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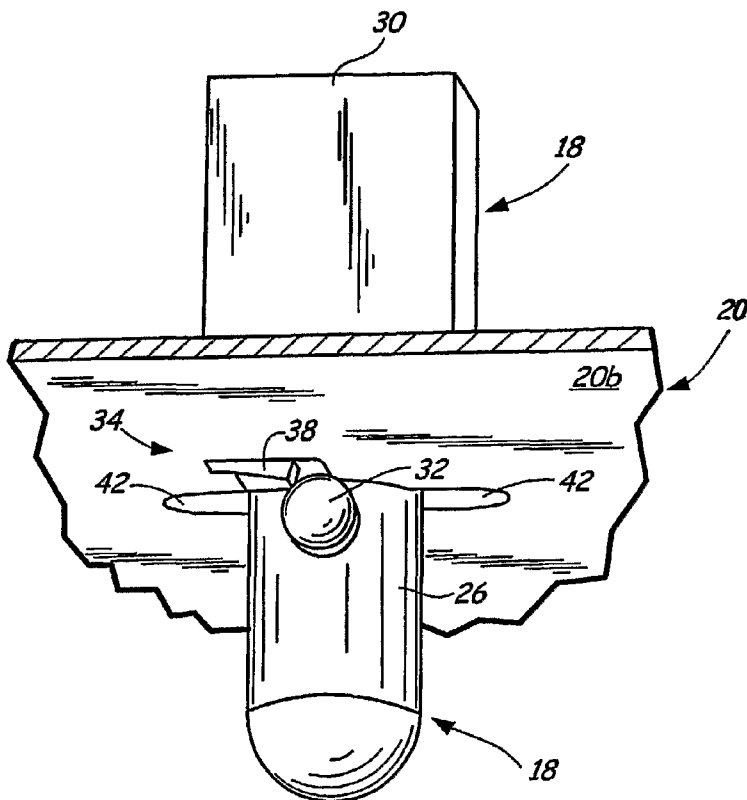
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: MOUNTING STRUCTURE FOR A SENSOR



(57) Abstract: A mounting structure (34) for receiving a sensor (18) having a sensing portion (26) and a base portion (30) includes a substantially flat sheet of material (20) having a first surface (20a), a second surface (20b) opposite the first surface (20a), and an aperture (36). The aperture (36) is configured such that the sensing portion (26) of the sensor (18) is passable through the aperture (36), and the base portion (30) is not passable through the aperture (36), but instead rests on the first surface (20a). The mounting structure (34) also includes a pair of tabs (38) that extend in a downward direction away from the second surface (20b) of the sheet of material (20) and are configured to immobilize the sensor (18) within the aperture (36).

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MOUNTING STRUCTURE FOR A SENSOR

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a mounting structure for securing a sensor. More particularly, the present invention relates to a mounting
5 structure for receiving and securing a sensor to a control box of a condensing unit.

A split system heating and/or cooling system includes an outdoor unit, such as a condensing unit, and an indoor unit, such as an evaporator unit. For operation of the condensing unit, an outdoor ambient air temperature is sensed by
10 a temperature sensor, such as a thermistor, and electrically transmitted to a controller of the unit located within a control box.

In some designs, if the thermistor is located outside of a control box of the condensing unit, the thermistor may be exposed to the sun and thus may provide inaccurate temperature data. In other designs, the thermistor may be located
15 inside the condensing unit, in part to avoid exposure to the sun. In that case, the thermistor may be exposed to warmer air circulating through a coil assembly inside the condensing unit and/or heat given off by a compressor inside the condensing unit, both of which may result in an inaccurate temperature reading. In some designs, the thermistor may be fastened to the inside of the condensing
20 unit through the use of wire ties, which may be labor intensive, and again, may result in inaccurate temperature data.

There is a need for a temperature sensor locatable in a position to accurately measure an outside ambient air temperature, yet be easily mounted to a part of the condensing unit such that the sensor is secure and under minimal
25 strain.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a mounting structure for receiving a sensor having a sensing portion and a base portion. The mounting structure includes a substantially flat sheet of material having a first surface, a second surface
30 opposite the first surface, and an aperture configured such that the sensing portion of the sensor is passable through the aperture, and the base portion is not passable through the aperture, but rests on the first surface. The mounting structure also includes a pair of tabs that extend in a downward direction away from the second

surface of the sheet of material and are configured to immobilize the sensor within the aperture.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A is a perspective view of a condensing unit with a cover removed
5 from a control box of the unit.

FIG. 1B is an enlarged view of a portion of the control box from FIG. 1A illustrating a thermistor secured within the control box.

FIG. 1C is a perspective bottom view of the thermistor and the control box from FIG. 1B.

10 FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the thermistor of FIGS. 1A-1C.

FIG. 3 is a perspective top view of a bottom wall of the control box of FIG. 1A to illustrate an aperture in the wall configured for receiving and securing the thermistor of FIG. 1.

15 FIG. 4 illustrates a process of inserting the thermistor of FIG. 2 into the aperture of FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 illustrates a process of securing the thermistor within the aperture.

