



US012392919B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Castrigno et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** US 12,392,919 B2
(45) **Date of Patent:** Aug. 19, 2025

(54) **FLUID DETECTION SYSTEMS AND METHODS USING THE SAME**(71) Applicant: **WATTS REGULATOR CO.**, North Andover, MA (US)(72) Inventors: **Steven Castrigno**, Chester, NH (US); **James Erhardt**, Bedford, NH (US); **Christopher Krause**, Haverhill, MA (US)(73) Assignee: **WATTS REGULATOR CO.**, North Andover, MA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **18/265,934**(22) PCT Filed: **Dec. 8, 2021**(86) PCT No.: **PCT/US2021/062336**

§ 371 (c)(1),

(2) Date: **Jun. 7, 2023**(87) PCT Pub. No.: **WO2022/125618**PCT Pub. Date: **Jun. 16, 2022**(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2024/0036226 A1 Feb. 1, 2024

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 17/115,682, filed on Dec. 8, 2020, now Pat. No. 12,188,213.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G01V 3/02 (2006.01)(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **G01V 3/02** (2013.01)(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G01V 3/02

(Continued)

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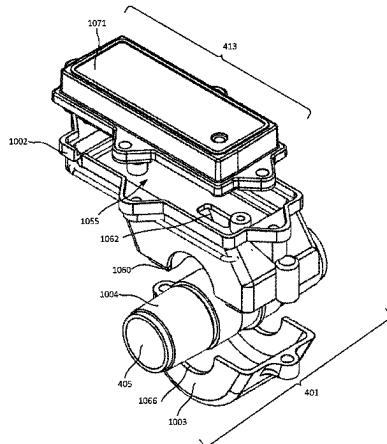
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(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Walter L Lindsay, Jr.*Assistant Examiner* — Philip T Fadul(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Grossman, Tucker, Perreault & Pfleger, PLLC(57) **ABSTRACT**

Fluid detection systems and methods using the same are disclosed. In embodiments the fluid detection systems include a sensor module and an electronics module. The sensor module includes a sensor housing that includes a liquid flow path and a sensor element disposed around at least part of the liquid flow path. The sensor element can detect a capacitance of the liquid flow path and provide a sensor signal to a controller in the electronics module. The electronics module can determine a detected capacitance in the liquid flow path based at least in part on the sensor signal, and can determine whether a wet event has occurred based on a comparison of the detected capacitance to a

(Continued)



Exploded View

threshold capacitance. Methods using the fluid detection systems and fluid supply systems including the fluid detection systems are also disclosed.

19 Claims, 52 Drawing Sheets

(58) Field of Classification Search

USPC 324/686

See application file for complete search history.

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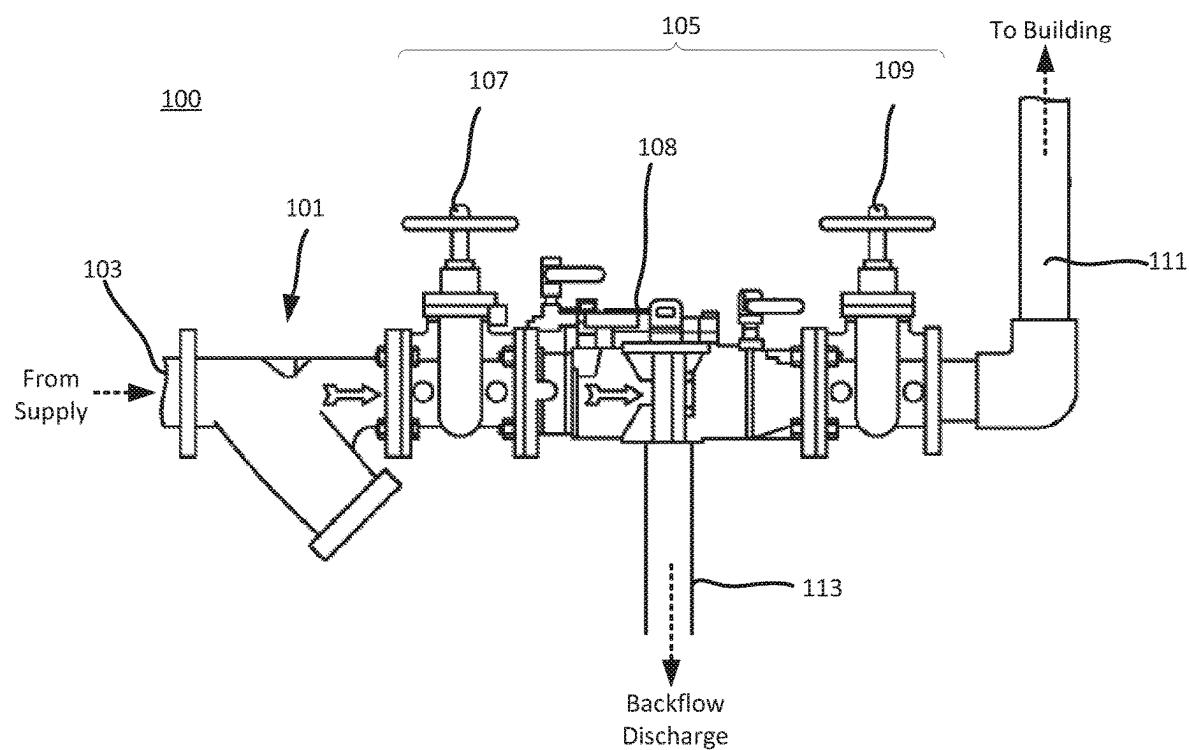


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

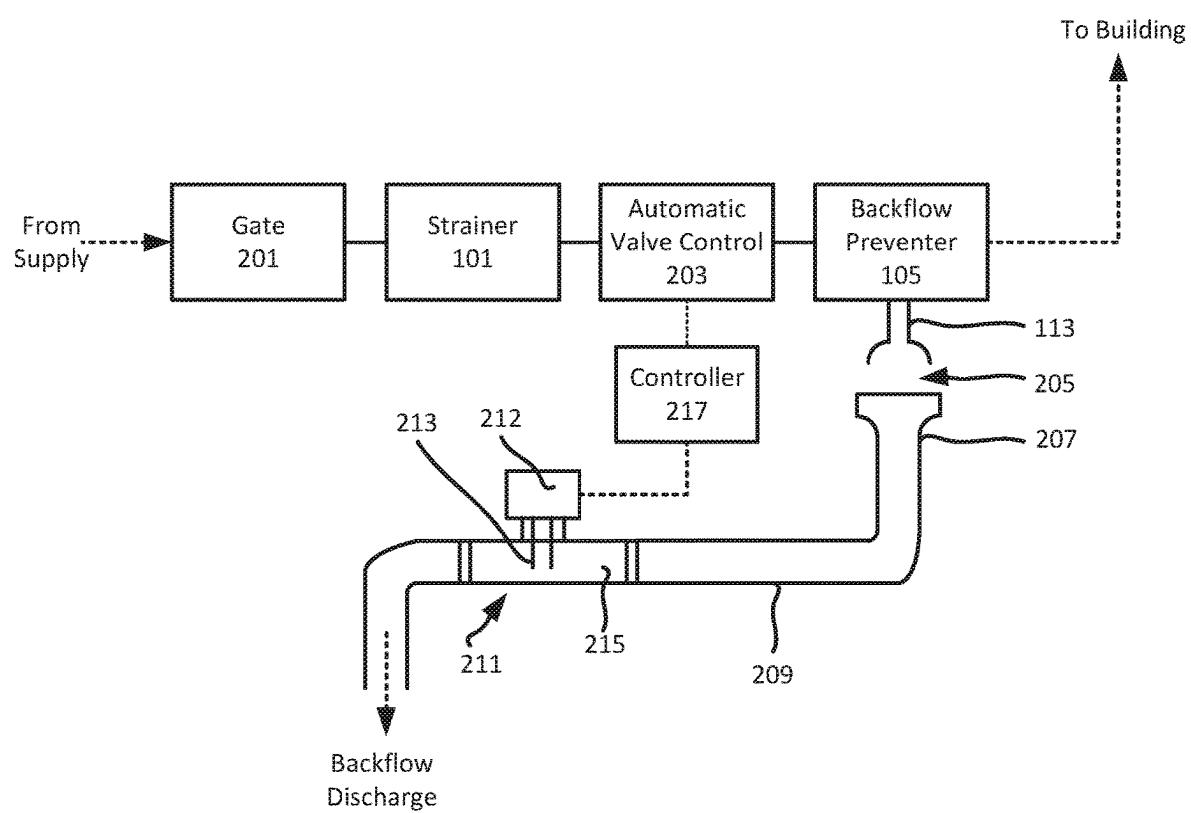
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FIG. 2
PRIOR ART

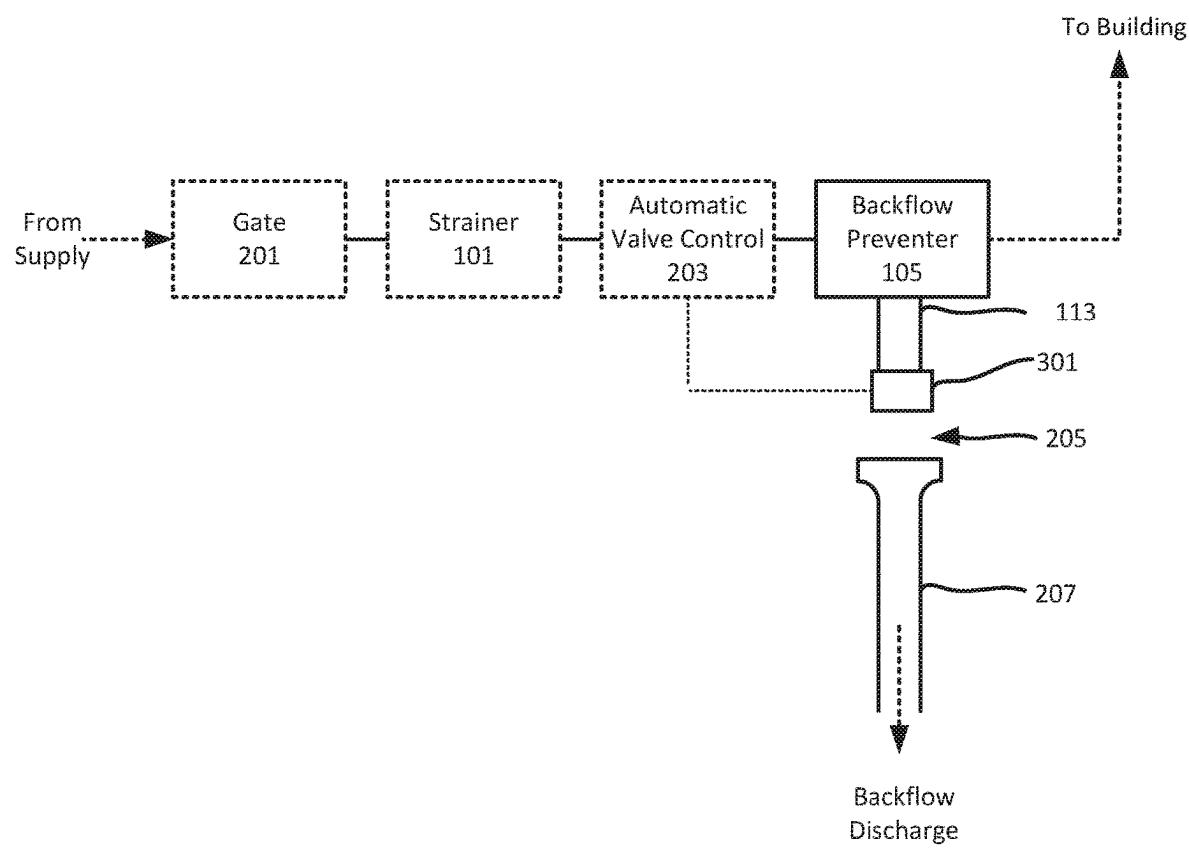
300

FIG. 3

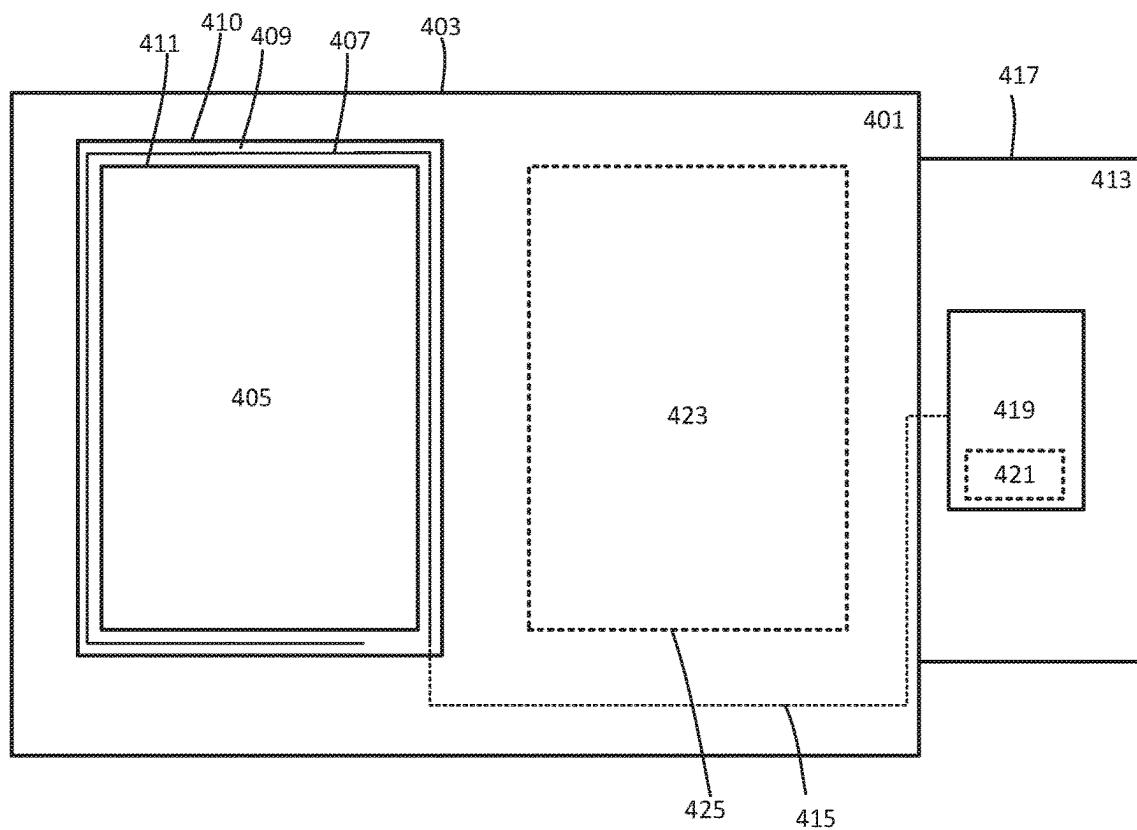
301

FIG. 4

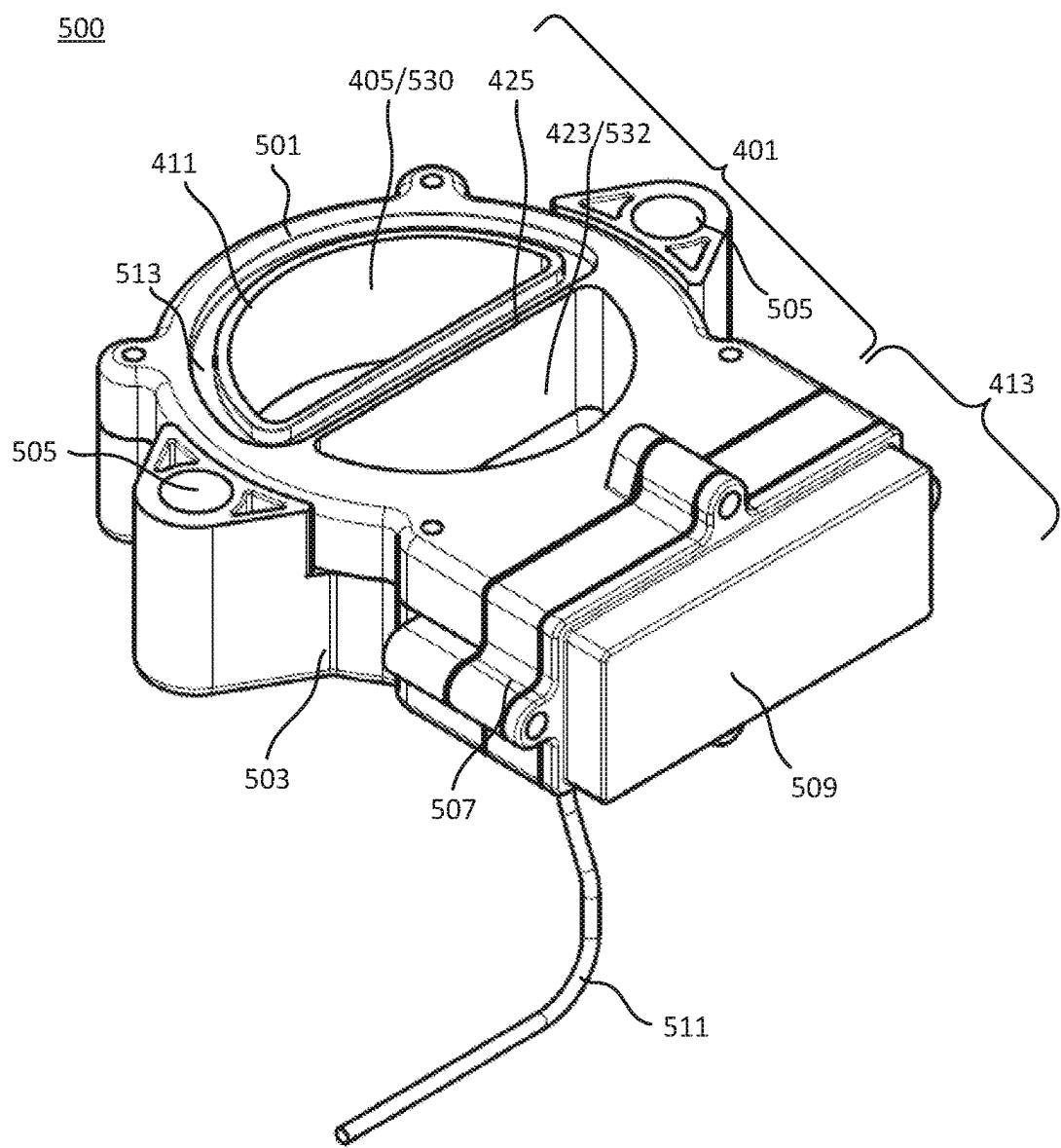
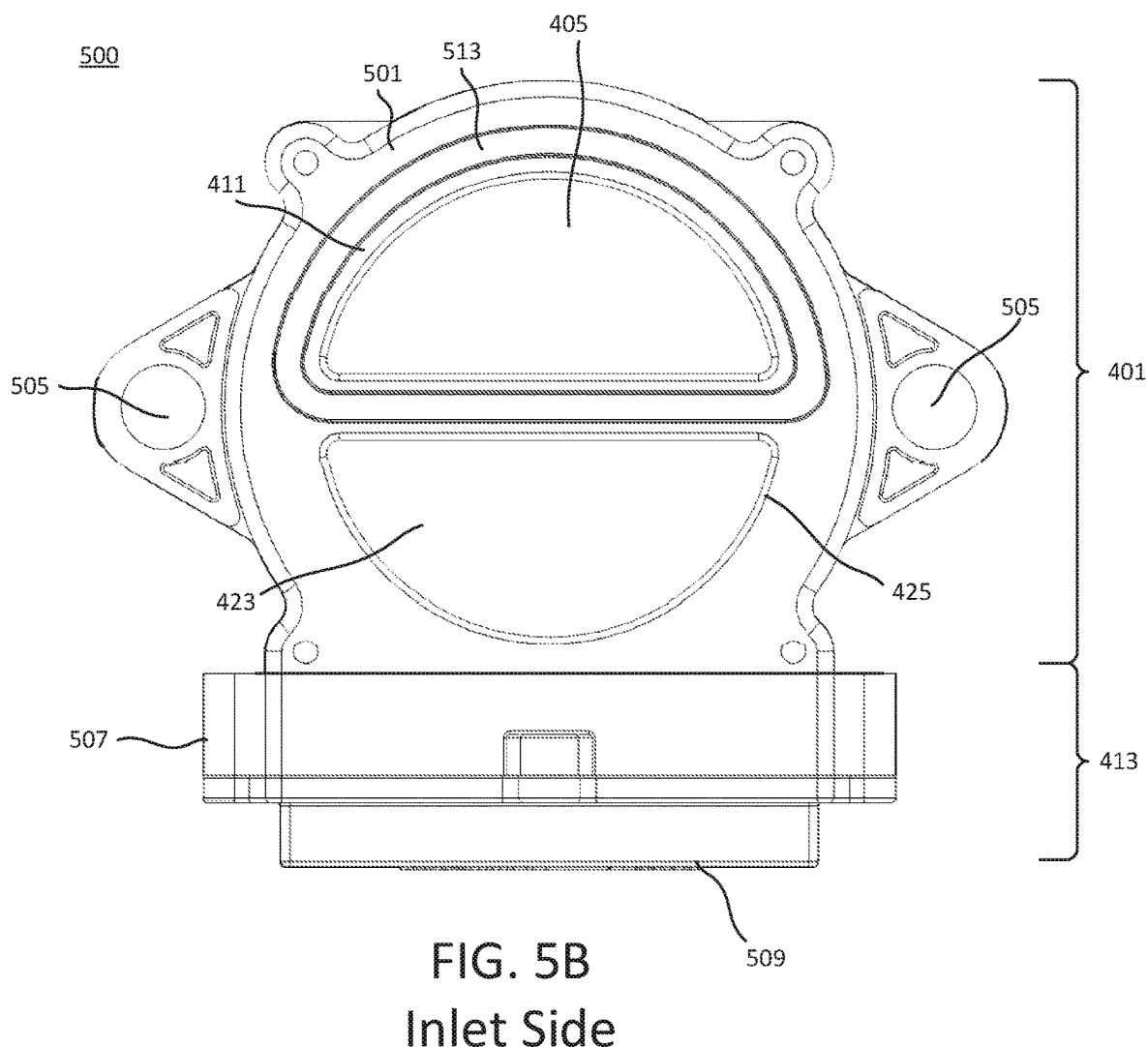


FIG. 5A



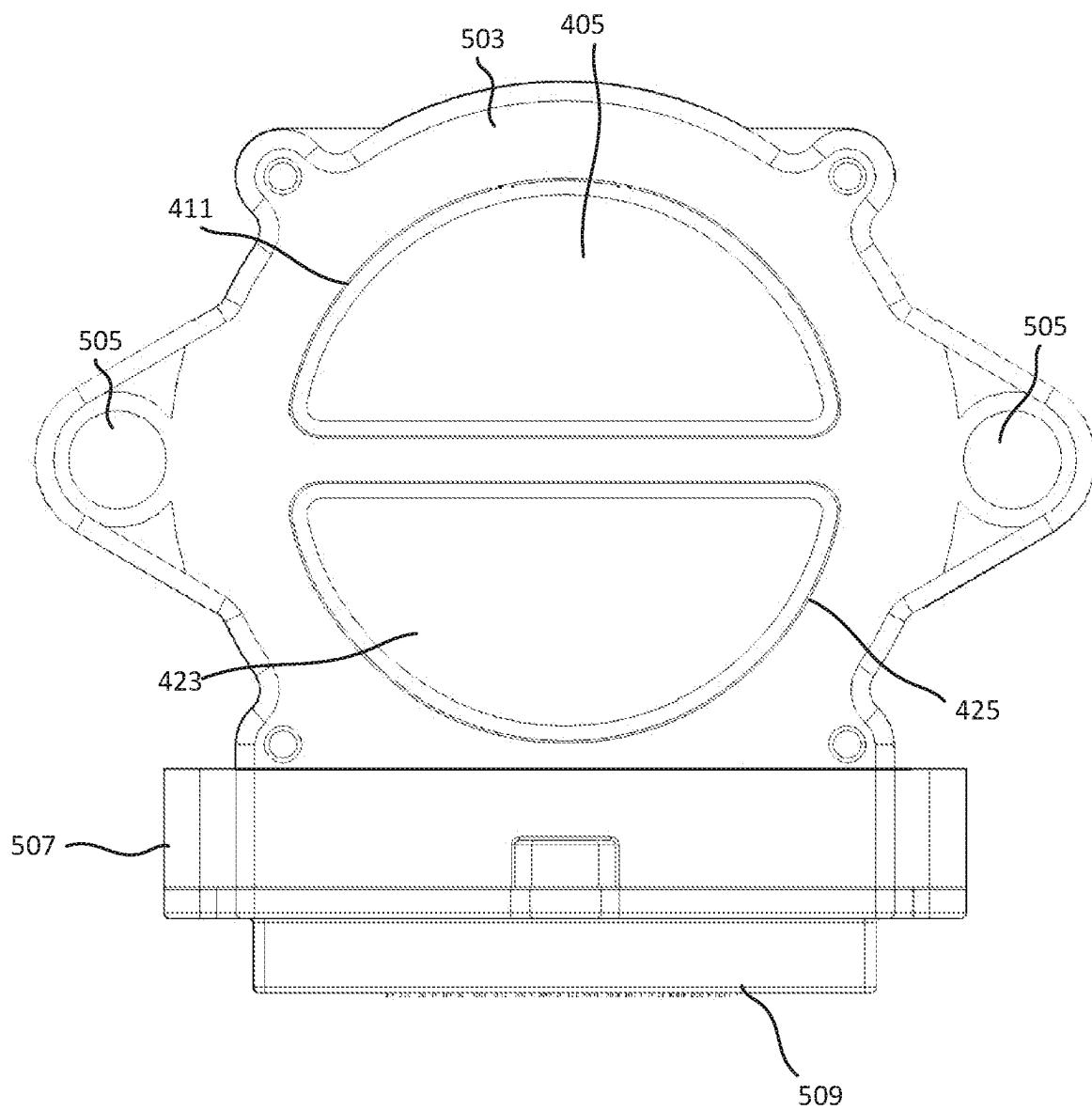
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FIG. 5C
Outlet Side

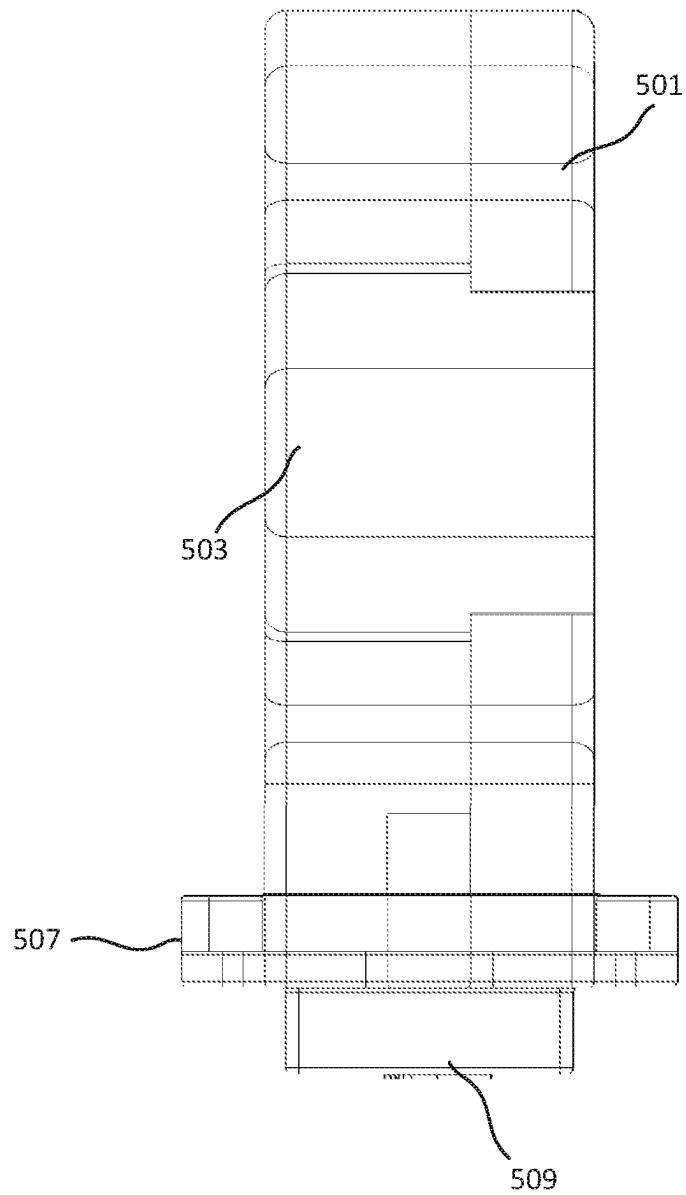
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FIG. 5D
Left Side

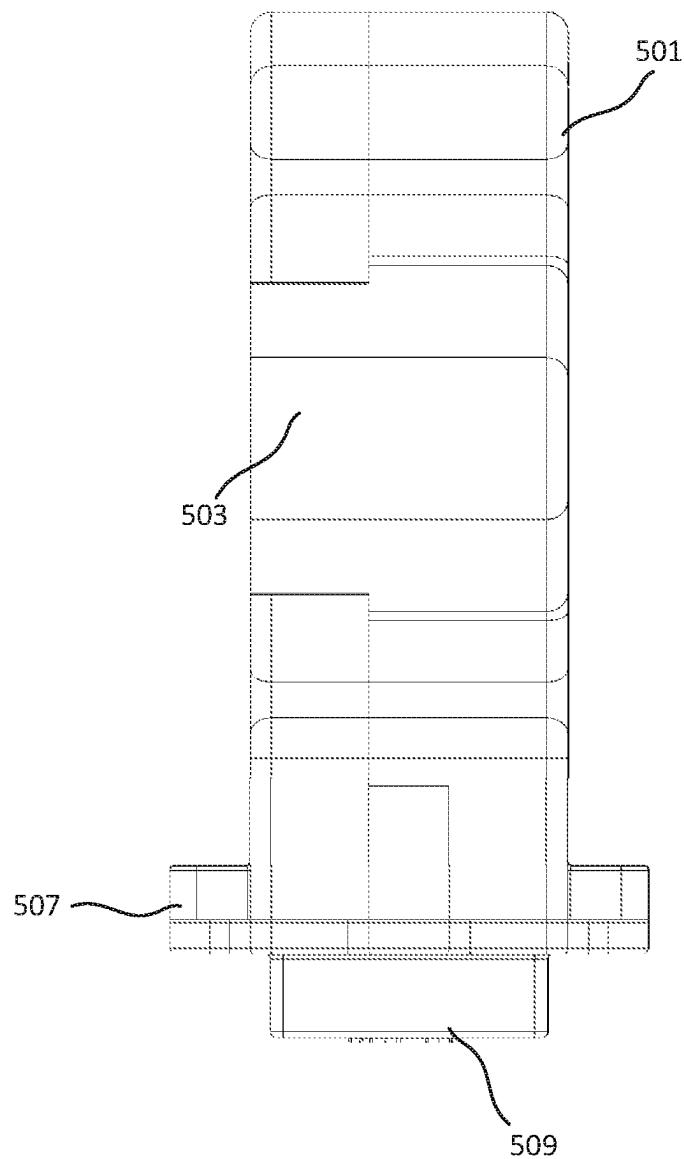
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FIG. 5E
Right Side

