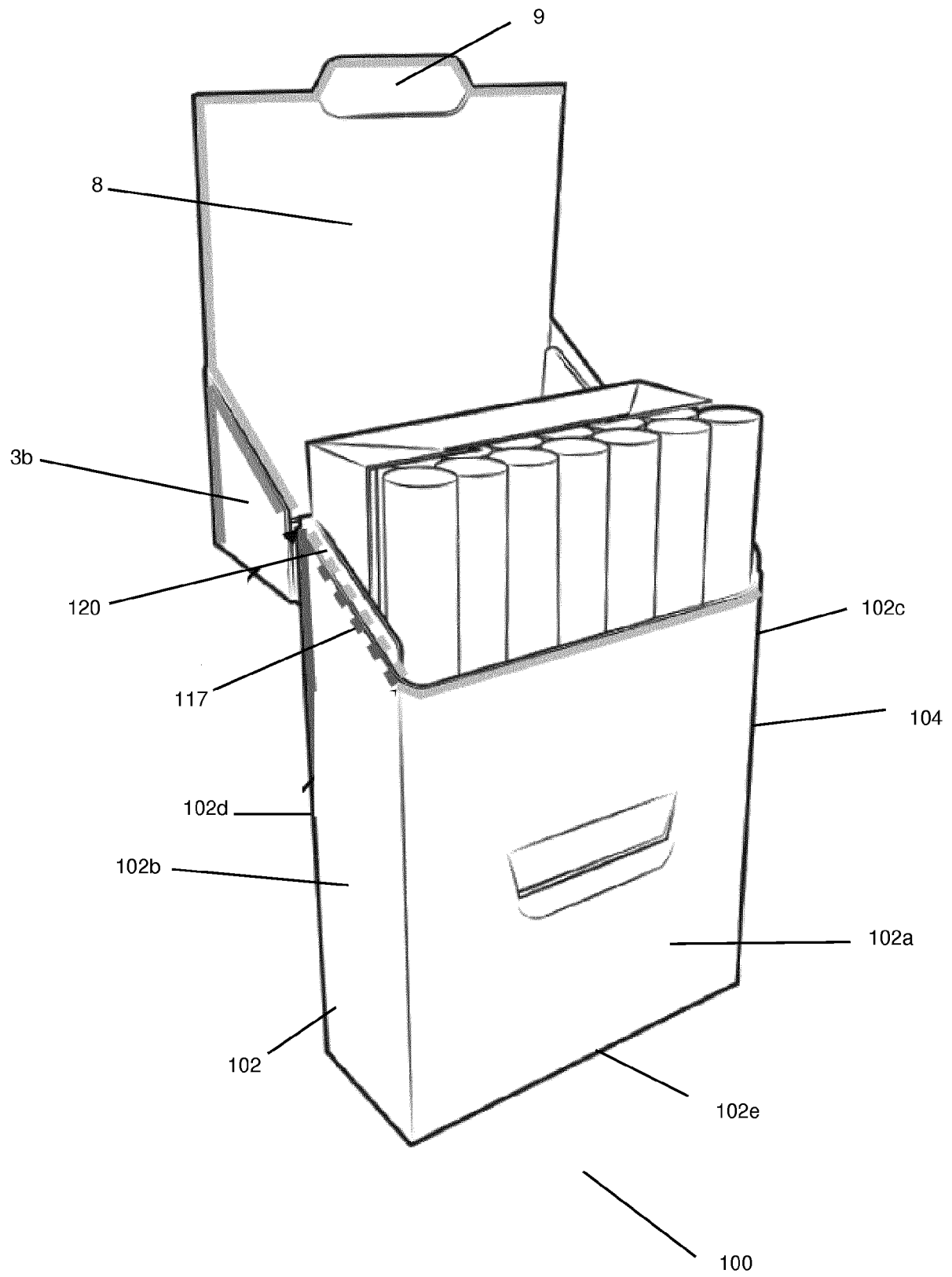


Figure 4

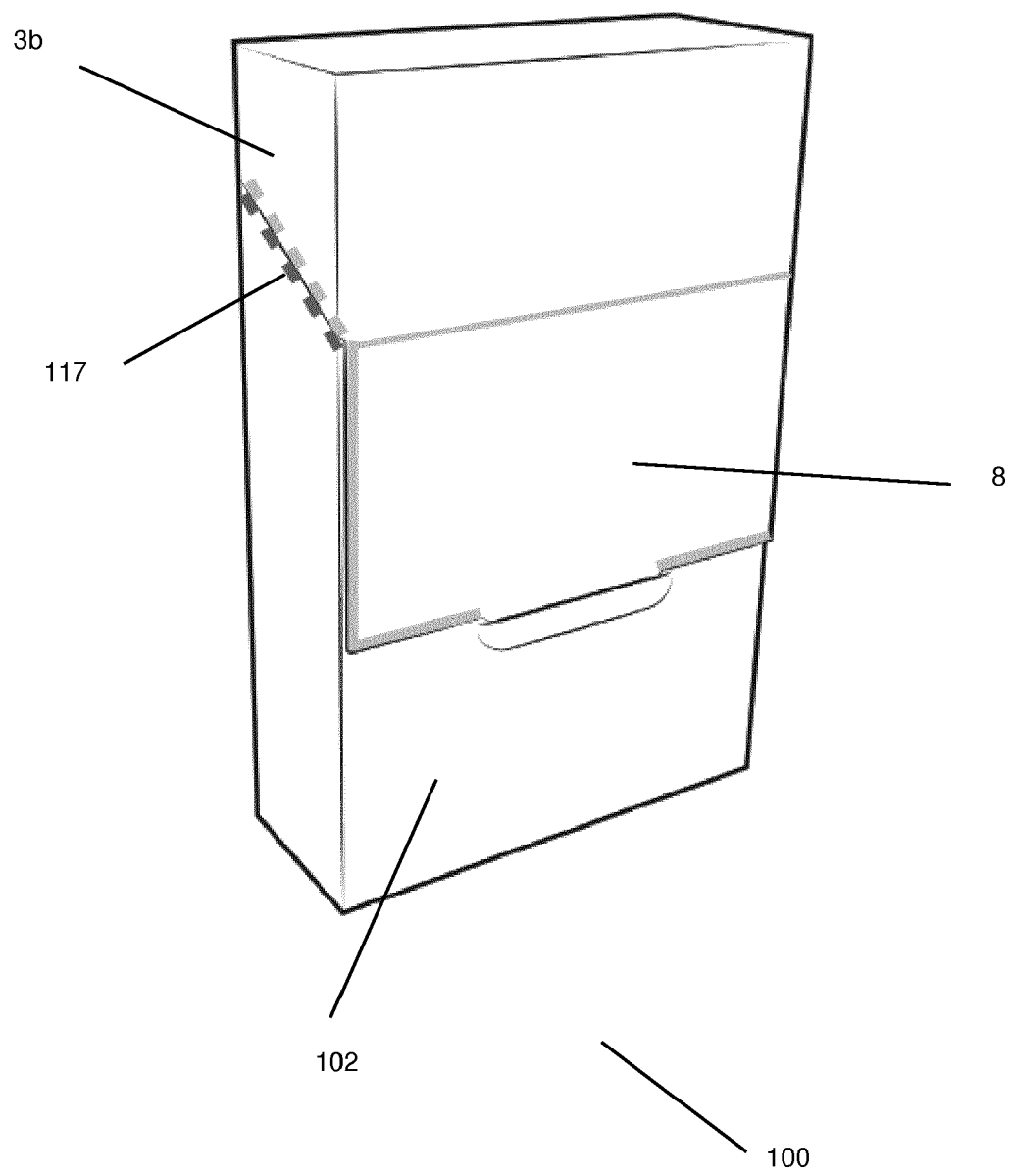