FIG. 6 is a perspective bottom view of the thermistor once it is secure inside the aperture.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

20 The present invention is a structure and method for mounting a sensor (such as a thermistor) to a surface (such as a wall or plate of a control box or housing). FIG. 1A is a perspective view of condensing unit 10 of an air conditioning or heat pump system. Condensing unit 10 is shown to aid in the description of the present invention and is not intended to limit the scope of the
25 present invention. Condensing unit 10 includes fan 12, coil assembly 14, and control box 16.

When condensing unit 10 is used as part of an air conditioning unit, fan 12 draws air from outside condensing unit 10 across coil assembly 14. Refrigerant is enclosed in tubing used to form a coil in coil assembly 14. As the
30 refrigerant passes through the coil of coil assembly 14 and the cooler air from outside condensing unit 10 passes across coil assembly 14, the air absorbs heat from coil assembly 14, which causes the refrigerant to condense. The resulting cooled liquid refrigerant then flows to an evaporator, which is part of a corresponding indoor unit, and the evaporator utilizes the refrigerant to cool air.

When condensing unit 10 is used as part of a heat pump system, coil assembly 14 acts as an evaporator coil to extract heat from the surrounding air.

Condensing unit 10 includes control box 16. As shown in FIG. 1A, a cover (not shown) has been removed from control box 16. Control box 16 includes circuit board 17 which controls an overall operation of outdoor condensing unit 10 and the corresponding indoor unit.

FIG. 1B is an enlarged view of control box 16 from FIG. 1A. Control box 16 includes thermistor 18, which is secured within an aperture or cut-out in bottom wall 20 of control box 16. Thermistor 18 is configured to measure an ambient air temperature, and includes wires 22 which are also connected to circuit board 17 in order to relay signals from thermistor 18 to circuit board 17. Additional wires may be connected to circuit board 17 to connect various other components of unit 10 to circuit board 17; for clarity these other wires have not been shown in FIGS. 1A-1C.

FIG. 1C is a perspective bottom view of control box 16 and thermistor 18 from FIG. 1B. As explained in more detail below, thermistor 18 is configured such that a portion of thermistor 18 is inserted through the cut-out in bottom wall 20 and extends outside of control box 16, and another portion resides inside control box 16. The portion of thermistor 18 extending outside of control box 16 includes a sensing portion of thermistor 18, and as such, thermistor 18 is able to obtain accurate temperature measurements of the outside ambient air. Because of its location extending out of a bottom of control box 16, thermistor 18 is generally shielded from the sun and has minimal solar gain.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of thermistor 18 from FIGS. 1A-1C. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 2, thermistor 18 includes sensor portion 26, shoulder 28, base portion 30, wires 22 extending from base portion 30, and pair of ears 32 extending from sensor portion 26.

FIG. 3 is a perspective top view of a portion of bottom wall 20 of control box 16 of FIG. 1A to illustrate mounting structure 34 including aperture or cut-out 36 and a pair of tabs 38. Mounting structure 34 is configured for securing thermistor 18 to control box 16 such that sensor portion 26 of thermistor 18 is exposed to outside ambient air and thermistor 18 is immobile, yet under little or no strain. Bottom wall 20 includes top surface 20a and bottom surface 20b (not visible in FIG. 3).

In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 3, cut-out 36 includes generally circular portion 40, a pair of oblong portions 42, and a pair of L-shaped portions 44. Each L-shaped portion 44 has short leg 44a and tall leg 44b. Tabs 38 are each formed from a portion of wall 20 remaining inside and between L-shaped portions 44 and circular portion 40 and are defined by a bend or crease 46 formed in wall 20. Tabs 38 are each bent downward extending away from bottom surface 20b of wall 20. In preferred embodiments, tabs 38 are spring-like and resilient. In their natural position, tabs 38 are bent downward; however, if an upward force is applied to tabs 38, tabs 38 are movable such that they are generally flush with wall 20. Once a force is no longer exerted on tabs 38, tabs 38 may return to their original downward-bent orientation.

Circular portion 40 of cut-out 36 is configured to receive sensor portion 26 of thermistor 18 and oblong portions 42 are configured to each receive one of ears 32 of sensor portion 26.

In preferred embodiments, wall 20 of control box 16 may be formed from sheet metal. However, it is recognized that any other suitable material may also be used to form wall 20. Mounting structure 34 may be formed in wall 20 using any metal cutting technique, including, but not limited to, stamping. In the embodiment of FIG. 3, a die may be used to punch out the features of cut-out 36, and in a secondary operation using the same die, tabs 38 may be formed and bent downward.

