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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR STORING AND MIXING TWO OR MORE SUBSTANCES

(57) Abstract: A container system for separately storing and mixing two or more substances. The container system is comprised of a main container for holding at least one first substance and a cup for holding at least one second substance, the cup being removably mounted on the neck of the main container such that at least a portion of the cup is suspended within the main container. The cup has an upper portion, a lower portion, and one or more arms for connecting the upper and lower portions. Apertures are formed between the upper and lower portions of the cup such that the contents of the cup may mix with the contents of the main container following removal of an inner cap attached to the cup, and agitation of the main container. The cup and neck are sized to provide a void therebetween, thereby also permitting the substances to mix.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR STORING AND MIXING TWO OR MORE SUBSTANCES

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to containers, and more particularly, the present invention relates to a system and method for separately storing and mixing two or more substances.

Description of the Related Art

It is often necessary to keep two or more substances separate until it is time for them to be mixed and used for their intended purpose. This is necessary because many substances configured to be mixed with one another begin to quickly degrade after being mixed. For example, many sulphur containing substances such as amino acids, protein mixtures, creatine mixtures, flavoring mixtures, and sweeteners begin to quickly degrade when in the presence of other substances with which they react. Other substances, such as coffee and tea, are commonly stored and shipped in dehydrated form and therefore must be also protected from the introduction of moisture into their respective containers.

Although two substances intended for mixture may each be separately transported and stored in different containers, the end user may find it more convenient if both substances are stored in the same container system. Users may also find it convenient if the container system provides a means for easily mixing the substances.

The prior art reveals various container systems configured to separately store two substances and provide a means for mixing said substances. Many prior art container systems utilize dual containers as a means for segregating the substances. However, the

means by which the substances are mixed varies considerably within the prior art. For

example, U.S. Patent numbered 6,059,443 to Casey ("the '443 patent") discloses a container system having a main body configured to contain a liquid, and a storage repository containing a mixing substance, said storage repository is sized to fit in the neck of said main body. The storage repository is supported within the neck of the main body by a plurality of support arms. A threaded cap is fastened to threads formed on the outer surface of the neck of the main body such that a water-tight seal is formed therebetween. When fastened, a void is formed between the lip of the neck of the main body and the top inner surface of the cap. In order to mix the substances stored within the main body and the storage repository, the cap and a removable seal fastened to the lip of the neck of the main body must be removed, and the cap refastened. Vortices generated by the liquid mix with the mixing substance within the void between the cap and the lip of the neck. One drawback of the embodiment disclosed in the '443 patent is that once the removable seal has been removed and the cap is refastened to the neck, the cap must maintain a water-tight seal with the neck of the main body. Maintaining the water-tight seal has proven to be problematic as the threads of the cap and the neck must provide said seal.

Another container system which utilizes two containers is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,114,011 to Robbins, III ("the '011 patent"). The '011 patent discloses a container assembly which is comprised of a main container body configured to hold a liquid, and a cup configured to hold a liquid or a powder. The cup and its contents are detachably supported within the neck of the main container body. After a cap is removed from the neck of the main container body, the cup is removed by the user and a seal is removed

from said cup. The contents of the cup are then poured by the user into the main container body and shaken until the desired level of mixing has occurred. The cup is then inverted and fastened to the main container body to be used as a dispenser. A drawback of this design is that it requires a user to physically pour the contents of the cup into the main container body

Therefore, a need exists for a container system capable of separately containing two or more substances and provides a user with a means for easily mixing said separated substances.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, there is provided herein, a container system that, in its preferred embodiments, is capable of separately storing two or more substances and is configured to provide a means by which the separated substances may be easily mixed.

In one aspect of the invention the container system comprises a main container for holding one or more substances, and a cup for holding one or more other substances. The main container includes a neck having an outer surface adapted for securing an outer cap thereon, and a lip which defines an upper opening of said main container. The cup comprises an upper portion, a lower portion, and support arms for connecting the upper and lower portions. The upper portion of the cup is supported on a shoulder formed adjacent to the lip on the inner surface of the neck. The lower portion of the cup is suspended within the main container. An inner cap seals the cup, preventing premature mixing of the segregated substances. Once the inner cap is removed and the outer cap securely fastened to the neck, the main container may be inverted and shaken, thus

the upper and lower portions of the cup. The cup and neck are sized to provide a void between the neck of the main container and all parts of the cup except for the upper portion. The presence of the void, as well as the apertures, allow the contents of the main container to mix with the contents of the cup following removal of the inner cap, and inversion and agitation of the main container.

In another aspect of the invention, a removable liner is attached to the lip of the main container in order to provide additional means for sealing the main container and cup, thus preventing unwanted leakage of the substances contained therein.

In yet another aspect of the invention, the container system may be shipped, stored, and presented to the consumer in a partitioned packaging system. The packaging system is partitioned such that at least one compartment of the packaging system holds at least a main container body and an outer cap, and a plurality of other compartments each hold a sealed individual cup containing one or more substances ready for mixing. By packaging the container system in this manner, a user may utilize the container system to mix the contents of the plurality of cups packaged with said main container, thus allowing said user to realize a cost savings as it will not be necessary for said user to purchase an entire container system each time they wish to partake of the substances to be mixed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The features of the present invention can be more readily understood from the following detailed description with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the

container system of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the container system shown in **FIG. 1**;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the upper portion of the main container, the cup, and the removable liner of a prior art embodiment of a container system;

FIG. 4 is a cross sectional view of the upper portion of the main container, the cup, and the removable liner of the container system shown in **FIG. 1**;

FIG. 4A is a zoomed-in view of the container system shown in **FIG. 4**, which more closely shows the manner in which the cup is removably secured to the neck of the main container body.

FIG. 4B is a zoomed-in view of an alternate embodiment of the cup and main container body shown in **FIG. 4A**.

FIG. 5 is a first perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the cup shown in **FIG. 1**.

FIG. 6 is a second perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the cup shown in **FIG. 1**.

FIG. 7 shows a perspective view (including a “cut-away” view) of the container system of the present invention and a preferred manner of use thereof;

FIG. 8 shows a cross-sectional view of an alternate embodiment of the container system of the present invention;

FIG. 9 shows an exploded perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the container system of the present invention; and

FIG. 10 shows a perspective view of a packaging system configured to contain

the container system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Preferred embodiments of the container system according to the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to **FIG. 1**, an exploded perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the container system **100** of the present invention. The container system **100** is comprised of a main container **102**, a cup **104**, an inner cap **106**, a removable liner **108**, and an outer cap **110**. The cup **104** contains at least one first substance **112** suitable for mixing with at least one of a second substance **114** contained in said main container **102**. All manner of liquid and solid substances are contemplated with respect to the first and second substances including, by way of example and not of limitation, the following substances: protein mixtures, amino-acids, creatine, dietary supplement mixtures, nutritional mixtures, water, tea, coffee, as well as any other substances which may be consumed by a user either alone, or in combination with any other substance. The container system **100** has been configured to allow a user to mix the first substance **112** of the cup with the second substance **114** of the main container body **102** without the necessity of removing the cup **104** from the main container **102**. It should be noted that both the main container **102** and the cup **104** are each adapted to hold combinations of substances.