Figure 5

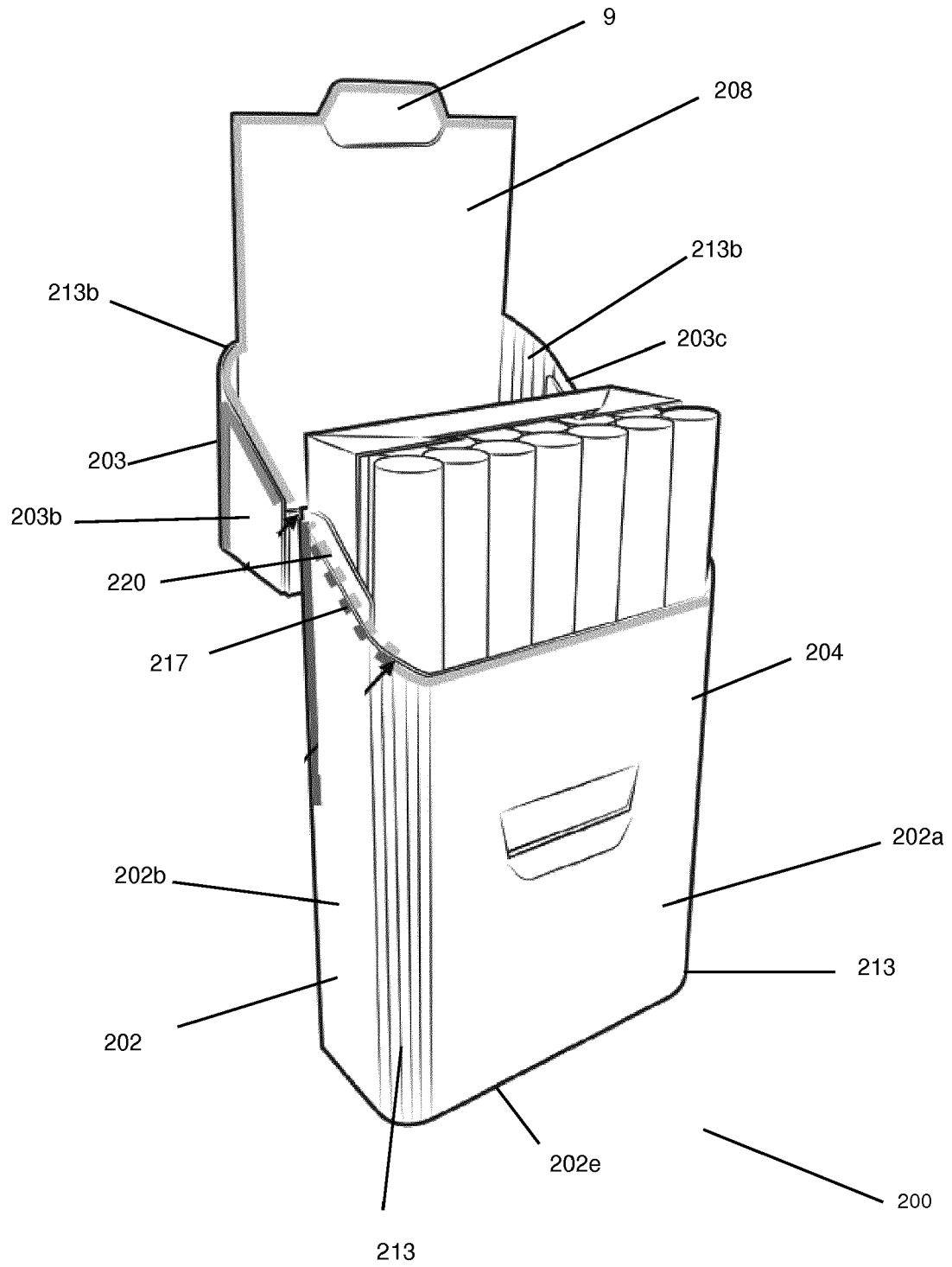


Figure 6