FIG. 4 is a perspective top view of top surface 20a of wall 20, including mounting structure 34 from FIG. 3 (rotated counter-clockwise approximately 90 degrees), and thermistor 18 from FIG. 2. FIG. 4 illustrates a step in the process of inserting thermistor 18 through cut-out 36. Thermistor 18 may be placed above top surface 20a of wall 20 such that ears 32 of sensor portion 26 are aligned with oblong portions 42 of cut-out 36. Sensor portion 26 including ears 32 are then received through cut-out 36 such that sensor portion 26 extends below bottom surface 20b (not shown in FIG. 4) of wall 20. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-4, thermistor 18 and cut-out 36 are configured such that shoulder 28 of thermistor 18 is larger than circular portion 40; thus, shoulder 28 is unable to pass through cut-out 36. Instead, shoulder 28 rests on top surface 20a of wall 20.

Thermistor 18 may then be rotated 90 degrees in either direction by gripping and rotating base portion 30. As thermistor 18 is rotated and ears 32 of sensor portion 26 pass under tabs 38, ears 32 exert an upward force on resilient tabs 38, thus pushing tabs 38 up towards wall 20. Once thermistor 18 is rotated
5 enough such that ears 32 are past tabs 38, ears 32 will each be generally aligned with each short leg 44a of L-shaped portions 44. Resilient tabs 38 then spring back to their original downward-bent position and lock ears 32 such that thermistor 18 is no longer able to rotate. Thermistor 18 is thus fixed within cut-out 36.

10 FIG. 5 is a perspective view of bottom surface 20b of wall 20 with thermistor 18 and mounting structure 34. As shown in FIG. 5, ears 32 of sensor portion 26 are aligned with short legs 44a of L-shaped portions 44 and tabs 38 are bent such that tabs 38 prevent movement by ears 32. Rotation of thermistor 18 in either direction (i.e. clockwise or counterclockwise) is prevented because of the
15 pair of tabs 38.

FIG. 6 is another perspective view of thermistor 18 and mounting structure 34 of FIG. 5. As explained above and as illustrated in FIG. 6, because tabs 38 are bent downward and contact ears 32, thermistor 18 is locked in place within bottom wall 20 of control box 16. With the use of mounting structure 34,
20 fasteners are not needed to secure thermistor 18 within wall 20. Thermistor 18 is easily mounted to wall 20 by inserting sensor portion 26 through cut-out 36 and then locking thermistor 18 in place with a quarter-turn twist (in either direction). Thermistor 18 is adequately fixed to wall 20 but is not under any strain.

Sensor portion 26 of thermistor 18 extends below bottom surface 20b of
25 wall 20 of control box 16. Sensor portion 26 is exposed to outside air, thus enabling thermistor 18 to provide an accurate ambient air temperature for efficient operation of condensing unit 10. Moreover, because of its position extending from a bottom of control box 16, sensor portion 26 is also shielded from any solar effects that may impact sensor portion 26 and its ability to provide
30 an accurate temperature reading.

In the preferred embodiment of thermistor 18 and mounting structure 34, as shown in FIGS. 1-6, thermistor 18 may be easily removed from mounting structure 34 if removal is necessary (i.e. for maintenance or replacement of thermistor 18). A small device, such as a screwdriver or knife, may be inserted

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between tab 38 and ear 32 (of FIG. 6) to temporarily push tab 38 upward towards wall 20. Thermistor 18 may then be rotated 90 degrees clockwise until ears 32 are aligned with oblong portions 42 and sensor portion 26 may be lifted back out through cut-out 36. If the device were instead inserted between the opposite tab 5 38 and corresponding ear 32 (neither of which is visible in FIG. 6), in that case, thermistor 18 may be rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise in order to back thermistor 18 out of cut-out 36. Thermistor 18 may be easily removed without any damage to itself or to mounting structure 34.

The present invention relates to a mounting structure for a sensor or 10 similar component. Although the present invention has been described above in relation to a thermistor for a control box of an outdoor condensing unit, it is recognized that the mounting structure could be used in various other applications where it is critical or desirable to easily mount a sensor or other small component without the use of additional fasteners.

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

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CLAIMS:

1. A mounting structure for receiving a sensor having a sensing portion and a base portion, the mounting structure comprising:

a substantially flat sheet of material having

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a first surface;

a second surface opposite the first surface; and

an aperture, wherein the aperture is configured such that the sensing portion of the sensor is passable through the aperture, the base portion is not passable through the aperture, and the base portion

10

is configured to rest on the first surface; and

a pair of tabs that extend in a downward direction away from the second surface of the sheet of material, wherein the pair of tabs are configured to immobilize the sensor within the aperture.

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2. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the sensor is a thermistor used to measure an outdoor ambient air temperature.

3. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the mounting structure is part of a control unit of a condensing unit.

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4. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the aperture includes a generally circular portion, a pair of oblong portions extending from opposite ends of the generally circular portion, and a pair of L-shaped portions extending from the generally circular portion and positioned approximately 90 degrees from each of the oblong portions.

5. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the mounting structure is formed from sheet metal.

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6. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the sensing portion of the sensor includes a pair of ears that extend from the sensing portion and are configured to engage with the pair of tabs.

7. The mounting structure of claim 1 wherein the base portion of the sensor includes a shoulder configured to rest on the first surface of the sheet of material.