The main container **102** includes a neck **116** with an opening **118** formed on the upper end of said neck **116**. Threads **120** are formed on the outer surface of said neck **116**, said threads **120** being configured to receive a correspondingly threaded surface (not shown) formed on the inner surface of said outer cap **110**. A lip **122** is formed at the opening **118** of the neck **116**. The main container **102** may be constructed of any material suitable for storing liquid or solid substances. For example, materials such as plastic, glass, metal, styrofoam and the like may be used to construct said main container **102**. It is contemplated that alternate embodiments of the container system **100** may be constructed of materials suitable for heating within a microwave oven or other heating apparatus. It should be noted that the first substance **112** and the second substance **114** may each be in solid form, liquid form, or some combination thereof.

The cup **104** includes an upper portion **126** which is connected to a lower portion **128**. The upper portion **126** of the cup **104** rests on a shoulder **124** formed below or flush with the lip **122** on the inner surface of the neck **116**. The upper portion **126** of the cup **104** is connected to the lower portion **128** of the cup by at least one arm **130** such that at least one aperture **132** exists between said upper portion **126** and said lower portion **128** of the cup **104**. Although a plurality of arms **130** are utilized in connecting the upper **126** and lower portion **128** of the presently preferred embodiment of the cup **104**, alternate embodiments of the cup **104** may include any means for connecting said upper portion **126** and said lower portion **128**, provided that substantially sized apertures **132** remain between the said upper portion **126** and lower portion **128** such that the contents **112** of the cup **104** may escape during the mixing process and the contents **114** of the main container body **102** may also enter said cup **104** during said mixing process. A

second lip **134** is formed on the lower portion **128** of the cup **104**. The second lip **134**

defines an opening having a diameter smaller in size than the diameter of the upper portion **126** of the cup **104**. However, alternate embodiments of the cup **104** may include a second lip **134** having a diameter equal or greater than that of the upper portion **126** of the cup **104**.

The presently preferred embodiment of the cup **104** is constructed of High Density Polyethylene (HDPE). However, those skilled in the art will appreciate that other materials such as polymers and metals may possess properties sufficiently suitable for use in constructing the cup **104** of alternate embodiments of the invention.

The inner cap **106** is configured to attach to the lip **134** of the lower portion **128** of the cup **104** during shipping and storage of the container system **100**. The inner cap **106** includes a top end **136** and a bottom end **138**. The bottom end **138** of the inner cap **106** is configured such that it may be secured to the lip **134** of the lower portion of the cup **128**, thus preventing the contents of the cup **112** from prematurely mixing with the contents of the main container **114**. The top end **136** of the inner cap **106** may include a means for gripping the cap, thus allowing the user to easily remove the inner cap **106** from the cup **104**. Furthermore, at least a portion **137** of the top end **136** of the presently preferred embodiment of the cup **104** is constructed of polypropylene, thus providing a surface which may be more easily adhered to by the removable liner **108**. It is contemplated that the removable liner **108** will adhere to the portion **137** of the inner cap **106** which is constructed of polypropylene such that when said liner **108** is removed by the user, the inner cap **106** will also be removed. However, as previously mentioned, the inner cap **106** contains a means for gripping said inner cap **106** such that it may be

embodiments of the top end 136 of the inner cap 106 may be constructed of other suitable materials such that the removable liner 108 may be readily adhered thereto.

When the container system 100 is configured for shipping or storing the contents of the cup and main container 112, 114, the removable liner 108 is attached to the lip 122 of the main container 102 and the upper portion 126 of the cup 104. A tab 140 formed on the liner 108 comprises a means for removing the liner 108 in the presently preferred embodiment.

Referring now to FIG. 2, a cross sectional view of a preferred embodiment of the container system 100. The upper portion 126 of the cup 104 is supported by the neck 116 of the main container 102. The outer cap 110 has outer walls 202 which may be utilized by the user to grip the cap 110, and threads 204 formed on inner walls 206 of the cap 110 which are adapted to engage the threads 120 formed along the outer surface of the neck 116. The inner surface of the top of the outer cap 110 is flush with the removable liner 108, thus aiding in sealing the main container 102 when properly secured to the neck 116. Like the top end of the inner cap 137, the outer cap 110 of the presently preferred embodiment is constructed of polypropylene, which is a material that may be easily adhered to by the removable liner 108. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that like the top end of the inner cap 137, the outer cap 110 may also be constructed of a material other than polypropylene provided that the material chosen is suitable for coupling with the removable liner 108. It should be understood that the removable liner 108 is not an essential element of the present invention and may be absent in alternate embodiments thereof.

Although the presently preferred embodiment of the invention utilizes

corresponding threaded surfaces **120, 204** to removably secure the outer cap **110** to the main container **102**, alternate embodiments may include any means for securing the outer cap **110** to said main container body **102**. Likewise, alternate embodiments of the container system **100** may include other means for sealing the main container **102**. One such alternate embodiment is further described below with reference to **FIG. 7**.

Referring now to **FIG. 3** and **FIG. 4**, cross-sectional views of the upper portions of the main container **102** and cup **104** of prior art container systems and the presently preferred embodiment respectively. The present invention provides an advantage over prior art container systems which include a cup **104** configured to rest on top of the lip **122** of the main container **102**. In such prior art container systems (see **FIG. 3**), a small gap **133** exists between the upper portion **125** of the cup **104** and the lip **122** of the main container **102**, thus allowing for the possibility that leakage may occur between said gap **133**. Now also referring to **FIG. 4A**, the present invention does not suffer from this drawback as the upper surface of the upper portion **126** of the cup **104** is configured to be flush with the lip **122** of the main container **102**. With reference to **FIG. 4B**, the upper portion **126** of the cup **104** may alternatively be supported on the shoulder **124** such that the upper portion is not flush with the lip **122**. The upper portion **126** of the cup **104** is further configured such that a protrusion **400** formed therein, engages with an indentation **402** formed on the inner surface of the neck **116** adjacent to the lip **122**, therefore further sealing the main container **102** and also securing the cup **104** to said main container **102**.

Referring now to **FIG. 5** and **FIG. 6**, first and second perspective views of the preferred embodiment of the cup **104** of the present invention respectively. The distance

between the upper portion **126** of the cup and the lower portion **128** of the cup **104** should be substantial enough to allow the first substance **112** of the cup **104** to easily mix with the second substance **114** via the apertures **132** between said upper **126** and lower portions **128** of the cup **104** during the mixing process. The presence of the apertures **132** through which the substances may mix provides an advantage not seen in the prior art in that the mixing process may occur without removing the cup **104** from the main container **102**. Another advantage is that the mixing of the substances may occur without utilizing a void within the outer cap **110**, thus eliminating sealing problems found in prior art container systems.