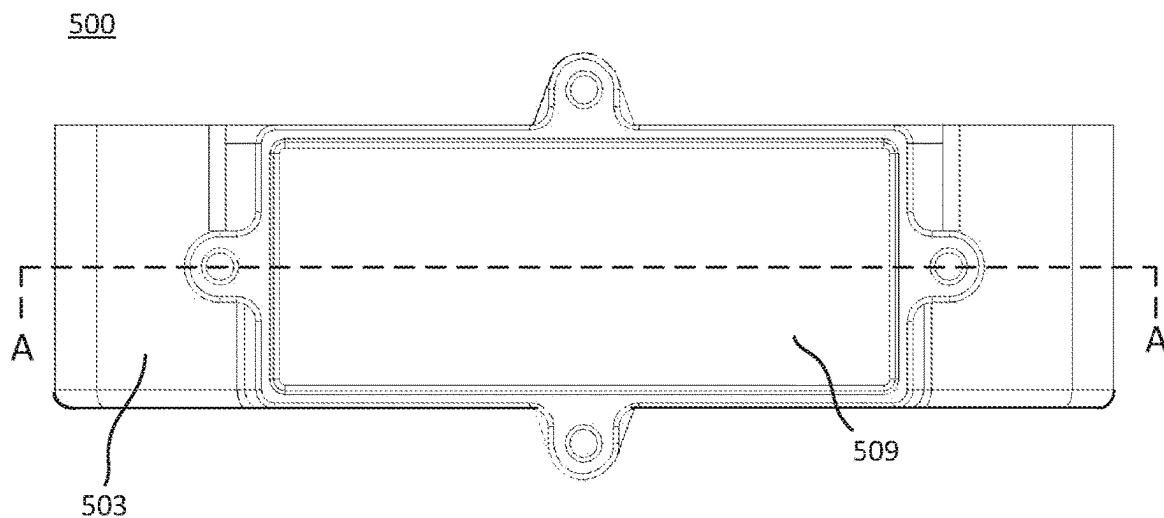


FIG. 5F
Bottom Side

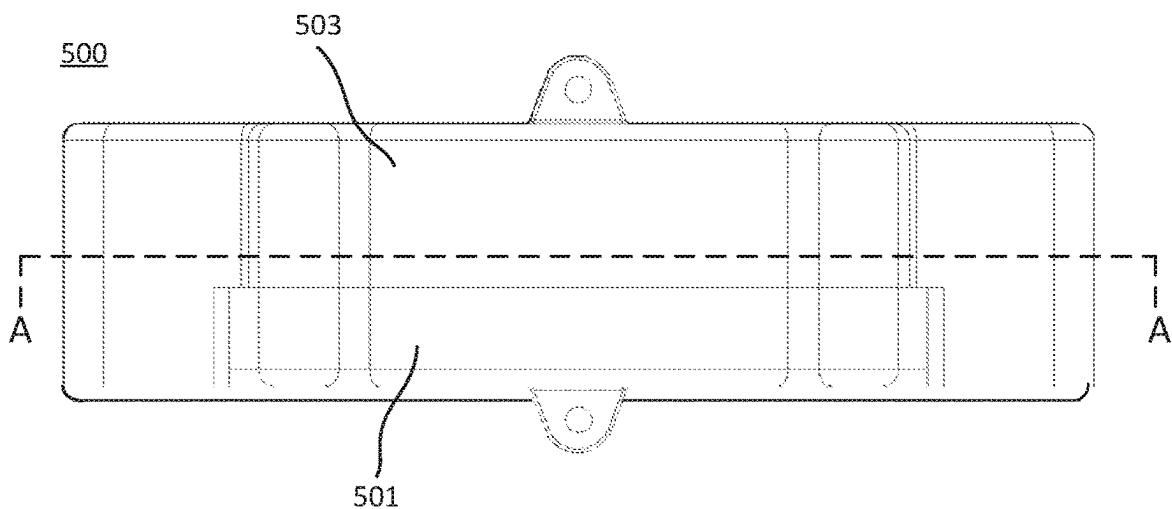


FIG. 5G
Top Side

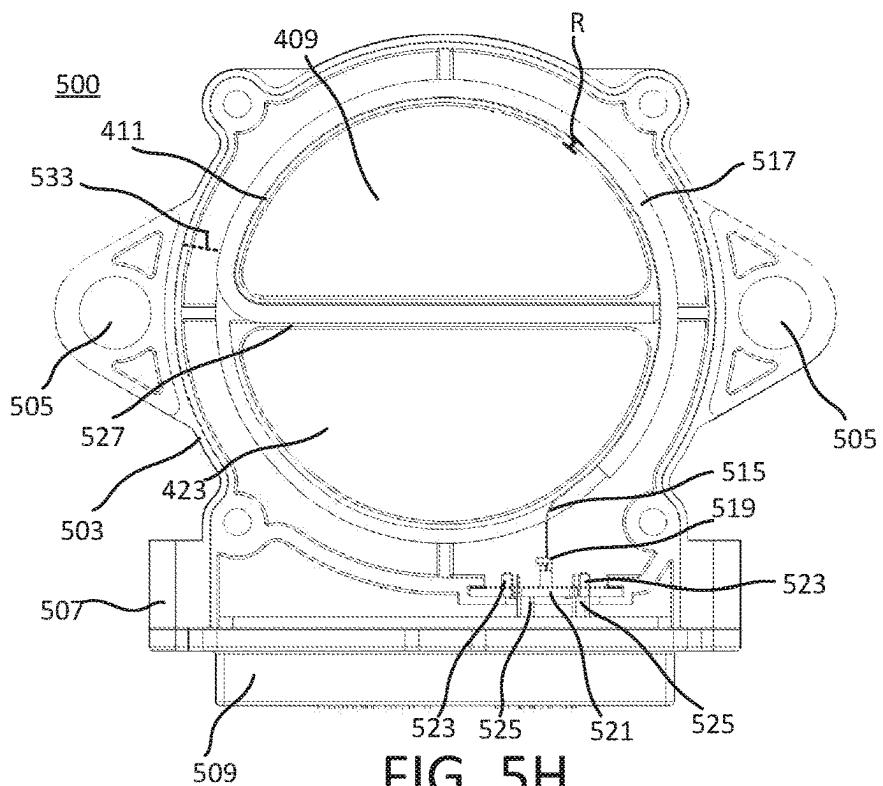


FIG. 5H

Sensor Cover Removed

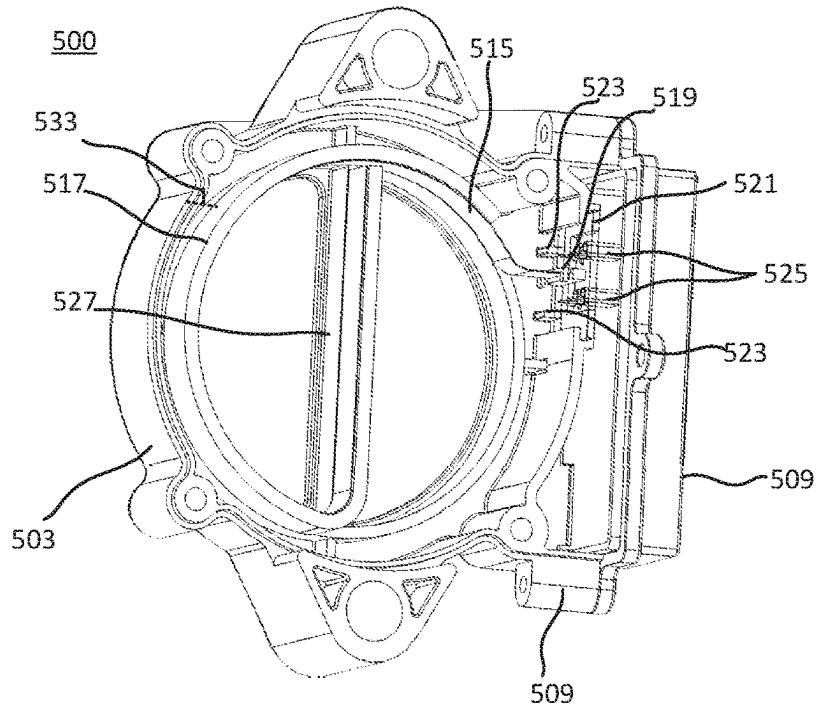


FIG. 5I

Perspective Cross Section Cover Removed

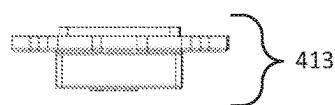
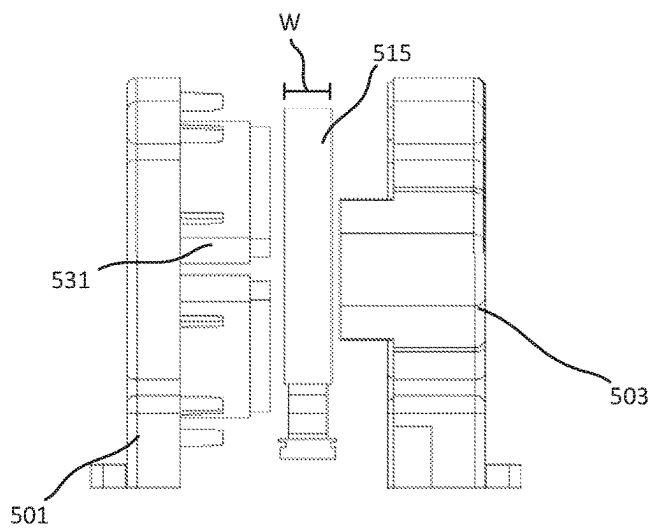


