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(54) **PILE FABRICS AND SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR FORMING PILE FABRICS**

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(71) Applicant: **ProGlobal Products LLC**, Dalton, GA (US)

(72) Inventors: **Barclay PAYNE**, Cartersville, GA (US); **Forrest JAQUITH**, Acworth, GA (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

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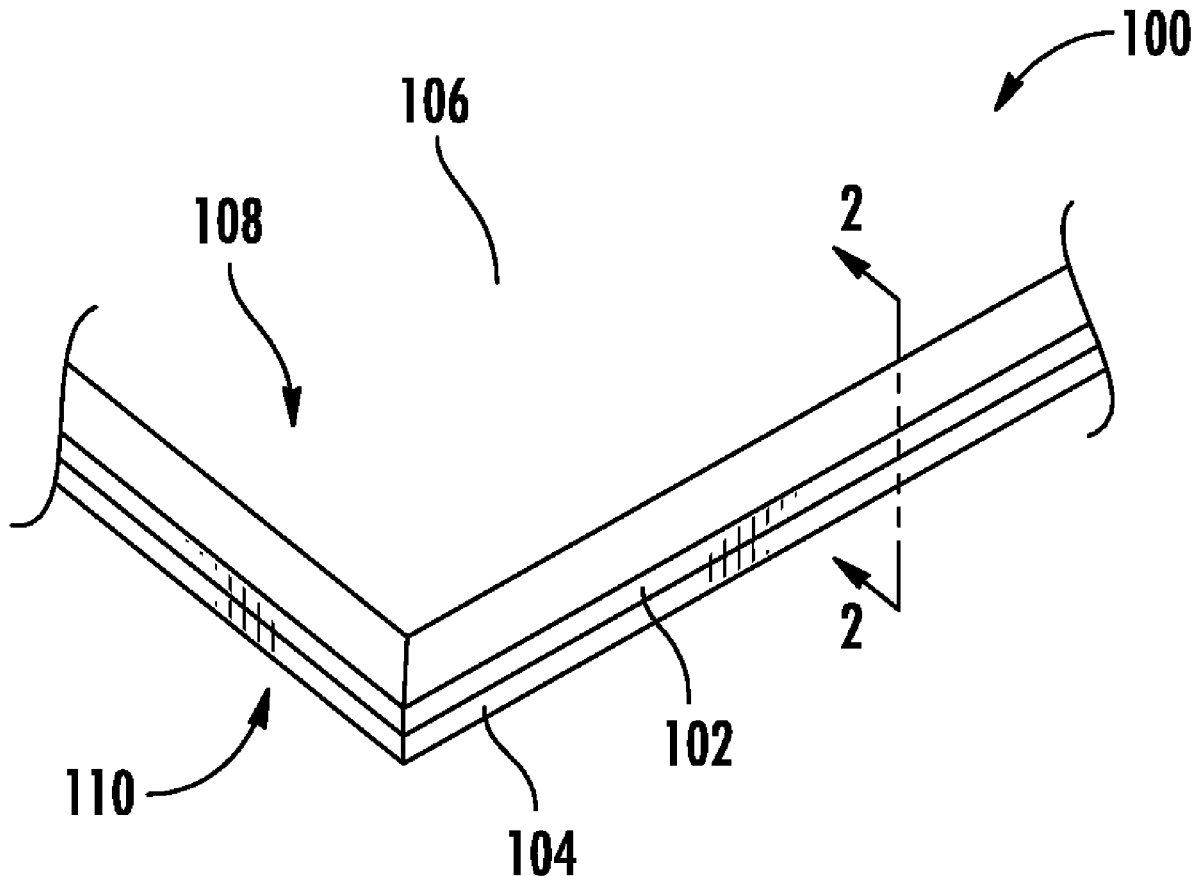
**Related U.S. Application Data**

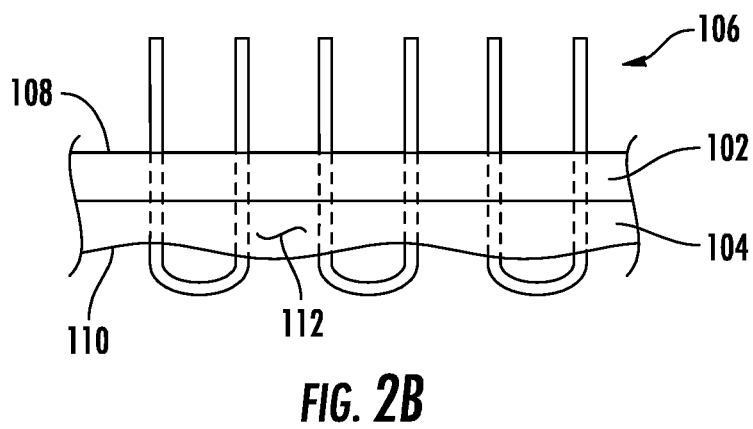
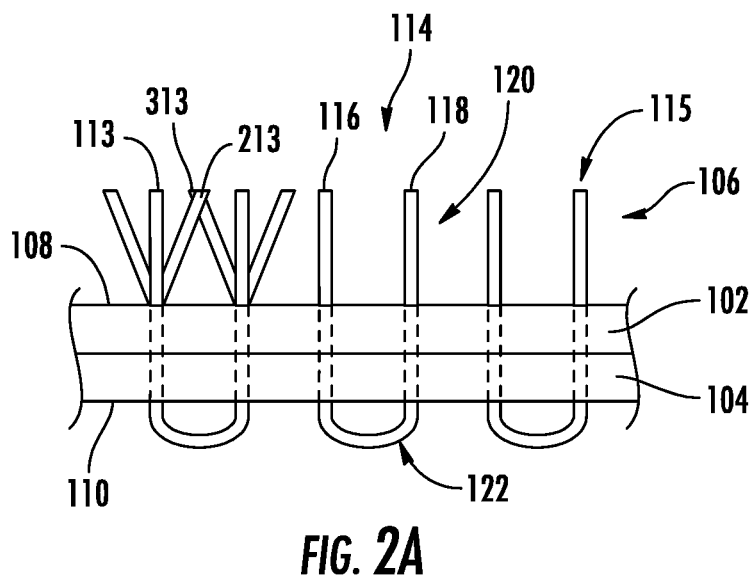
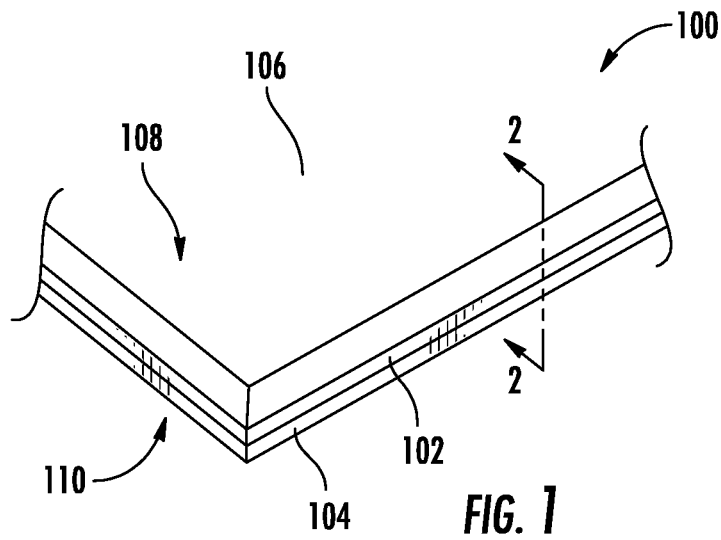
(60) Provisional application No. 62/991,897, filed on Mar. 19, 2020.