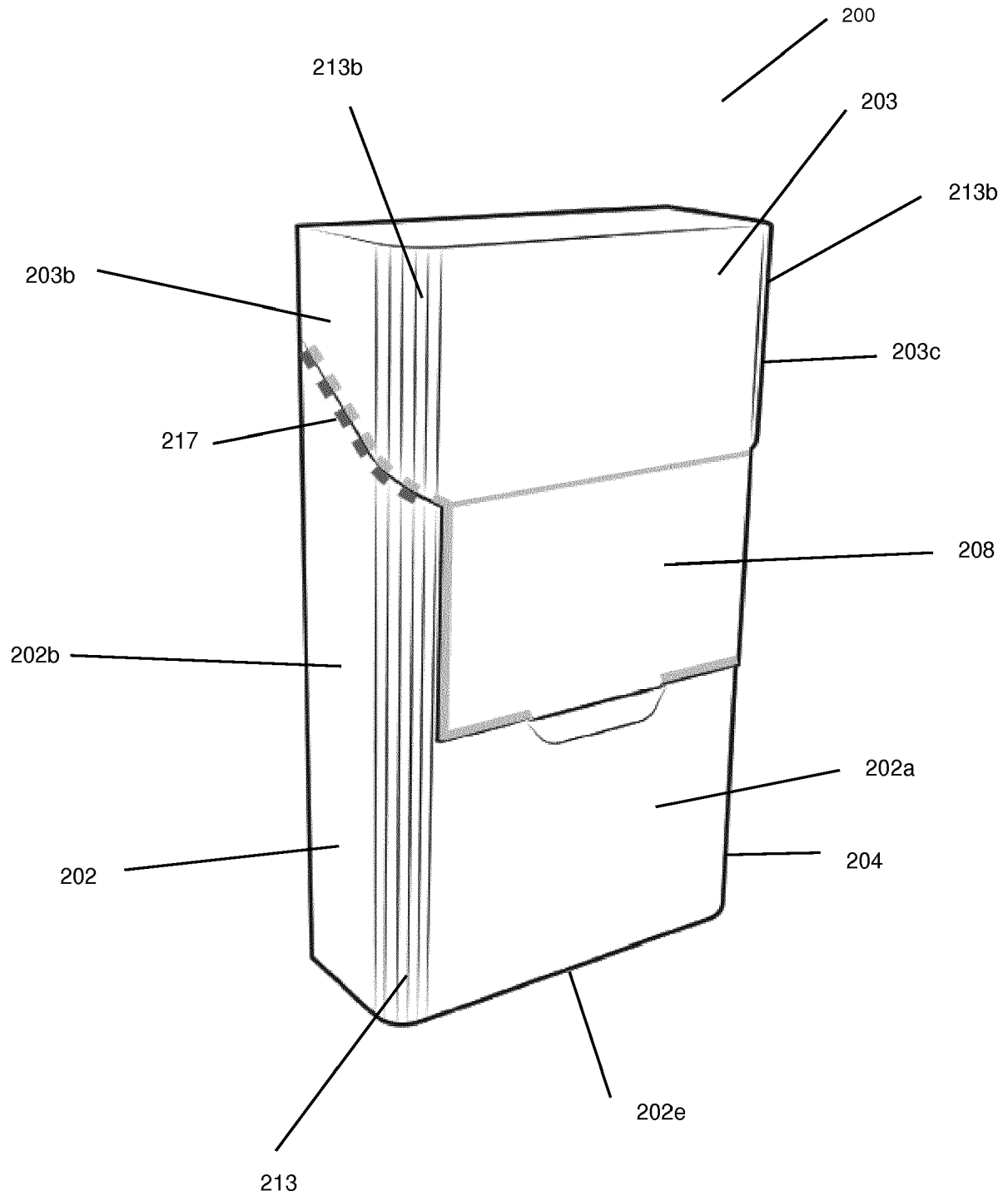


Figure 7

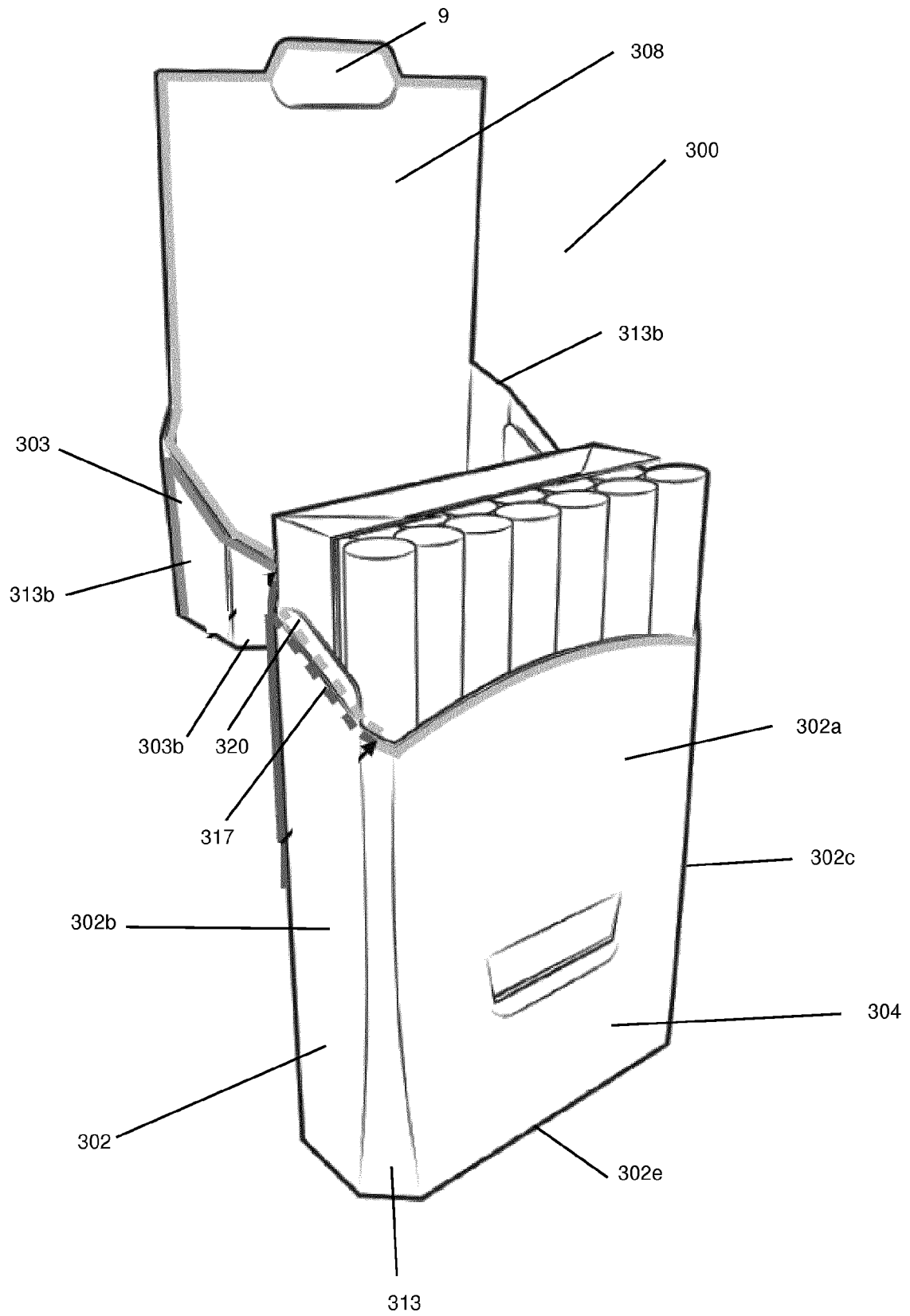