8. An assembly comprising:

a thermistor having a sensor portion, a base portion, and a pair of ears extending from opposite sides of the sensor portion; and

a mounting structure comprising:

5 a wall having a top surface, a bottom surface, and a cut-out for receiving and securing the thermistor, wherein the wall is substantially flat; and

10 a pair of tabs that extend from the bottom surface of the wall in a downward direction, wherein the cut-out of the wall is configured such that the base portion of the thermistor is secured on the top surface above the wall and the sensor portion of the thermistor is secured below the wall, and the pair of tabs engage with the pair of ears to secure the thermistor to the mounting structure.

15 9. The assembly of claim 8 wherein the base portion of the thermistor includes a shoulder configured to rest on the top surface of the wall.

10. The assembly of claim 8 wherein the cut-out includes a generally circular portion and a pair of oblong portions extending from opposite ends of the generally circular portion, wherein the oblong portions are configured for receiving the ears on the sensor portion of the thermistor.

20 11. The assembly of claim 10 wherein the cut-out further includes a pair of L-shaped portions extending from opposite ends of the generally circular portion and positioned approximately 90 degrees from each of the oblong portions.

12. The assembly of claim 8 wherein the mounting structure is formed from sheet metal.

25 13. The assembly of claim 8 wherein the mounting structure is part of a controller of a condensing unit and the thermistor is configured for measuring an outdoor ambient air temperature.

14. A method of attaching a sensor to a wall of a control unit, wherein the wall is a substantially flat sheet of material having a top surface and a bottom surface, the method comprising:

forming an aperture in the sheet;

5 forming a locking feature from a portion of the sheet;

inserting a first portion of the sensor through the aperture;

preventing a second portion of the sensor from passing through the aperture; and

rotating the sensor to lock the sensor within the aperture.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein forming the locking feature includes a pair of
10 tabs bent in a downward direction away from the bottom surface of the sheet.

16. The method of claim 14 wherein rotating the sensor to lock the sensor within the aperture includes engaging a pair of ears on the first portion of the sensor with the pair of tabs to immobilize the sensor.

17. The method of claim 14 wherein rotating the sensor includes at least one of
15 rotating the sensor 90 degrees clockwise or rotating the sensor 90 degrees counter-clockwise.

18. The method of claim 14 wherein the aperture includes a main portion configured for receiving the first portion of the sensor, a pair of oblong portions configured for receiving a pair of protrusions extending from the first portion of the sensor, and a pair
20 of L-shaped portions positioned approximately 90 degrees from each of the oblong portions and configured for receiving the pair of protrusions after the sensor is rotated approximately 90 degrees.

19. The method of claim 14 wherein preventing the second portion of the sensor from passing through the aperture is performed by a shoulder located between the first
25 portion and the second portion of the sensor.