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An example method for forming a pile fabric includes: providing a primary backing material (configured as a sheet), a layer of thermoplastic material (disposed at the back side of the primary backing material), and a plurality of pile tufts extending through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; and heating only the back of the pile fabric to melt the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond disposed at the back side of the primary backing material to secure the pile tufts to the primary backing material.





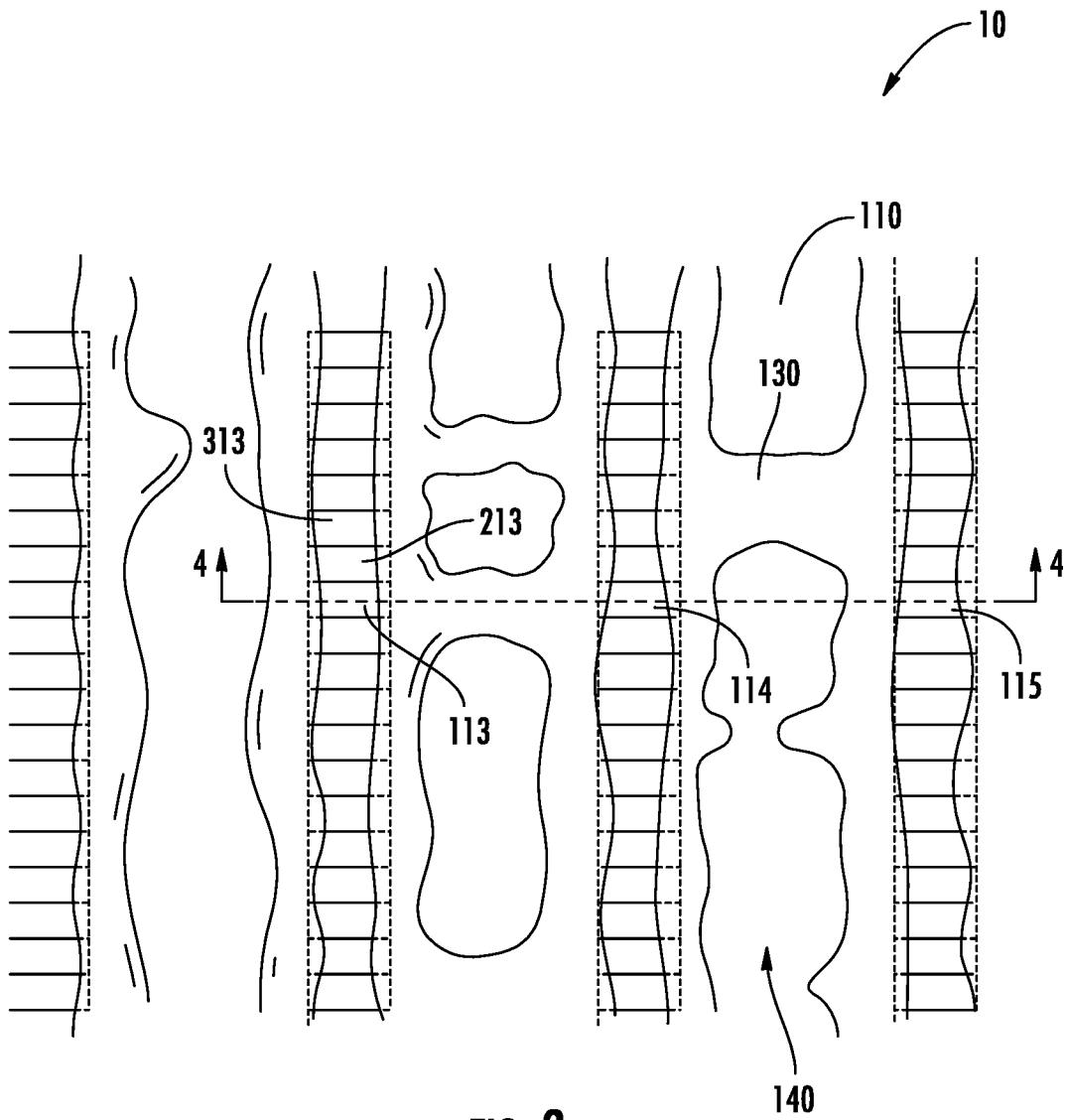


FIG. 3



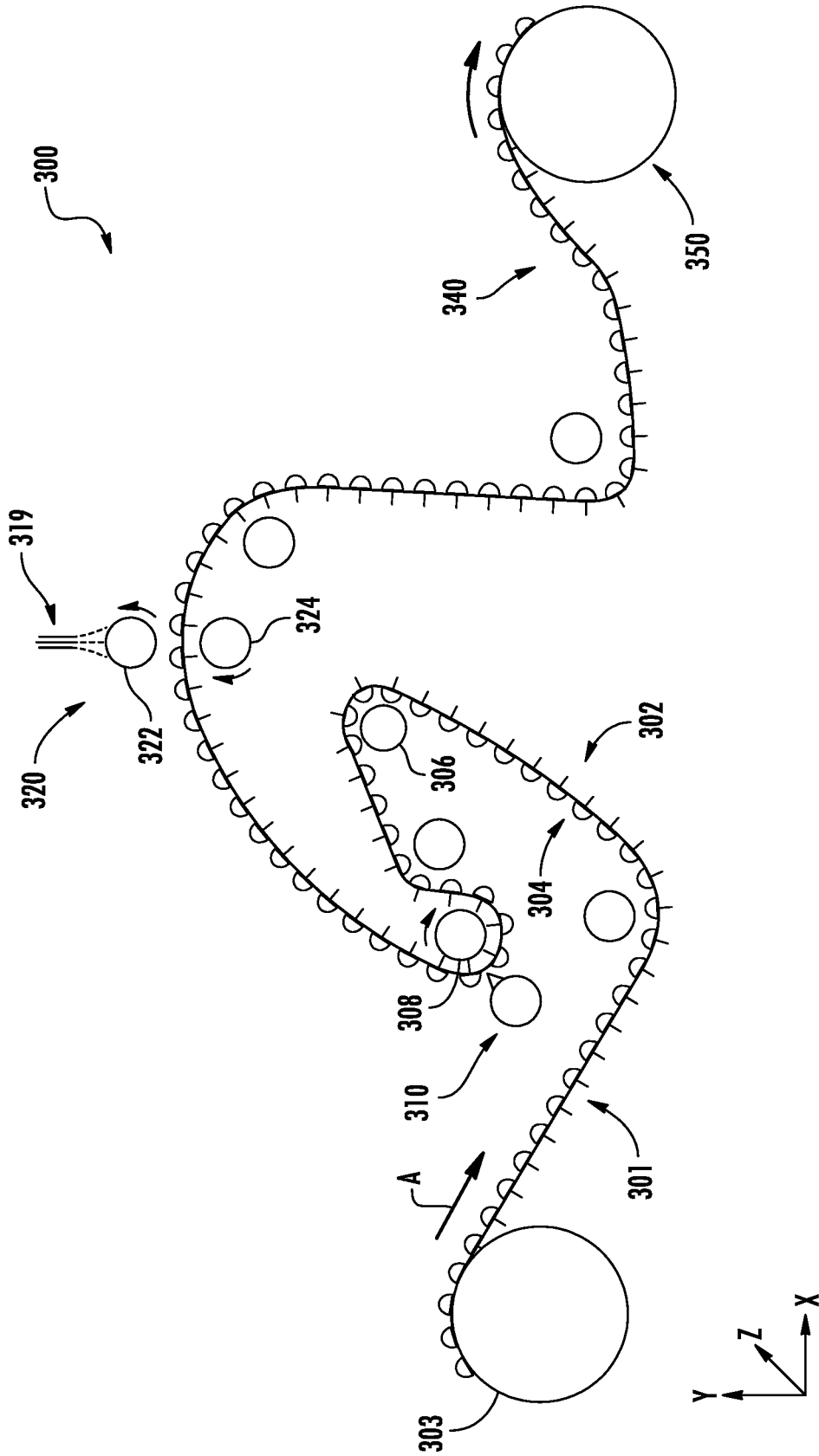


FIG. 6

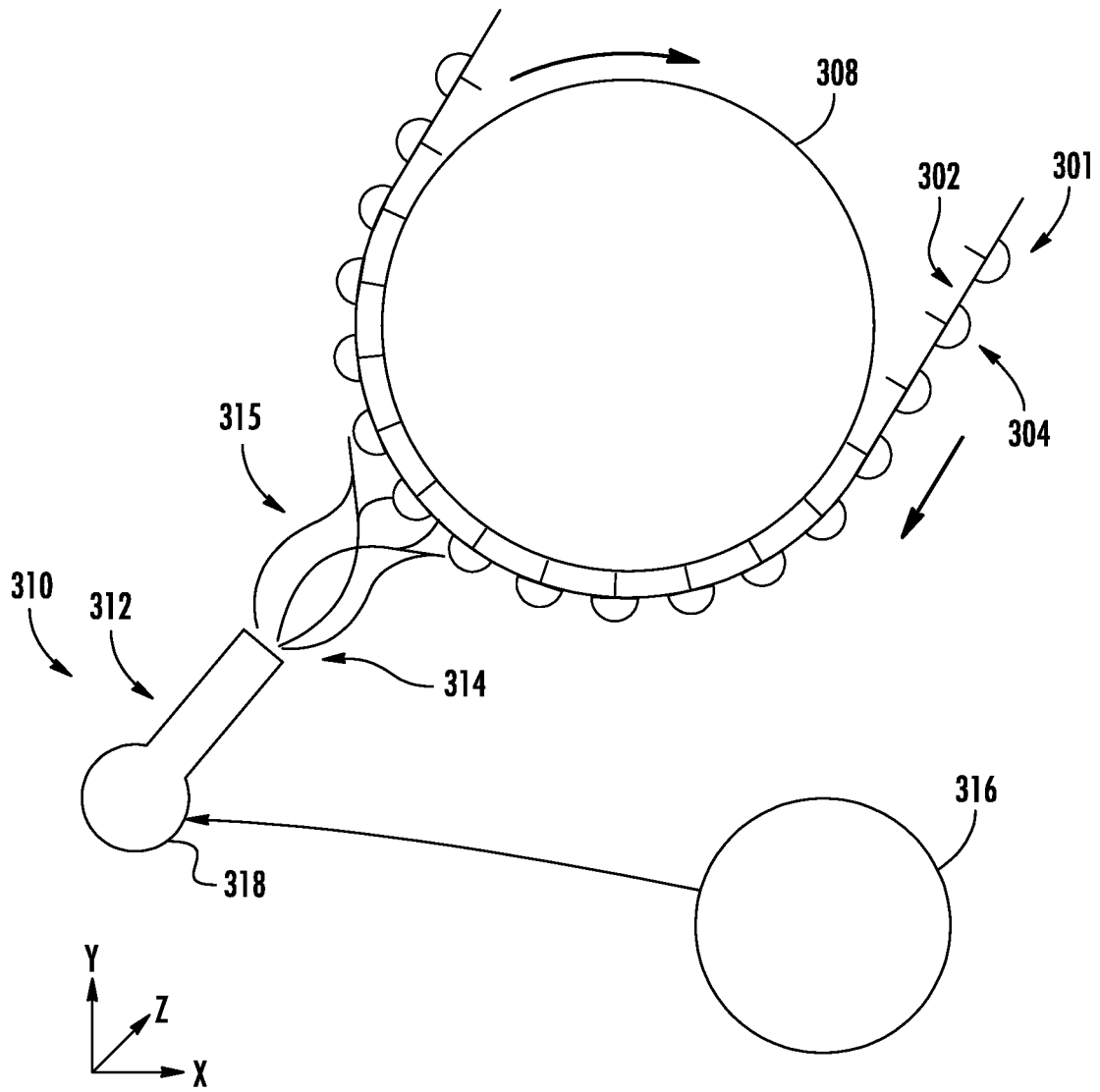
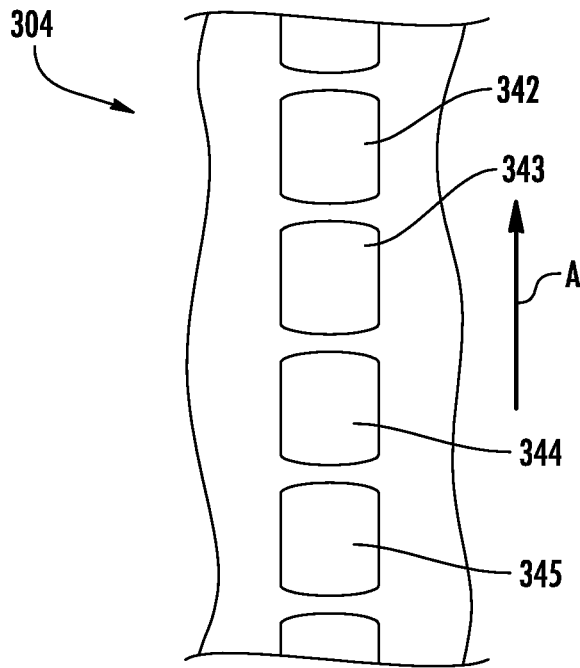
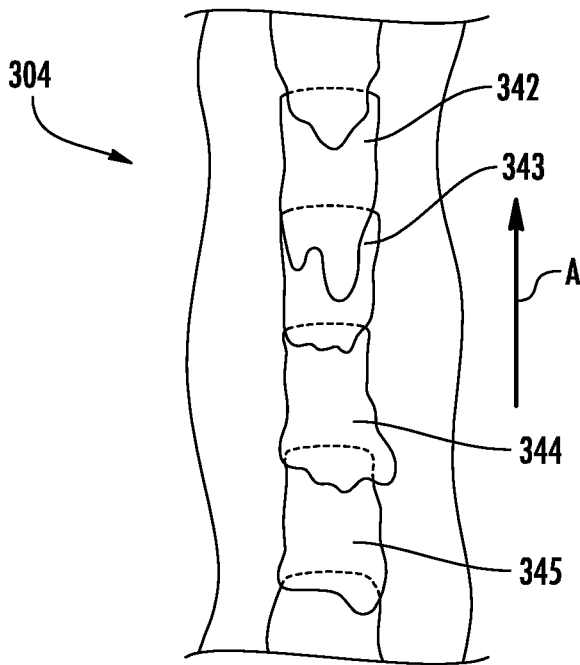