Referring now to **FIG. 7**, a cut-away perspective view of the container system **100** of the present invention and a preferred manner of use thereof. The present invention provides a structure allowing for a manner of mixing the first substance **112** with the second substance **114** held within the cup **104** and main container **102** respectively. Prior to mixing the substances, the outer cap **110** must initially be removed in order to allow the user to remove the liner **108** and the inner cap **106**. The liner **108** may be optionally reattached to the lip **122** and upper portion **126** of the cup **104** to provide additional sealing capabilities. The outer cap **110** must then be re-secured to the neck **116** of the main container body **102**. The container system **100** may be inverted and shaken by the user, thus allowing the first substance **112** to exit through the apertures **132** which exist between the upper portion **126** of the cup **104** and lower portion **128** of the cup **104**. The contents of the cup **112** and the contents of the main container **114** thoroughly mix within the main container **102** and the cup **104**. It should be noted that it is not essential that the main container **102** be inverted in order to mix the substances

112, 114. In fact, mixing of the substances **112, 114** will occur if the user chooses to

merely agitate the main container **102**.

Although parts of the upper portion **126** of the cup **104** abut the inner surface of the neck **116**, a void **500** exists between the lower portion of the cup and the inner surface of the neck, allowing the contents **112, 114** to freely flow between the cup and the main container during the mixing process. The diameter of the lower portion **128** of the cup **104** is less than the diameter of the neck adjacent to said lower portion **128**, such that the space therebetween defines said void **500**. When said second substance **114** is in liquid form, a shaking motion by the user, imparted to the main container **102** will generate vortices (not shown) within said liquid, thereby promoting the mixing of said substances **112, 114**. It should be noted that alternate embodiments of the container system **100** which contain two solid substances or two liquid substances may also be mixed in this manner, although said vortices are not substantially generated in said solid substances. However, solid substances may nevertheless be effectively mixed in the container system **100** of the present invention.

Referring now to **FIG. 8**, which shows a cross-sectional view of an alternate embodiment of the container system **100** of the present invention. The lower portion of the cup is bifurcated with a wall **800** separating two different substances **802, 804** held within the cup. The bottom end **138** of the inner cap **106** contains a sealing notch **806**, thus preventing the substances held within the cup from mixing prematurely. Furthermore, the lower portion **128** of the cup **104** is substantially longer than the cup of the presently preferred embodiment, thus allowing a greater volume of substances **112** to be stored therein.

Referring now to **FIG. 9**, which shows an exploded perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the container system **100** of the present invention. The outer cap of the alternate embodiment includes a nozzle **900** and nozzle cap **902**. Nozzles **900** of the type shown are actuated into an open position by moving the nozzle **900** upwards relative to the outer cap **110**. Such nozzles **900** are well known in the art. The nozzle **900** allows a user to drink from the main container **102** while the outer cap **110** remains secured to the neck **116**. The nozzle cap **902** may be included in alternate embodiments of the present invention in order to further seal the nozzle **900** and keep the surface of said nozzle **900** free from dust or other undesirable substances.

Referring now to **FIG. 10**, a perspective view of a package **1000** for storing the container system **100** and cups **104** (with mixing substances) of the present invention. The package **1000** is partitioned such that one portion of the package **1000** holds at least one main container body **102** and outer cap **110**, and individual cups **104**. The individual cups **104** may contain substances for mixing **112**, or may alternatively be empty. By packaging the cups **104** and container system **100** in this manner, a user may use the main container **102** multiple times. Furthermore, the user may be provided with multiple cups **104** containing pre-measured amounts of substances **112**, thus maximizing user convenience while minimizing user costs. Both the container system **100** and each of the individual cups **104** are secured **1002** to the packaging system **1000**. It is contemplated that the container system **100** and individual cups **104** may be secured within the package by any means.

It should be noted that the descriptions and embodiments disclosed herein are not exhaustive and are illustrative only. Many modifications and variations will be apparent

WO 2009/032939 **PCT/US2008/075273**
to those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, the protection sought herein is as set

forth in the claims below.

I Claim:

1. A container system for mixing two or more substances comprising:

(a) a main container for holding one or more first substances, said main container including a neck which has a lip defining an upper opening;

(b) a cup for holding one or more second substances, said cup including an upper portion and a lower portion, said upper portion and said lower portion having one or more apertures formed therebetween;

(c) a first sealing means removably securable to said main container; and

(d) a second sealing means removably securable to said cup;

wherein said cup is supported on said neck, said neck and said lower portion having a void formed therebetween;

wherein during mixing, said second substances and said first substances flow through said apertures and said void.

2. The container system of claim 1, wherein said neck further comprises an inwardly extending shoulder formed adjacent to said lip, wherein said cup is supported on said shoulder whereby an upper surface of said upper portion is flush with said lip.
3. The container system according to claim 1, further comprising a removable liner attached to said lip.
4. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said first sealing means comprises an outer cap having an inner surface, said inner surface including a means for securing said outer cap to an outer surface of the neck.
5. The container system according to claim 4 wherein said outer cap further comprises a nozzle.
6. The container system according to claim 4 wherein at least a portion of said outer cap and at least a portion of said cup are composed of High Density Polyethylene.
7. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second sealing means comprises an inner cap having a top end and a bottom end, the top end including a means for gripping said inner cap, said bottom end having a means for mounting on the lower portion of said cup.

8. The container system according to claim 7 wherein at least a portion of said top end is composed of polypropylene.

9. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said cup is removably supported on said lip.

10. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second substances comprise a mixture containing amino acids.

11. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second substances comprise a mixture containing coffee.

12. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second substances comprise a mixture containing tea.

13. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second substances comprise a mixture containing creatine.

14. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said second substances comprise a mixture containing caffeine.

15. The container system according to claim 1 wherein said lower portion further

comprises a wall which bifurcates said lower portion, whereby different second substances may be separately contained within said cup.

16. The container system according to claim 15 wherein said second sealing means further comprises a third sealing means for preventing the premature mixture of said second substances separated by said wall.

17. A partitioned packaging system for holding a container system and individual

discrete elements thereof, comprising:

(a) at least one first compartment for holding a main container body and outer cap which comprises said container system, said main container formed to hold one or more first substances, said outer cap removably securable to said main container;

(b) a plurality of second compartments adjacent to said first compartment, each of said second compartments holding at least one cup which further comprises said container system, said cup being formed to hold one or more second substances and adapted to be removably supported by a neck formed on said main container body, said cup having one inner cap removably securable thereto.