20. The method of 14 wherein the sensor is a thermistor configured for measuring an outdoor ambient air temperature.

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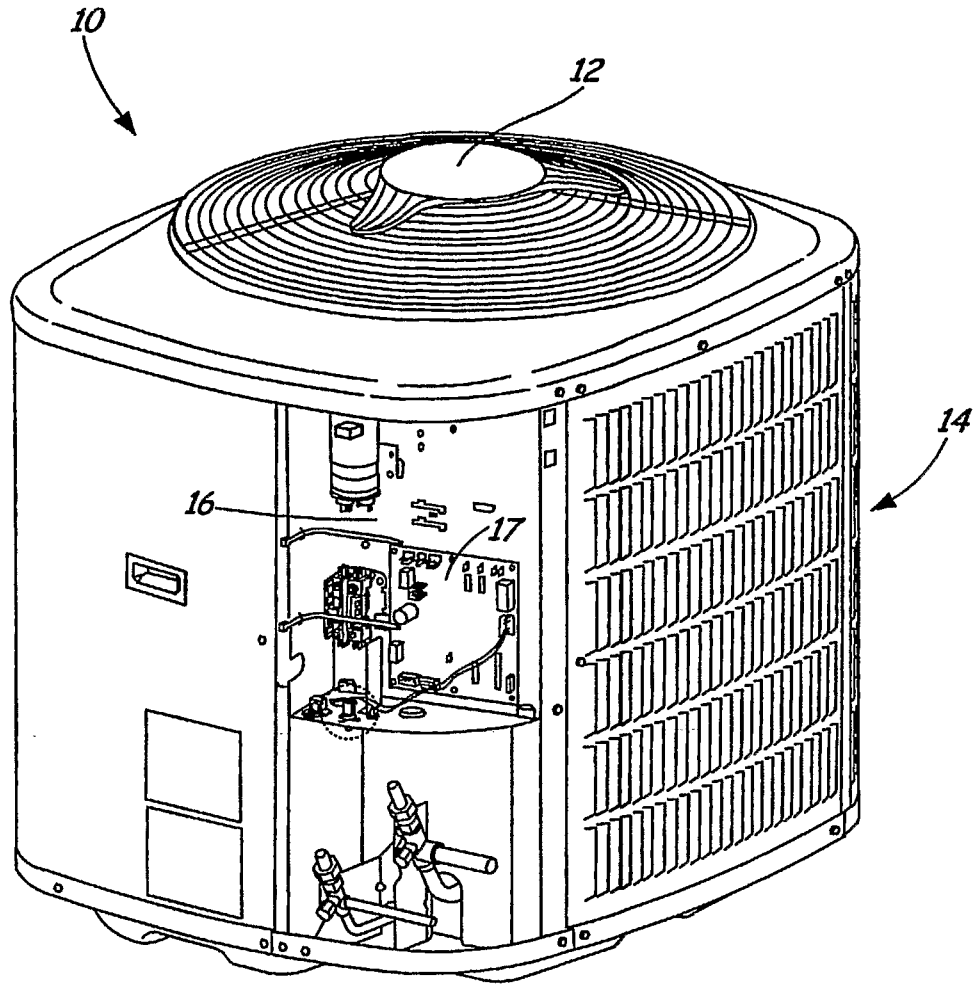
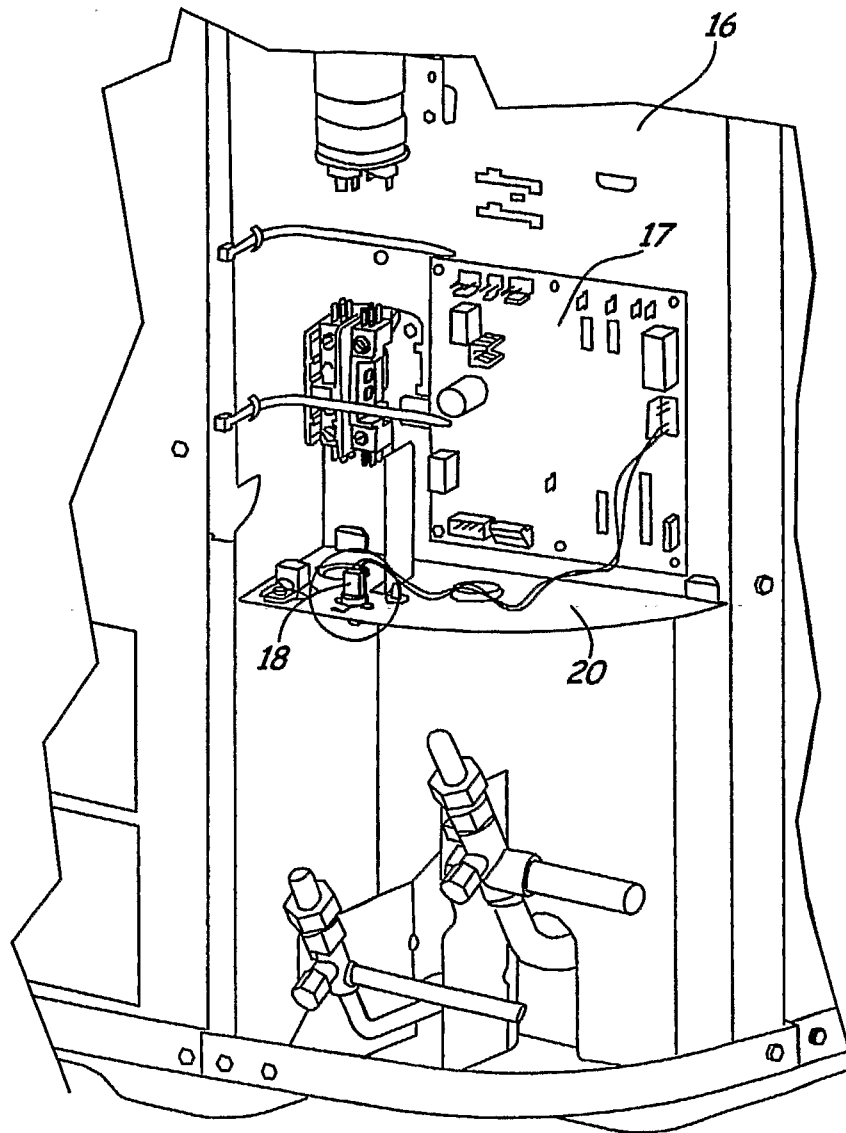