FIG. 7



**FIG. 8A**



**FIG. 8B**

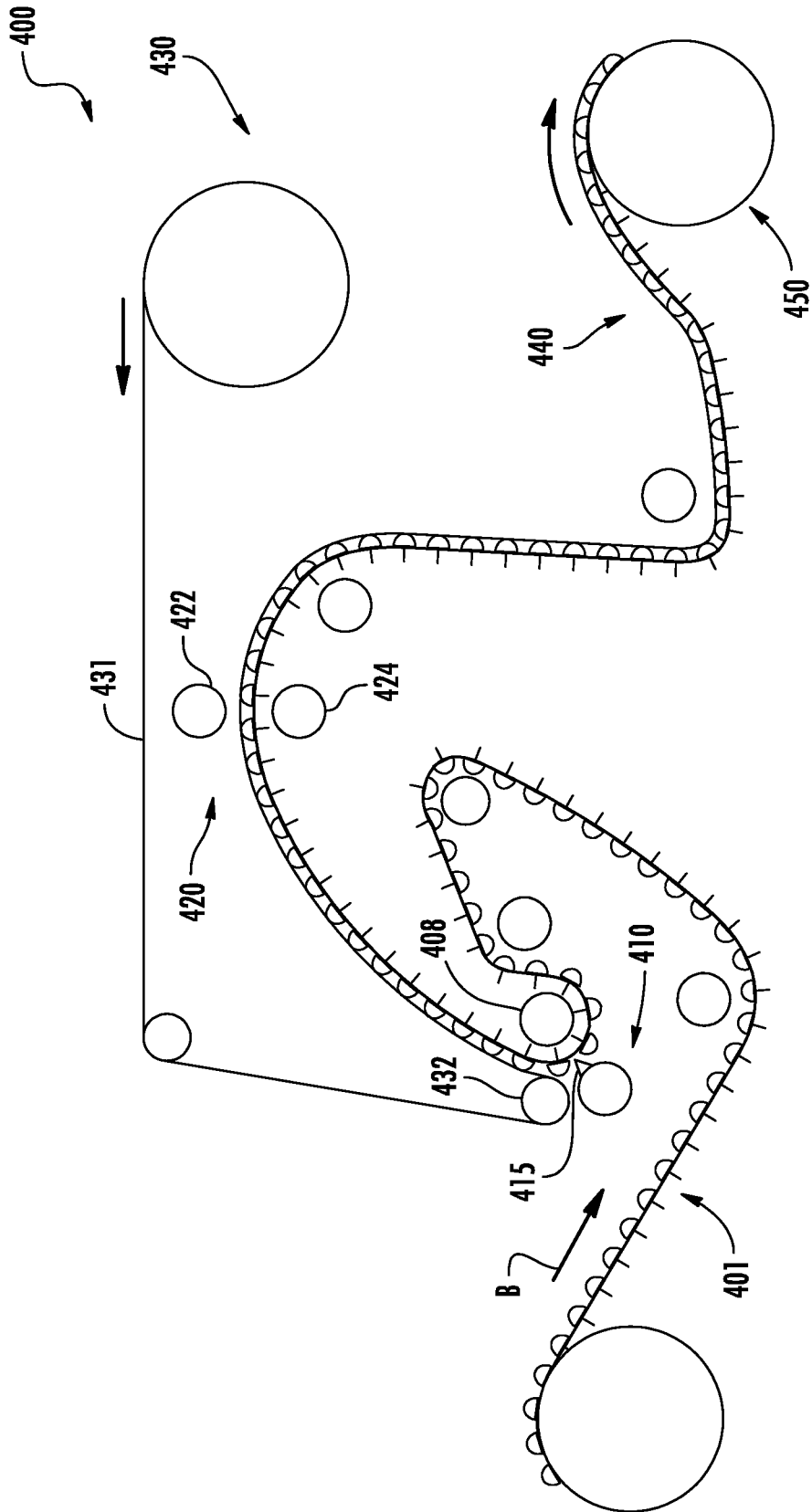


FIG. 9



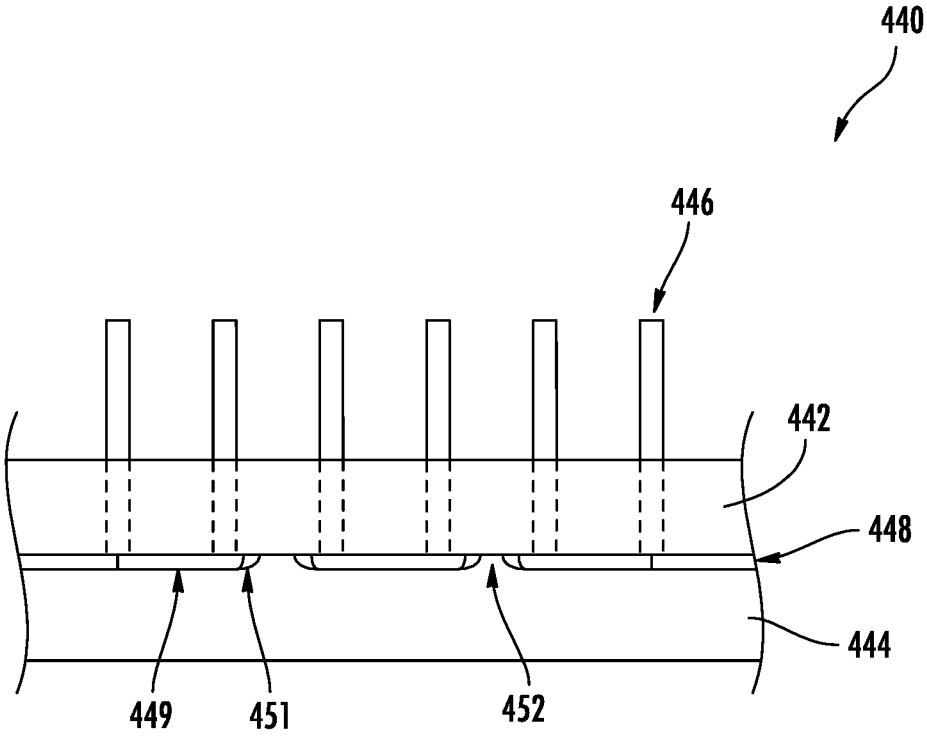


FIG. 10

## PILE FABRICS AND SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR FORMING PILE FABRICS

### CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This utility patent application claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application 62/991, 897, filed on 19 Mar. 2020, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

### BACKGROUND

#### Technical Field

[0002] The disclosure relates to pile fabrics and the formation of pile fabrics.

#### Description of the Related Art

[0003] Pile fabrics (which include tufted carpets, carpet tiles, artificial turf, rugs and mats, for example) generally are formed of pile tufts that are stitched into a backing layer and then bonded to the backing layer by a binder. Currently in the art, binders such as styrene butadiene rubber, vinyl acetate ethylene, natural rubber, hot melt thermoplastics and polyurethane are utilized to create a tuft bind and delamination in the pile fabric. The application of binders can be an expensive method and process for producing pile fabric with tuft bind and delamination. Additionally, the utilization of such binders can reduce the ability to recycle spent or discarded pile fabric, which results in the disposal of the spent pile fabric in landfills. Moreover, these processes may also utilize a lot of energy associated with drying or curing of the binder material.

[0004] Therefore, what is needed are improvements for addressing one or more of these perceived shortcomings.

### SUMMARY

[0005] An example method for forming a pile fabric, which has a front and a back, comprises: providing a primary backing material, a layer of thermoplastic material, and a plurality of pile tufts, the primary backing material being configured as a sheet having a front side oriented at the front of the pile fabric and an opposing back side oriented at the back of the pile fabric, the layer of thermoplastic material being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material, each of the plurality of pile tufts extending through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; and heating only the back of the pile fabric to melt the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond disposed at the back side of the primary backing material to secure the pile tufts to the primary backing material.

[0006] In some embodiments, heating only the back of the pile fabric comprises exposing the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to an open flame.

[0007] In some embodiments, exposing the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to the open flame is performed at a location where the primary backing material is redirected about a roller with the back side of the primary backing material facing outwardly from the roller.

[0008] In some embodiments, the melt bond is formed without the primary backing material being tented.

[0009] In some embodiments, the front of the pile fabric is cooled for at least a portion of time during which the back of the pile fabric is heated to form the melt bond.

[0010] In some embodiments, the cooling is performed by a first chill roller as the primary backing material, the layer of thermoplastic material and the plurality of pile tufts are conveyed about the first chill roller.