18. The portioned packaging system according to claim 17 wherein said one or more second substances are held within said cups.

19. A method of separately storing one or more first substances and one or more second substances such that said first substances and said second substances may be mixed, the method comprising the steps of:

placing one or more first substances in a main container having a neck and a lip defining an upper opening;

placing one or more second substances in a cup, said cup including an upper portion and a lower portion, said upper portion and said lower portion having one or more apertures formed therebetween, said cup being supported on said neck, said neck and said lower portion having a void formed therebetween;

providing a first sealing means that is securable to said cup which may be removed prior to mixing of said first and second substances; and

providing a second sealing means that is securable to said main container.

20. The method of according to claim 19, further comprising the step of providing a removable liner that is removably attached to said lip and said upper portion.

21. The method according to claim 19 wherein said second substance comprises a mixture containing amino acids.

mixture containing coffee.

23. The method according to claim 19 wherein said second substance comprises a mixture containing tea.

24. The method according to claim 19 wherein said second substance comprises a mixture containing creatine.

25. The method according to claim 19 wherein said second substance comprises a mixture containing caffeine.

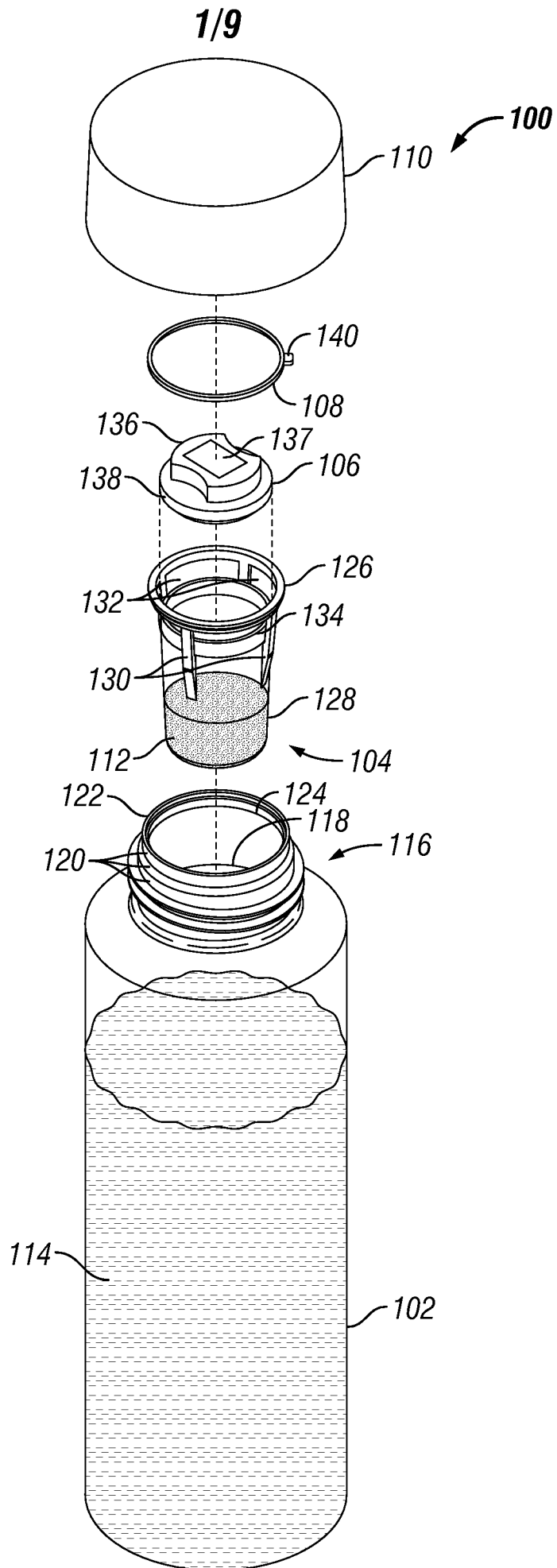


FIG. 1

2/9

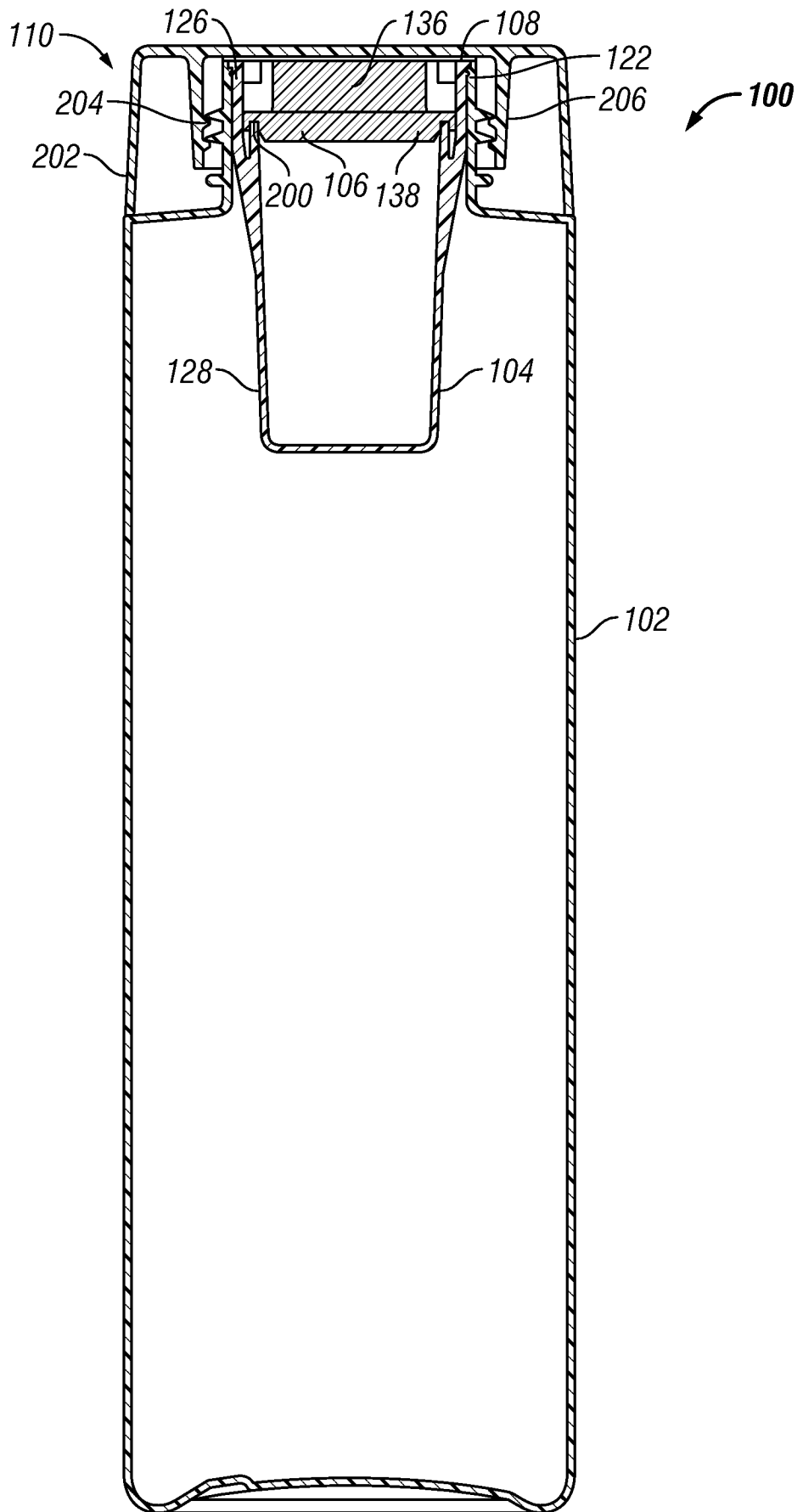


FIG. 2

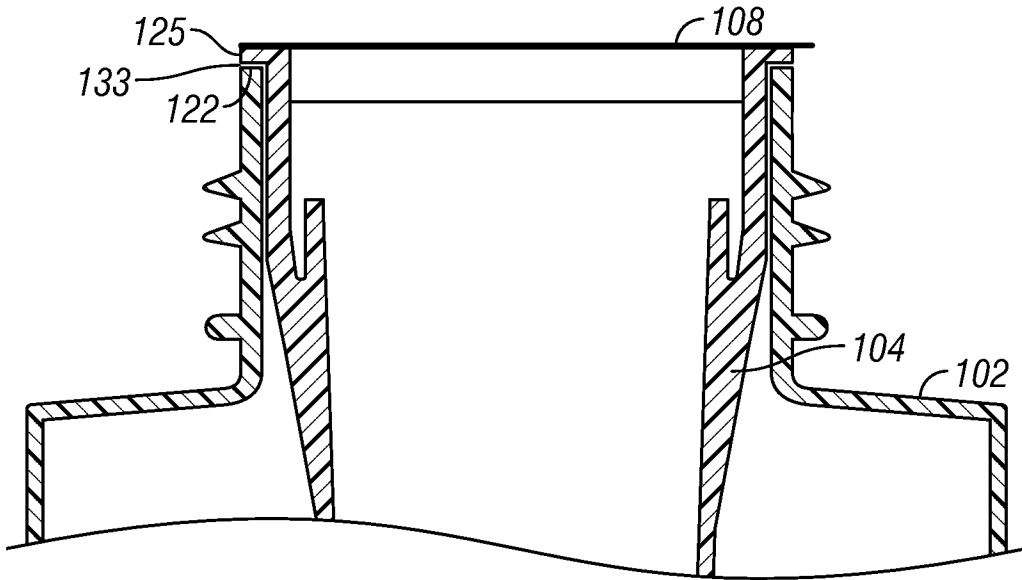


FIG. 3

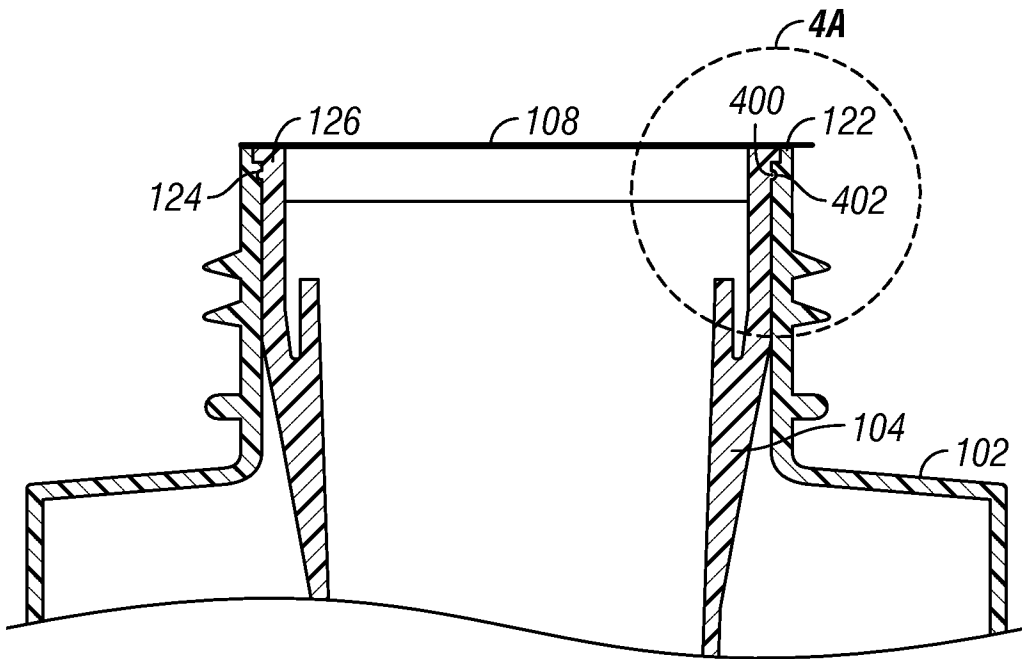