FIG. 5J
Exploded

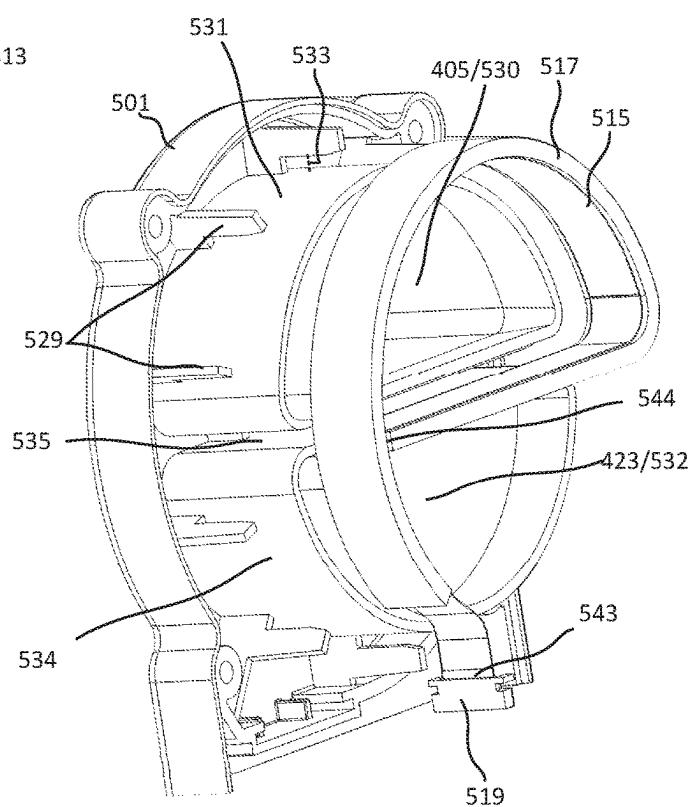


FIG. 5K
Partial Exploded

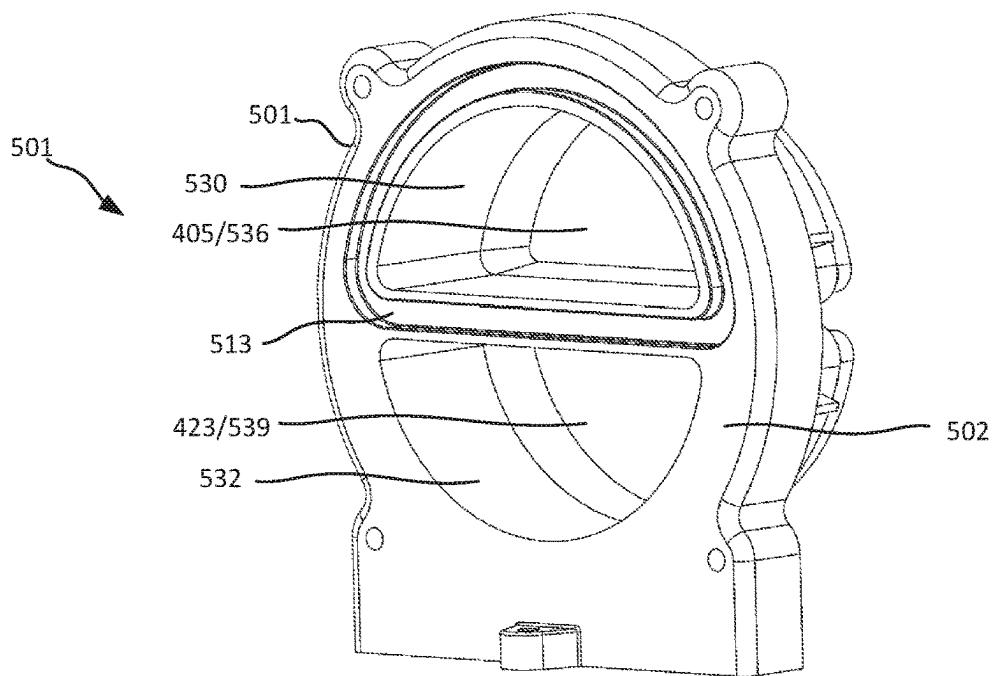


FIG. 5L
Sensor Cover Front

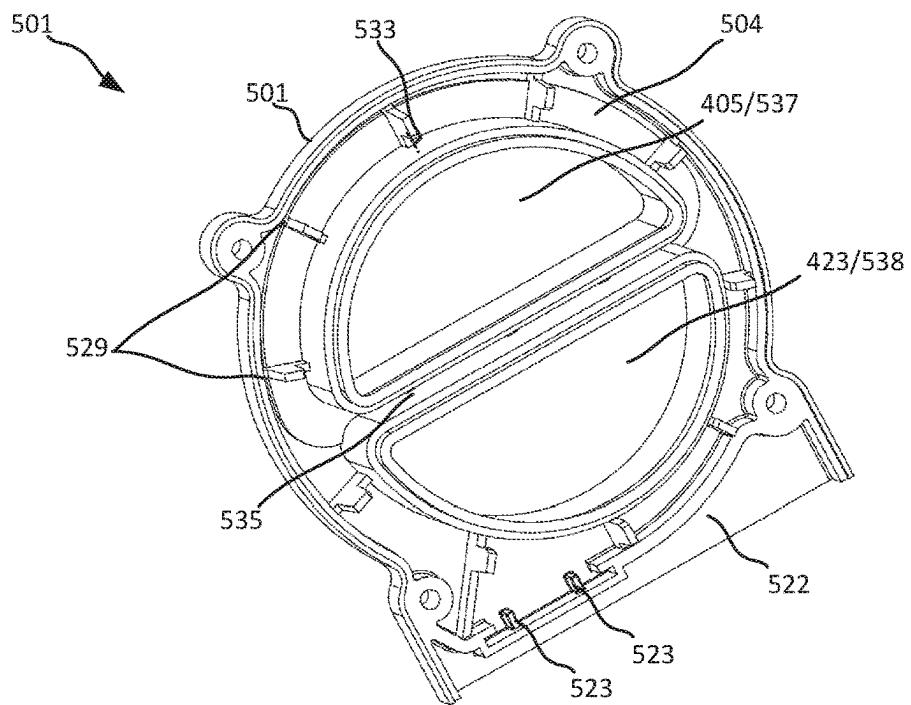


FIG. 5M
Sensor Cover Rear

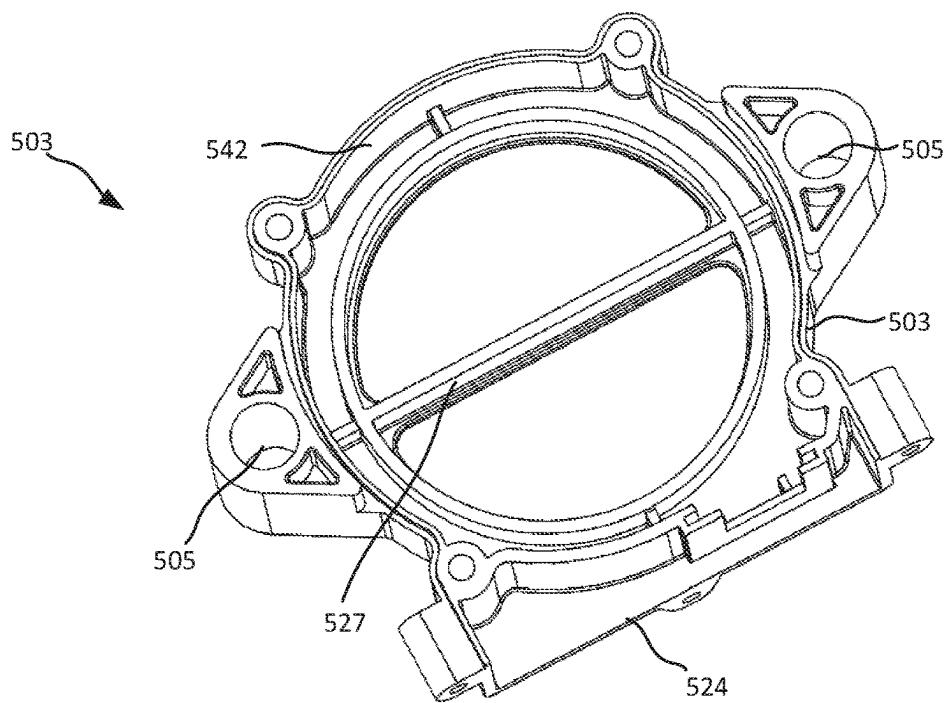


FIG. 5N
Sensor Base Top

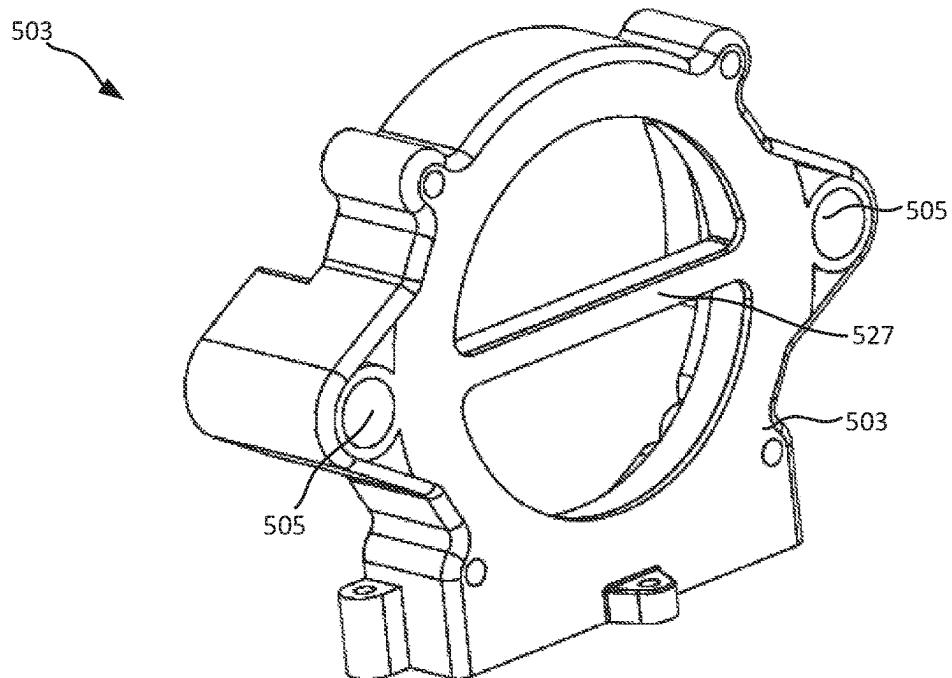


FIG. 5O
Sensor Base Bottom

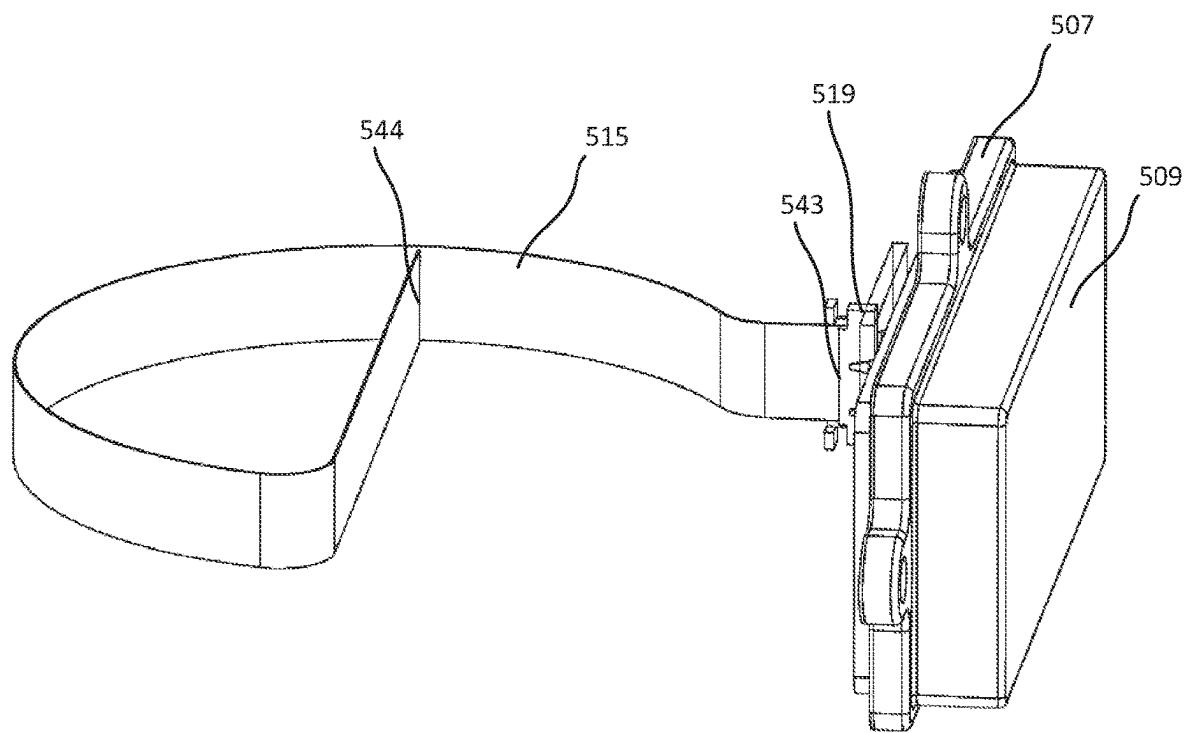


FIG. 5P
Sensor Element Detail

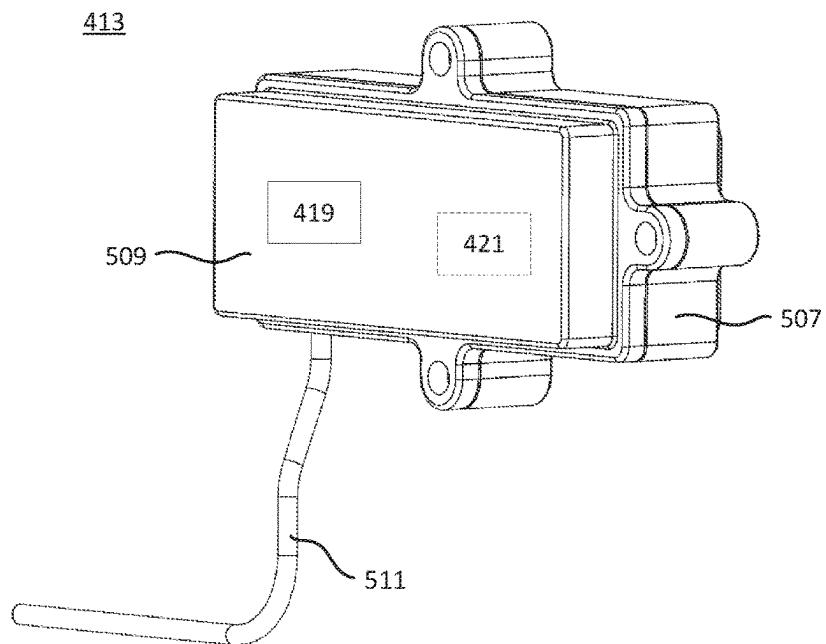


FIG. 6A

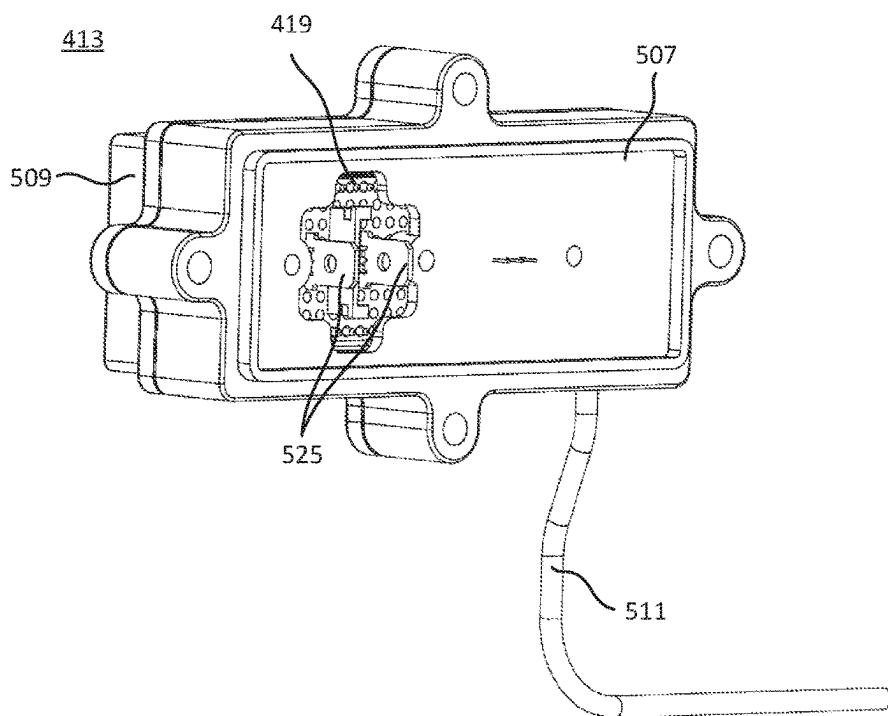


FIG. 6B

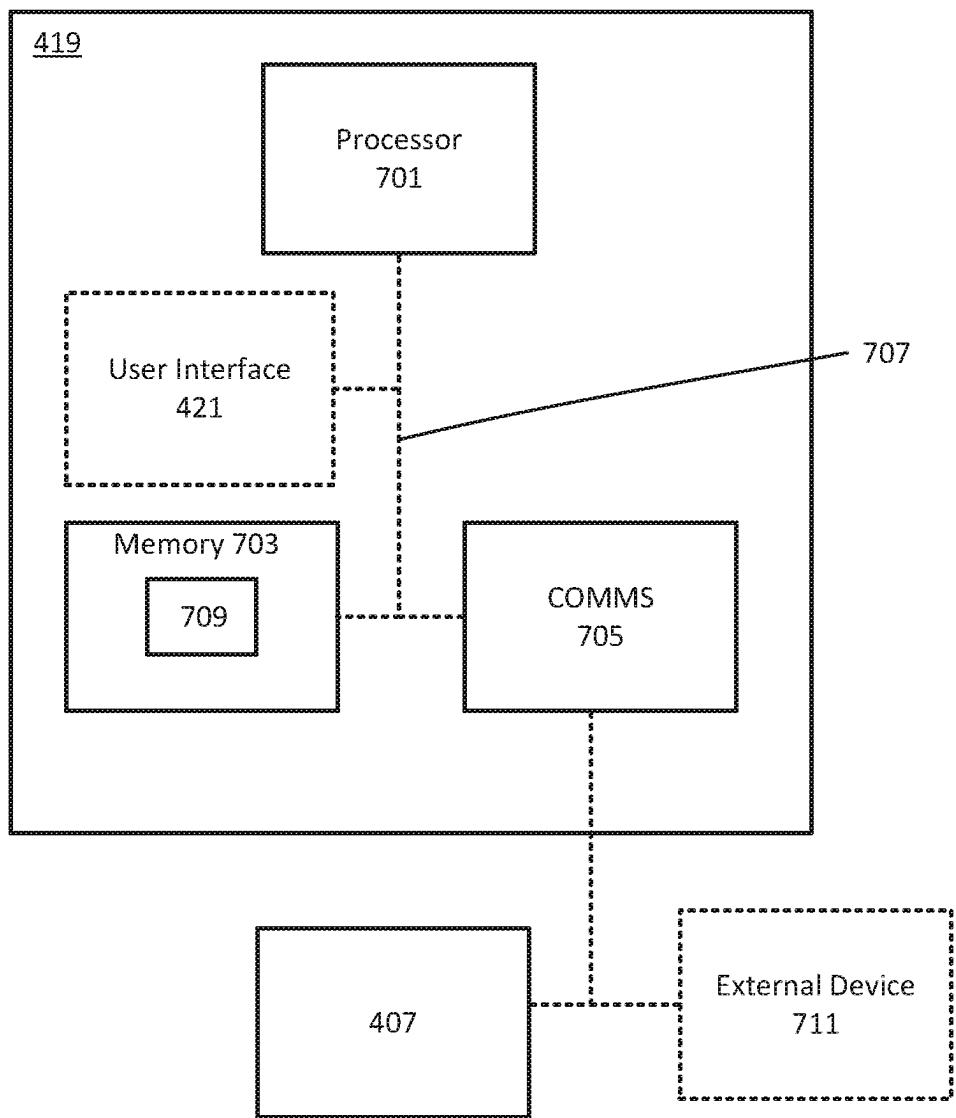


FIG. 7

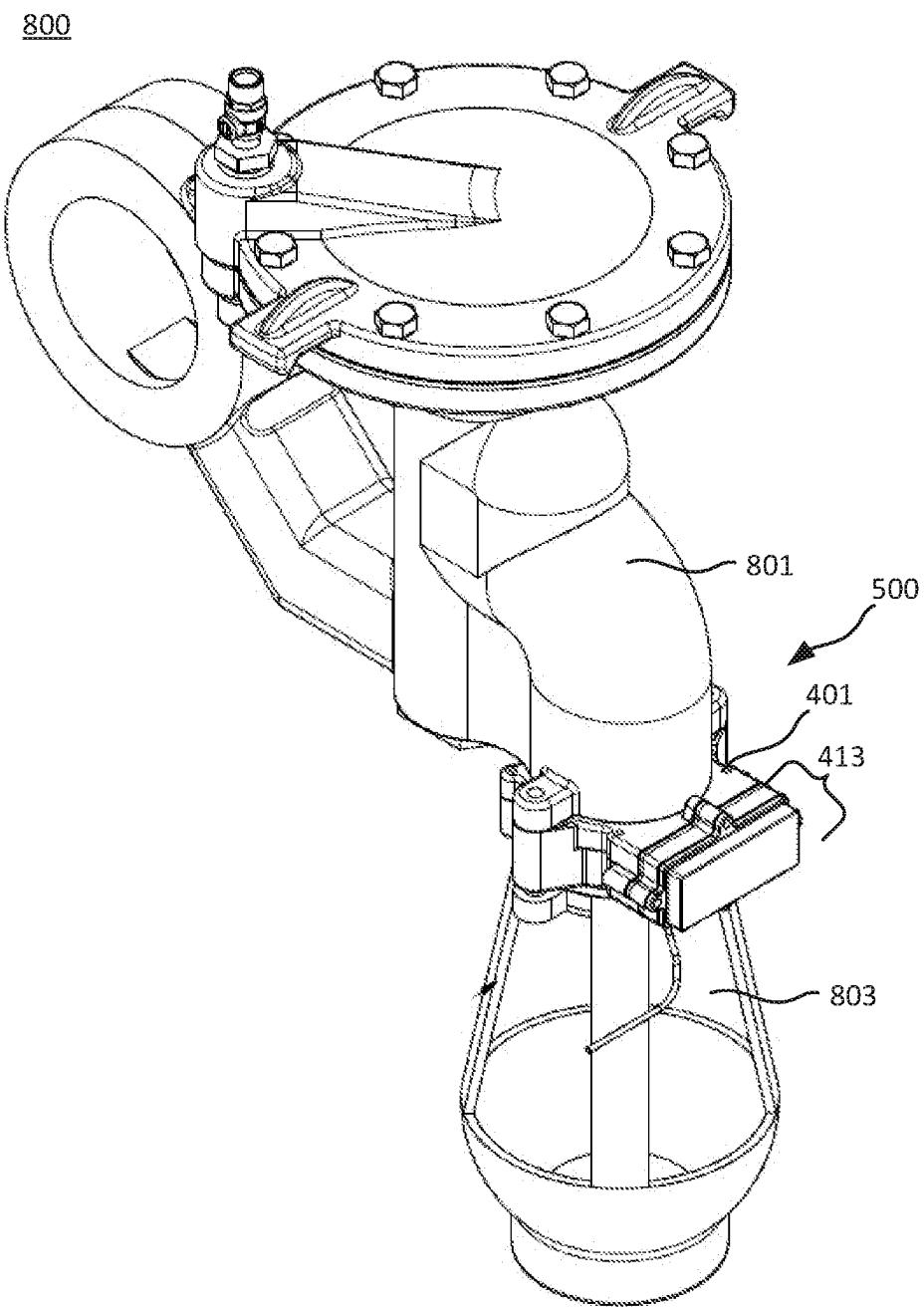


FIG. 8A

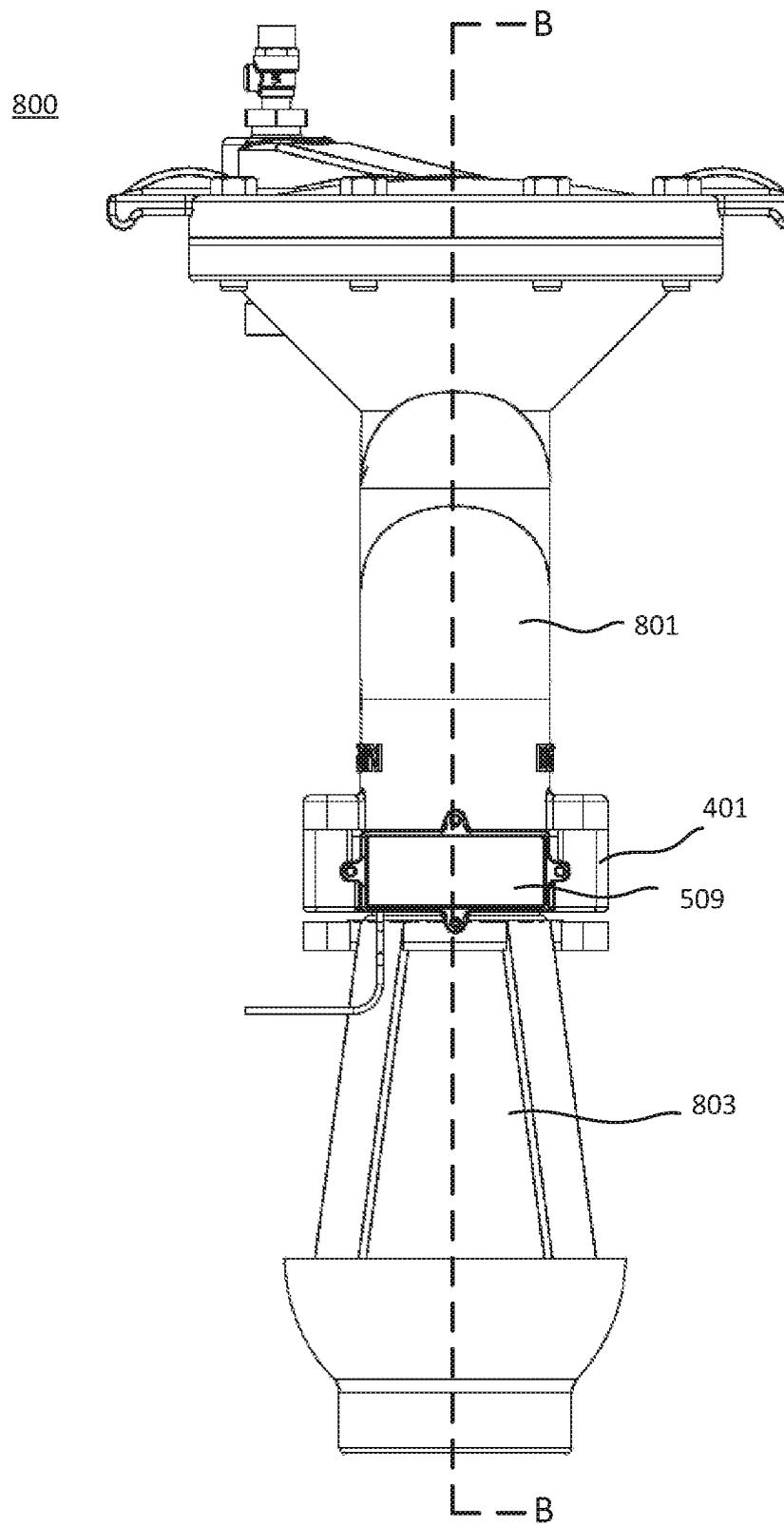


FIG. 8B

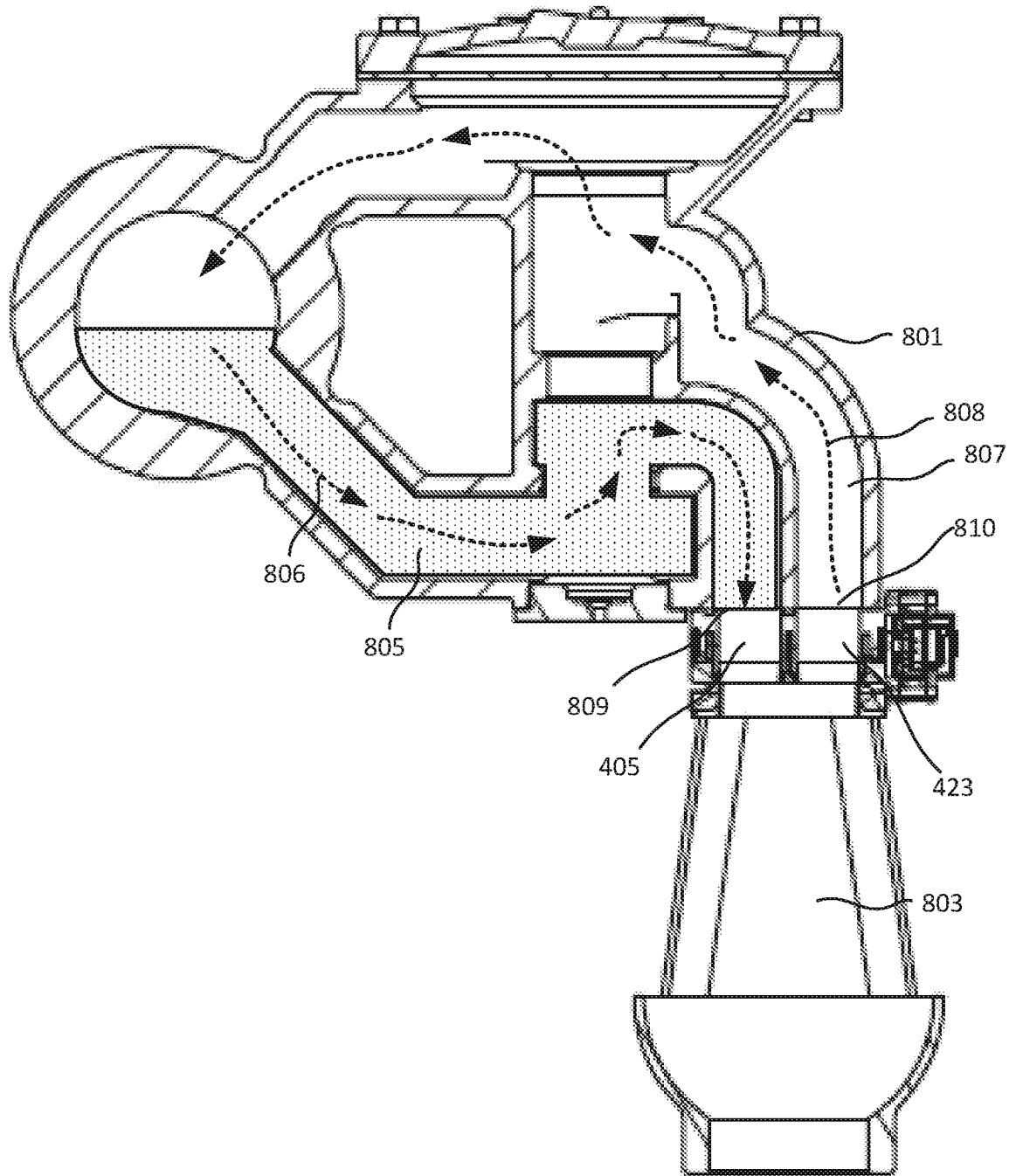
800

FIG. 8C

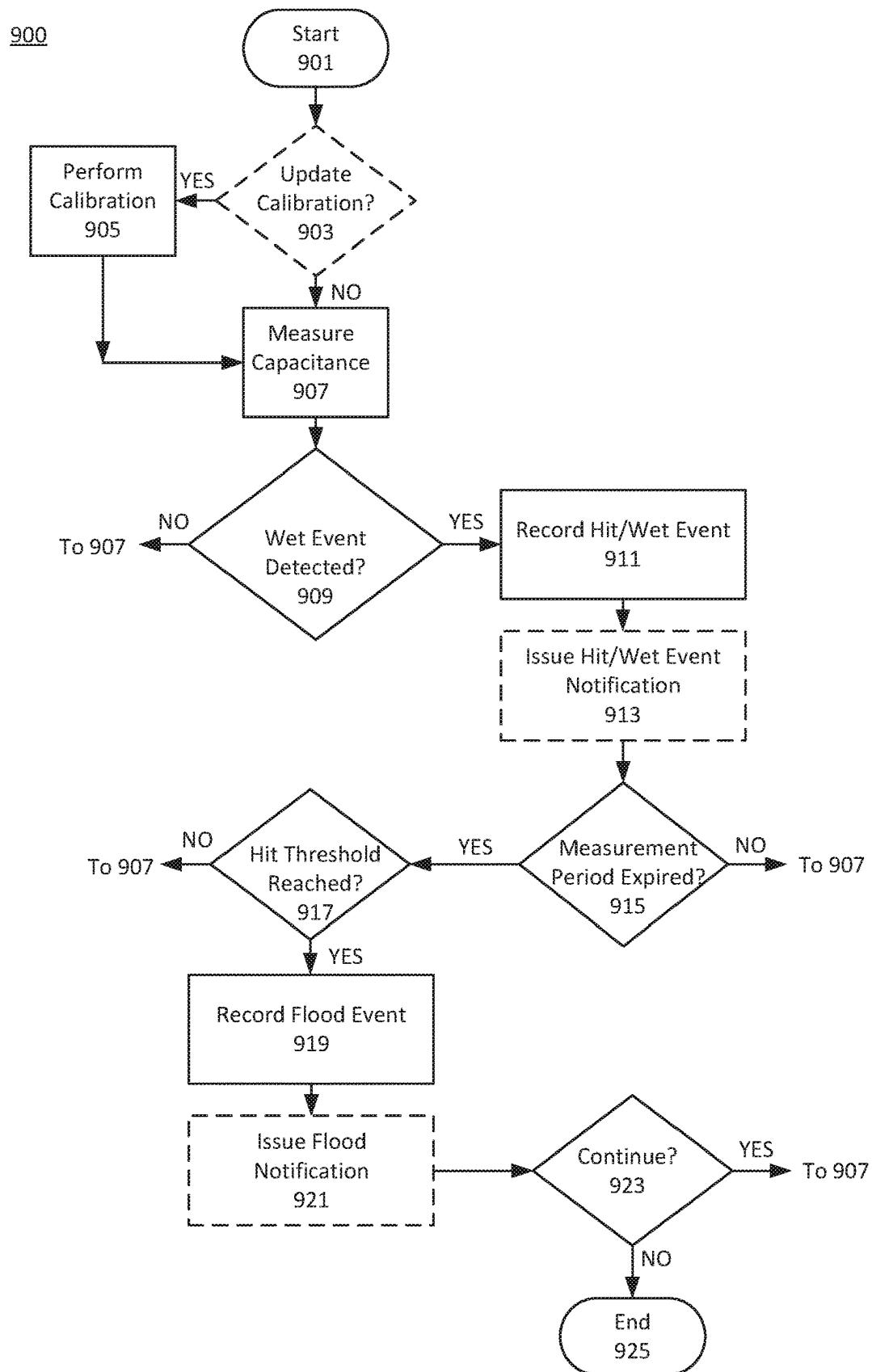


FIG. 9

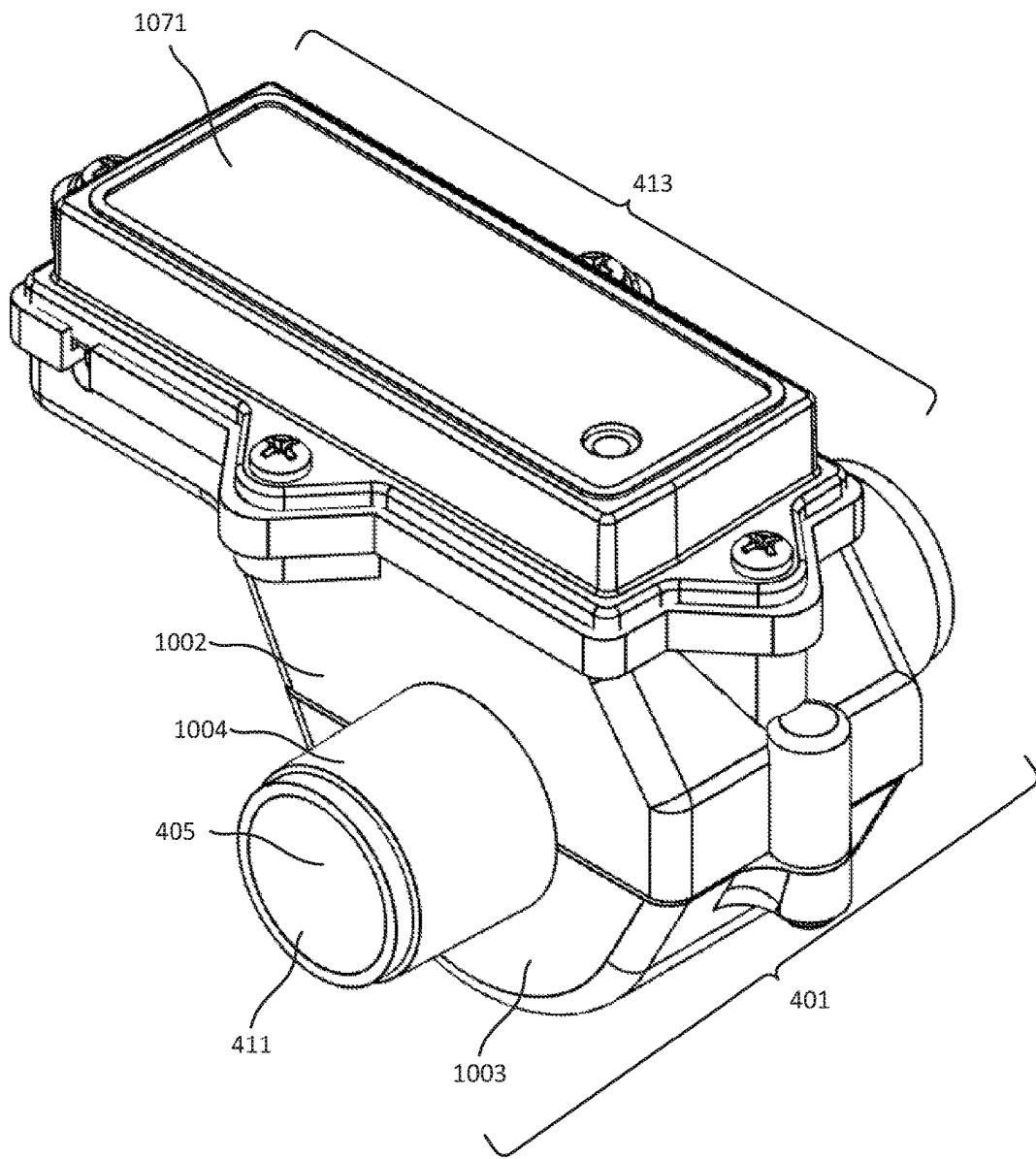
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FIG. 10A