[0011] In some embodiments, while molten, the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material are pressed against the back side of the primary backing material.

[0012] In some embodiments, the pressing is performed with a second chill roller.

[0013] In some embodiments, the second chill roller is wetted to reduce a potential for the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to stick to the second chill roller.

[0014] In some embodiments, the melt bond is disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material.

[0015] An example pile fabric comprises: a front and a back; a primary backing material configured as a sheet having a front side oriented at the front of the pile fabric and a back side oriented at the back of the pile fabric; a layer of thermoplastic material disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; a plurality of pile tufts, each of the plurality of pile tufts extending through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; and a melt bond, disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material, formed of melted material of the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and melted material of the layer of thermoplastic material.

[0016] In some embodiments, the pile fabric is configured as artificial turf.

[0017] In some embodiments, the pile fabric is liquid permeable.

[0018] In some embodiments, the melt bond defines voids, configured as areas of liquid permeability, at which the back side of the primary backing material lacks the melted material of the layer of thermoplastic material.

[0019] In some embodiments, the layer of thermoplastic material is configured as a sheet.

[0020] In some embodiments, the pile fabric is a recyclable pile fabric formed only of thermoplastic materials.

[0021] In some embodiments, the pile fabric is configured as carpet.

[0022] In some embodiments, the melt bond comprises material of the back stitch portions pressed against the primary backing material.

[0023] In some embodiments, the melt bond comprises material of a first of the back stitch portions adhered to material of adjacent back stitch portions.

[0024] In some embodiments, the pile fabric comprises a secondary backing material, configured as a sheet, adhered to the back side of the primary backing material by the melt bond.

[0025] In some embodiments, the primary backing material exhibits transverse shrinkage due to exposure to heat.

[0026] In some embodiments, the primary backing material is an olefin-based primary backing material.

[0027] An example system for forming a pile fabric, which exhibits a front and a back, comprises: a first roller

defining a processing path along which material for forming the pile fabric is conveyed in a processing direction, the first roller extending across a width of the material for forming the pile fabric in a direction transverse to the processing direction; a flame singer having an outlet positioned adjacent to the first roller, the outlet being configured to direct an open flame toward the material for forming the pile fabric to expose the back of the material, which faces outwardly from the first roller to the open flame.