FIG. 4

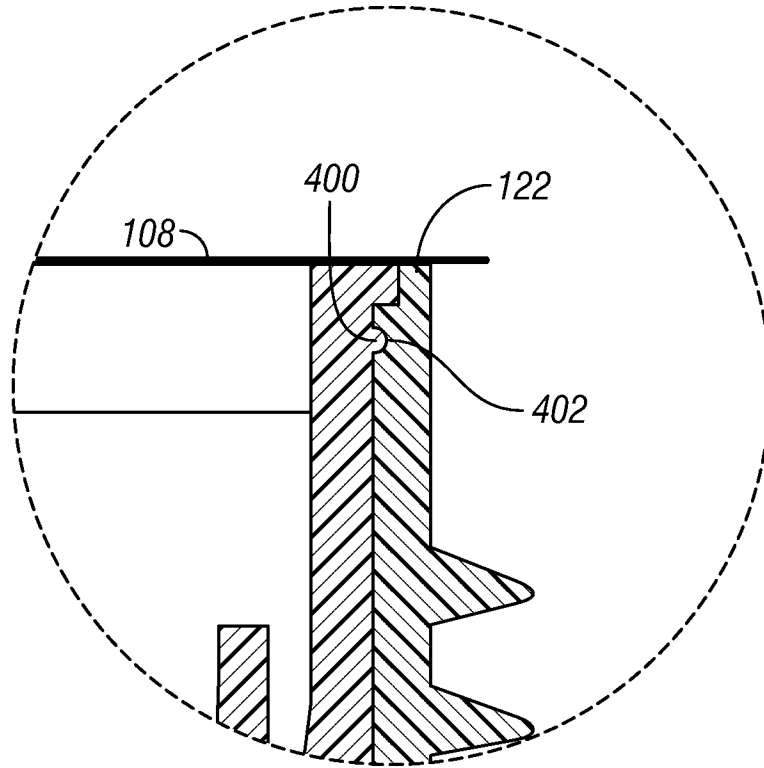


FIG. 4A

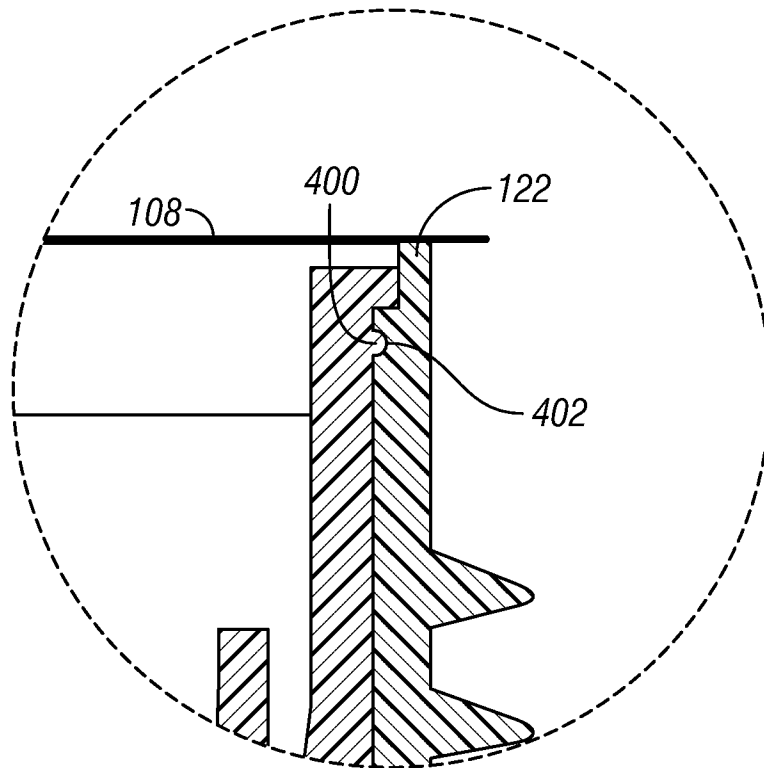


FIG. 4B

5/9

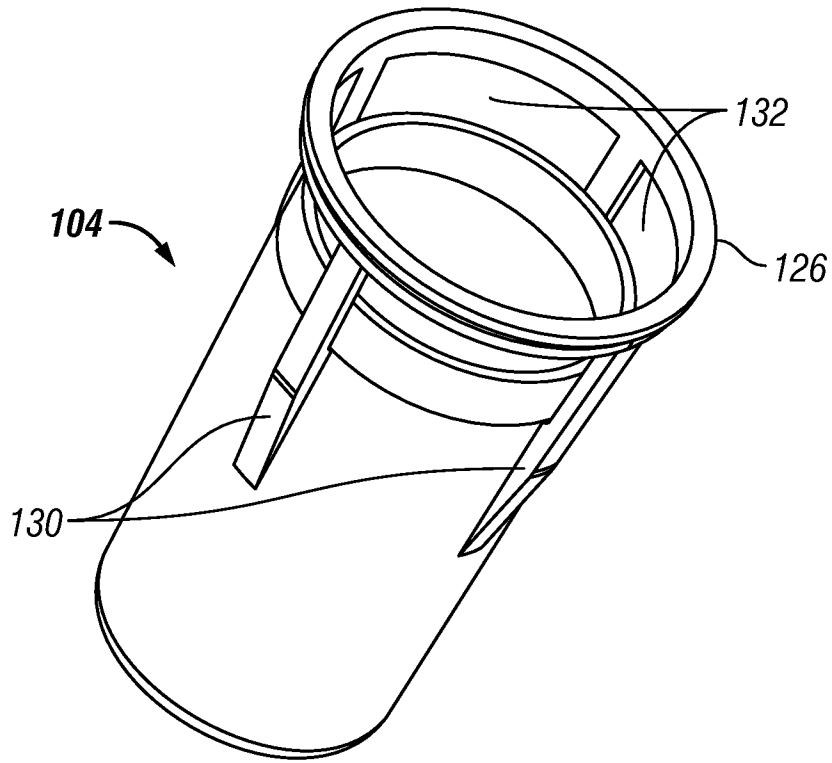


FIG. 5

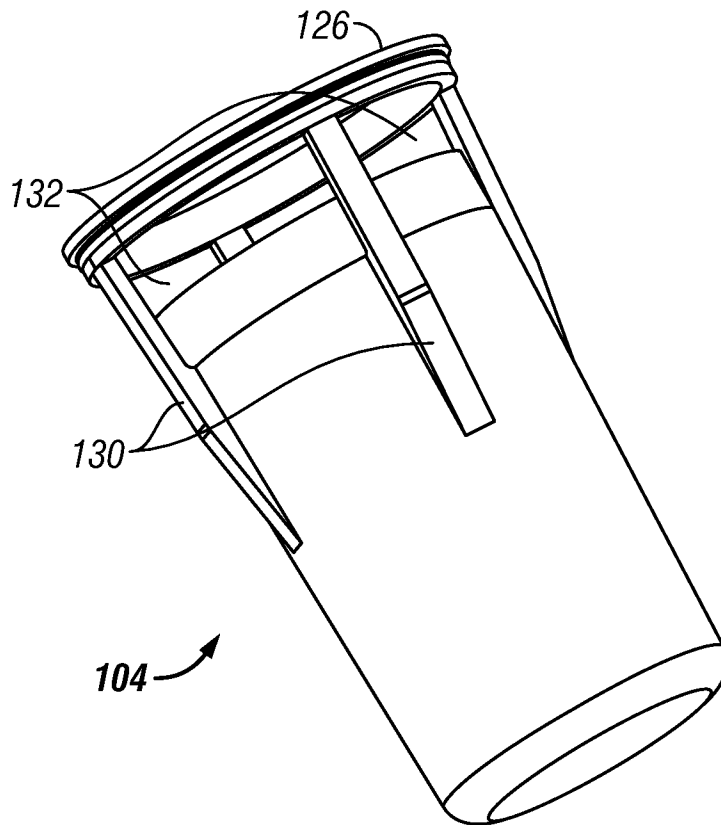


FIG. 6

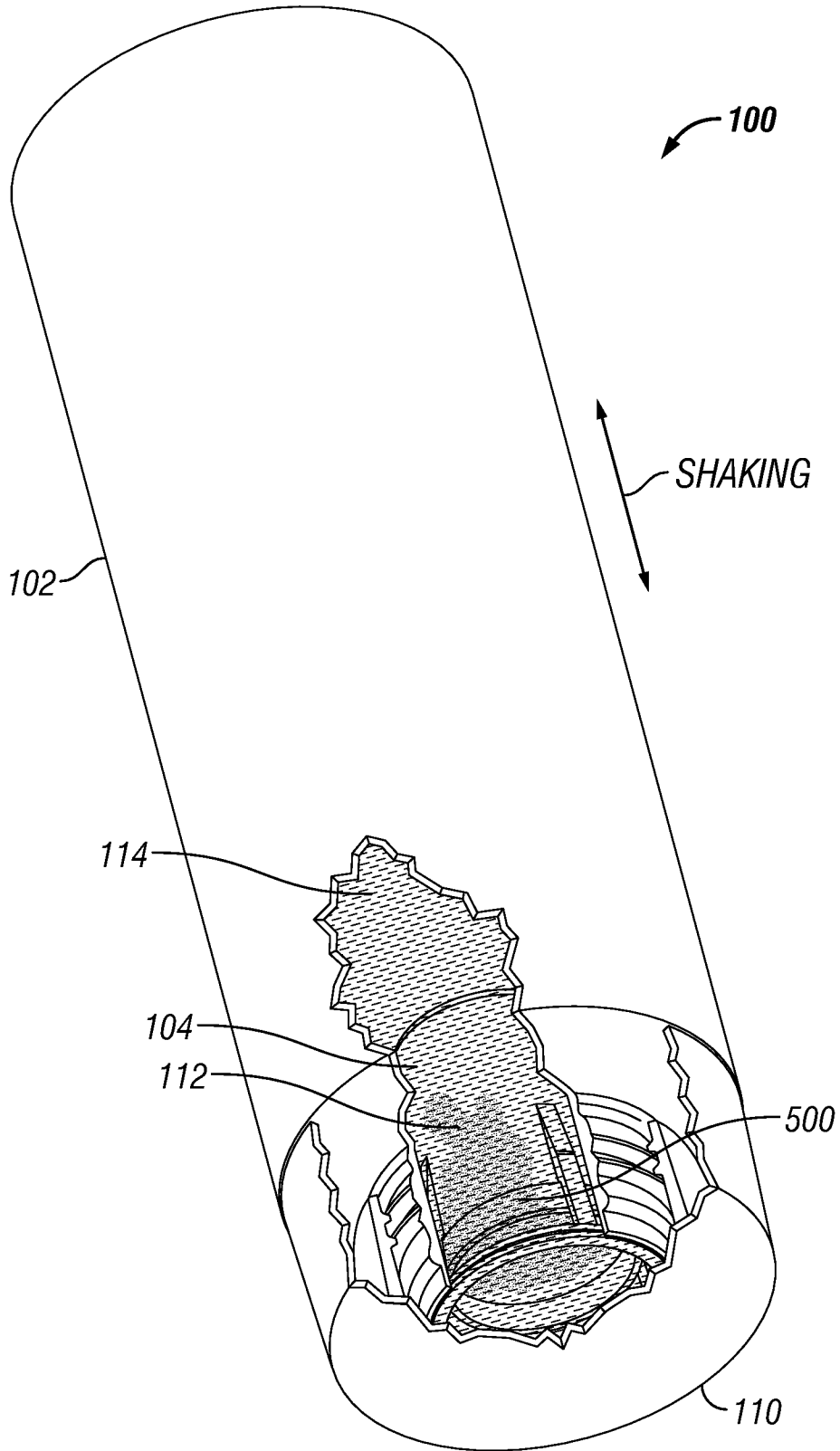


FIG. 7

7/9

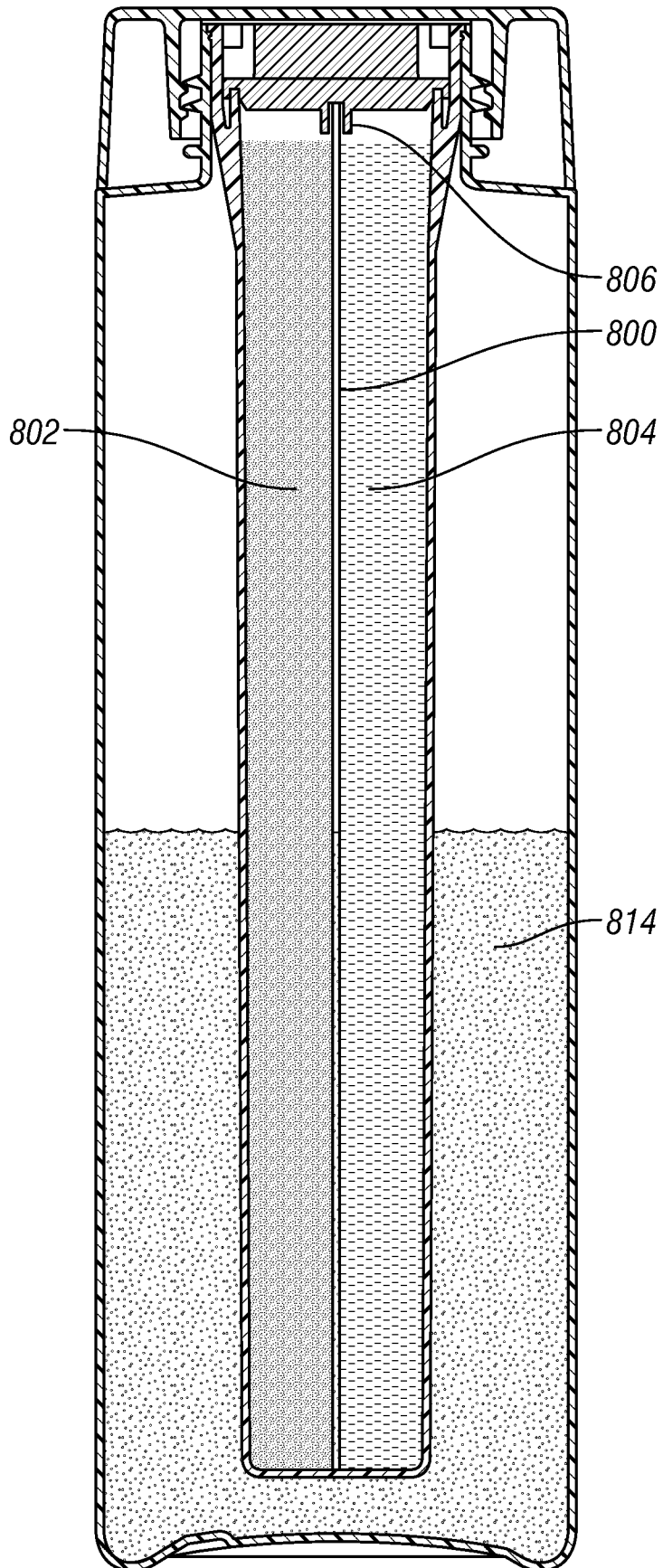


FIG. 8

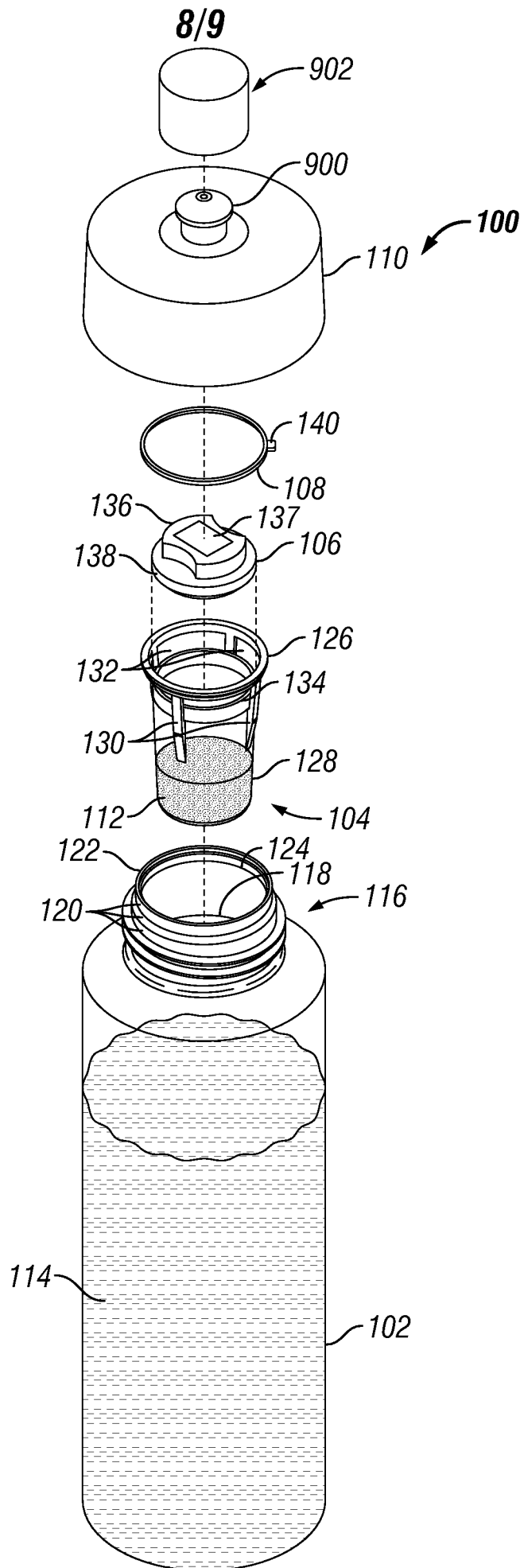


FIG. 9

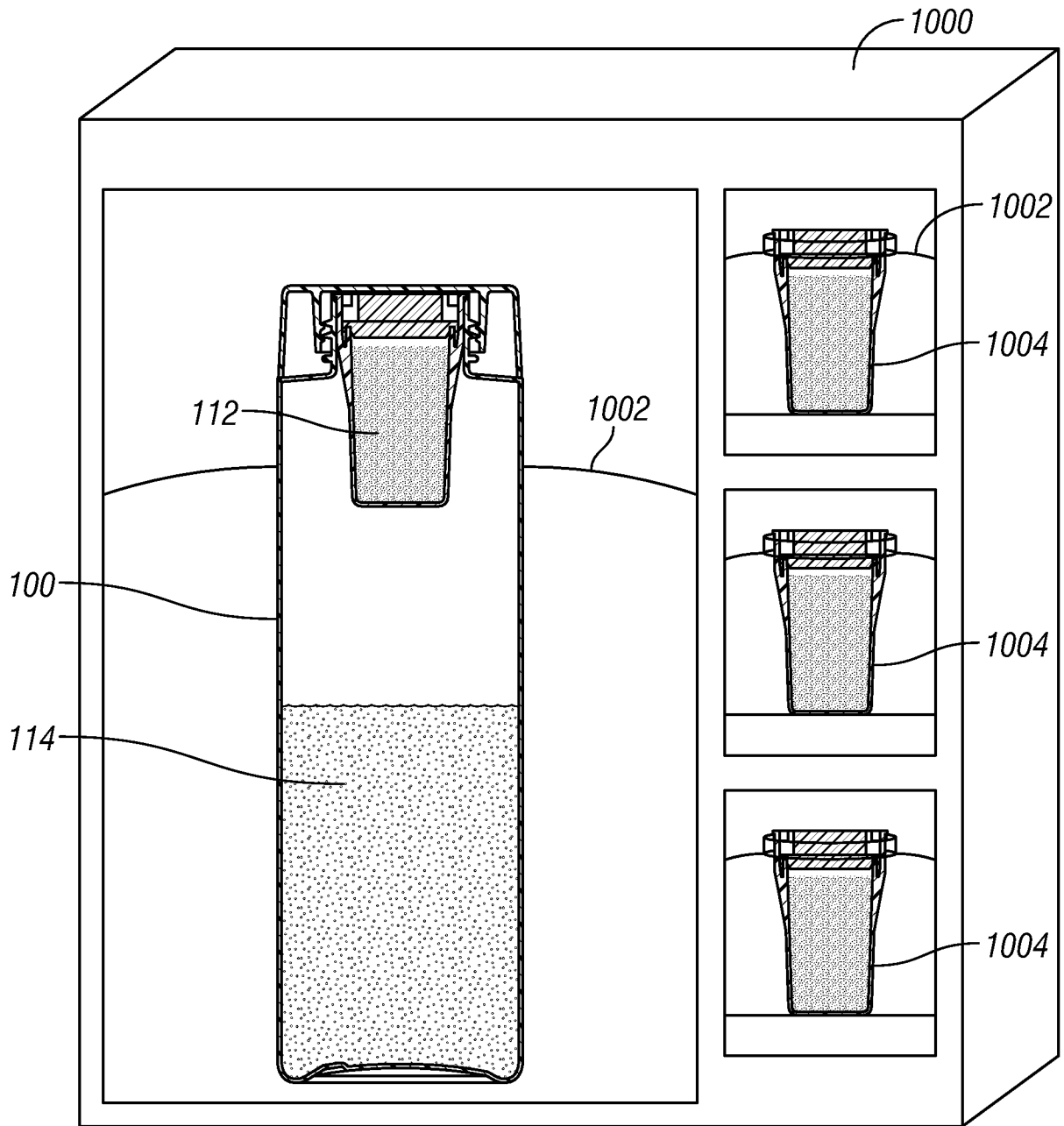


FIG. 10