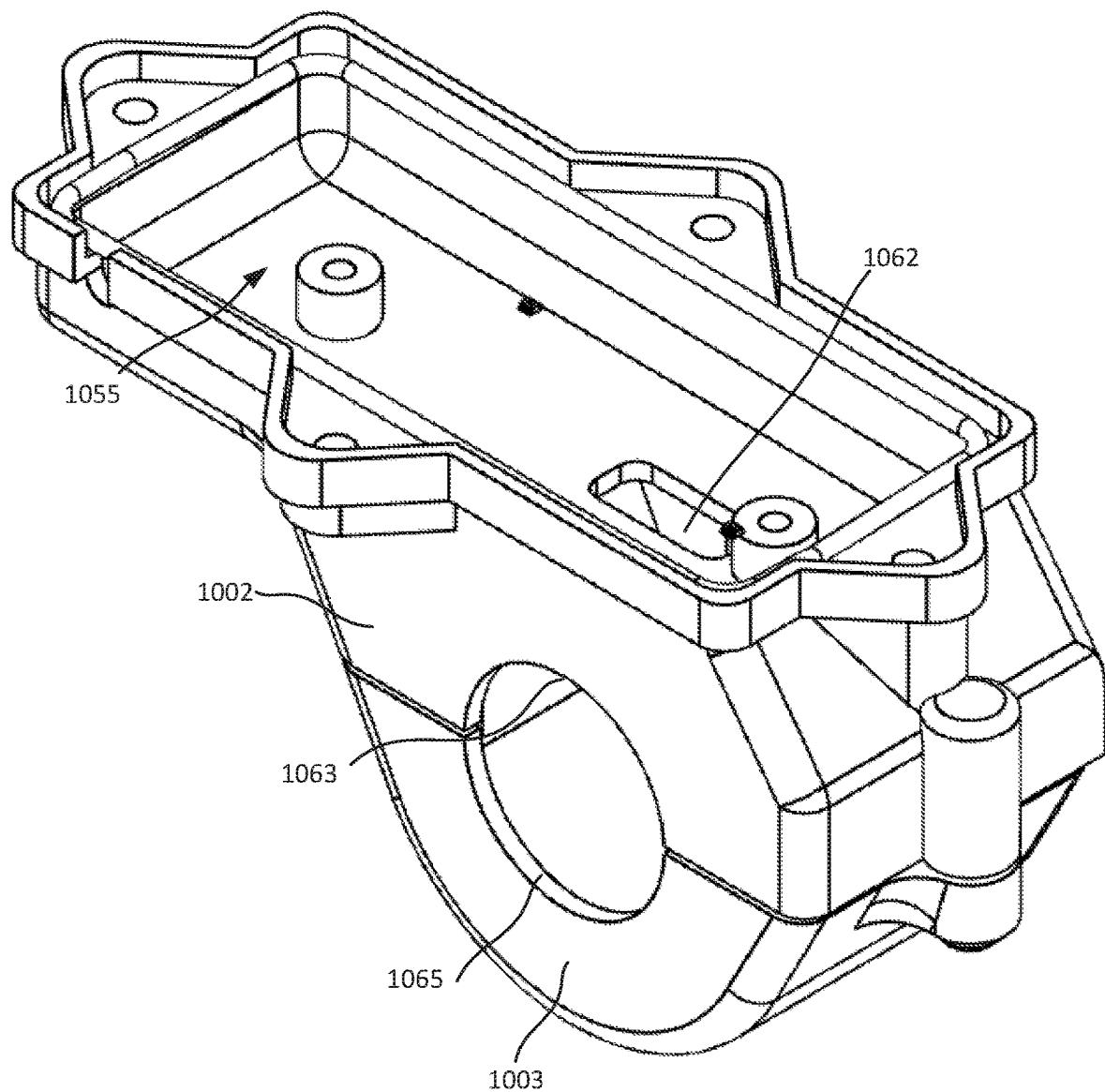


FIG. 10B
Sensor Housing Perspective View

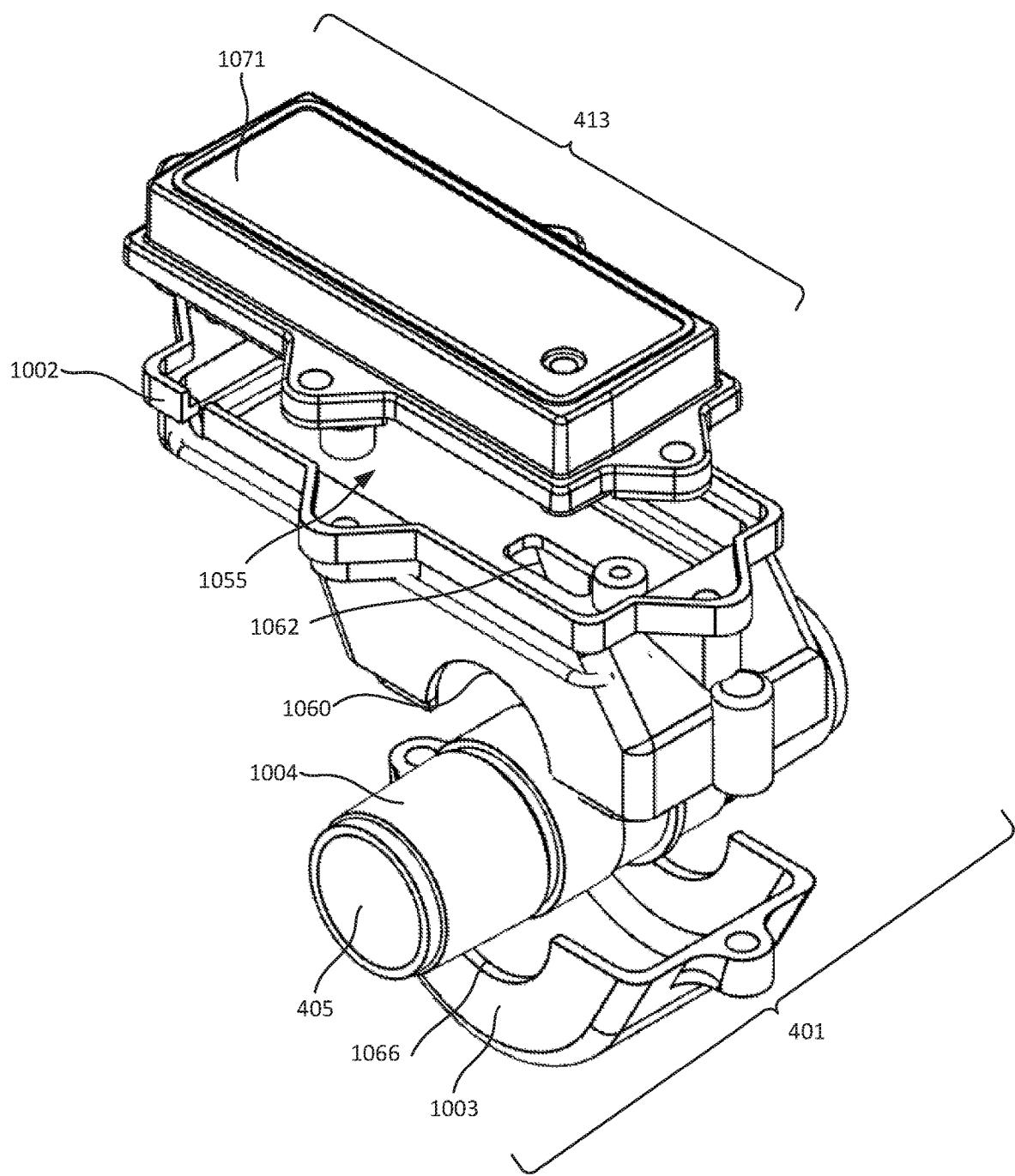


FIG. 10C
Exploded View

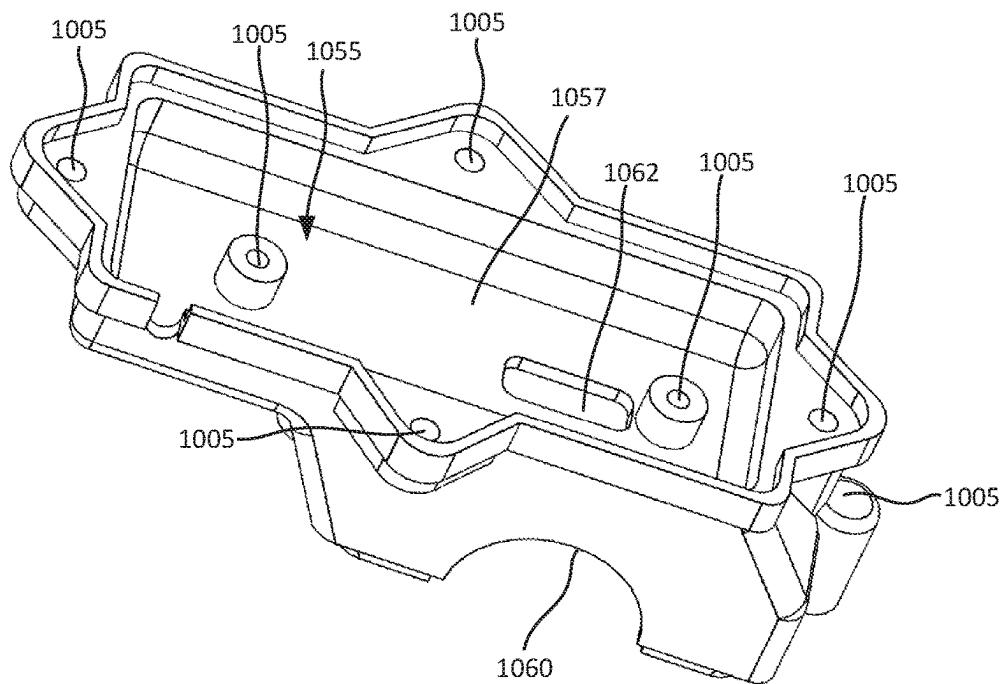
1002

FIG. 10D

Sensor Cover Top Perspective View

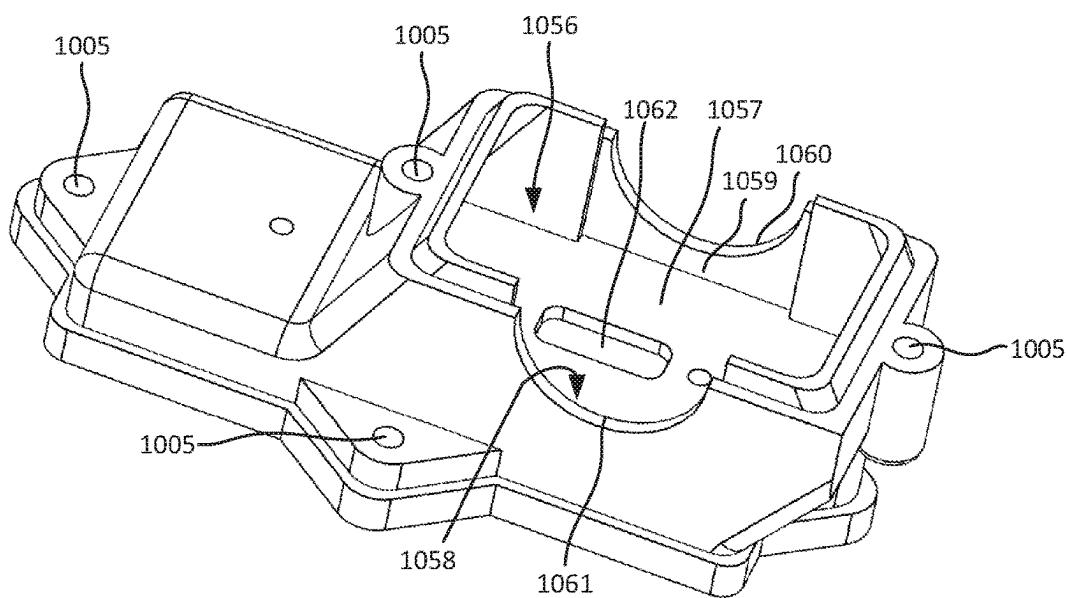
1002

FIG. 10E

Sensor Cover Bottom Perspective View

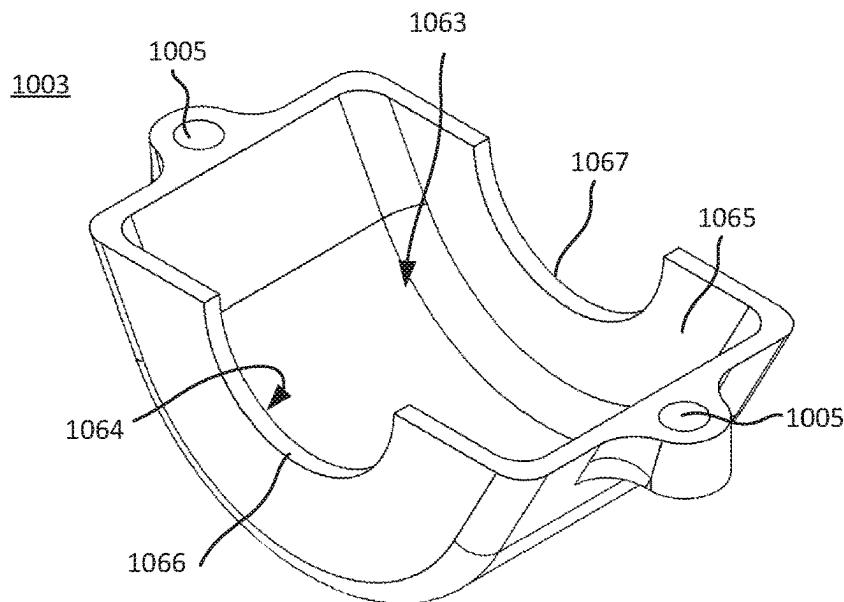


FIG. 10F
Sensor Base Top Perspective View

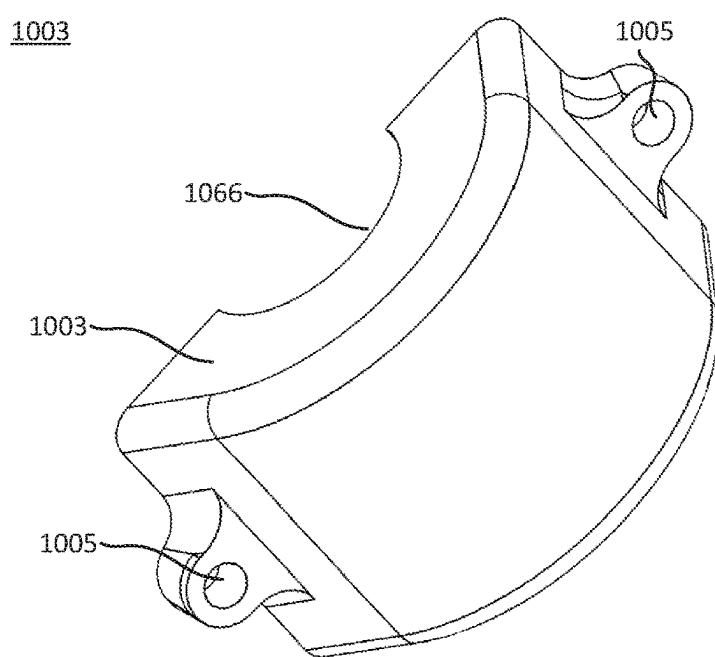


FIG. 10G
Sensor Base Bottom Perspective View

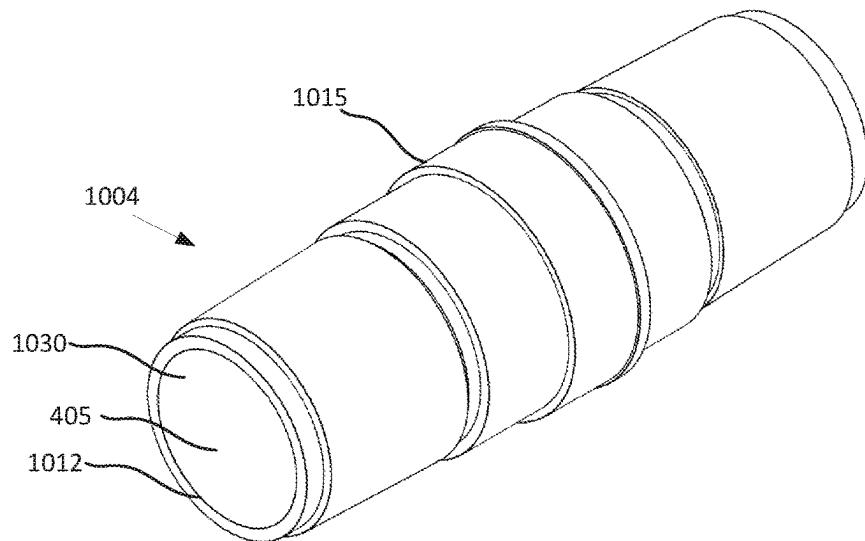


FIG. 10H
Base Part Perspective with Sensor

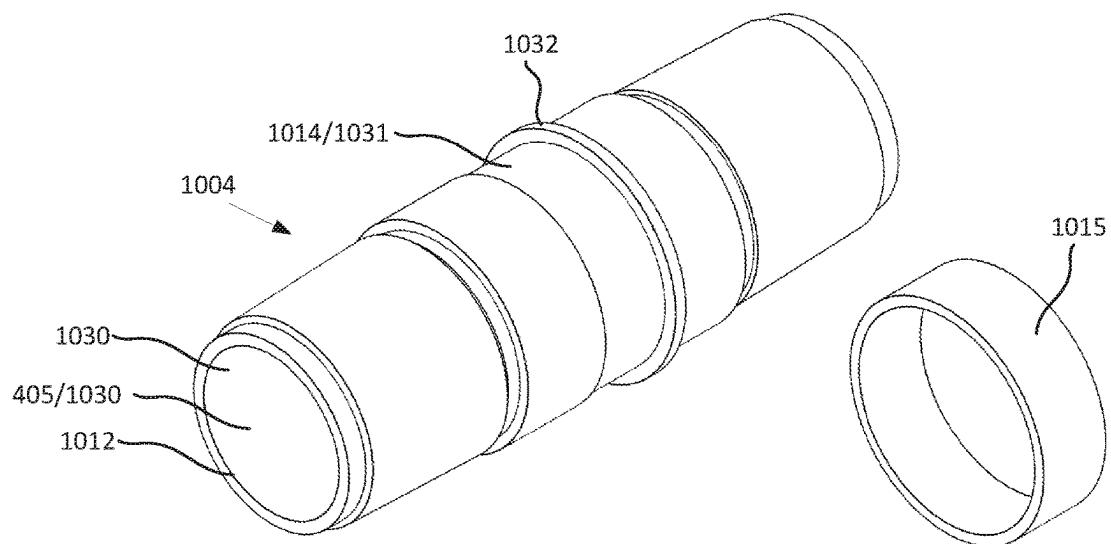


FIG. 10I
Base Part Perspective with Sensor Separate

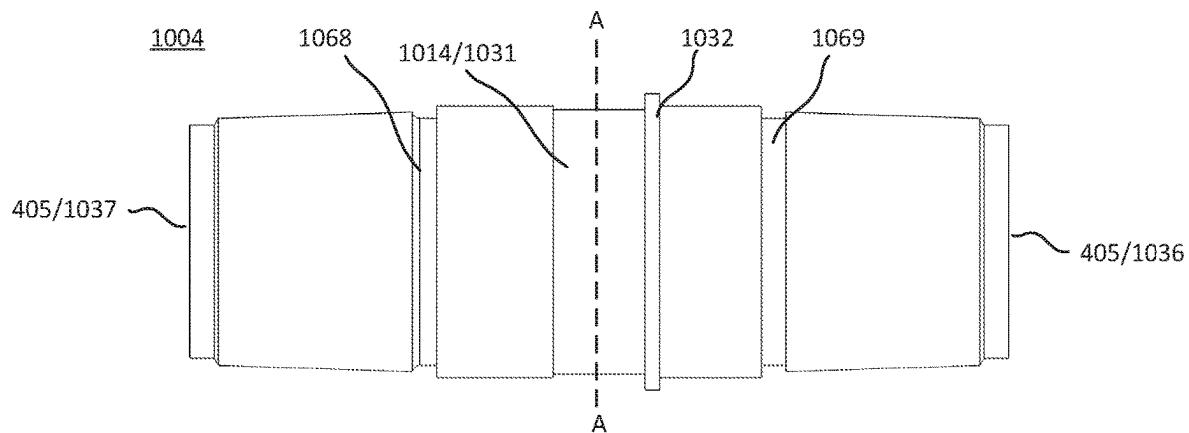


FIG. 10J
Base Part Side View (Sensor Element Removed)

1004

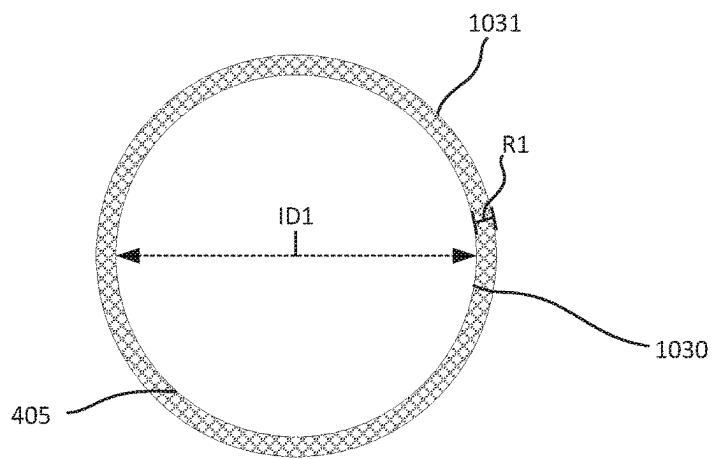


FIG. 10K
Base Part Cross Section (A-A)