**[0028]** In some embodiments, the first roller is a chill roller.

**[0029]** In some embodiments, the system further comprises a second roller downstream of the first roller, the second roller being configured to press molten material, heated by the open flame, against a back side of a primary backing material of the material for forming the pile fabric.

**[0030]** In some embodiments, the second roller is a chill roller.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

**[0031]** A more complete understanding of the disclosure may be had by reference to the following Detailed Description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference numerals indicate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

**[0032]** FIG. 1 is a schematic, cut-away view of an example component configuration for forming pile fabric.

**[0033]** FIG. 2A is a schematic, cross-sectional view of an example component configuration for forming pile fabric, as viewed along line 2-2 of FIG. 1, when the thermoplastic layer is configured as a sheet.

**[0034]** FIG. 2B is a schematic, cross-sectional view of another example component configuration for forming pile fabric, as viewed along line 2-2 of FIG. 1, when the thermoplastic layer is configured as a layer of fibers.

**[0035]** FIG. 3 is a schematic, cut-away, plan view of an example pile fabric showing detail of an example melt bond.

**[0036]** FIG. 4 is a schematic, cross-sectional view of the pile fabric of FIG. 3, as viewed along line 4-4.

**[0037]** FIG. 5 is a flowchart depicting an example method for forming a pile fabric.

**[0038]** FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram depicting a system for forming a pile fabric.

**[0039]** FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram depicting an example assembly for melting material during processing.

**[0040]** FIG. 8A is a schematic, cut-away, plan view of an example pile fabric showing detail of adjacent back stitch portions prior to melting.

**[0041]** FIG. 8B is a schematic, cut-away, plan view of the example pile fabric of FIG. 8A showing detail of the adjacent back stitch portions after pressing.

**[0042]** FIG. 9 is a schematic diagram depicting another system for forming a pile fabric.

**[0043]** FIG. 10 is a schematic, cross-sectional view of another example pile fabric.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

**[0044]** As will be described in greater detail, pile fabrics, systems for forming pile fabrics and methods for forming pile fabrics preferably avoid the use of binder compositions, thus potentially reducing material and/or energy costs and enabling the recycling of a larger quantity of spent pile

fabrics, which reduces the accumulation of pile fabric waste. In some applications, such as those that utilize olefin-based primary backing materials, thermal stability may be improved by heat stabilizing (pre-shrinking) the materials prior to use. In some applications, the omission of binder compositions is facilitated by a melt bond that secures pile tufts to a primary backing material of the pile fabric. The melt bond, which may be disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material, is formed of melted material of the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and melted material of a layer of thermoplastic material. In some applications, only the back of the pile fabric is heated to melt the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to form the melt bond, with melting of the materials of the melt bond preferably being performed by exposure to an open flame.

**[0045]** In FIG. 1, an example component configuration **100** for forming pile fabric (that is, an arrangement of constituent components prior to heating and/or otherwise forming those components into a pile fabric) is depicted. Component configuration **100** includes a primary backing material **102**, a layer of thermoplastic material **104** and a plurality of pile tufts **106**. Primary backing material **102** is configured as a sheet with a front side **108** oriented at what is to become the front of the pile fabric and a back side **110** oriented at what is to become the back of the pile fabric. Primary backing material **102** may be formed of one or more of various thermoplastic materials such as olefins (e.g., polypropylene or polyethylene) or polyesters.

**[0046]** Layer of thermoplastic material **104** is disposed at back side **110** of primary backing material **102** and may be provided in various configurations depending upon the desired application. By way of example, FIG. 2A depicts layer of thermoplastic material **104** configured as a sheet, whereas FIG. 2B depicts layer of thermoplastic material **104** configured as a layer of fibers (note that only a portion of a fiber **112** is shown). In some applications, the fibers may incorporate one or more of continuous fibers and/or staple fibers. Preferably, layer of thermoplastic material **104** exhibits a melting temperature that is less than or equal to the melting temperature of primary backing material **102**.

**[0047]** The plurality of pile tufts **106** (which are depicted schematically in FIG. 1 as a layer for ease of illustration) are formed of lengths of tufted face yarn that extends through primary backing material **102** and at least partially into layer of thermoplastic material **104** as shown in FIGS. 2A and 2B. Typically, the pile tufts are arranged in rows and columns. Each pile tuft (e.g., pile tufts **113**, **114**, **115**, **213** and **313**) includes a back stitch portion that is disposed at back side of primary backing material **102**. For instance, pile tuft **114** incorporates a free end **116** and a free end **118**, with an intermediate portion **120** extending between the free ends. Back stitch portion **122** of pile tuft **114** is the part of intermediate portion **120** that protrudes beyond the back side **110** of primary backing material **102**.

**[0048]** Pile tufts may be formed of one or more of various thermoplastic materials, such as polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyester, nylon 6 6 and/or nylon 6 as non-limiting examples. Preferably, the pile tufts exhibit a melting temperature that is less than or equal to the melting temperature of primary backing material **102**. Additionally, pile tufts may be provided in various configurations depending upon the desired application. By way of example, when the pile fabric is configured as artificial turf, the pile tufts

may be configured as lengths of slit tape or monofilament yarn. In contrast, when the pile fabric is configured as carpet, bulk continuous filament and spun yarn can be used. In some applications, it may be preferable to ensure that the pile fabric is a recyclable pile fabric that is formed only of compatible thermoplastic materials. For instance, all of the materials used may be olefin-based materials (e.g., PE and/or PP) or all of the materials used may be polyester materials.

**[0049]** As shown in FIG. 3, after the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and layer of thermoplastic material **104** are melted and subsequently cooled, a melt bond **130** is provided that secures the pile tufts **106** to primary backing material **102** to form pile fabric **10**. It should be noted that melt bond **130** preferably is disposed only at back side **110** of primary backing material **102**. Melt bond **130** defines voids (void **140**, for example) that are configured as locations at which back side **110** of primary backing material **102** lacks material that was melted to form melt bond **130**. When primary backing material **102** is liquid permeable, the voids provide areas of liquid permeability for the pile fabric **10**. So configured, the tuft bind and delamination of the pile fabric may not be compromised by being liquid permeable as is often the case with conventional practices. By way of example, styrene butadiene rubber is a water soluble material that is often used in carpet; however, exposure to water tends to result in tuft bind and delamination weakness. In an effort to avoid these weaknesses, polyurethane may be used instead; however, polyurethane is not liquid permeable.