FIG. 1A

FIG. 1B



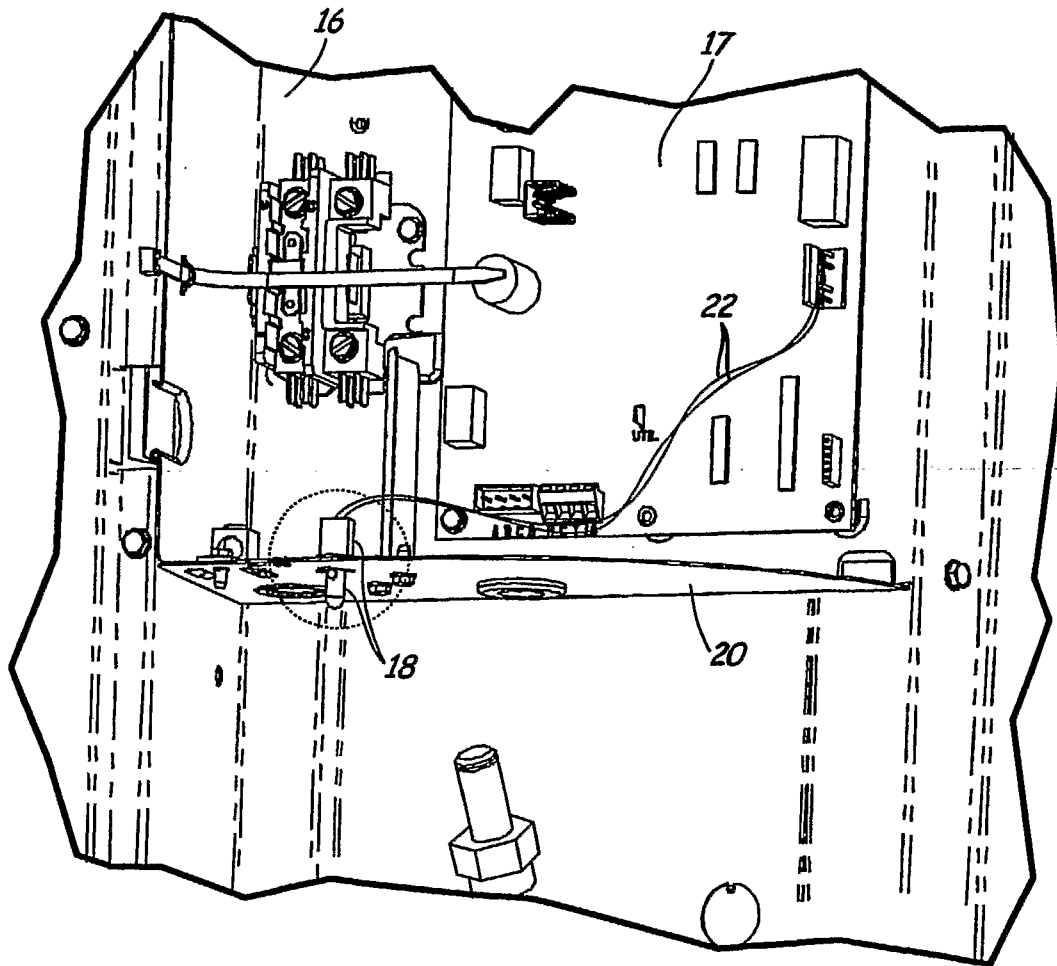


FIG. 1C

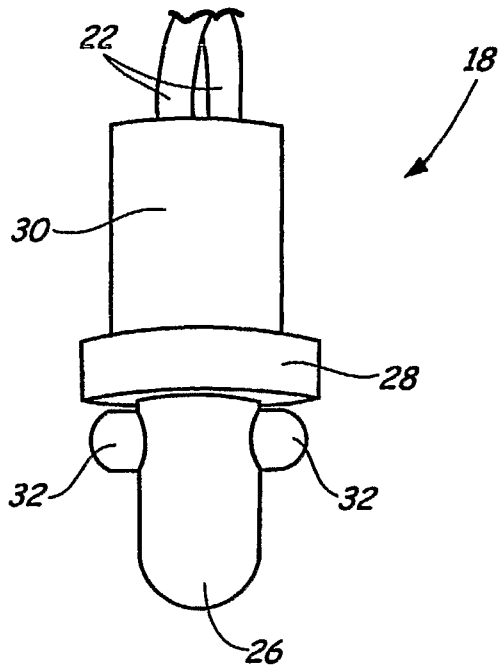


FIG. 2