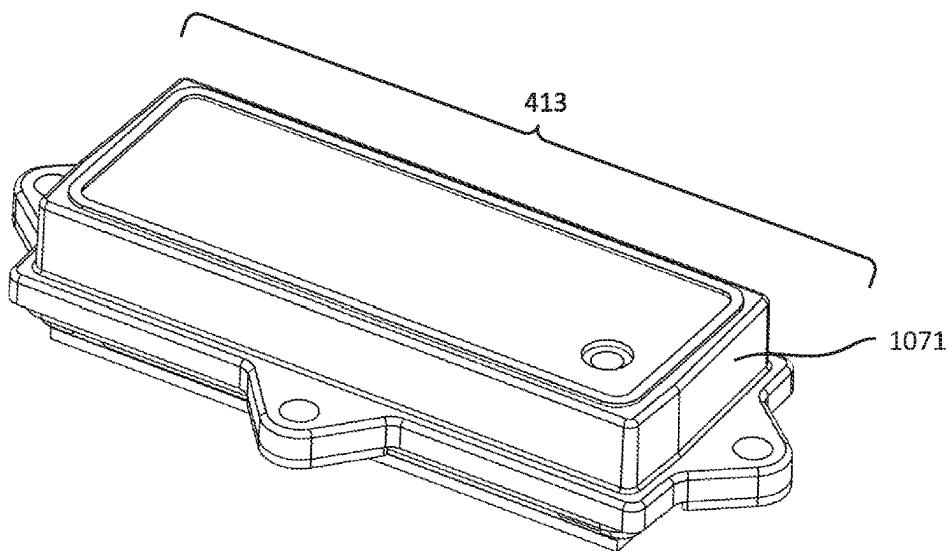


FIG. 10L
Electronics Module Top Perspective View

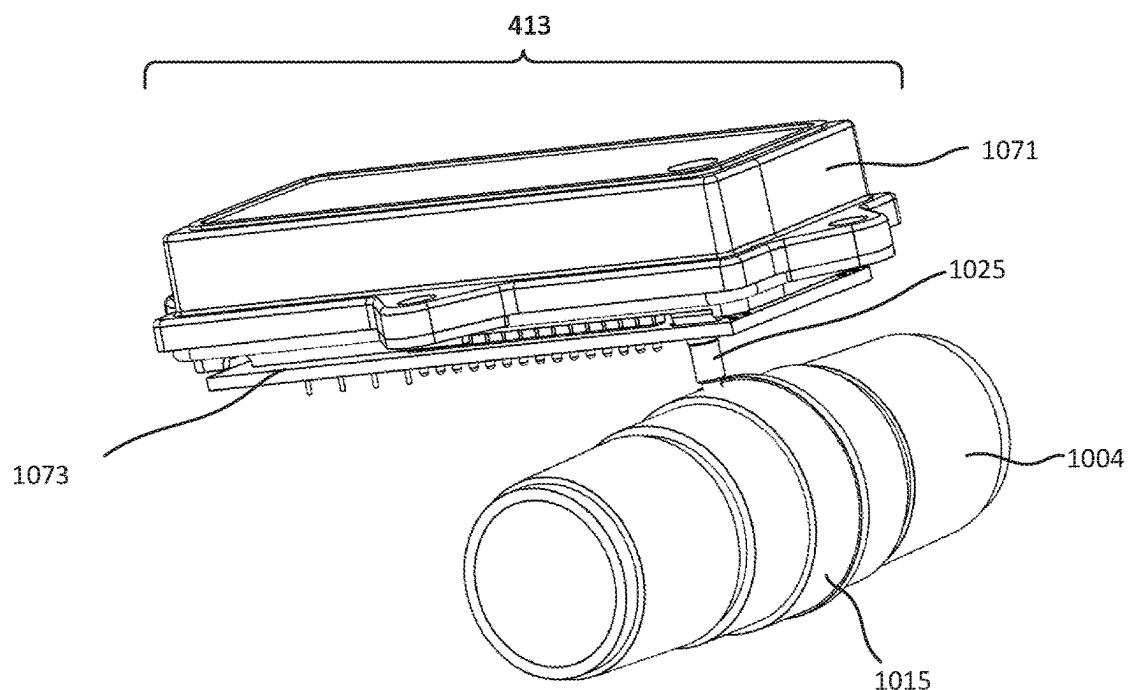


FIG. 10M
Partial Assembly Perspective View

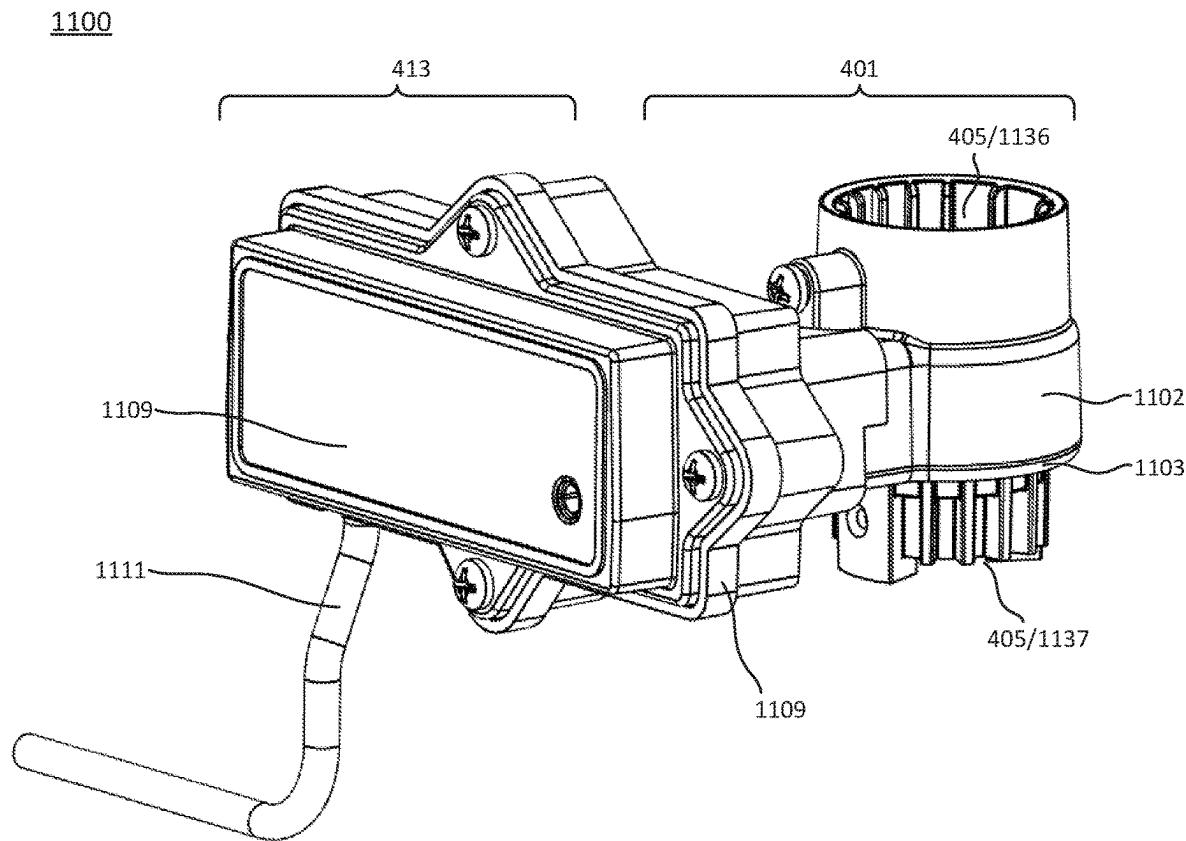


FIG. 11A

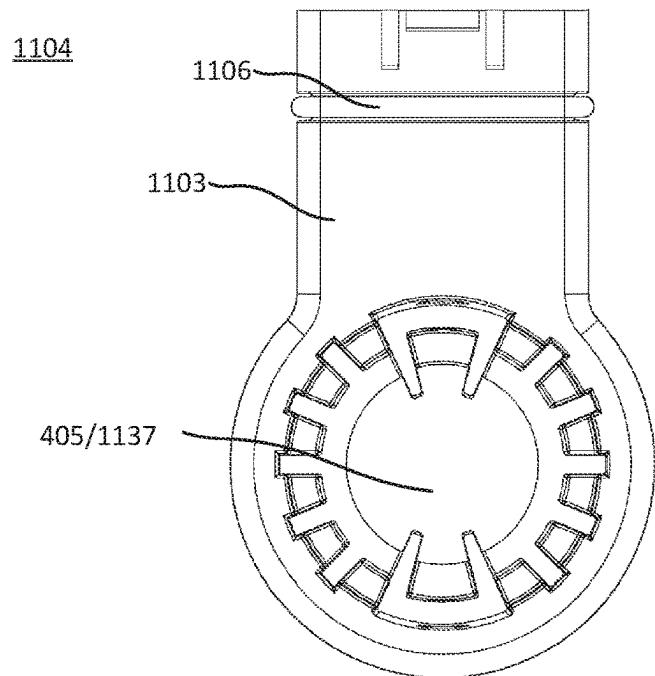


FIG. 11B
Sensor Housing Bottom View

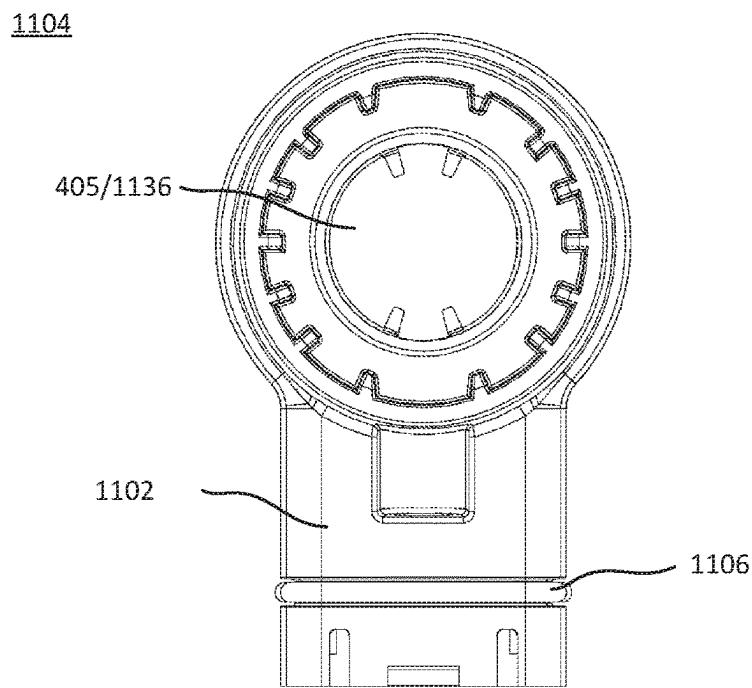


FIG. 11C
Sensor Housing Top View

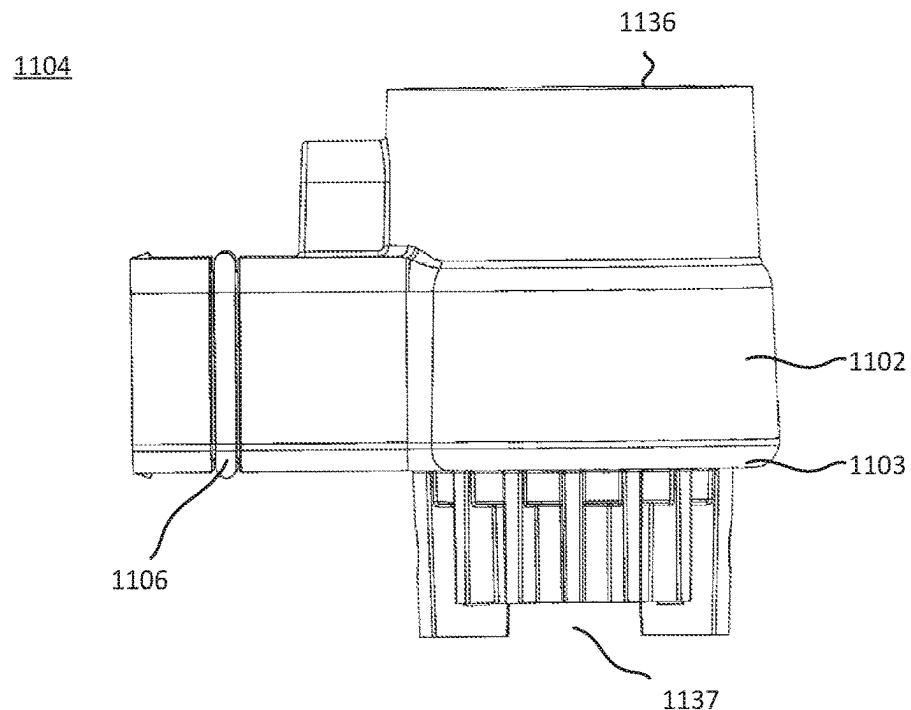


FIG. 11D
Sensor Housing Left Side View

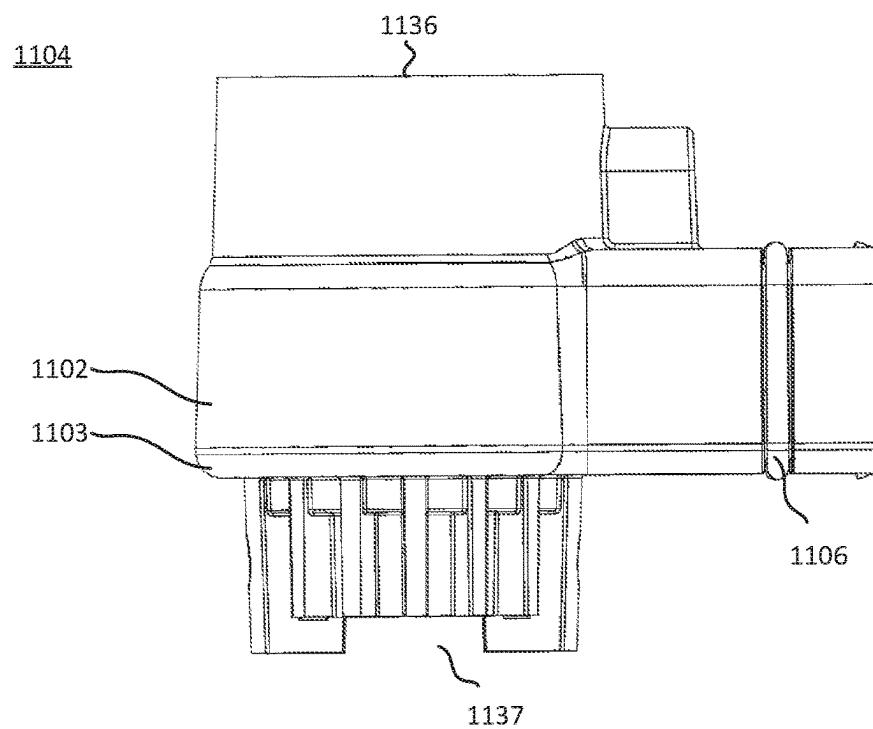


FIG. 11E
Sensor Housing Right Side View

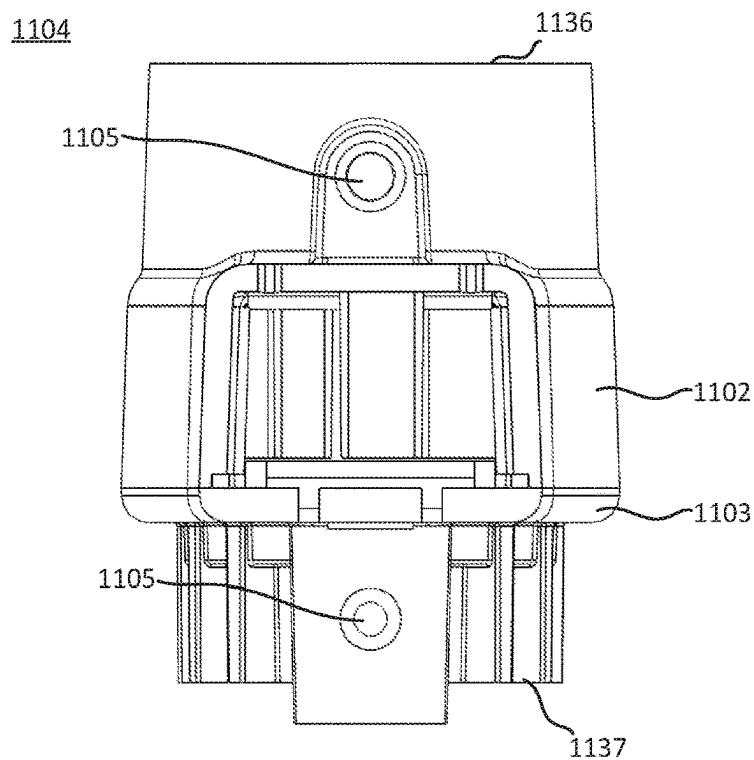


FIG. 11F

Sensor Housing Back View

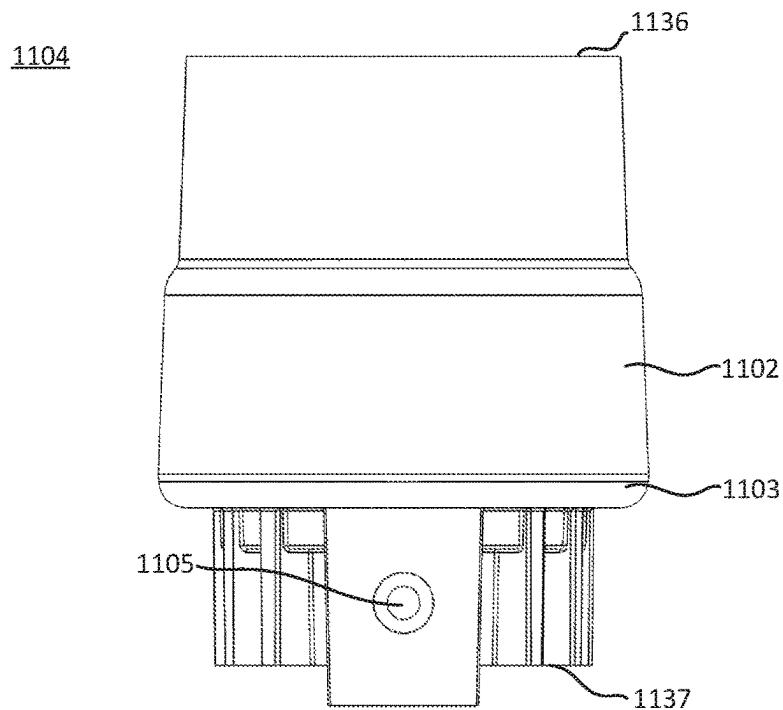


FIG. 11G

Sensor Housing Front View

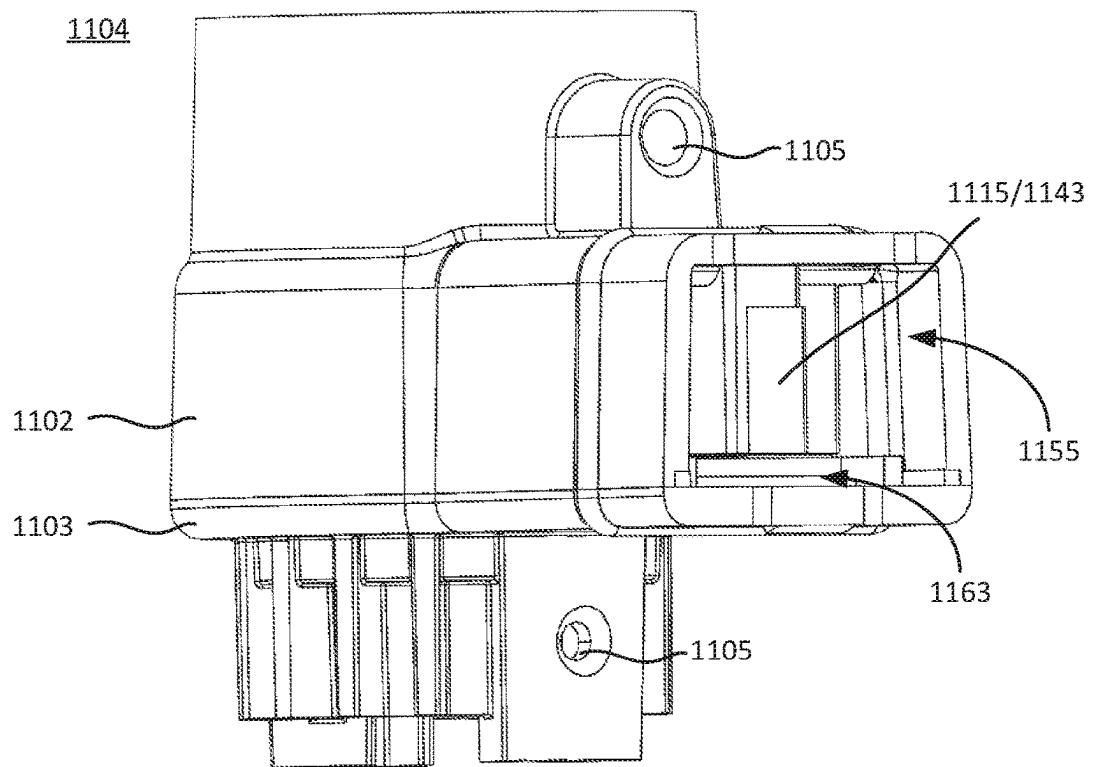


FIG. 11H
Sensor Housing Back Left Perspective

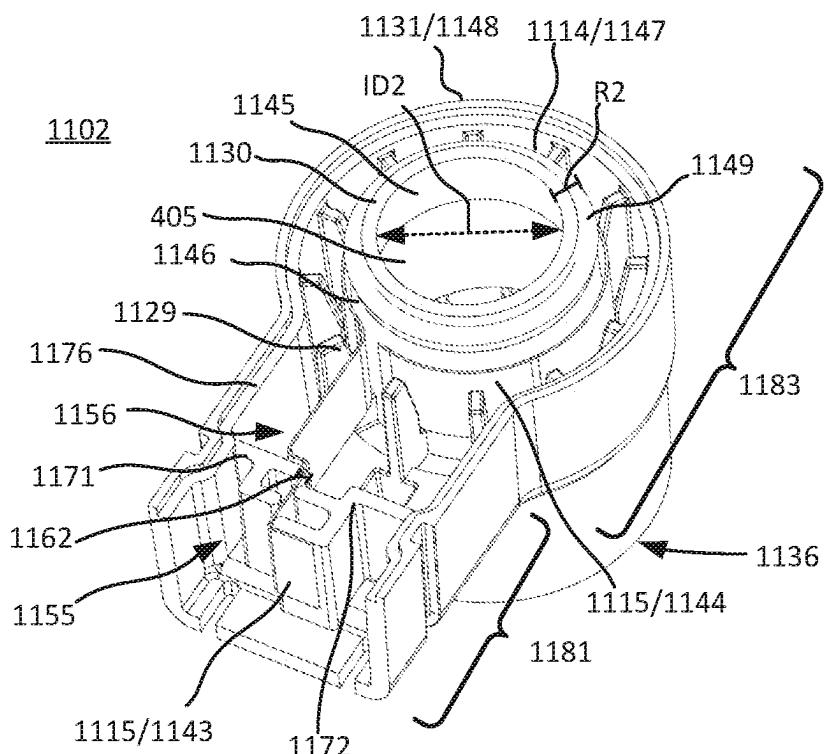


FIG. 11

Sensor Cover with Base Removed

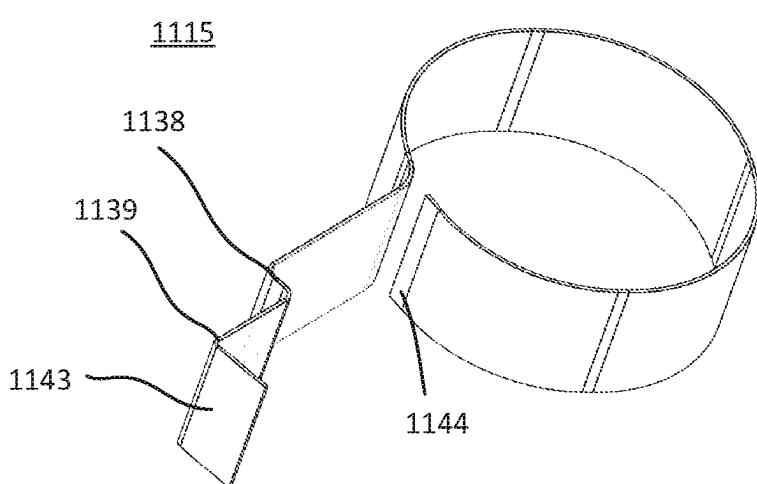


FIG. 11J
Sensor Element

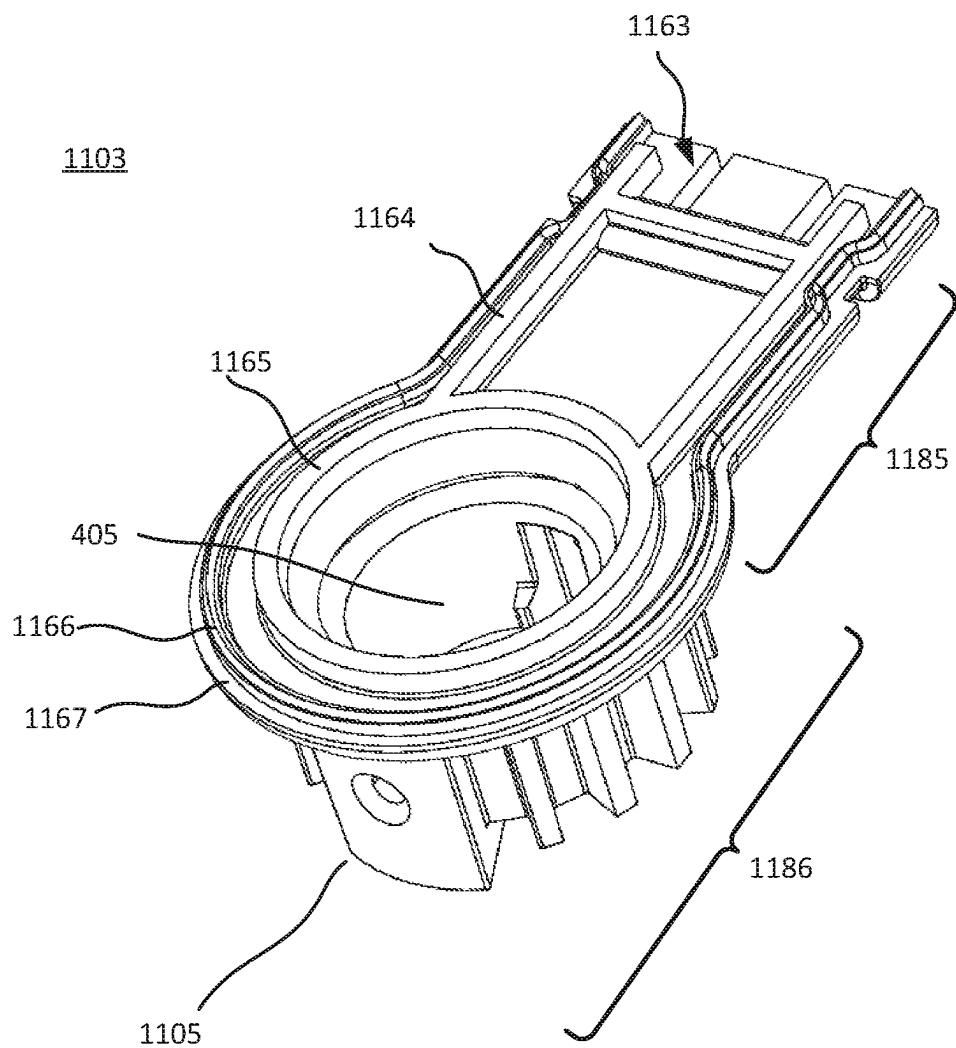


FIG. 11K
Sensor Base Perspective

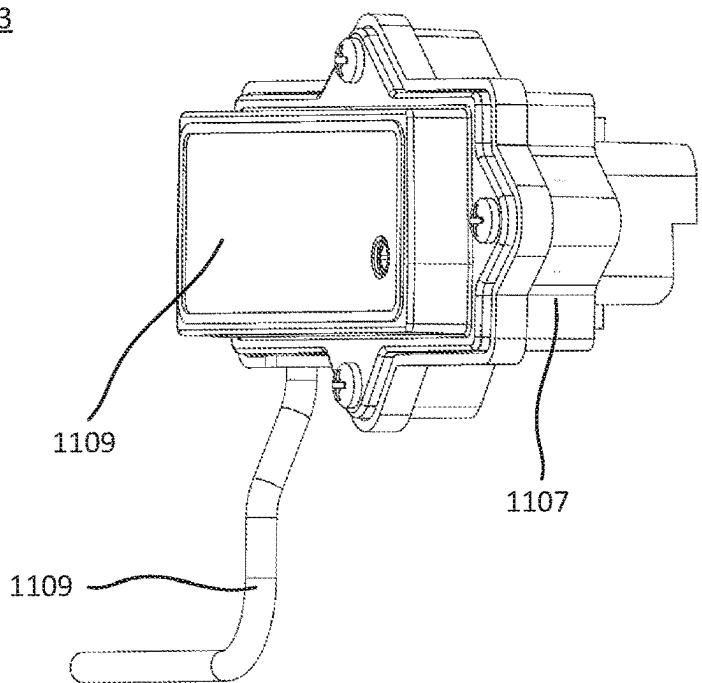
413

FIG. 11L

Electronics Module Front Perspective

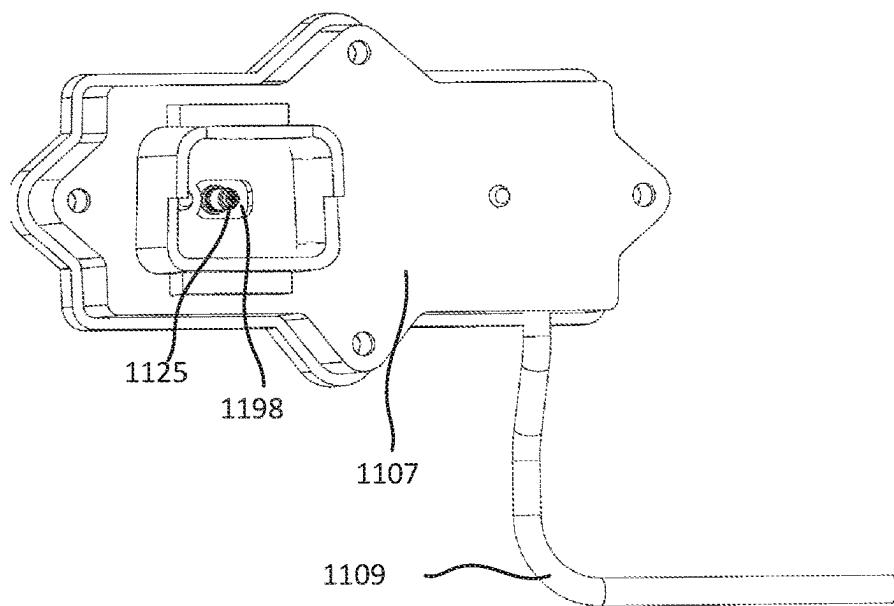
413

FIG. 11M

Electronics Module Rear Perspective

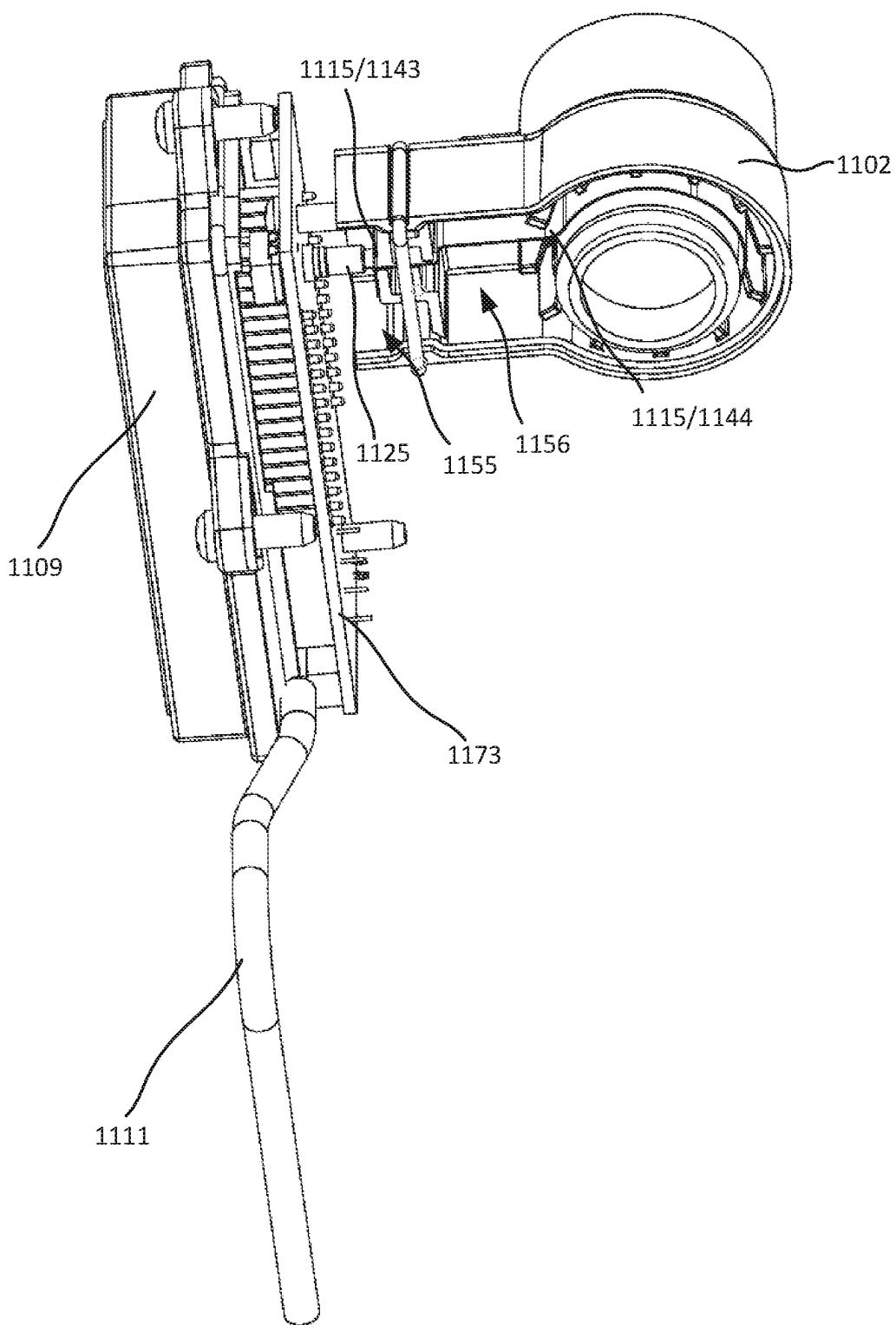


FIG. 11N
Partial Assembly Perspective View

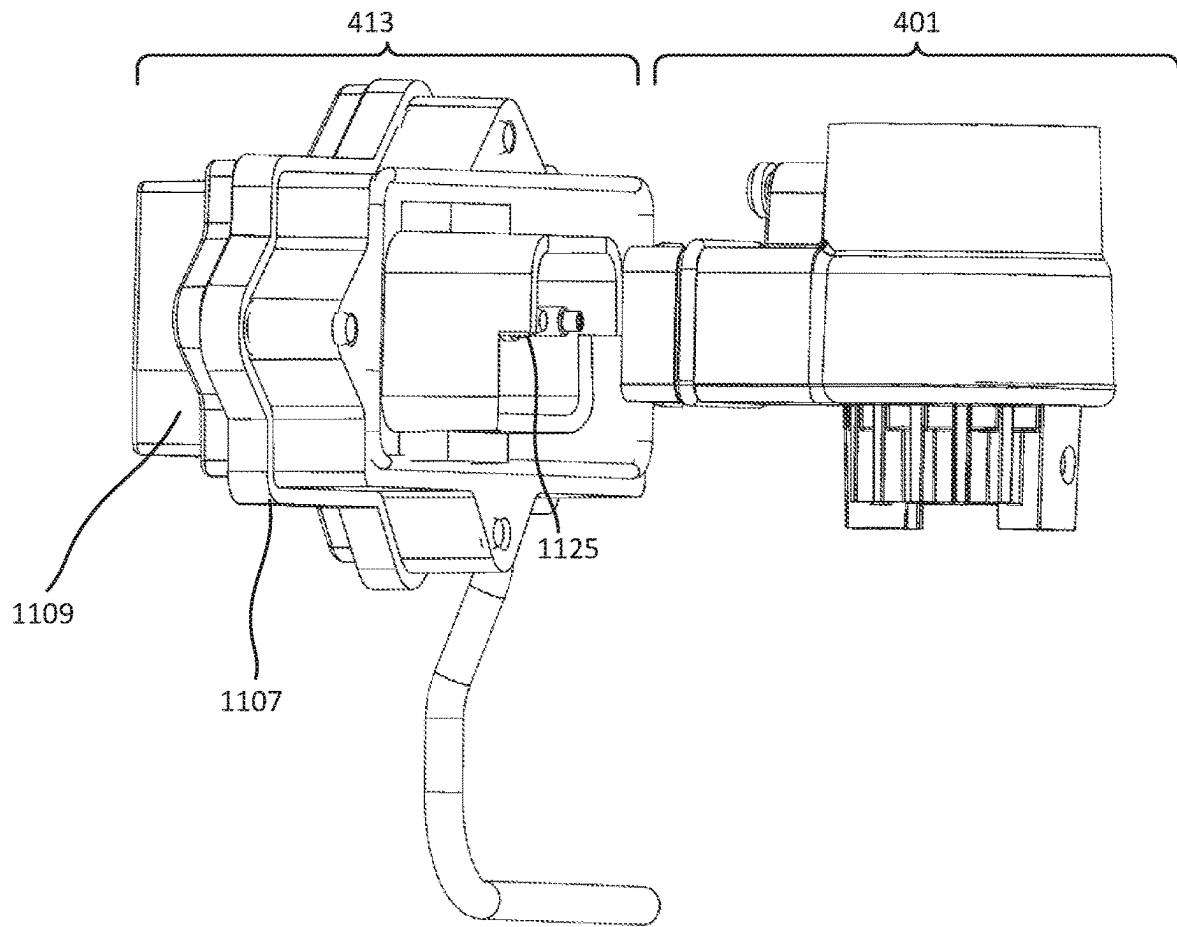


FIG. 110

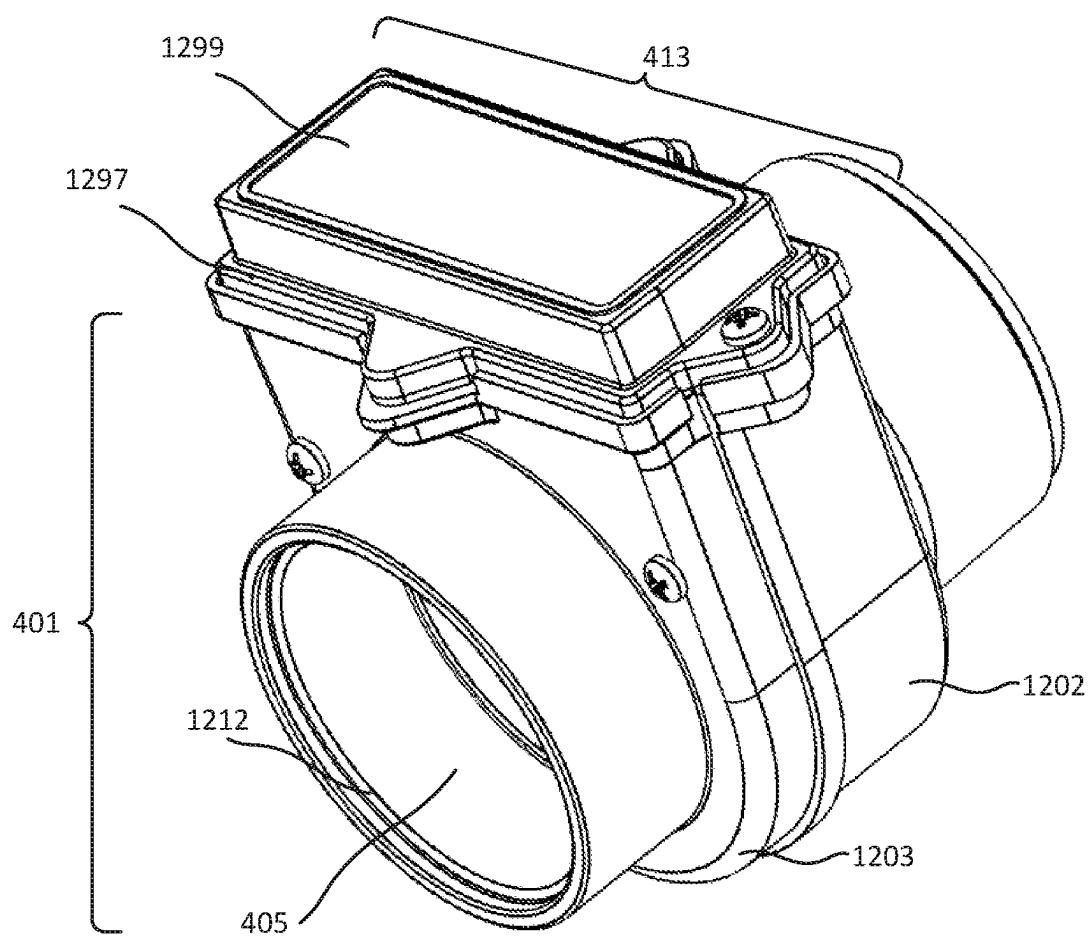
1200

FIG. 12A

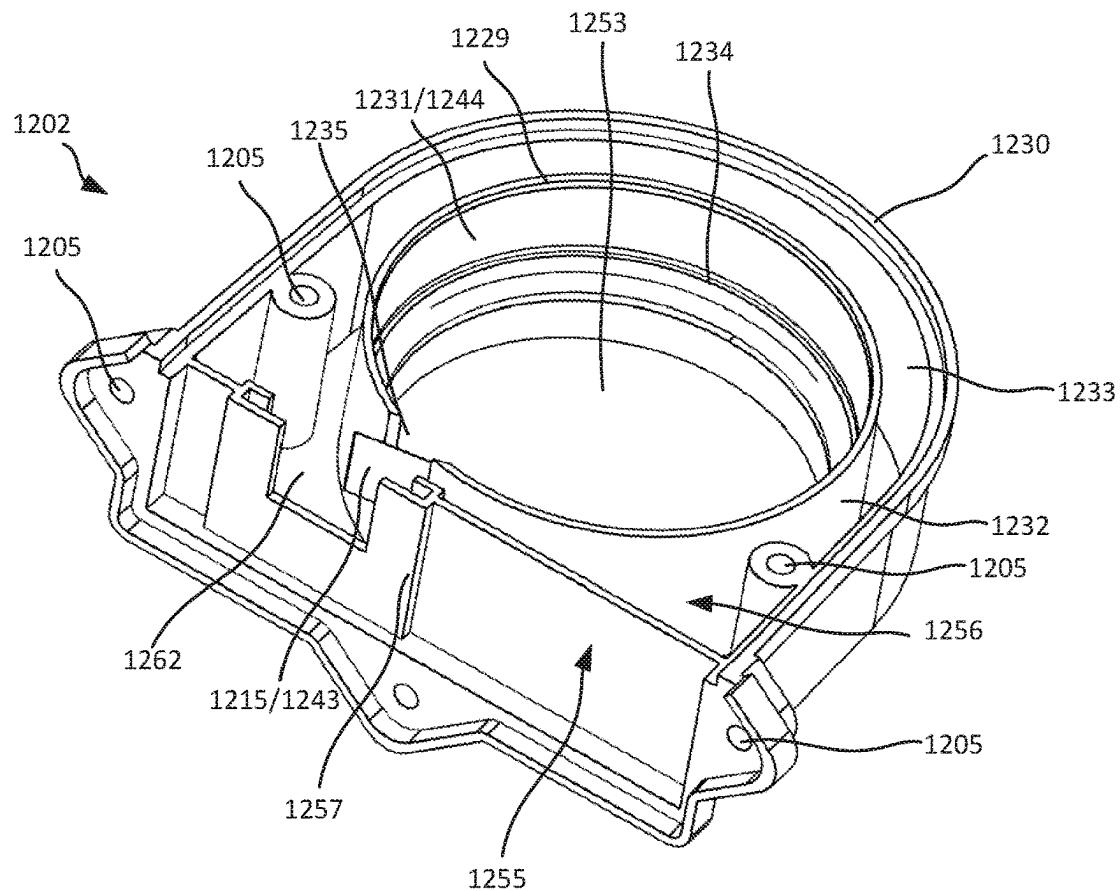


FIG. 12B

Sensor Cover with Sensor Installed

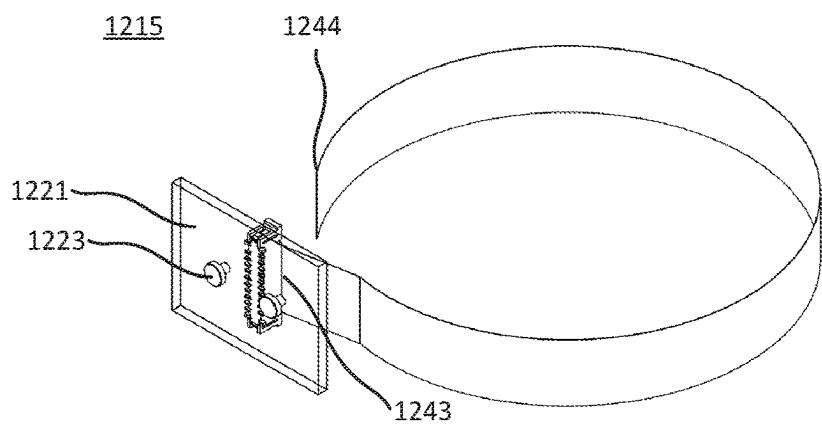


FIG. 12C

Sensor Element

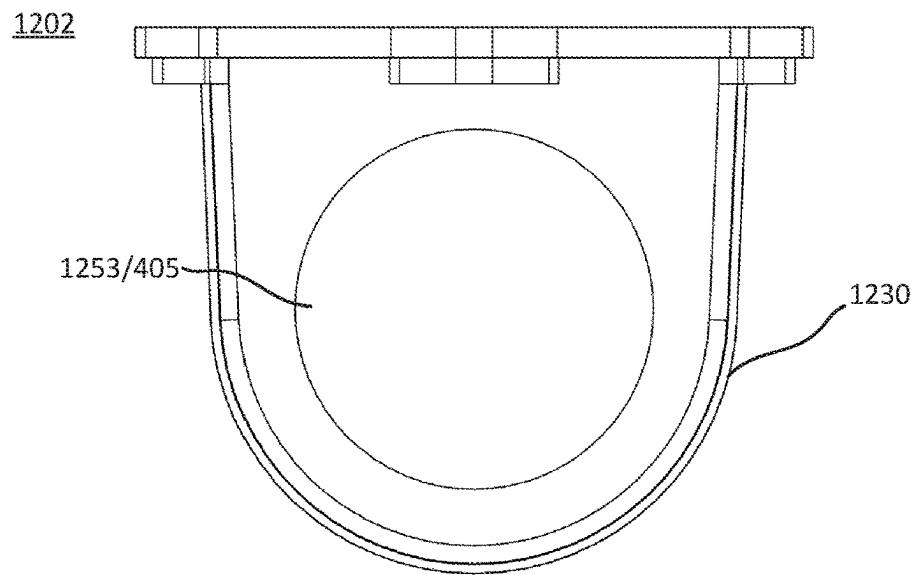


FIG. 12D
Sensor Cover Top View

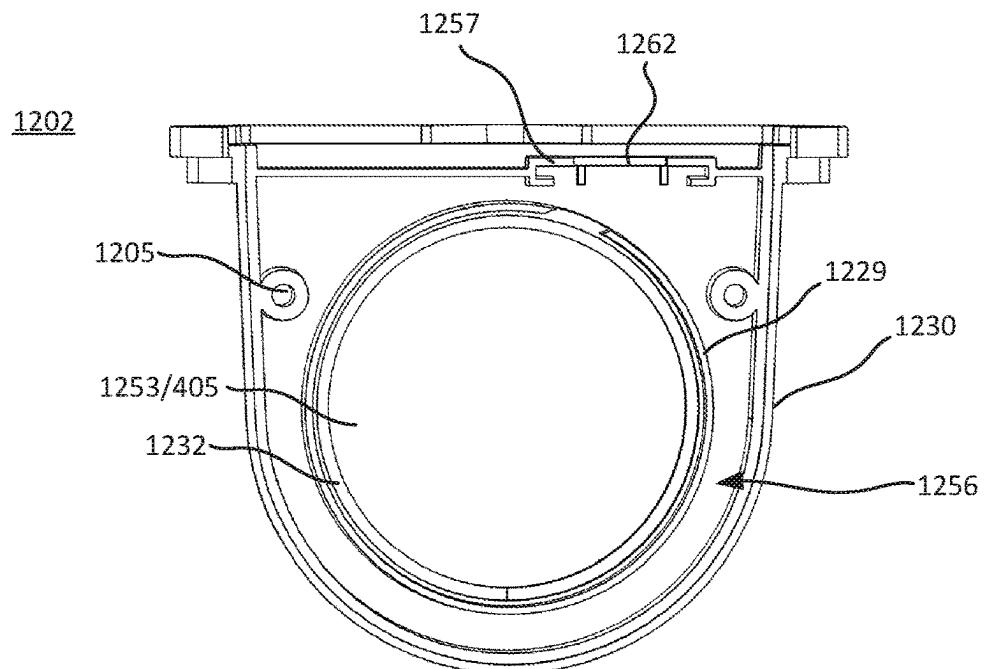


FIG. 12E
Sensor Cover Bottom View

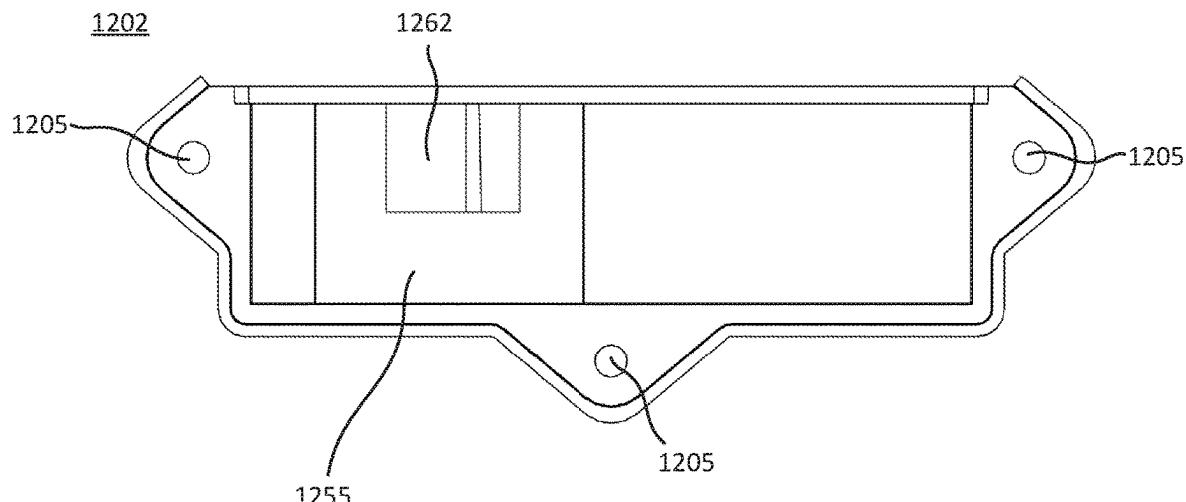


FIG. 12F
Sensor Cover Front View

1202

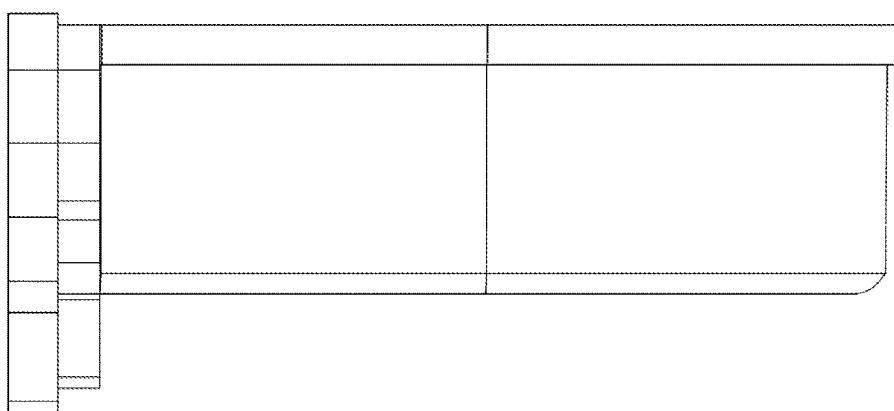


FIG. 12G
Sensor Cover Side View

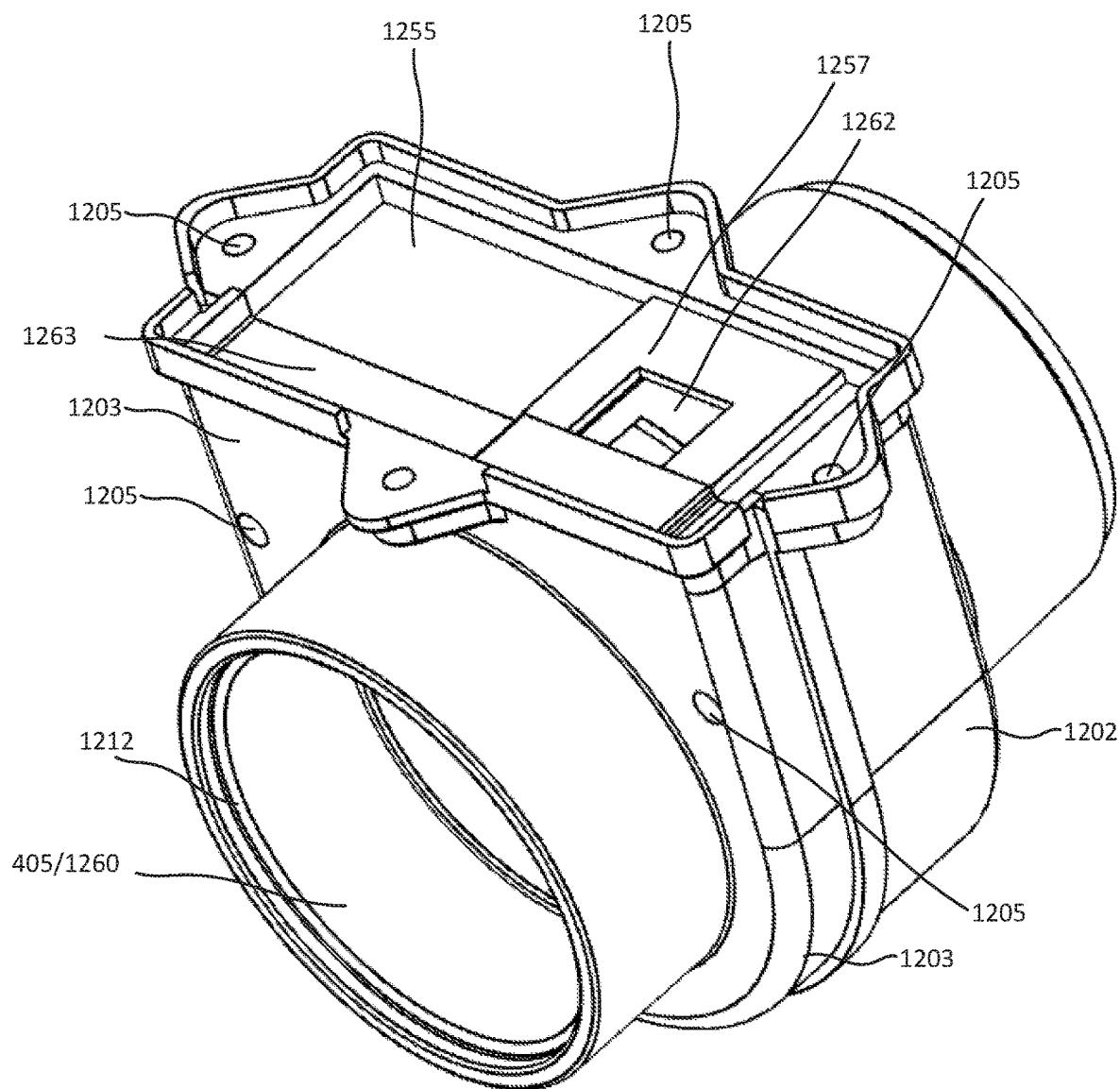


FIG. 12H
Sensor Housing

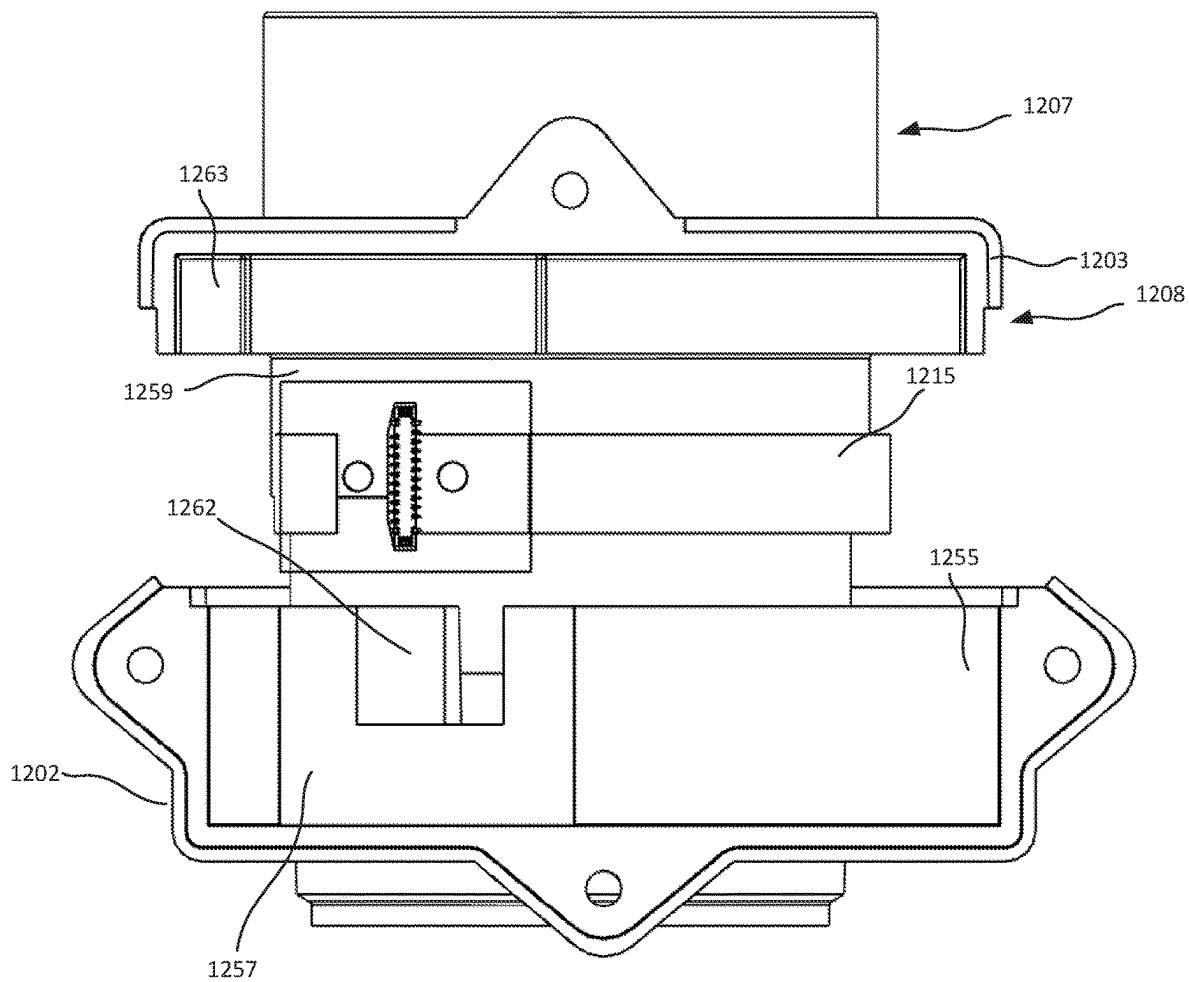


FIG. 12I
Exploded View

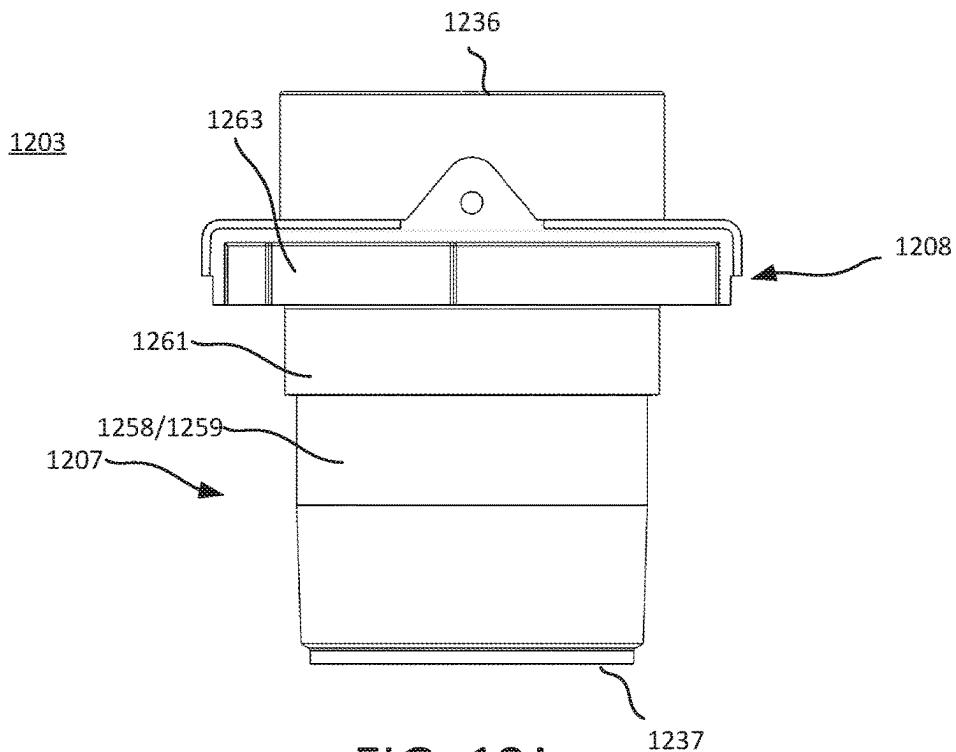


FIG. 12J

Sensor Base Front View

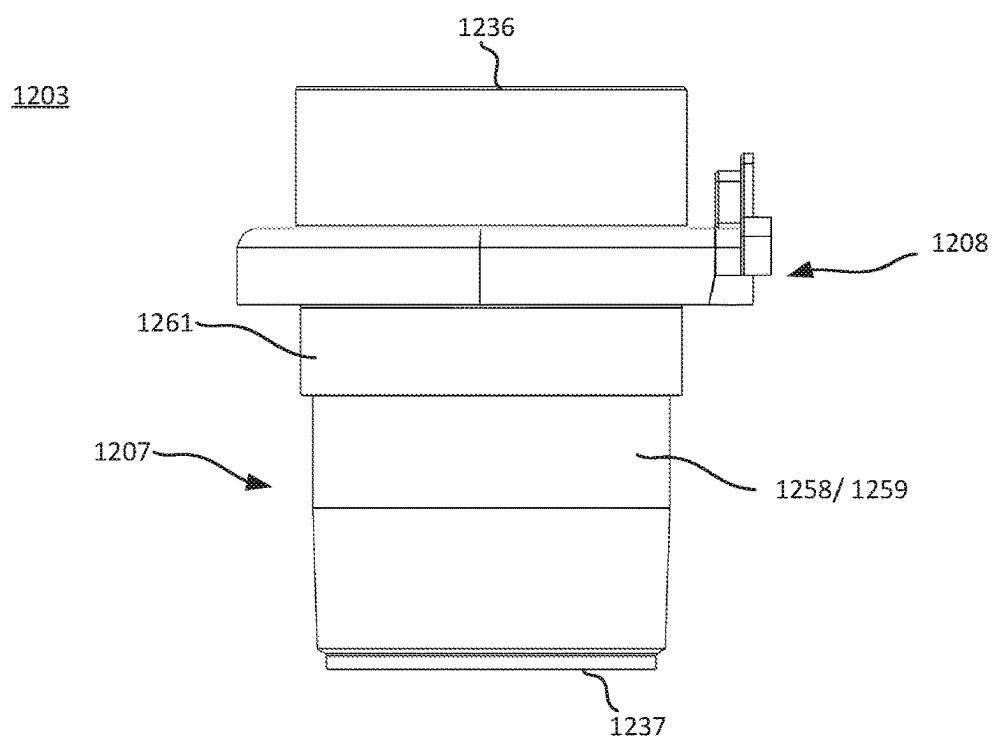


FIG. 12K

Sensor Base Side View

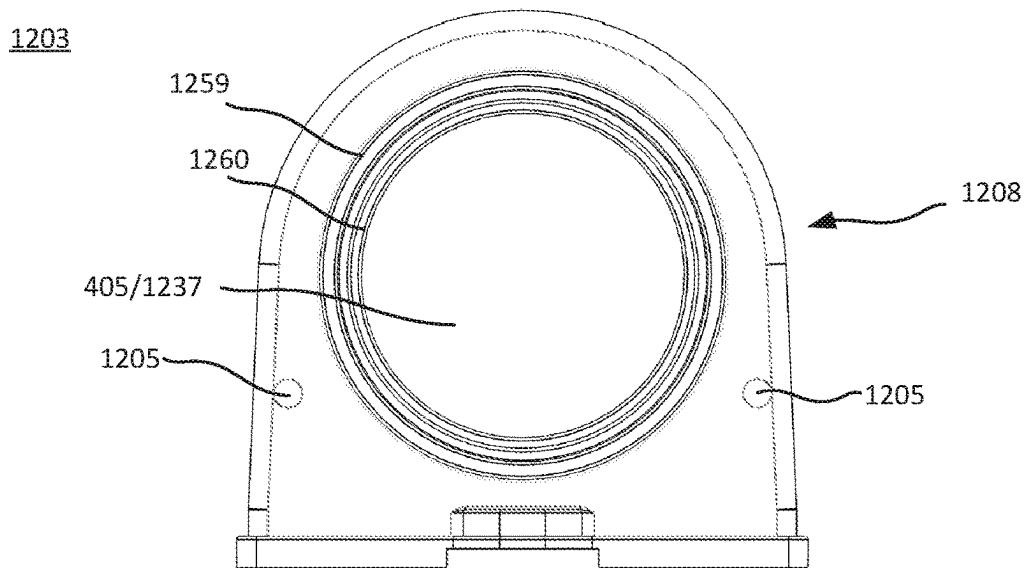


FIG. 12L
Sensor Base Top View

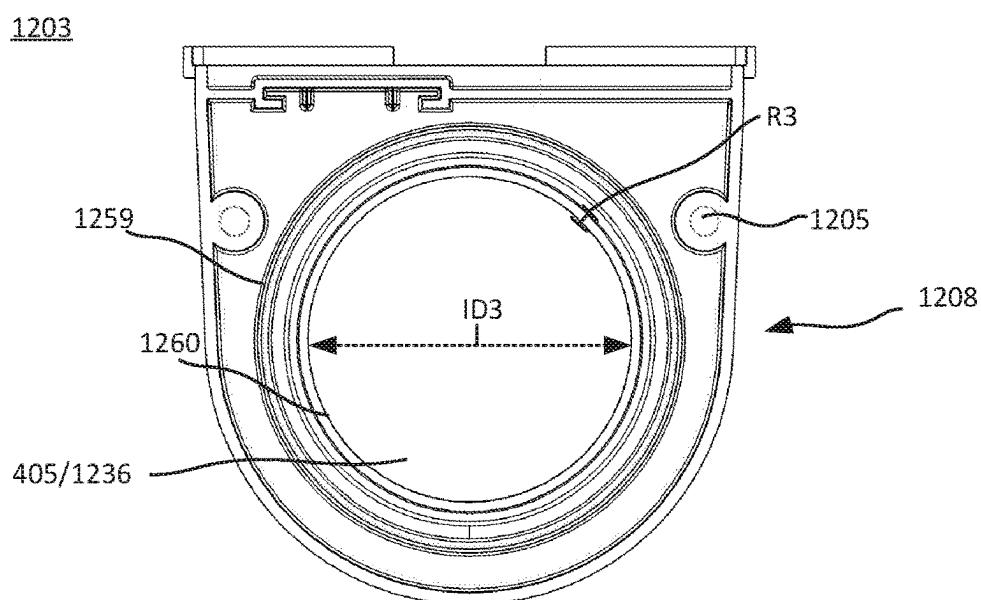


FIG. 12M
Sensor Base Bottom View

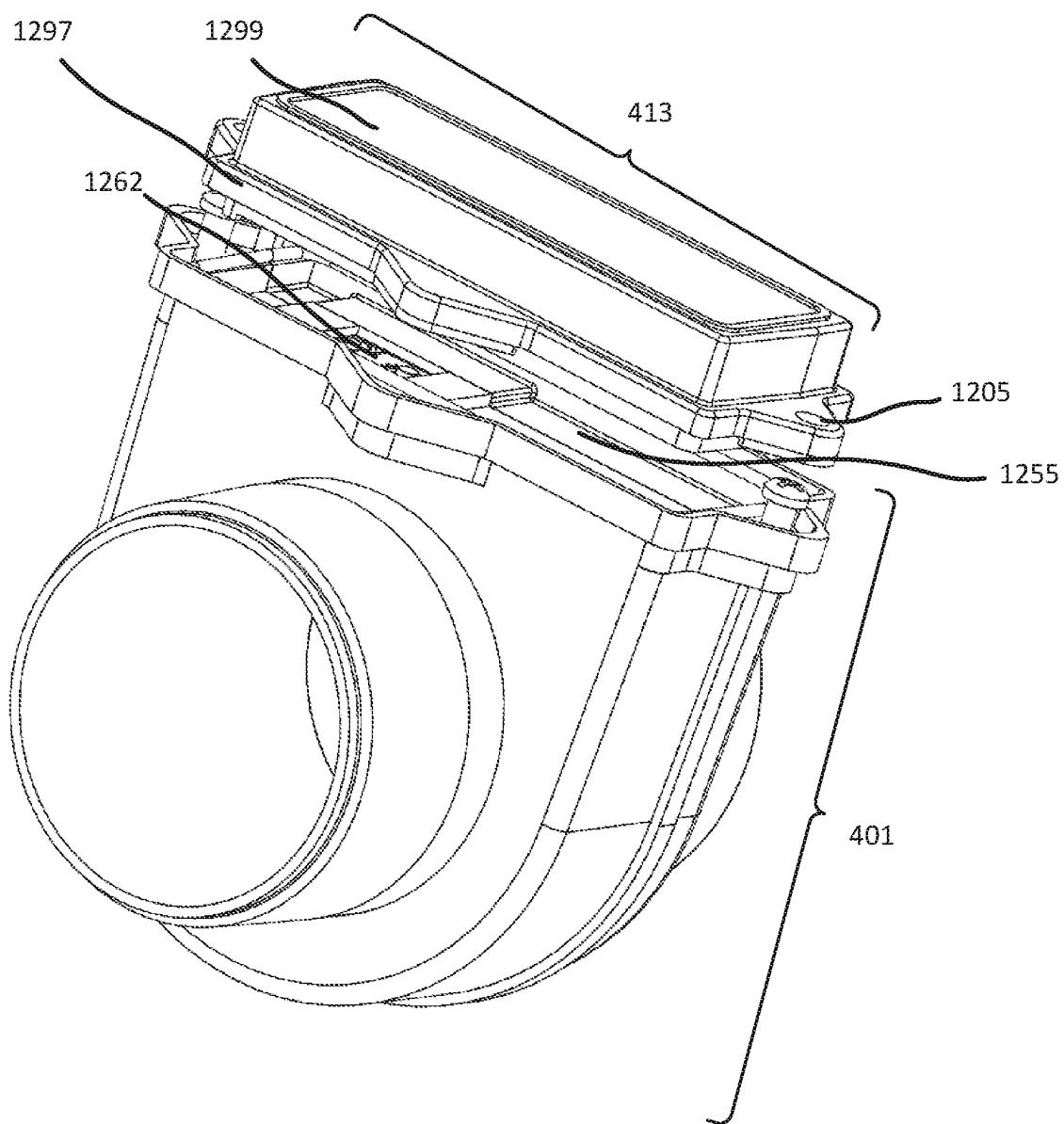


FIG. 12N
Perspective Exploded View

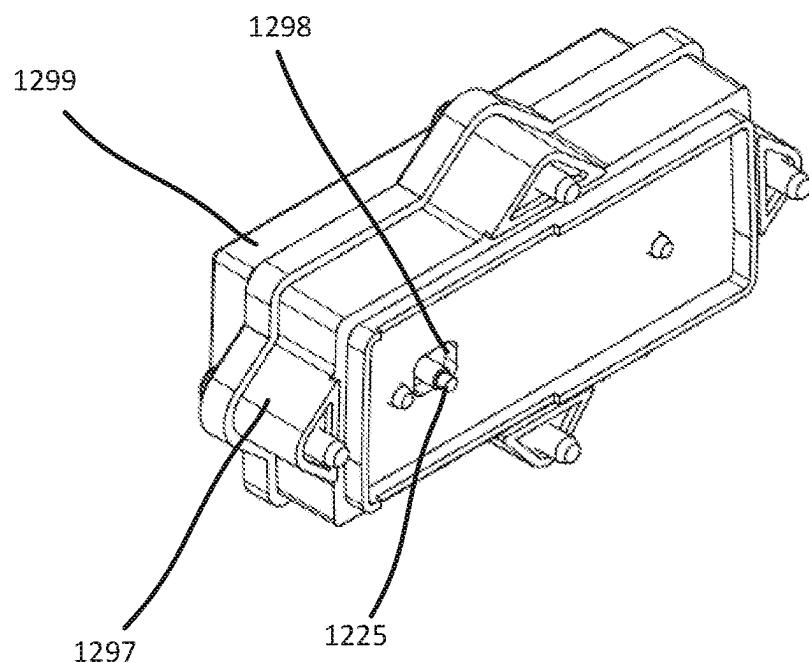
413

FIG. 120
Electronics Module

1300

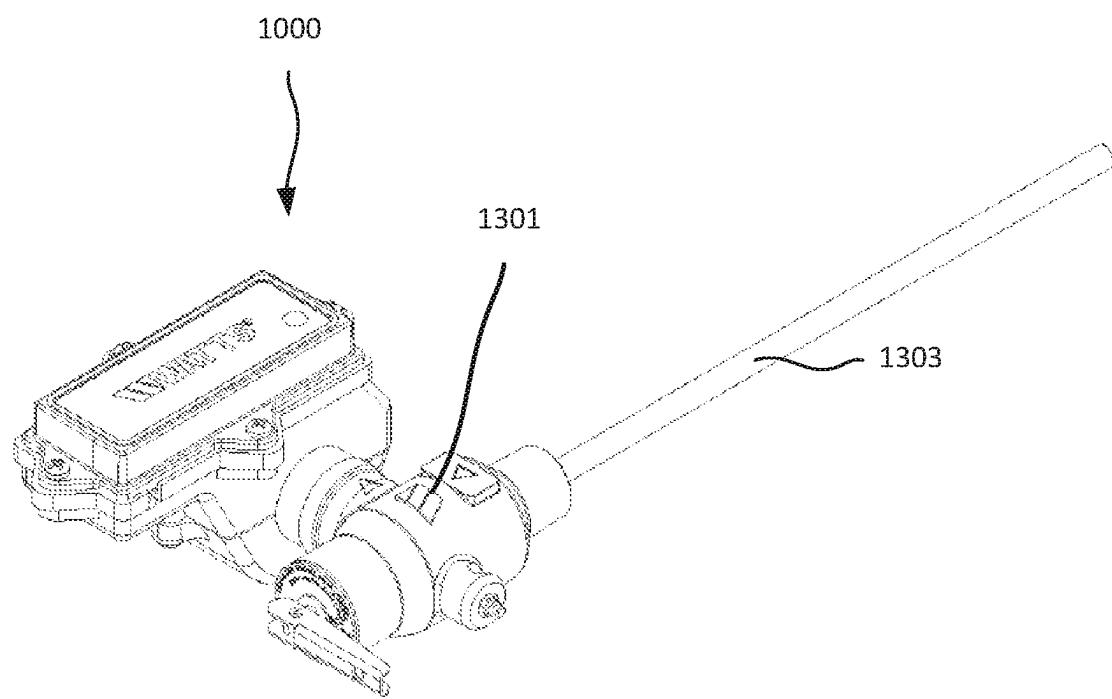


FIG. 13

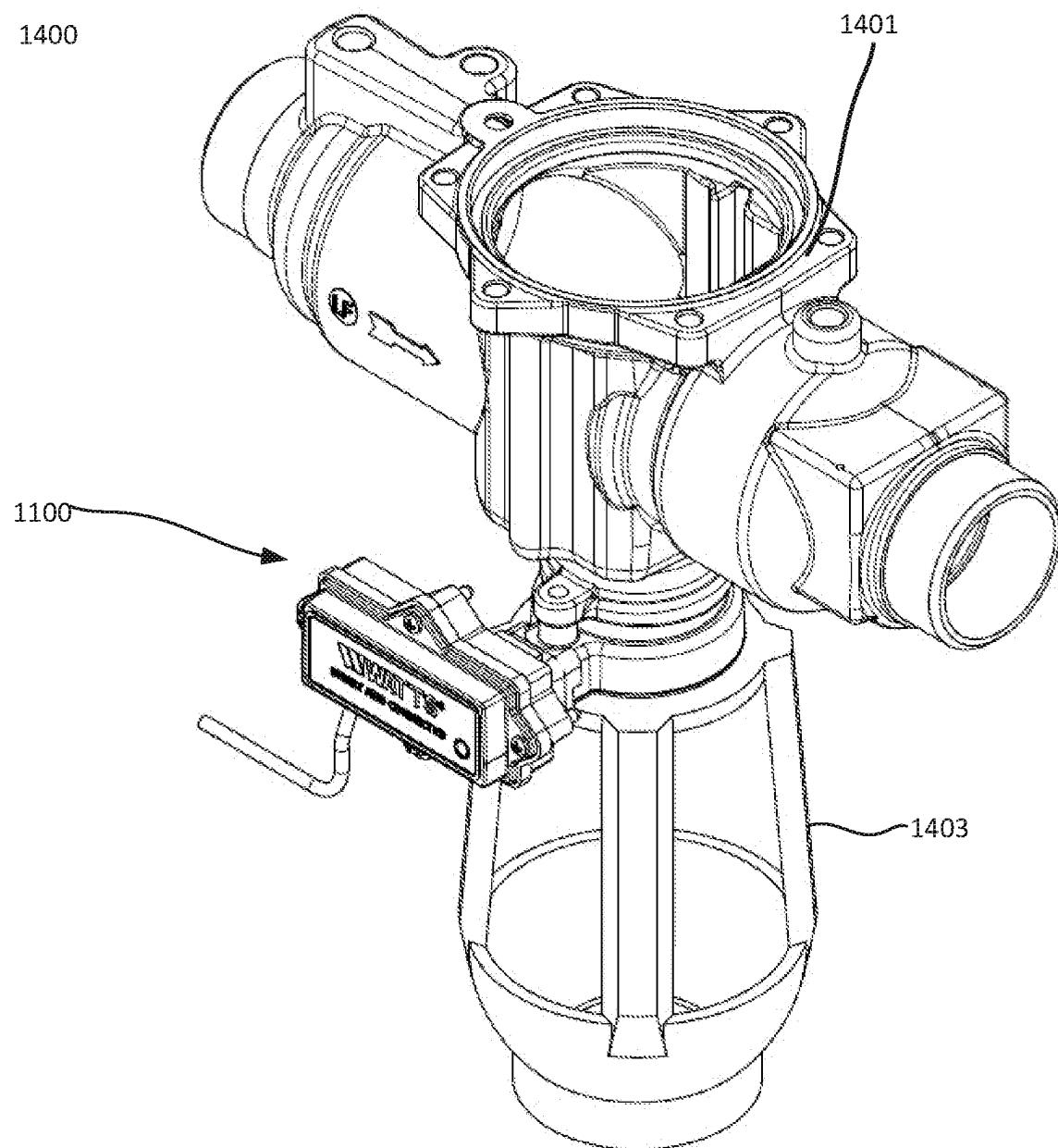


FIG. 14

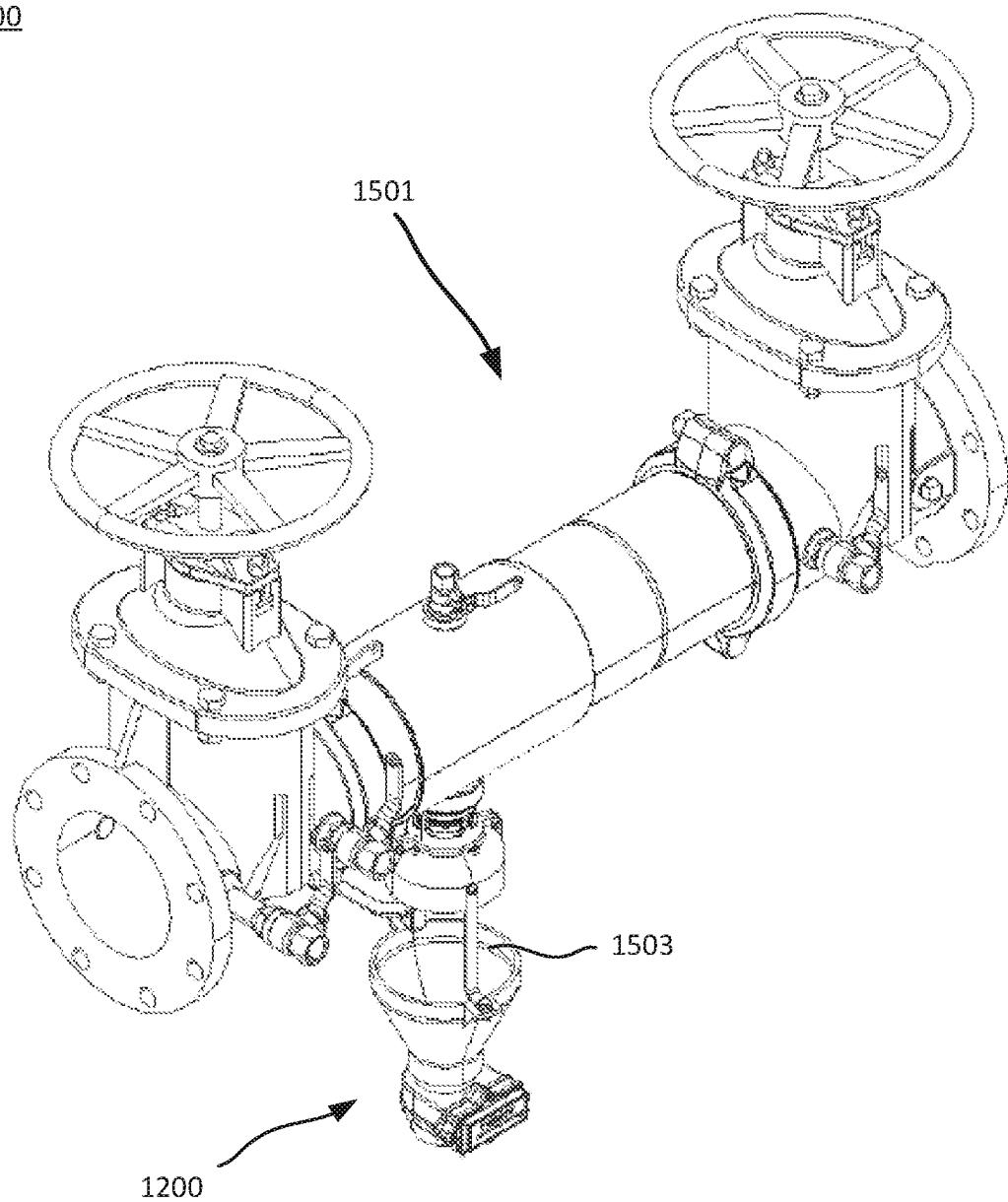
1500

FIG. 15