**[0050]** FIG. 4 depicts a cross-section of pile fabric **10**. As shown, melt bond **130** is disposed at a back **12** of pile fabric **10** and is formed of material of the back stitch portions and material of the layer of thermoplastic material. Preferably, the material of melt bond **130**, including that of the back stitch portions, is pressed against primary backing material **102** prior to cooling and takes a final (e.g., flattened) form. Note also that the pile tufts extend across a width ( $W_F$ ) of primary backing material **102** that exhibits transverse shrinkage due to exposure to heat. Specifically, the width changes from an original width ( $W_O$ ) prior to heating to a final width ( $W_F$ ) after heating. Notably, the shrinkage that takes place depends, at least in part, on the weight of the materials. Those of lighter weights tend to shrink more because there are often fewer yarns to prevent shrinkage, whereas those of heavier weights tend to shrink less because there are more yarns to prevent the carpet from shrinking. Regardless, the characteristic change in dimension of primary backing material **102** in response to heating is permitted to occur in some applications by not tentering (i.e., a transverse stretching force not being applied) across the width of the primary backing material. This tends to prevent transverse stresses from being locked into the matrix of the pile fabric that may result in unwanted rippling of the pile fabric.

**[0051]** Conventionally, manufacturers have tended to incorporate polyester (which has a melting temperature of approximately 500° F.) into their primary backing materials when producing artificial turf or carpet tile so that shrinking does not occur after installation due to exposure to high temperatures. For instance, artificial turf is known to experience exposure to 190° F. after installation. However, polyester (e.g., PET) and olefin-based materials cannot be recycled together due to the significant differences in melting points. By subjecting an olefin-based primary backing

material, while under little stress/tension (no tentering), to a temperature that it should not be exposed to after installation provides enhanced thermal stability pile fabrics formed of these lower melting point materials.

**[0052]** FIG. 5 is a flowchart depicting an example method **200** for forming a pile fabric. As shown in FIG. 5, the method may be construed as beginning at block **202**, in which a primary backing material, a layer of thermoplastic material, and a plurality of pile tufts are provided. Preferably, the primary backing material is configured as a sheet with a front side oriented at the front of the pile fabric and an opposing back side oriented at the back of the pile fabric. The layer of thermoplastic material is disposed at the back side of the primary backing material. Additionally, each of the plurality of pile tufts extends through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material. In block **204**, only the back of the pile fabric is heated to melt the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond disposed at the back side of the primary backing material. Preferably, the heating is performed by exposing the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to an open flame without damaging the primary backing material or the non-back stitch portions (face yarn portions) of the pile tufts. Formation of the melt bond secures the pile tufts to the primary backing material.

**[0053]** FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram depicting a system for forming a pile fabric. As shown in FIG. 6, system **300** is configured to receive material (constituent components) **301** that is conveyed along a processing path of system **300** in a processing direction (indicated by arrow A) that is generally aligned with a lengthwise span of material **301**. Material **301**, which may be provided by material supply **303** (e.g., a griegie roll), includes a primary backing material, a layer of thermoplastic material and a plurality of pile tufts (such as described before), with **302** indicating the front side (face yarn side) and **304** indicating the back side (back stitch portions).

**[0054]** System **300** incorporates various rollers along the processing path, such as roller **306** (which may be an idler roller) and roller **308**. Roller **308** is positioned to redirect material **301** to draw apart and expose the back stitch portions. Specifically, roller **308** is configured to engage front side **302** so that back side **304** and its associated back stitch portions are exposed at the outermost diameter of roller **308** as the material travels about the roller. A gas-fueled assembly **310** is configured to direct an open flame toward roller **308** and the exposed back stitch portions of material **301**. Notably, exposure to the open flame for forming a melt bond preferably is performed without the primary backing material being tentering (i.e., tensioned in the transverse direction along the z-axis).

**[0055]** As shown in greater detail in FIG. 7, an example gas-fueled assembly **310** incorporates a flame singer **312** with an associated outlet **314**, which is positioned adjacent to roller **308** to provide an open flame **315**. Preferably, flame singer **312** receives a flow of fuel (e.g., propane gas) from a fuel supply **316** via a gas manifold **318**. Although only one outlet is depicted, multiple outlets communicating with manifold **318** may be provided at intervals extending across the transverse (z-axis) direction of the processing path to melt material simultaneously across the width of material

**301.** In some applications, such as when the flame singer is configured to provide a flame across a width of 188 inches, flame singer **312** may generate approximately 500,000 BTU/hour.

**[0056]** Flame singer **312** preferentially exposes only the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to open flame **315** across the width of the material **301** to melt the back stitch portions and the layer of thermoplastic material while the material is conveyed about roller **308**. To reduce a temperature of front side **302** in the vicinity of open flame **315**, roller **308** is optionally a chill roller (which may exhibit a surface temperature of between approximately 70 degrees F. and approximately 100 degrees F.) that helps prevent damaging the face yarns of the pile fabric. Use of a chill roller may also enable the use of a higher flame temperature (a temperature between approximately 400 degrees F. and approximately 525 degrees F., preferably between approximately 400 degrees F. and approximately 475 degrees F.), which provides for efficient melting and increased conveyance speeds. For instance, a conveyance speed of between approximately 10 ft/min and approximately 15 ft/min may be achieved with a flame temperature at or above approximately 400 degrees F.

**[0057]** After melting of the back stitch portions and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond, molten material **301** may be pressed (calendared) against the back side of the primary backing material by a pressing assembly **320**. In the example of FIG. 6, pressing assembly **320** includes opposing rollers **322** and **324**, with roller **322** being wetted (such as by sweating or applying liquid) to ensure that the exterior surface of the roller is wet when contacting the material. Notably, sweating the roller involves operating the roller at a temperature that produces condensate (due to atmospheric humidity) on an exterior surface of the roller. Additionally, or alternatively, a liquid (e.g., water) may be applied to an exterior surface of the roller such as by an applicator **319**. These operations may reduce a tendency of heated materials to stick to the roller and/or damage the pile tufts and/or primary backing material. Depending on the application, roller **324** may be optionally heated or chilled.

**[0058]** After pressing, an adequate conveyance time along the processing path is provided to permit cooling of the formed pile fabric **340**. Specifically, conveyance time is provided to permit cooling of the melt bond, which preferably is disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material. Pile fabric **340** may then be gathered, such as by spooling onto a roll **350**.