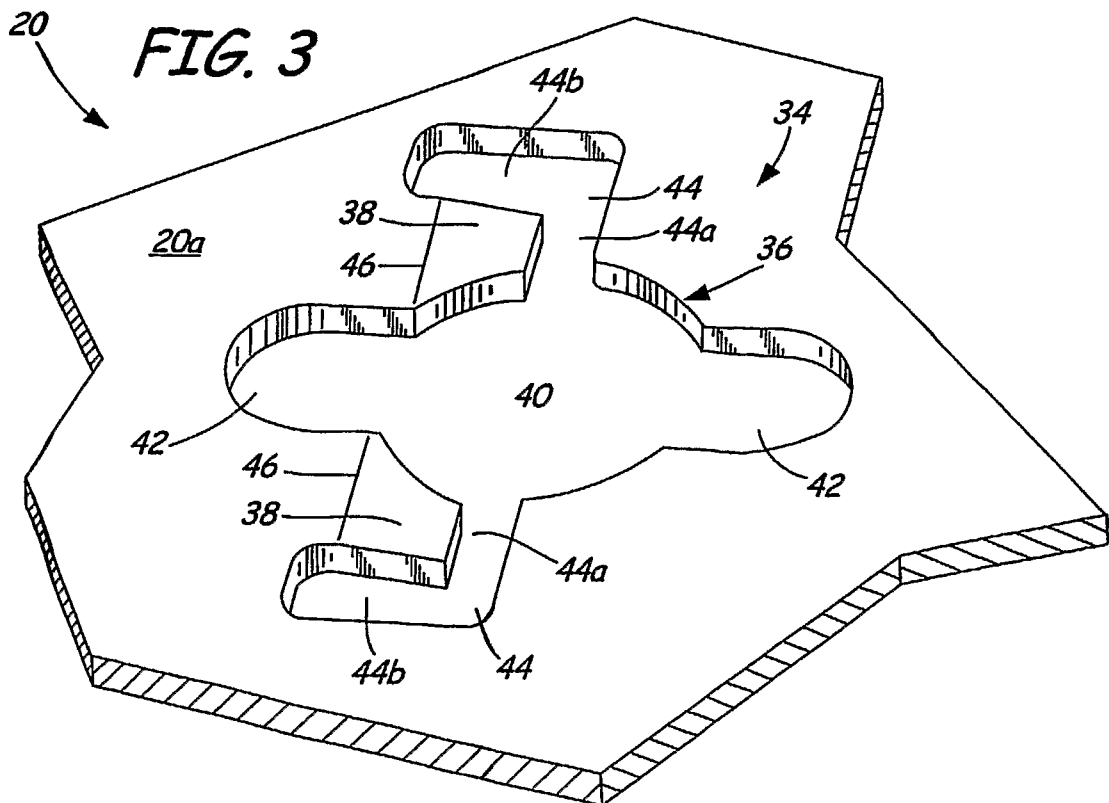


FIG. 3

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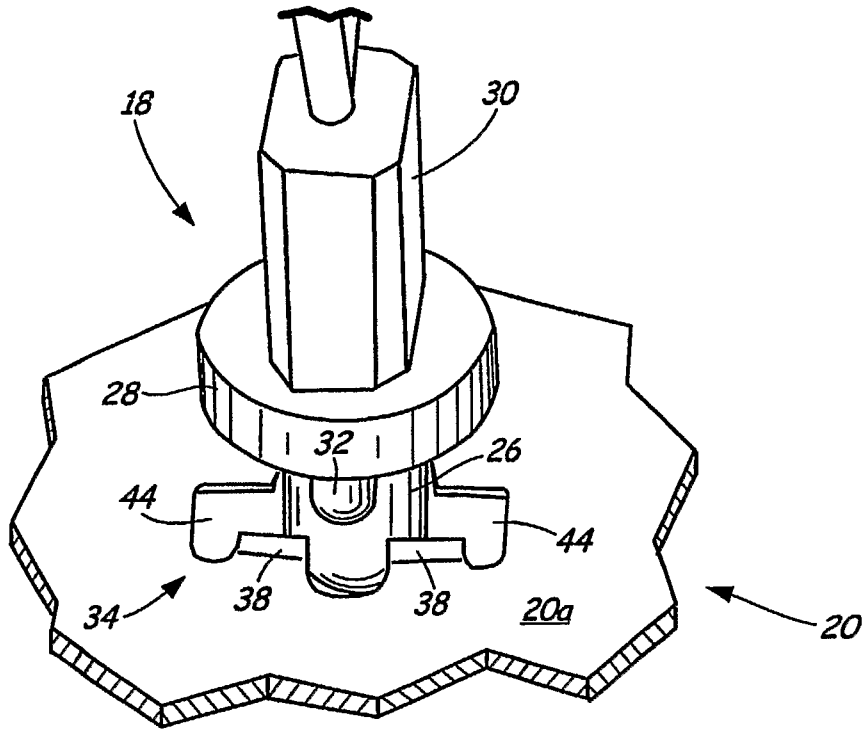