1**FLUID DETECTION SYSTEMS AND METHODS USING THE SAME****CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a U.S. National Stage Application of PCT/US21/62336 filed 8 Dec. 2021, and claims priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 17/115,682, filed Dec. 8, 2020, the entire contents both of which are incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure relates to fluid detection systems and methods using the same. In particular, the present disclosure relates to fluid detection systems for use with fluid supply equipment such as backflow prevention devices and relief valves.

BACKGROUND

Fluid supply systems are often configured to convey fluid (e.g., water) from a pressurized source to a destination, such as a building or other structure. For example, buildings often include a water supply system that is configured to receive a pressurized supply of water from a municipal water supply, and to convey water to various outlets such as toilets, faucets, fire prevention systems, etc., within the building. When the water is provided at a sufficient pressure, it will be pressurized against and can flow through the outlets in a forward direction. If pressure is lost or reduced below a threshold amount, however, a “backflow” condition may arise in which the water flows backwards toward the source. As fluid backflow may contaminate the source, technologies such as backflow preventers have been developed to limit or prevent fluid backflow.

FIG. 1 depicts one example of a fluid supply system 100 that includes a backflow preventer. System 100 includes a strainer 101 that is coupled to an inlet 103 that receives a fluid (e.g., water) from a supply, such as a municipal water supply. Strainer 101 is coupled to an inlet side of backflow preventer 105. The outlet side of backflow preventer 105 is coupled to a proximal end of a supply pipe 111. Backflow preventer includes an upstream shutoff valve 107, a double check valve assembly (DCVA) 108, and a downstream shutoff valve 109. The distal end of supply pipe 111 conveys water to a destination, such as a building. Backflow preventer 105 is also coupled to a discharge pipe 113. In normal operation fluid such as water is conveyed under pressure from the supply to inlet 103. The pressure from the supply sufficiently biases the fluid in the forward direction to keep the check valves in DCVA 108 open and allow the fluid to flow through pipe 111 to the destination/building in a forward direction. When pressure is lost upstream of backflow preventer 105, however, one or both of the check valves in DCVA 108 will close to prevent backflow of fluid into the supply.