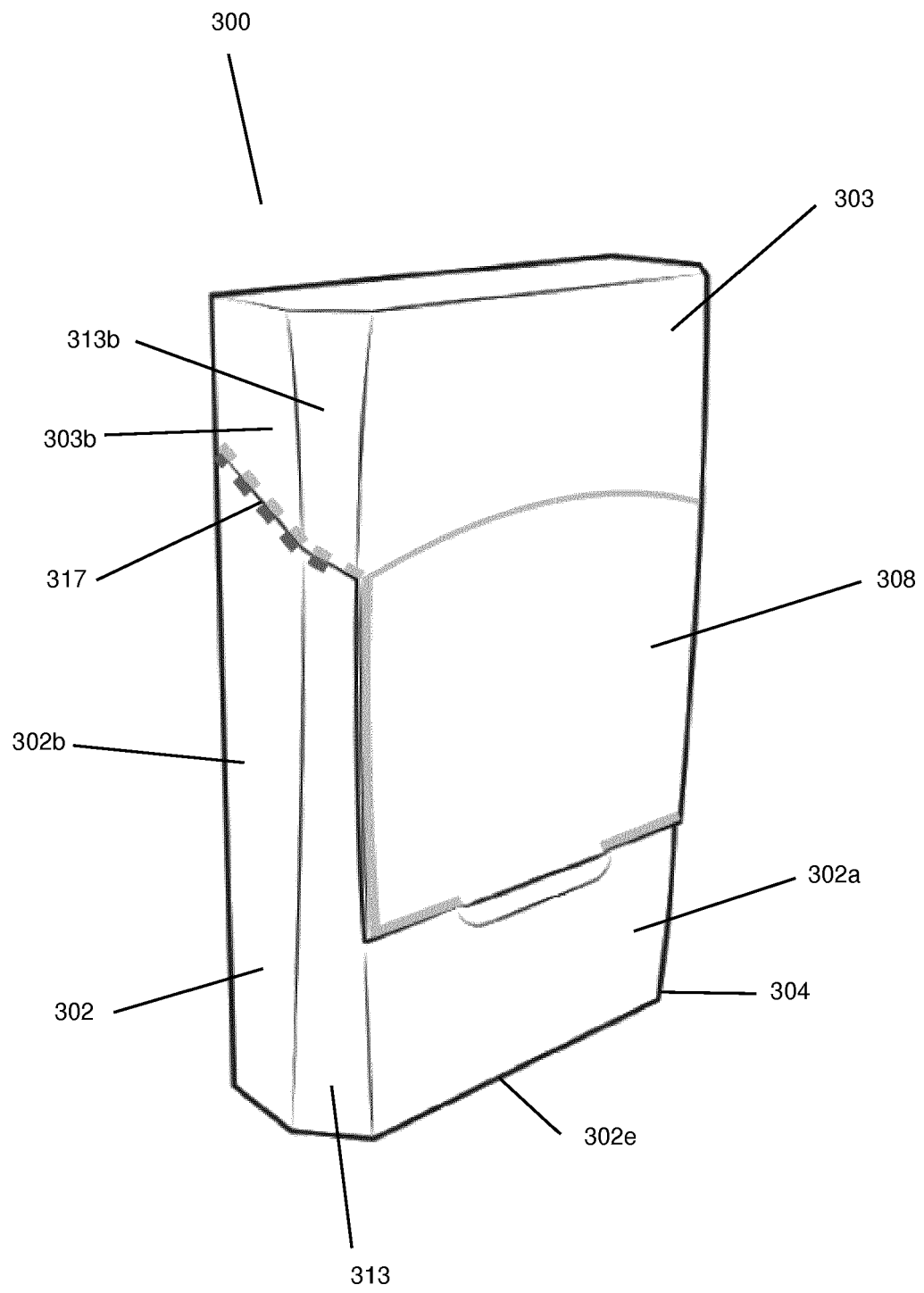


Figure 8





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CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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