**[0059]** As shown in greater detail in FIG. 8A, several back stitch portions (e.g., **342**, **343**, **344**, **345**) protruding from back side **304** are oriented in a column along the processing direction (shown by arrow A corresponding to the processing direction shown in FIG. 7). Specifically, the back stitch portions are shown prior to being melted by an open flame. The back stitch portions are arranged based on the desired characteristics of the final pile fabric and, thus, may vary in spacing. It should be noted, however, that adjacent back stitch portions are not physically attached to each other even though abutting may occur. FIG. 8B shows the back stitch portions after melting and pressing. Of significance, each of the back stitch portions now adheres to adjacent back stitch portions (in addition to the melted thermoplastic layer as described before) forming a generally continuous melt bond (chain linking) of back stitch portions along the length of

each such column. This configuration of the melt bond is believed to provide an enhanced bond and better turf bind.

**[0060]** FIG. 9 is a schematic diagram depicting another system for forming a pile fabric. As shown in FIG. 9, system **400** incorporates many components similar to those described previously with respect to system **300**. For instance, system **400** is configured to receive material **401**, which may be provided by material supply **403**, for conveyance along a processing path (indicated by arrow B). A roller **408** is positioned to redirect material **401** to draw apart and expose the back stitch portions as the material travels about the roller. A gas-fueled assembly **410** is configured to direct an open flame toward roller **408** and the exposed back stitch portions of material **401**.

**[0061]** In contrast to system **300**, however, system **400** further includes a supply **430** of secondary backing material **431**. Secondary backing material **431** enters the processing path along which material **401** travels in a vicinity of (i.e., at or downstream of) open flame **415**, which is used to melt the back stitch portions and layer of thermoplastic material of material **401**. Entering the processing path at this location positions secondary backing material **431** for adhering to the molten material used to form the melt bond. It should be noted that secondary backing material **431** also is a thermoplastic material and, depending on the application, the side of secondary backing material **431** that will be adhered to the pile fabric may be exposed to the open flame and melted. Roller **432**, which directs secondary backing material for entry into the processing path, may be a chill roller depending on the application.

**[0062]** After melting of the back stitch portions and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond, molten material **401** may be pressed (calendared) between the back side of the primary backing material and a side of secondary backing material **431**, which may or may not be molten on the side being pressed into the back stitch, by a pressing assembly **420**. In the example of FIG. 9, pressing assembly **420** includes opposing rollers **422**, **424**, each of which may be optionally heated or chilled.

**[0063]** After pressing, an adequate conveyance time along the processing path is provided to permit cooling of the formed pile fabric **440**. Thereafter, pile fabric **440** may be gathered, such as by spooling onto a roll **450**.

**[0064]** FIG. 10 is a schematic, cross-sectional view of an example pile fabric **440** that may be formed by system **400**, for example. As shown in FIG. 10, pile fabric **440** includes a primary backing material **442**, a secondary backing material **444** and a plurality of pile tufts (e.g., pile tuft **446**). Notably, both primary backing material **442** and secondary backing material **444** are configured as sheets of material. A melt bond **448** is disposed between primary backing material **442** and secondary backing material **444**, with melt bond **448** adhering primary backing material **442** to secondary backing material **444**, as well as securing the pile tufts to primary backing material **442**. Melt bond **448** is formed of material from the back stitch portions (e.g., back stitch portion **449**) and the layer of thermoplastic material **451**. It should be noted that, in some embodiments, one or more voids (e.g., void **452**) defined by melt bond **448** may be present.

**[0065]** Although preferred embodiments have been illustrated in the accompanying Drawings and described in the foregoing Detailed Description, it should be understood the disclosure is not limited to the embodiments disclosed but is

capable of rearrangement, modification, and substitution of parts and elements without departing from the spirit of the invention.

We claim:

**1.** A method for forming a pile fabric, the pile fabric having a front and a back, the method comprising:

providing a primary backing material, a layer of thermoplastic material, and a plurality of pile tufts, the primary backing material being configured as a sheet having a front side oriented at the front of the pile fabric and an opposing back side oriented at the back of the pile fabric, the layer of thermoplastic material being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material, each of the plurality of pile tufts extending through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; and

heating only the back of the pile fabric to melt the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to form a melt bond disposed at the back side of the primary backing material to secure the pile tufts to the primary backing material.

**2.** The method of claim **1**, wherein heating only the back of the pile fabric comprises exposing the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to an open flame.

**3.** The method of claim **2**, wherein exposing the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to the open flame is performed at a location where the primary backing material is redirected about a roller with the back side of the primary backing material facing outwardly from the roller.

**4.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the melt bond is formed without the primary backing material being tented.

**5.** The method of claim **1**, further comprising cooling the front of the pile fabric for at least a portion of time during which the back of the pile fabric is heated to form the melt bond.

**6.** The method of claim **5**, wherein the cooling is performed by a first chill roller as the primary backing material, the layer of thermoplastic material and the plurality of pile tufts are conveyed about the first chill roller.

**7.** The method of claim **1**, further comprising pressing, while molten, the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material against the back side of the primary backing material.

**8.** The method of claim **7**, wherein:

the pressing is performed with a second chill roller; and the method further comprises wetting the second chill roller to reduce a potential for the pile tufts and the layer of thermoplastic material to stick to the second chill roller.

**9.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the melt bond is disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material.

**10.** A pile fabric comprising:

a front and a back;

a primary backing material configured as a sheet having a front side oriented at the front of the pile fabric and a back side oriented at the back of the pile fabric;

a layer of thermoplastic material disposed at the back side of the primary backing material;

a plurality of pile tufts, each of the plurality of pile tufts extending through the primary backing material and at least partially into the layer of thermoplastic material with back stitch portions of the pile tufts being disposed at the back side of the primary backing material; and

a melt bond, disposed only at the back side of the primary backing material, formed of melted material of the back stitch portions of the pile tufts and melted material of the layer of thermoplastic material.

**11.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the pile fabric is configured as artificial turf.

**12.** The pile fabric of claim **11**, wherein the pile fabric is liquid permeable.

**13.** The pile fabric of claim **12**, wherein the melt bond defines voids, configured as areas of liquid permeability, at which the back side of the primary backing material lacks the melted material of the layer of thermoplastic material.

**14.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the layer of thermoplastic material is configured as a sheet.

**15.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the pile fabric is a recyclable pile fabric formed only of thermoplastic materials.

**16.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the melt bond comprises material of the back stitch portions pressed against the primary backing material.

**17.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the melt bond comprises material of a first of the back stitch portions adhered to material of adjacent back stitch portions.

**18.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, further comprising a secondary backing material, configured as a sheet, adhered to the back side of the primary backing material by the melt bond.

**19.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the primary backing material exhibits transverse shrinkage due to exposure to heat.

**20.** The pile fabric of claim **10**, wherein the primary backing material is an olefin-based primary backing material.

\* \* \* \* \*