Backflow preventer 105 may operate in a normal (flow) condition for many years without any backflow events. During that time, mechanical components within backflow preventer 105 may corrode or otherwise degrade such that they might not function as intended during a backflow event. For example, one or more of the double check valves in DCVA 108 may not fully close during a backflow event, resulting in leakage of back flowing fluid. To address that issue backflow preventer 105 is fluidly coupled to a dis-

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charge pipe 113, and is configured to direct fluid leaking through DCVA 108 in a backflow condition to discharge pipe 113 such that the leaking fluid does not enter the supply. While redirecting leaking fluid into discharge pipe 113 can prevent contamination of the supply, the discharge of fluid from discharge pipe 113 may be problematic. For example, fluid discharged from discharge pipe 113 may flood the surrounding environment, which may cause substantial damage—particularly when the outlet of discharge pipe 113 is within a mechanical room of a building.

Systems have been developed to detect fluid flow through a discharge flow path, such as may occur during a backflow event. FIG. 2. illustrates one such system. System 200 includes a gate valve 201, a strainer 101, an automatic valve control 203, a backflow preventer 105, a flow sensor 212, and a controller 217. Under normal operation, pressurized fluid is provided by a supply and flows/is pressured in a forward direction through the gate valve 201, strainer 101, automatic valve control 203, and backflow preventer 105. Like system 100, backflow may occur when pressure is lost upstream of backflow preventer 105, but such backflow may be stopped or substantially stopped by backflow preventer 105. Back flowing fluid that may leak through backflow preventer 105 (i.e., leakage fluid) may be directed into a discharge pipe 113, where it may flow through an air gap 205, into a vertical discharge conduit 207, and then into a horizontal discharge conduit 209.

System 200 further includes a flow detector 211 coupled in-line with horizontal discharge conduit 209. Flow detector 211 includes a flow sensor 212 that includes one or more probes 213 that extend into a discharge flow path 215. Flow sensor 212 is generally configured to monitor the voltage of probes 213 in order to determine whether there is liquid within discharge flow path 215 that is coupled in line with horizontal discharge conduit 209. If liquid is detected in discharge flow path 215, controller 217 may cause automatic valve control 203 to actuate one or more gate valves to physically prevent liquid flow toward and/or from the supply, toward and/or from the building, or both.

Although effective, flow detector 211 is not without certain limitations. For example, probes 213 of flow detector 211 must extend into and thus partially obstruct discharge flow path 215, which may be undesirable. Moreover, due to the nature of probes 213, flow detector 211 needs to be installed into a horizontal length of discharge flow path 215. This can impose a meaningful limitation on the manner in which system 200 may be configured within a mechanical room or other confined space. The orientation of probes 213 may also make it difficult for flow detector 211 to detect relatively small flows of fluid within discharge conduit, particularly if the fluid flow is insufficient to cause the fluid to contact probes 213.

A need therefore remains in the art for improved technologies for detecting fluid within a flow path. The present disclosure is aimed at that need.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Features and advantages of various embodiments of the claimed subject matter will become apparent as the following Detailed Description proceeds, and upon reference to the Drawings, wherein like numerals designate like parts, and in which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic drawing of a prior art fluid supply system including a backflow preventer;

FIG. 2 is a schematic drawing of a prior art fluid supply system including a backflow preventer and a discharge detection system within a length of horizontal pipe;

FIG. 3 is a schematic drawing illustrating one example of a fluid supply system including a backflow preventer and a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of one example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure;

FIGS. 5A-5P depict various views of one example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure;

FIGS. 6A and 6B are front and rear perspective views, respectively, of one example of an electronics module for a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure;

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of one example of a controller consistent with the present disclosure;

FIGS. 8A-8C are various views of one example of a backflow prevention system including a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure; and

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of one example of a method of detecting fluid, consistent with the present disclosure.

FIGS. 10A-10M depict various views of another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure.

FIGS. 11A-11O depict various views of another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure.

FIGS. 12A-12O depict various view of another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure.

FIG. 13 shows one example of a valve system coupled to a fluid detection system consistent with FIGS. 10A-10M.

FIG. 14 shows one example of a valve system coupled to a fluid detection system consistent with FIGS. 11A-11O.

FIG. 15 shows one example of a valve system coupled to a fluid detection system consistent with FIGS. 12A-12O.

Although the following Detailed Description will proceed with reference being made to illustrative embodiments, many alternatives, modifications and variations thereof will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present disclosure is directed to fluid detection systems, systems including the same, and methods using the same. In embodiments the fluid detection systems include a sensor module that includes a sensor housing. A liquid flow path (also referred to herein as a sensing conduit) extends through the sensor housing from a first inlet opening to a first outlet opening. The sensor module further includes a sensor element that is located outside the liquid flow path and which extends at least partially around a perimeter of the liquid flow path. The sensor element is configured to detect a capacitance within the liquid flow path and to provide a detection signal indicative of a detected capacitance within the liquid flow path. The sensor element is also configured to communicatively couple to a controller within an electronics module.

The sensor modules described herein may optionally include an air flow path that extends through the sensor housing, e.g., from a second inlet opening to a second outlet opening. The air flow path is configured to allow air or another gas to flow, e.g., when the fluid detection system is coupled to another component of a fluid supply system such as a backflow preventer or a relief valve. In embodiments, at least a portion of the liquid flow path and at least a portion of the air flow path extend parallel or substantially parallel to each other.

The sensor modules described herein may also include a sensor channel that is generally configured to house at least a portion of the sensor element. In embodiments the sensor channel is at least partially disposed outside the perimeter of the liquid flow path, and at least a portion of the sensor element is within the sensor channel. In such embodiments the sensor element does not obstruct any part of the liquid flow path due to its position and configuration.

The sensor element may include several parts (or portions), which may be coupled to or integral with one another. For example, the sensor element may include a first portion and a second portion, wherein the first portion is disposed around at least a portion of the perimeter of the liquid flow path. In such embodiments the second portion of the second element may be configured to communicatively couple to the controller, e.g., within the electronics module. Of course, sensor elements with one or greater than two portions may also be used. The liquid flow path may have any suitable shape and the first portion of the sensor element may substantially correspond to that shape. For example, at least a portion of the liquid flow path may have a circular, c shape, or d shape cross section, and the first portion of the sensor element may have a corresponding circular, c shape, or d shape cross section.

In embodiments the fluid detection systems described herein include the electronics module and the controller. In such embodiments the controller may be located within the electronics module, i.e., within a housing of the electronics module (hereinafter, the "electronics housing"). The electronics housing may be configured to physically couple to the sensor housing such that the sensor element is communicatively coupled to the controller. Physical coupling of the electronics module and the sensor housing may be accomplished in any suitable manner. In some embodiments the electronics housing and sensor housing may be integral with one another. In other embodiments, the electronics housing may be detachable from the sensor housing. In such instances the electronics housing may be configured such that the sensor element is communicatively coupled within the controller when the electronics housing and sensor housing are in an assembled state. Physical decoupling of the electronics housing from the sensor housing may, in some embodiments, break communication between the sensor element and the controller.

The controller is generally configured to receive a detection signal from the sensor module and determine whether fluid is present within the liquid flow path based at least in part on the detection signal. In embodiments the sensor signal is indicative of a capacitance within the liquid flow path that is detected by the sensor element, and the controller is configured to determine the capacitance detected by the sensor element (i.e., the detected capacitance) based at least in part on the detection signal. The controller may then compare the detected capacitance to a capacitance threshold and determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path based at least in part on that comparison. The controller may record a wet event (e.g., in a memory thereof) when it determines that liquid is present in the liquid flow path. In contrast, the controller may discard a reading and/or record a dry event when it determines that liquid is not present in the liquid flow path. In embodiments, the controller is configured to determine that liquid is present within the liquid flow path when the detected capacitance is at or above the capacitance threshold, and to determine that liquid is not within the liquid flow path when the detected capacitance is above the capacitance threshold. In embodiments the determination of whether a wet event is occurring may

depend on whether the controller determines that the detected capacitance within the liquid flow path remains above or below the threshold capacitance for at least a (first) threshold period of time (i.e., for at least a first measurement period).

The controller may also be configured to determine whether a flood event is occurring. The controller may make that determination by comparing a total number of wet events within a (second) measurement period (i.e., a (second) threshold period of time) to a threshold number of wet events for that (second) measurement period. If the comparison indicates that total number of wet events recorded within the (second) measurement period is greater than or equal to the threshold number of wet events for the (second) measurement period, the controller may record a flood event. If the total number of wet events in the (second) measurement period is less than the threshold number of wet events for the (second) measurement period, however, the controller may continue to monitor for the occurrence of wet and/or flood events as previously described.

The fluid detection systems described herein may also include communications circuitry (COMMS). In embodiments the COMMS is located within the electronics housing, though it may be located elsewhere (e.g., in the sensor housing). The COMMS is generally configured to communicate with one or more external devices (e.g., cell phones, smart phones, computers, tablets, combinations thereof, and the like), e.g., via a wired or wireless communication protocol. When the systems described herein include COMMS, the controller may be configured to cause the COMMS to issue an alert (e.g., wet notification and/or flood notification) to an external device via wired or wireless communication, e.g., in response to the detection of a wet event or a flood event, respectively. Alternatively, or additionally, the controller may issue an alert in another form, such as an audio, visual, or audiovisual alert that is configured to notify a user of the occurrence of a wet and/or flood event.

In embodiments the fluid detection systems described herein further include a calibration module that is configured to establish a baseline capacitance within the liquid flow path. The calibration module may be in the electronics module, the sensor module, or another other suitable location. In any case, the controller may be configured to set the capacitance threshold relative to the baseline capacitance, e.g., to improve the controller's ability to accurately detect the occurrence of wet and flood events. For example, the controller may be configured to set the capacitance threshold above the baseline capacitance by a predetermined margin. Alternatively, or in addition to a calibration module, the capacitance threshold may be set by a physical component of the electronics module (e.g., one or more jumpers such as dip switches).

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of one example of a fluid supply system including a backflow preventer and a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure. Similar to system 200, system 300 includes a backflow preventer 105 and a discharge pipe 113. System 200 can also include can include a gate valve 201, strainer 101, and automatic valve control 203, but such components are not required. When used, the gate valve 201 includes an inlet that is fluidly coupled to a fluid source such as a municipal water supply. Gate valve 201 further includes a valve (not shown) that may be used to shut off the supply of fluid to system 300. Strainer 101, when used, is fluidly coupled to the gate valve 201 (or directly to the fluid source) and is configured to remove solids that may be present within a supplied fluid. Automatic

valve control 203, when used, has an inlet that is fluidly coupled to the strainer 101, gate valve 201, and/or the fluid source. Automatic valve control 203 may also have an outlet that is fluidly coupled to an inlet of a backflow preventer 105. In any case, automatic valve control 203 is configured to control one or more valves, e.g., in backflow preventer 105, automatic valve control 203, gate valve 201, etc., e.g., in response to a control signal.

Backflow preventer 105 includes an inlet and an outlet. 10 The inlet of backflow preventer 105 is fluidly coupled (or configured to be fluidly coupled) to the fluid supply and/or one or more upstream components, such as gate valve 201, strainer 101, automatic valve control 203, or the like. The outlet of backflow preventer 105 is fluidly coupled (or 15 configured to be fluidly coupled) to a destination for a supplied fluid. In this case the outlet of backflow preventer 105 is fluidly coupled to one or more outlets within a building, but backflow preventer 105 may be coupled to any type of destination, such as a storage tank, a fire hydrant, etc. 20 In general, backflow preventer 105 is configured to permit forward fluid flow under normal operating conditions (i.e., when fluid is supplied under adequate pressure), and to limit or prevent backflow of fluid in the event there is a loss of pressure.

25 Non-limiting examples of suitable backflow preventers that may be used as backflow preventer 105 include backflow preventers produced and sold by WATTS Water Technologies, Inc., such as but not limited to the WATTS 957 RPZ backflow preventer, the WATTS series LF909 reduced pressure zone assembly, the Watts 909 series backflow preventers, combinations thereof, and the like. Of course, such backflow preventers are enumerated for the sake of example only, and any suitable backflow preventer that may be used. In embodiments, backflow preventer 105 includes 30 at least one check valves that is biased in an open position by a fluid when a pressure of the fluid is above a threshold pressure, but which is in a closed position when the pressure of the fluid is below the threshold pressure.

In addition to being fluidly coupled to a fluid source and 40 a fluid destination (e.g., a building), backflow preventer 105 is also fluidly coupled (or configured to fluidly couple) to a discharge pipe 113. Consistent with the foregoing discussion, discharge pipe 113 generally functions to redirect fluid that may leak through backflow preventer 105 away from 45 the fluid source. The flow of fluid into discharge pipe 113 may be caused by various things, such as a backflow event or a problem with backflow preventer 105 (e.g., a malfunctioning check valve therein). Alternatively, fluid flow into discharge pipe 113 may happen even when backflow preventer 105 is functioning properly. In any case, fluid within discharge pipe 113 (also referred to herein as leakage flow) 50 may flow downstream through fluid detection system 301, through an air gap 205, and into a vertical discharge conduit 207.

55 As will be described in further detail below fluid detection system 301 includes a sensor module and an electronics module. In embodiments the sensor module includes a sensor housing that includes a liquid flow path (i.e., a sensing conduit) that is configured to receive the leakage flow, and a sensor element disposed at least partially around the liquid flow path. The sensor element is configured to enable detection of fluid within the liquid flow path at least in part by measuring the capacitance within the liquid flow path and providing a detection signal representative of the measured capacitance within the liquid flow path. The detection signal may be provided to a controller, which may be integral with or coupled to the sensor housing in any

suitable manner. In embodiments the controller is disposed within the electronics module, which is configured to physically couple to the sensor module.

When the sensor element is in communication with the controller, the controller may determine the capacitance within the liquid flow path based at least in part on a sensor signal provided by the sensor element. The controller may then determine whether a wet event is occurring within the liquid flow path based at least in part on the determined capacitance. If the controller detects a wet event (i.e., that liquid is present in the liquid flow path), it may further determine whether the wet event is part of a flood event, as described later. In response to a detected wet and/or flood event, the controller may act to alert a user of system 300 to such an event, and may issue control signals (e.g., to optional automatic valve control 203) that cause one or more valves within system 300 to close.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of one example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure. As shown, fluid detection system 301 includes a sensor module 401 and an electronics module 413. Sensor module 401 includes a sensor housing 403, and electronics module 413 includes an electronics housing 417. The electronics housing 417 may be coupled to or integral with the sensor housing 403.

Sensor module 401 is configured to couple in-line with at least one fluid (e.g., liquid) conduit, such as a discharge pipe or other fluid conduit that may be used in a fluid supply system. Alternatively, or additionally, sensor module 401 is configured to couple in-line to an outlet of an upstream component used in fluid supply equipment, such as a backflow preventer, a pressure relief valve, combinations thereof and the like. In embodiments, sensor housing 403 may be configured to enable sensor module 401 to couple to an end of a fluid conduit such as but not limited to an open end of discharge conduit or pipe. The manner in which sensor module 401 is configured to couple to such a conduit is not limited. In embodiments, sensor housing 403 includes one or more fastening elements (e.g., male/female threads), which are configured to engage with corresponding fastening elements of a fluid conduit. Alternatively, or additionally, sensor housing 403 may be configured to couple to a fluid conduit via adhesive, solder, a mechanical fastener, a mechanical fitting (e.g., a press fit or other mechanical arrangement), combination thereof, and the like. Similar features may be used to couple sensor housing 403 to an outlet of equipment used in a fluid supply system, such as a backflow preventer, a pressure relief valve, or the like.

Sensor housing 403 may be formed of any suitable materials, such as plastics, metals, alloys, composites, and the like. In embodiments, sensor housing 403 is formed from or includes a plastic material, such as but not limited to polyvinylchloride (PVC), chlorinated PVC, cross linked polyethylene, epoxy, fiber reinforced plastic, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) combinations thereof, and the like. Alternatively, or additionally, in embodiments sensor housing 403 is formed from or includes one or more metals, such as but not limited to copper, galvanized steel, stainless steel, iron, combinations thereof, and the like. In specific non-limiting embodiments, sensor housing 403 is formed from or includes a polymer coated metal, such as epoxy coated metal.

Sensor module 401 further includes liquid flow path 405, which may also be referred to as a sensing conduit. In general, liquid flow path 405 is configured to provide a passageway for the flow of a fluid such as water. Accordingly, liquid flow path 405 includes at least one inlet, at least

one outlet, and a passageway that extends between the at least one inlet and the at least one outlet. The at least one inlet may be defined at least in part by an opening on an inlet side of sensor module 401 or, more specifically, of sensor housing 403. The at least one outlet may be defined at least in part by an opening on an outlet side of sensor module 401. In embodiments, the inlet and outlet sides of sensor module are opposite or substantially opposite one another, and the inlet and outlet openings of liquid flow path 405 are opposite or substantially opposite one another. That is, the inlet and outlet openings may be oriented along corresponding planes that are parallel or substantially parallel (i.e., +/- five degrees of parallel) to one another. In such embodiments the passageway between the inlet and outlet openings of liquid flow path 405 may be straight or substantially straight.

The inlet and outlet openings may of course be arranged differently. For example, when liquid flow path 405 is curved or includes a bend, the inlet and outlet openings may be angled or offset relative to one another. In embodiments, the inlet and outlet openings are oriented along respective first and second planes, wherein the first and second planes intersect with each other.

The cross sectional shape of liquid flow path 405 is not limited and liquid flow path 405 may have any suitable cross sectional shape. For example, the cross sectional shape of at least a portion of liquid flow path 405 may be a geometric (e.g., circular, ellipsoidal, oval, triangular, quadrilateral, pentagonal, etc.) shape, an irregular shape, or a combination thereof. Without limitation, at least a portion of liquid flow path 405 preferably has a circular, oval, or other geometric cross sectional shape. Still further, in some embodiments liquid flow path 405 has a cross sectional shape that is the same as or complementary to the shape of a flow path in a liquid conduit to which sensor housing 403 is to be coupled.

Liquid flow path 405 is preferably positioned within sensor housing 403 such that when sensor housing 403 is coupled to an outlet of a component used in fluid supply equipment (e.g., a discharge pipe, a backflow preventer, a relief valve, etc.), the inlet of liquid flow path 405 is aligned or substantially aligned with the outlet of the upstream component. In any case, at least a portion of the liquid flow path 405 is defined at least in part by a perimeter 411. The perimeter 411 may form an edge of an inlet or an outlet of liquid flow path 405, and/or a portion of a wall of a passageway of flow path 405. In embodiments, perimeter 411 is formed or otherwise defined at least in part by material of sensor housing 403, but of course other materials may also be used.

Sensor module 401 further includes a sensor element 407, which is generally configured to detect a capacitance within liquid flow path 405. Sensor element 407 may be any suitable sensing structure, such as a capacitance sensor. In embodiments sensor element 407 is a capacitive sensor that is in the form of or includes a conductor, such as a conductive antenna or electrode. In such embodiments the conductor of sensor element 407 may extend at least partially around the perimeter 411 of liquid flow path 405. Without limitation, sensor element 407 preferably includes at least one conductive antenna that includes or is in the form of one or more wires or strips of conductive material that extend from greater than 0 to 100% of the distance around the perimeter 411 of liquid flow path 405, such as from greater than or equal to about 25% to about 100%, from greater than or equal to about 25 to about 99%, from greater than or equal to about 40% to about 99%, from greater than or equal to about 50% to about 99% of the distance around perimeter 411, or even from greater than or equal to about 95% of the

distance around perimeter 411. In specific non-limiting embodiments, sensor element 407 is located outside of liquid flow path 405 (i.e., such that no part of sensor element 407 is present within liquid flow path 405), and extends around perimeter 411 within the previously noted ranges.

The number of conductive elements used in sensor element 407 is not limited, and any suitable number of conductive elements may be used. For example, sensor element 407 may include 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15, 20, or more conductive elements. When multiple elements are used, they may be spaced apart (laterally offset) and extend parallel or substantially parallel to one another. In specific non limiting embodiments, sensor element 407 is in the form of a flat flexible cable (FFC) that includes a plurality of parallel conductors, each conductor of which is laterally offset from one or more adjacent conductors by offset distance that ranges from greater than 0 to about 2.5 millimeters (m), such as from greater than 0 to about 1.5 mm, from greater than 0 to about 1.0 mm, or even from greater than 0 to about 0.5 mm. In a preferred non-limiting embodiment, sensor element 407 is an FFC with 20 parallel conductors, wherein each conductor is offset from one or more adjacent conductors by an offset distance of about 0.5 mm.

Any suitable conductive materials may be used as or in the conductive element(s) of sensor element 407. Non-limiting examples of suitable conductive materials that may be used in or as such conductive elements include metals such as aluminum, copper, gold, silver, conductive metal alloys, combinations thereof, and the like. Without limitation, in embodiments sensor element 407 includes one or more copper wires or strips that extend around perimeter 411 of liquid flow path 405 within the above noted ranges.

Sensor element 407 may be grounded to provide a common ground reference point that can improve the consistency and reliability of capacitance measurements taken by the element. The manner in which sensor element 407 is grounded is not limited, and any suitable grounding method may be used. For example, sensor element 407 may be connected to an earth ground or a floating ground, e.g., by one or more grounding cables or other types of ground connections.

Sensor module 401 may also include a sensor channel 409 that is configured to house or otherwise support at least a portion of sensor element 407 therein. In embodiments sensor channel 409 may extend completely around the perimeter 411 of liquid flow path 405. Alternatively, sensor channel 409 may extend at least partially around the perimeter 411 of liquid flow path 405, e.g., within the ranges noted above for sensor element 407. In any case sensor channel 409 may be defined at least in part by an inner wall 410 of sensor housing 403 and an outward facing side of perimeter 411. For example, sensor channel 409 may be in the form of a groove that includes an inner groove wall defined at least in part by an outward facing side of perimeter 411, an outer groove wall defined by inner wall 410 of sensor housing 403, and a bottom. In such instances, the groove may have a depth that is greater than or equal to the width and/or thickness of the sensor element 407, such that all or substantially all (e.g., greater than or equal to 95%) of the sensor element is within the groove.

Sensor element 407 is configured to communicatively couple with a controller. In that regard and as further shown in FIG. 4, sensor module 401 may further include a second portion 415, which may be separate from or integral with sensor element 407. When used, second portion 415 is configured to provide a communications pathway between sensor element 407 and a controller 419 as will be described

later. In embodiments, the second portion 415 is in the form of or includes a conductive element (e.g., a conductive wire or stripe) that is configured to provide a physical interface between sensor element 407 and the controller 419. In such instances the second portion 415 may be coupled to or integral with sensor element 407. For example, second portion 415 may be in the form of a wire or other conductive element that is coupled to or integral with sensor element 407.

When second portion 415 is used, sensor element 407 may be understood to correspond to a first portion of a fluid sensor, and second portion 415 may be understood to correspond to a second portion of the fluid sensor. The fluid sensor is of course not limited to two portions, and may include greater (e.g., 3, 4, 5, etc.) or fewer (e.g., 1) portions. In instances where the sensor element includes a single portion (i.e., sensor element 407), second portion 415 may be omitted and sensor module 401 may be configured such that sensor element 407 can communicate with a controller in any suitable manner. For example, sensor element 407 may be physically connected to a controller (either directly or via one or more intervening components), or it may communicate with the controller via wireless communications—e.g., near field communication, a wireless local area network (WLAN), a ZIGBEE® network, BLUETOOTH®, combinations thereof, and the like. In any case, the sensor element 407 is configured to detect a capacitance within liquid flow path 405, produce a sensor signal indicative of the detected capacitance, and to provide the sensor signal to a controller to which it is communicatively coupled, as described later.

Sensor module 401 may optionally include an air flow path 423. In general, air flow path is configured to provide a passageway through sensor housing 403 for the flow of air or another gas. Such may be useful in instances where sensor module 401 is coupled to an outlet of a relief valve, where inflow of air into the relief valve can aid in flow of liquid from the relief valve. This concept will be described later in conjunction in with FIGS. 8A-8C. When used, optional air flow path 423 may be at least partially defined by a perimeter 425, which may be formed from material of sensor housing 403 and/or other material.

As noted above, electronics module 413 may be integral with or coupled to sensor module 401. In the former case electronics housing 417 is integral with sensor housing 403, such that the electronics housing 417 and sensor housing are in one piece. In the latter case, the electronics module 413 is configured to couple to sensor module 401 in any suitable manner. Without limitation, electronics housing 417 is preferably configured to detachably couple to sensor module 401 and, more particularly, to detachably couple to sensor housing 403. In such instances fluid detection system 301 may be understood to have an assembled state in which electronics module 413 is coupled to sensor module 401, and a disassembled state in which electronics module 413 and sensor module 401 are separated. Accordingly, FIG. 4 may be understood to depict fluid detection system 301 in an assembled state. In any case, sensor element 407 is configured to communicatively couple to a controller 419 within electronics housing 417, e.g., by second portion 415 or in another manner as previously described.

Controller 419 is generally configured to determine a detected capacitance within liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on a sensor signal received from sensor element 407, wherein the sensor signal is indicative of a capacitance detected by the sensor element 407 within liquid flow path 405. Controller 419 can then use the detected capacitance to

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determine whether liquid is present within liquid flow path 405 in any suitable manner. For example, controller 419 may determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path 405 by comparing the detected capacitance to a capacitance threshold and to record (or not record) a wet event based on that comparison, e.g., in a memory thereof. For example, when the determined capacitance is less than or equal to the capacitance threshold, controller 419 may determine that liquid is present within liquid flow path 405 and record a wet event. Conversely when the determined capacitance is greater than the capacitance threshold, controller 419 may determine that liquid is not present within liquid flow path 405. In such instances controller may record a dry event, or may discard the determination and continue to monitor the capacitance within liquid flow path 405.

The capacitance threshold used by controller 419 can be set in any suitable manner. In embodiments, the capacitance threshold is a default capacitance threshold that may be set by the manufacturer of fluid detection system 301. Such a configuration may be useful when fluid detection system 301 is to be installed in a fluid supply system with a known configuration, i.e., one in which a baseline capacitance of the fluid supply system is known. In other embodiments, the capacitance threshold is set based on a baseline capacitance, which may be set by calibration of fluid detection system 301, e.g., post installation. Still further, the capacitance threshold may be set by one or more physical components of the controller 419 or an electronics module in which the controller 419 is installed. For example, the capacitance threshold may be set by one or more jumpers (e.g., dip switches) on controller 419 or within electronics module 413.

In that regard electronics module 413 may optionally include a user interface 421. In the embodiment of FIG. 4 optional user interface 421 is shown as part of controller 419, but such a configuration is not required and user interface 421 may be provided at any suitable location. For example, user interface 421 may be provided on or within sensor housing 403, on or within electronics housing 417, and/or within controller 419 as shown. In any case, user interface 421 may provide a mechanism for a user to interact with sensor module 401 and/or electronics module 413. For example, user interface 421 may include a calibration module that is configured to calibrate fluid detection system 301. More particularly, the calibration module may be configured to establish a baseline capacitance within liquid flow path 405. The baseline capacitance may be set based at least in part on a capacitance detected by sensor element 407, e.g., under a known condition. For example, the baseline capacitance may be set based on a capacitance detected by sensor element 407 in response to user interaction with a calibration button or other interactive element of user interface 421. Alternatively, or additionally, the baseline capacitance may be set based on capacitance readings that are taken by fluid detection system 301 automatically, e.g., a predetermined time or time interval. Still further, the baseline capacitance may be set using jumpers (e.g., dip switches) or another type of electrical control system.

Once the baseline capacitance is determined, controller 419 may set the capacitance threshold based on the baseline capacitance, e.g., with a calibration module, one or more physical elements (e.g., one or more jumpers such as dip switches), combinations thereof, and the like. For example, controller 419 may set the capacitance threshold to a value that is offset from the baseline capacitance by a predetermined margin. The predetermined margin may be any suitable value, and in some instances is equal to about 25%,

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about 50%, about 100%, about 150%, or even about 200% of the baseline capacitance value or more. In embodiments, controller 419 is configured to set the capacitance threshold above the baseline threshold by the predetermined margin.

5 In embodiments, the sensor element may have a sensitivity range of 100 picofarads (pF), the range of capacitance in the typical system may range from 5 to 20 pF, and the controller may set the threshold capacitance to 10-15 pF, such as about 12 pF.

10 The controller may be further configured to determine that a wet event has occurred when a detected capacitance is less than or equal to the threshold capacitance for a (first) time period, i.e., a first measurement period. The length of the first measurement period is not limited and the first mea-

15 surement period may be set to any suitable length of time. In embodiments, the first measurement period ranges from greater than 0 to about 5 seconds, such as from greater than 0 to about 2.5 seconds. The first measurement period may of course be set to a longer or shorter period of time. In general,

20 use of the first measurement period can limit or prevent controller 419 from determining that a wet event has occurred due to drips or other short leaks that cause liquid to be present within the liquid flow path 405 for a very short period of time. This may improve the accuracy of controller 419 and the user experience by preventing controller 419 from falsely reporting small leaks, drips, and other minor transient events as wet events that may need attention from a user.

Controller 419 may be further configured to determine 30 whether a flood event is occurring within liquid flow path 405. In embodiments, controller 419 may determine whether a flood event is occurring by monitoring the detected capaci-

35 tance within liquid flow path 405 during a (second) measurement period, determining a total number of wet events occurring within the (second) measurement period, and comparing the total number of wet events within the (sec-

40 ond) measurement period to a threshold number of wet events set for the (second) measurement period. The second measurement period may be used independently or in conjunction with the first measurement period, and may be set to any suitable length of time. For example, the second measurement period and may range from greater than 0 seconds to several minutes or more. In embodiments the second measurement period ranges from greater than 0 to about 10 minutes (600 seconds), such as from greater than 0 to about 5 minutes (300 seconds), from greater than 0 to about 2 minutes (120 seconds), or even from greater than 0 to about 90 seconds. In those or other embodiments, controller 419 may be configured such that the second measurement period begins at the end of a first measurement

45 period in which a wet event is detected.

50 When the total number of wet events meets or exceeds the threshold number of wet events in the (second) measurement period, controller 419 may determine that a flood event is occurring within liquid flow path 405, and may record the occurrence of that flood event accordingly (e.g., in a memory thereof). Upon detection of a flood event, controller 419 may be configured to cause the issuance of an alert. The alert may be in the form of an audio, visual, or audiovisual alert (e.g., a light and/or siren), a notification message to an external device, combinations thereof, and the like. For example, controller 419 issue a control signal that is con-

55 figured to cause communications circuitry (not shown) within or communicatively coupled to fluid detection system 301 to issue a notification message to an external device via a wired or wireless communication protocol, wherein the notification message is indicative of the occurrence of a

60 alert (e.g., a light and/or siren), a notification message to an external device, combinations thereof, and the like. For example, controller 419 issue a control signal that is con-

65 figured to cause communications circuitry (not shown) within or communicatively coupled to fluid detection system 301 to issue a notification message to an external device via a wired or wireless communication protocol, wherein the notification message is indicative of the occurrence of a

flood event. In addition, controller 419 may cause an alert light and/or an alert siren to activate to provide an audio visual notice of a detected flood event.

In embodiments controller 419 may be configured to delay issuance of an alert/notification for a delay time following detection of a wet and/or flood event. During the delay time, controller 419 may continue to monitor the detected capacitance in the liquid flow path. If the controller determines that the detected capacitance returns to above the capacitance threshold during the delay time (i.e., returns to a capacitance indicative of normal operation), controller 419 may not issue a notification/alert as described above. If the detected capacitance remains at or below the capacitance threshold during the delay time, however, controller 419 may issue a notification/alert as described above. As may be appreciated, use of the delay time may limit reporting of transient wet/flood events that may not require service. The delay time may be any suitable length. For example, in embodiments the delay time ranges from greater than 0 to about 300 seconds (5 minutes), greater than 0 to about 180 seconds (3 minutes), even greater than 0 to about 60 seconds (1 minute), or even greater than 0 to about 30 seconds. The delay time may be set in any suitable manner, such as via a user interface of controller 419, a calibration module within controller 419, one or more physical elements of electronics module 413 (e.g., one or more dip switches), combinations thereof, and the like.