FIG. 4

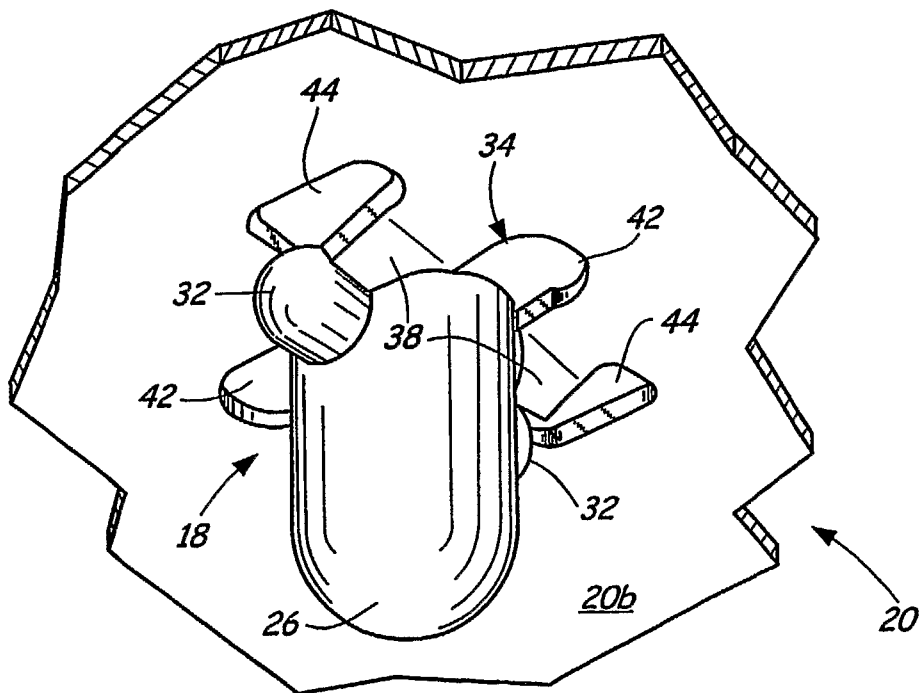


FIG. 5

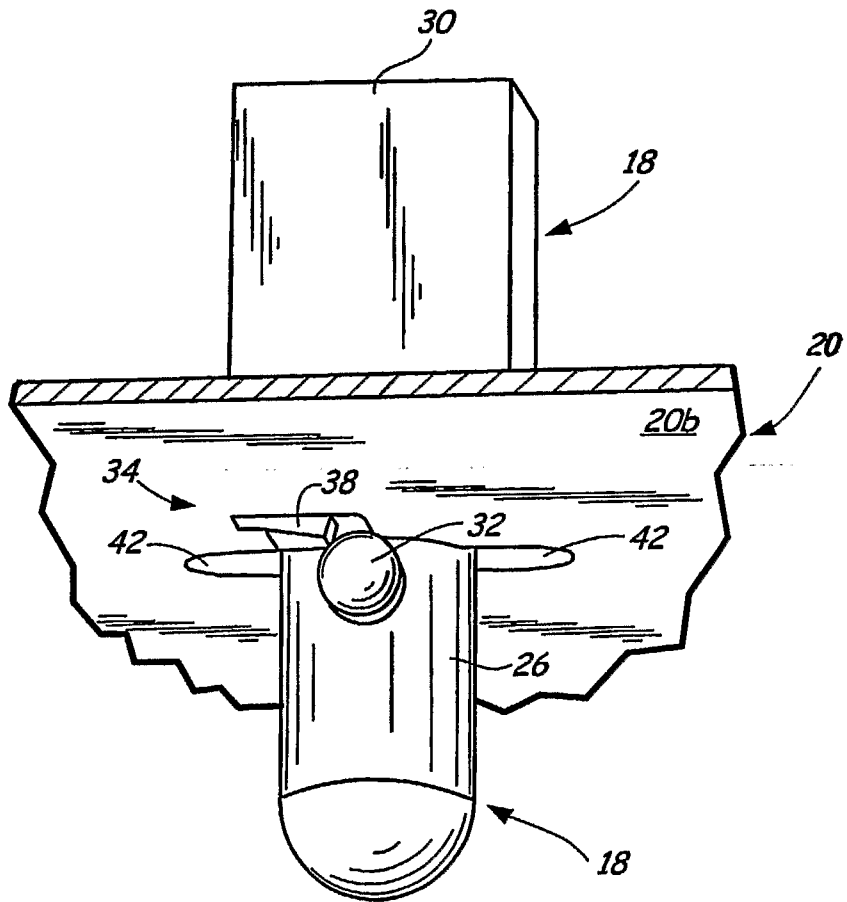


FIG. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US06/30949

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC: F28F 7/00(2006.01)

USPC: 165/11.1,76
 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 U.S. : 165/11.1, 76; 236/94, 99R, 101R

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
 Please See Continuation Sheet

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- A	US 4,404,813 A (PADDOCK et al) 20 September 1983 (20.09.1983), especially column 5, lines 23-43 and figure 5.	1-3, 5, 7 ----- 4, 6, 8-20
A	US 4,014,178 A (KELLS) 29 March 1977 (29.03.1977), entire document.	1-20
A	US 4,092,698 A (BREFKA) 30 May 1978 (30.05.1978), entire document.	1-20
A	US 4,148,194 A (KELLS) 10 April 1979 (10.04.1979), entire document.	1-20
A	US 4,507,935 A (MADARAME et al) 02 April 1985 (02.04.1985), entire document.	1-20
A	US 6,101,819 A (ONAKA et al) 15 August 2000 (15.08.2000), entire document.	1-20

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	Symbol
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search 20 February 2007 (20.02.2007)	Date of mailing of the international search report 18 APR 2007
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450 Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. (571) 273-3201	Authorized officer Ljiljana (Lil) V. Ciric <i>Sharon D. Greene for</i> Telephone No. 571-272-4900

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US06/30949

Continuation of B. FIELDS SEARCHED Item 3:

EAST

search terms: mount or mounting; sensor or thermostat or thermistor; (metal or flat) adj sheet; temperature; condenser or condensing; ears or tabs; shoulder; circular; oblong or oval