When the total number of wet events is below the threshold number of wet events for the (second) measurement period, controller 419 may determine that a flood event is not occurring within liquid flow path 405. In such instances controller 419 may continue to monitor the capacitance within the liquid flow path 405 for occurrence of wet and/or flood events. Controller 419 may also issue a control signal that is configured to cause communications circuitry to issue a notification message to an external device as noted above, wherein the notification message is indicative of the occurrence of the wet event(s) occurring within the measurement period, either alone or along with an indication that a flood event has not been detected.

Any suitable type of controller may be used as controller 419. With that in mind, FIG. 7 is a block diagram of one example of a controller that may be used as controller 419 in accordance with the present disclosure. Controller 419 includes a processor 701, memory 703, and communications circuitry (COMMS) 705, which are communicatively coupled to one another via a bus 707. Controller 419 may optionally further include a user interface 421, as discussed above.

Processor 701 may be any suitable general-purpose processor or application specific integrated circuit. Without limitation, in embodiments processor 701 is one or more single or multicore processors produced by INTEL® corporation, APPLE® corporation, AMD® corporation, SAMSUNG® corporation, NVIDIA® corporation, Advanced Risc Machines (ARM®) corporation, combinations thereof, or the like. While FIG. 7 depicts the use of a single processor 701, it should be understood that multiple processors can be used.

Memory 703 may be any suitable type of computer readable memory. Examples of memory types that may be used as memory 703 include but are not limited to: programmable memory, non-volatile memory, read only memory, electrically programmable memory, random access memory, flash memory (which may include, for example NAND or NOR type memory structures), magnetic disk memory, optical disk memory, phase change memory, mem-

istor memory technology, spin torque transfer memory, combinations thereof, and the like.

Additionally, or alternatively, memory 703 may include other and/or later-developed types of computer-readable memory.

COMMS 705 may include hardware (i.e., circuitry), software, or a combination of hardware and software that is configured to allow system controller 419 (or fluid detection system 301) to transmit and receive messages via wired and/or wireless communication from an external device 711. Communication between COMMS 705 and an external device 711 may occur, for example, over a wired or wireless connection using one or more currently known or future developed communication standards. COMMS 705 may include hardware to support such communication, e.g., one or more transponders, antennas, BLUETOOTH™ chips, personal area network chips, near field communication chips, wired and/or wireless network interface circuitry, combinations thereof, and the like. As shown, COMMS 705 may be communicatively coupled to sensor element 407, e.g., via wired or wireless communication. In embodiments COMMS 705 is communicatively coupled with sensor element 407 when fluid detection system 301 is in an assembled state, and is configured to receive sensor signals from sensor element 407.

Controller 419 further includes a control module 709. In this specific context, the term “module” refers to software, firmware, circuitry, and/or combinations thereof that is/are configured to perform one or more operations consistent with the present disclosure. Software may be embodied as a software package, code, instructions, instruction sets and/or data recorded on non-transitory computer readable storage mediums. Firmware may be embodied as code, instructions or instruction sets and/or data that are hard-coded (e.g., nonvolatile) in controller 419, e.g., within memory 703 or other storage. In embodiments, control module 709 is in the form of logic that is implemented at least in part in hardware to perform operations consistent with the present disclosure.

For example, control module 709 may be configured to cause controller 419 to establish a capacitance threshold based on a baseline capacitance as discussed previously. Control module 709 may also be configured to cause controller 419 to determine a detected capacitance within liquid flow path 405, e.g., based on a sensor signal provided by sensor element 407. Control module 709 may further be configured to cause controller 419 to determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on a comparison between the detected capacitance and the capacitance threshold as previously described. Moreover, control module 709 may be configured to cause controller 419 to determine whether a flood event is occurring with liquid flow path 405 as discussed above. When a wet event and/or a flood event is detected, control module 709 may cause controller 419 (or more specifically, COMMS 705) to issue a notification message to an external device 711, e.g., via wired or wireless communication. Finally, control module 709 may be configured to cause controller 419 to perform calibration operations consistent with the present disclosure, e.g., at a predetermined time, at a predetermined interval, and/or in response to user interaction with a calibration button, e.g., on user interface 421, and/or in response to a position of a calibration jumper within controller 419. Pursuant to such calibration operations, control module 709 may cause controller to set a baseline capacitance and to set the capacitance threshold based on the baseline capacitance as discussed above.

FIGS. 5A-5P depict various views of another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure. As shown, fluid detection system 500 includes a sensor module 401 and an electronics module 413. The nature and function of sensor module 401 and electronics module 413 is the same as described above in connection with FIG. 4, and so will not be reiterated in detail.

As best shown in FIGS. 5A and 5J and 6A and 6B, electronics module 413 is separable from sensor module 401. That is electronics module 413 may be physically connected and separated from sensor module 401, such that fluid detection system 500 is in an assembled or disassembled state, respectively. In the assembled state, controller terminals 525 (best shown in FIG. 6B) on electronics module 413 are coupled to corresponding receiving terminals 523 (shown in FIG. 5I) on a printed circuit board (PCB) 521 of sensor module 401, and at least one sensor terminal 519 of a sensor element 515 (best shown in FIGS. 5H, 5I, 5K and 5P) is also coupled to sensor PCB 521. In that state, sensor PCB 521 communicatively couples the sensor element 515 to the controller 419.

With further reference to FIGS. 5A-5P—sensor module 401 includes a sensor cover 501 and a sensor base 503, which together form a sensor housing consistent with sensor housing 403 as described above in connection with FIG. 4. As best shown in FIG. 5J, sensor cover 501 and sensor base 503 are detachable from one another and form corresponding upper and lower portions of a sensor housing 403. The manner in which sensor cover 501 and sensor base 503 can be coupled to one another is not limited. In embodiments and as shown in FIG. 5J, sensor cover 501 may include one or more tabs (shown but not labeled) that are configured to be inserted into and engage with corresponding slots within sensor base 503. Sensor module 401 further includes a sensor element 515, which is functionally similar to sensor element 407 described previously.

As best shown in FIGS. 5A-5K, sensor module 401 includes a liquid flow path 405 that extends through the sensor housing formed by sensor cover 501 and sensor base 503. Like the liquid flow path in system 300, the liquid flow path 405 in fluid detection system 500 is defined at least in part by a perimeter 411. In the embodiment illustrated in FIGS. 5A-5P, perimeter 411 is D-shaped and defines at least a portion of the inlet 536 of liquid flow path 405. The shape of perimeter 411 and the inlet 536 of liquid flow path 405 is not limited to that configuration, and such components may have any suitable shape as discussed above. In this embodiment, liquid flow path 405 extends from inlet 436 on a first side of sensor module 401 to outlet 537 on a second side of sensor module 401, wherein the first and second sides are opposite to one another. Consequently, a passageway within liquid flow path 405 extends straight or substantially straight between the inlet 536 and the outlet 537. Of course, inlet 536 and outlet 537 of liquid flow path 405 may be sized and positioned differently, with a corresponding difference in the shape of the passageway there between.

In system 500, sensor module 401 further includes air flow path 423. Air flow path 423 includes an inlet 538 and an outlet 539, and is at least partially defined by a perimeter 425. In embodiments fluid detection system 500 is configured such that liquid can move through liquid flow path 405 in a first flow direction and air can move through air flow path in 423 in a second flow direction that is opposite the first flow direction. Thus, inlet 538 may be on the same side of sensor module 401 as outlet 537, and outlet 539 may be on the same side of sensor module 401 as inlet 536. In this case the perimeter 425 defines at least a portion of a D-shape

outlet 539 of air flow path 423. Of course, outlet 539 and air flow path 423 are not limited to such a configuration and may have any suitable shape, such as but not limited to the cross sectional shapes noted herein for liquid flow path 405.

As best shown in FIG. 5K, 5L, 5M, one or both of liquid flow path 405 and air flow path 423 may be completely defined by sensor cover 501. For example, sensor cover 501 may include first and second extensions that extend inwardly from a top surface 502 of sensor cover 501 towards sensor base 503, and which respectively define at least a portion of liquid flow path 405 and air flow path 423. The first extension may include an inner wall 530 that defines at least a portion of an inward facing side of the liquid flow path 405, and a corresponding outer wall 531. Similarly, the second extension may include an inner wall 532 that defines at least a portion of an inward facing side of the air flow path 423, and a corresponding outer wall 534.

As best shown in FIGS. 5A and 5L, sensor cover 501 may include a groove 513. In the embodiment of FIGS. 5A-5P, groove 513 extends fully around liquid flow path 405, with one side of groove 513 defined by the outer wall 531 of the first extension that defines liquid flow path 405. That configuration is not required, however, and groove 513 may be configured differently. For example, groove 513 may be configured to extend partially around the inlet opening of liquid flow path 405. Regardless of its configuration, groove 513 may be configured to facilitate in-line coupling of the inlet side of sensor module 401 to another component, such as an outlet of a discharge pipe, a backflow preventer, a relief valve or the like. Groove 513 may be configured to house or otherwise support a sealing element (e.g., an O-ring or other type of gasket) therein, wherein the sealing element is configured to form a seal between the inlet side of sensor module 401 and a corresponding surface of a component to which the inlet side is coupled, such as the outlet of a discharge pipe, a backflow preventer, etc.

Sensor cover 501 may include one or a plurality of cover spacers 529, as best shown in FIGS. 5K and 5M. When used, the cover spacers 529 may be in the form of a projection that extends from an underside 504 of sensor cover 501. The cover spacers 529 may extend from and be spaced apart from outer walls 531, 534 by a gap. The gaps between each of the cover spacers may collectively form a first sensor channel 533. The first sensor channel 533 may be sized to receive at least a portion of sensor element 515 and optionally at least a portion of a spacer element 517. In embodiments, cover spacers 529 are each sized and configured such that they are adjacent to or abut a corresponding portion of an inward facing side 542 (shown in FIG. 5N) of sensor base 503 when sensor module 401 is in an assembled state.

Sensor cover 501 may further include a second sensor channel 535 between liquid flow path 405 and air flow path 423. As best shown in FIG. 5M, the second sensor channel 535 may extend across the sensor cover 501 to at least partially separate liquid flow path 405 from air flow path 423. In embodiments the second sensor channel 535 is sized and configured to receive at least a portion of sensor element 515 and optionally at least a portion of spacer element 517 therein. As may be appreciated, the first sensor channel 533 and second sensor channel 535 can receive and support sensor element 515 and optionally spacer element 517 when sensor module 401 is in an assembled state.

As best shown in FIGS. 5H, 5I, 5N and 5O, sensor base 503 includes one or more fastener openings 505. In general, fastener openings 505 may function to facilitate coupling of sensor base 503 to sensor cover 501 and/or another structure,

e.g., with one or more fasteners. The number of fastener openings **505** is not limited, and such openings may be omitted.

As further shown in FIGS. **5H**, **5I**, **5N**, and **5O**, sensor base **503** includes a cross support **527**. In general, cross support **527** functions to support a portion of a sensor element **515** within sensor module **401**. In that regard, cross support **527** and cover spacers **529** similarly function to support and maintain the position of the sensor element **515** within sensor module **401**. In embodiments, cross support **527** and second sensor channel **535** are sized and positioned such that they extend parallel or substantially parallel to one another when sensor module **401** is in an assembled state.

In an assembled state sensor cover **501** and sensor base **503** form a receptacle for receiving or otherwise coupling to electronics module **413**. For example, and as best shown in FIGS. **5M** and **5N**, sensor cover **501** includes a first cavity **522** and sensor base **503** includes a second cavity **524**. The first and second cavities **522**, **524** form respective first and second portions of a receptacle for receiving or otherwise coupling to electronics module **413** when sensor cover **501** is coupled to sensor base **503**. In embodiments the first cavity **522** and second cavity **524** form respective halves of a receptacle for electronics module **413**. Of course, sensor module **401** need not be configured in that manner, and the receptacle for the electronics module **413** may be configured differently. For example, the receptacle for the electronics module **413** may be positioned entirely on sensor cover **501** or entirely on sensor base **503**.

Sensor element **515** is generally configured to detect the capacitance within liquid flow path **405**. In that regard, sensor element **515** may be configured to function in the same manner and be formed from the same materials noted above in connection with sensor element **407**. That is, sensor element **515** is configured to detect capacitance within liquid flow path **405** and to output a sensor signal indicative of a detected capacitance, e.g., to controller **419**.

In embodiments, sensor element **515** is in the form of one or more conductive strips and/or wires, which may be formed from copper or any other suitably conductive materials. Without limitation, in embodiments sensor element **515** is in the form of or includes or plurality of conductive strips or wires, such as copper wires or strips, which may be in the form of one or more open circuit conductors (antennas). The number of wires or strips may vary and is not limited. In embodiments, the number of wires or strips is greater than or equal to 1, such as ≥ 2 , ≥ 3 , ≥ 4 , ≥ 5 , ≥ 10 , ≥ 20 , or more. In specific non limiting embodiments, sensor element **515** is in the form of a flat flexible cable (FFC) that includes a plurality of parallel conductors, each conductor of which is laterally offset from one or more adjacent conductors by an offset distance that ranges from greater than 0 to about 2.5 millimeters (m), such as from greater than 0 to about 1.5 mm, from greater than 0 to about 1.0 mm, or even from greater than 0 to about 0.5 mm. In a preferred non-limiting embodiment, sensor element **515** is an FFC with 20 parallel conductors, wherein each conductor is offset from one or more adjacent conductors by an offset distance of about 0.5 mm.

In embodiments system **500** and sensor element **515** are physically configured to facilitate detection of the capacitance of liquid flow path **405** and, more particularly, a change in the capacitance of liquid flow path **405** due to the presence of liquid. In that regard, the perimeter **411** may be defined by a wall that is configured to space sensor element **515** from an inward facing side of liquid flow path **405** by a distance **R**, which may also be referred to herein as a radial

distance. This concept is best shown in FIG. **5H**, which illustrates an embodiment in which the distance **R** is equivalent to the thickness of the wall defining perimeter **411**. It should be understood that such illustration is for the sake of example only, and that distance **R** need not be equivalent to the thickness of the wall defining perimeter **411**. In any case, the distance **R** may be any suitable thickness, and embodiments **R** ranges from greater than 0 to about 25.4 mm (1 inch), such as from greater than 0 to about 12.7 mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch).

In embodiments the sensor element **515** (or each conductive element therein) may also be configured to facilitate detection of the capacitance within liquid flow path **405**. For example, and as best shown in FIG. **5J**, sensor element **515** may be in the form of or include one or more conductive strips, wherein each of the conductive strips has an axial width **W**. In this context, the term axial width means a width in the direction of the conductive element that is parallel an axis extending through liquid flow path **405**. **W** may be any suitable axial width, and in embodiments **W** ranges from greater than 0 to 127 mm (5 inch), such as from greater than 0 to 63.5 mm (2.5 inches), or even from greater than 0 to about 25.4 mm (1 inch).

The ratio of the axial width **W** to the distance **R** can impact the ability of sensor element **515** to detect the capacitance of liquid flow path **405**. In embodiments, the ratio of **W:R** ranges from greater than or equal to about 2:1 to about 10:1, such as from greater than or equal to about 2:1 to about 5:1. In non-limiting preferred embodiments, the ratio of **W:R** is about 5:1. While smaller ratios and higher ratios are possible, it is noted that performance of sensor element **515** may decrease at a **W:R** ratio of less than 2:1 and that increasing the ratio beyond 5:1 was not observed to produce significant performance gains relative to a ratio of 5:1. In specific non-limiting embodiments, the ratio of **W:R** is about 5:1, **R** is about 12.7 mm ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch), and **W** is about 63.5 mm (2.5 inches).

When a plurality of open circuit conductors (antennas) are used, they may be arranged such that they each extend parallel to one another and are disposed around at least a portion of the liquid flow path **405**. Notably, use of a plurality of parallel open circuit conductors can improve the sensitivity of sensor element **515**, e.g., allowing sensor element **515** to sense relatively low capacitance values within liquid flow path **405**. Pragmatically speaking, this means that sensor element **515** may be able to sense deviations from a relatively low baseline capacitance (e.g., detected within liquid flow path **405** during calibration), without requiring the use of specialize tooling or equipment to produce.

As best shown in FIGS. **5I** and **5K**, sensor element **515** extends around substantially all ($\geq 95\%$) of perimeter **411** of liquid flow path **405**. With reference to FIG. **5P**, at least a portion of sensor element **515** may have a shape that substantially corresponds to a shape of the liquid flow path **405** or, more specifically, the shape of the side of outer wall **531**. For example, when liquid flow path **405** or outer wall **531** have a D-shape, at least a portion of sensor element **515** has a D-shape as best shown in FIGS. **5I**, **5K**, and **5P**. When liquid flow path **405** or outer wall **531** have another shape (e.g., a C shape, quadrilateral shape, a single sided (e.g., circular) shape etc.), at least a portion of sensor element **515** may have a corresponding shape. In any case, sensor element **515** is configured such that it can be disposed around the outside of the perimeter **411** of liquid flow path **405**, e.g., within the first sensor channel **533** and the second sensor channel **535** noted above. In that regard, cross support **527**

of sensor base 503 functions to support the section of sensor element 515 that extends within the second sensor channel 535. Notably, no portion of sensor element 515 is present within liquid flow path 405.

As best shown in FIG. 5K, sensor module further includes a spacer element 517. In general, spacer element 517 functions to maintain the position of sensor element 515 within first and second sensor channels 533, 535, and in some cases to insulate sensor element from other components of sensor module 401—such as outer walls 531, 534, and/or cover spacer(s) 529. To that end, spacer element 517 may be formed from any suitable material. In embodiments, spacer element 517 is formed from or includes an insulating material, such as but not limited to an insulating foam. Non-limiting examples of insulating foams that can be used include open or closed cell foams, such as open or closed cell neoprene foam, ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) foam, styrene butadiene rubber (SBR) foam, combinations thereof and the like. Without limitation, spacer element 517 is preferably a closed cell insulating foam.

As best shown in FIG. 5P, sensor element 515 has a proximal end 543 and a distal end 544. The proximal end 543 is coupled to a sensor terminal 519. In general, sensor terminal 519 functions to communicatively couple sensor element 515 to a corresponding input terminal on sensor PCB 521. As noted previously, sensor PCB 521 generally functions to communicatively couple sensor element 515 to controller 419. In that regard, sensor PCB 521 includes receiving terminals 523 that are configured to couple to corresponding controller terminals 525 when fluid detection system 500 is in an assembled state, i.e., when electronics module is disposed within a receptacle formed by sensor cover 501 and sensor base 503 and controller terminals 525 are coupled to receiving terminals 523 on sensor PCB 521.

FIGS. 6A and 6B depict front and back views, respectively, of one example of an electronics module 413 consistent with the present disclosure. As shown electronics module 413 includes an electronics base 507 and electronics cover 509. Electronics base 507 and electronics cover 509 are configured to detachably couple to one another in any suitable manner, such as by a mechanical fastener, a form locking connection, a snap fit connection or the like. When so coupled, the electronics base 507 and electronics cover 509 define an electronics housing that includes a cavity for housing a controller 419 and an optional user interface 421, as shown in FIG. 6A. The nature and function of controller 419 and user interface 421 are the same as described above in connection with FIG. 4, and so are not reiterated. As best shown in FIG. 6B, electronics module 413 includes controller terminals 525 that are configured to communicatively couple controller 419 to sensor PCB 521, as described above. While FIG. 6B depicts controller terminals 525 in the form of two prongs, any type and shape of terminals may be used.

Electronics module 413 further includes a cable 511, as best shown in FIGS. 6A and 6B. Cable 511 is generally configured to provide power to the components of electronics module 413, and to provide a wired connection to a communications system (not shown) that may be used to send notification messages in response to a detected wet and/or flood event. In embodiments, cable 511 may also provide a connection to earth ground for sensor element 515. However, sensor element 515 may be ground in another manner as discussed above in connection with sensor element 407.

As noted above, when sensor module 401 includes a receptacle for receiving and coupling to electronics module

413. With that in mind, electronics module 413 may be sized and configured such that it can detachably couple the receptacle provided by sensor module 401, such that sensor module 401 is communicatively coupled to electronics module 413 (e.g., such that controller terminals 525 couple to receiving terminals 523 of sensor PCB 521).

In use, sensor module 401 may be coupled in-line with the outlet of another component, such as the outlet or inlet of a discharge pipe (or other fluid conduit), an outlet or inlet of a backflow preventer, an outlet or inlet of a check or relief valve, or the like. In any case, sensor element 515 may sense the capacitance within liquid flow path 405 and produce a sensor signal indicative of the detected capacitance. When the electronics module 413 is communicatively coupled to the sensor module 401 (e.g., as shown in FIG. 5A), the sensor signal may be provided to controller 419 via sensor terminal 519, sensor PCB 521, receiving terminals 523, and controller terminals 525. In any case, the controller 419 may determine a detected capacitance within liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on the sensor signal. Controller 419 may then determine whether a wet condition, a dry condition, and/or a flood condition is occurring based on the detected capacitance and a capacitance threshold, as previously described in association with FIG. 4. The baseline capacitance may be determined based on a capacitance of liquid flow path 405 measured during a calibration operation, e.g., in response to actuation of a calibration button or another interface element of user interface 421. If one or more of such conditions are detected, the controller 419 may cause a notification message to be sent to an external device, e.g., via communications circuitry that is communicatively coupled to controller 419. Such communications circuitry may be within sensor module 401, electronics module 413, and/or within a separate component that is communicatively coupled to controller 419 in any suitable manner.

While the present disclosure focuses on the use of the disclosed fluid detection systems in conjunction with the detection of fluid flow from an outlet of a relief valve or a backflow preventer, the fluid detection systems are not limited to such end uses. Indeed, the fluid detection systems described herein can be used to detect fluid that is passing through an outlet of any suitable fluid conduit, such as may be used in a fluid (e.g., water) supply system, a hot water heater, a recreational vehicle water system, or the like. For example, the fluid detection systems described herein may be used to couple to and detect fluid flow from one or more valves, pipes, conduits, low pressure regions, combinations thereof, and the like.

With the foregoing in mind and for the sake of illustration of one example end use, FIGS. 8A-8C depict one example of a relief valve leak detection system that includes a fluid detection system 500 consistent with the present disclosure.

55 As shown, relief valve leak detection system 800 includes relief valve 801, fluid detection system 500, and an air gap 803. As best shown in FIG. 8C (which is a cross sectional diagram along plane B shown in FIG. 8B), relief valve includes a liquid flow path 805 with a liquid flow outlet 809, and an air flow path 807 with an air flow inlet 810. The liquid flow path 805 is configured to convey a liquid flow 806 to liquid flow outlet 809, and the air flow path 807 is configured to receive an air flow 808 via air flow inlet 810. As further shown in FIG. 8C, fluid detection system 500 is coupled to relief valve 801 such that liquid flow path 405 is fluidly coupled to liquid flow outlet 809, and air flow path 423 is fluidly coupled to air flow inlet 810. The outlet side of fluid

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detection system 500 is coupled to a proximal end of air gap 803, and a discharge pipe (not shown) may be coupled to a distal end of air gap 803.

In operation, relief valve 801 may regulate the pressure within a component of a liquid supply system, such as a water supply system. Under normal operating conditions liquid may flow through relief valve 801 to a downstream component at a pressure that is less than a threshold pressure of relief valve 801. Under such conditions, liquid will typically not flow through liquid flow path 805 and liquid flow outlet 809. If the pressure within relief valve exceeds threshold pressure or if relief valve malfunctions, however, liquid may flow through liquid flow outlet 809 and through liquid flow path 405, which flow may be facilitated by the flow of air into air flow inlet 810 and into air flow path 807.

Consistent with the foregoing disclosure, fluid detection system 500 may monitor the capacitance of liquid flow path 405 to determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path, which may be indicative of an overpressure or other faulty condition of relief valve 801. To accomplish that function, when fluid detection system 500 is installed as shown in FIG. 8A, a calibration operation may be executed to establish a baseline capacitance within liquid flow path 405. Alternatively, the baseline capacitance may be pre-set. In any case, the sensor element within fluid detection system 500 may monitor the capacitance of liquid flow path 405 and provide a sensor signal indicative of that capacitance to a controller, e.g., with electronics module 413. The controller may then determine the detected capacitance in the liquid flow path 405, and determine whether a wet, dry, and/or flood event is occurring in liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on the detected capacitance as previously described. When a wet event is detected (e.g., when the detected capacitance is at or above a capacitance threshold, either independently or for greater than or equal to a (first) measurement period), the controller may record the wet event, and may optionally determine whether a flood event is occurring. The controller may make that determination, for example, based at least in part on a comparison of a total number of wet events occurring within a (second) measurement period and a threshold number of wet events for that (second) measurement period. For example, if the total number of wet events in the (second) measurement period meets or exceeds the threshold number of wet events for that (second) measurement period, the controller may determine that a flood event is occurring. Conversely, if the total number of wet events is less than the threshold number of wet events for the (second) measurement period, the controller may determine that a flood event is not occurring.

Reference is now made to FIG. 9, which is a flow diagram of one example of a method for detecting a fluid (e.g., with a fluid detection system) consistent with the present disclosure. As shown, method 900 begins with start block 901. The method may then proceed to optional block 903, pursuant to which a determination may be made as to whether a calibration of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure needs to be updated. When such operations are performed the outcome of block 903 may depend on various such the length of time since the calibration of the fluid detection system was last set, whether a calibration button has been pressed on a user interface of the system, etc.

If the calibration is to be updated the method may proceed from block 903 to block 905, pursuant to which calibration operations consistent with the present disclosure are performed. In embodiments such calibration operations include measuring a capacitance within a liquid flow path with a

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sensor element, conveying a sensor signal indicative of that capacitance to a controller, determining the detected capacitance with the controller, and setting a baseline capacitance value to the detected capacitance. The calibration operations 5 may also include setting a threshold capacitance value relative to the baseline capacitance value. For example, the threshold capacitance value may be set to a capacitance value that is offset above the baseline capacitance value by a predetermined margin, such as about 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 10 30, 35, 40, or even 50% of the baseline capacitance value.

Once calibration operations are performed or if the operations of block 903 are omitted the method may proceed to block 907, pursuant to which a capacitance of a liquid flow path is measured. Consistent with the foregoing discussion, 15 the capacitance of a liquid flow path may be measured at least in part with a sensor element that is disposed at least partially around the liquid flow path. More specifically, the sensor element may sense the capacitance within the liquid flow path and output a sensor signal indicative of the 20 capacitance to a controller. The controller may then determine the detected capacitance within the liquid flow path based at least in part on the sensor signal.

The method may then proceed to block 909, pursuant to 25 which a determination may be made (e.g., by a controller) as to whether a wet event has occurred based at least in part on the detected capacitance in the liquid flow path as noted above. If not, the method may loop back to block 907. But if so, the method may proceed to block 911, pursuant to 30 which the controller records a wet event (or ‘hit’), e.g., in a memory thereof. The method may then proceed to optional block 913, pursuant to which a hit/wet event notification 35 may be sent, e.g., to an external device. For example, and consistent with the above description, in response to detection of a hit/wet event, the controller may cause communications circuitry to issue a notification message indicative of that event to an external device, via wired or wireless communication.

Following block 913 or if the operations of block 913 are 40 omitted, the method may proceed to block 915, pursuant to which a determination may be made (e.g., by a controller) as to whether a (second) measurement period has expired. The (second) measurement period may be set to any desired amount of time and may fall within the second measurement period ranges described above. If the measurement period 45 has not expired the method may loop back to block 907. If the measurement period has expired, however, the method may proceed to block 917.

Pursuant to block 917 a determination may be made (e.g., 50 by a controller) as to whether a flood event is occurring within the liquid flow path. To that end a controller may perform flood event detection operations consistent with the present disclosure, wherein such operations include determining a total number of wet events detected in a (second) measurement period, comparing the total number of wet 55 events to a threshold number of wet events for the (second) measurement period, and determining whether a flood event has occurred based on that comparison. When the total number of wet events in the (second) measurement period is less than the threshold number of wet events for that (second) measurement period, a determination is made that a flood event has not occurred and the method may loop back to block 907. When the total number of wet events for the (second) measurement period meets or exceeds the threshold number of wet events for that (second) measurement period, however, determination is made that a flood event has occurred and the method proceeds to block 919, 60 pursuant to which a flood event may be recorded by the

controller, e.g., in a memory thereof. The method may then proceed to optional block 921, pursuant to which a flood notification message may be issued in the same manner as the hit/wet notification message described above in connection with block 913.

Once a flood notification message has been sent or if the operations of block 921 are omitted the method may proceed to block 923, pursuant to which a determination may be made (e.g., by a controller) whether the leak detection method is to continue. If so, the method loops back to block 907. But if not, the method proceeds to block 925 and ends.

FIGS. 10A-10M illustrate another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure. As shown, fluid detection system 1000 includes a sensor module 401 and an electronics module 413. The function of sensor module 401 and electronics module 413 are largely the same as described above in connection with FIG. 4, and so will not be reiterated in detail. This embodiment is also functionally similar to system 500 described above but lacks an air flow path 423. As may be appreciated, fluid detection system 1000 may be particularly useful to detect leaks from smaller water systems, such as residential water systems, recreational vehicle water systems, hot water heaters, and the like.

As best shown in FIGS. 10A, 10C, and 10M, electronics module 413 is separable from sensor module 401. That is, electronics module 413 may be physically connected and disconnected from sensor module 401, such that fluid detection system 1000 is in an assembled or disassembled state. In the assembled state a controller (e.g., a controller 419 as described above in connection with FIG. 4) is present within electronics module 413 and is communicatively coupled to a sensor element 1015 in sensor module 401. The controller within electronics module 413 may be communicatively coupled to sensor element 1015 in any suitable manner. For example, and as will be described later, when system 1000 is in an assembled state, sensor element 1015 is communicatively coupled to a controller in electronics module 413 by one or more contacts, such as one or more spring-loaded pins.

As best shown in FIG. 10C, sensor module 401 includes a sensor cover 1002, a sensor base 1003, a conduit part 1004, and a sensor element 1015. The sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 are separable from one another. When sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 are coupled to one another they form a sensor housing, as best shown in FIG. 10B. The way sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 can be coupled to one another is not limited. In embodiments, sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 are coupled by one or more fasteners (e.g., screws), a weld, an interference fit between corresponding parts of sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003, combinations thereof, and the like. To that end, sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 may include one or more fastener openings 1005 that are configured to facilitate coupling of sensor cover 1002 to sensor base 1003 and/or another structure, e.g., with one or more fasteners. The number of fastener openings 1005 is not limited, and any or all such openings may be omitted.

As shown in FIGS. 10B-10D, sensor cover 1002 includes a cover body that includes a first cover cavity 1055 and a second cover cavity 1056. The first cover cavity 1055 is generally configured to receive or otherwise couple to electronics module 413. The way sensor cover 1002 (and, more particularly, first cover cavity 1055) couples to electronics module 413 is not limited, and such components may be coupled in any suitable manner. For example, sensor cover 1002 may couple to electronics module 413 via one

more fasteners, an adhesive, a weld, an interference fit, or the like. In embodiments, sensor cover 1002 is configured to couple to electronics module 413 using one or more fasteners that extend through one or more fastener openings 1005, e.g., within first cover cavity 1055. At least some of the fastener openings 1005 of the sensor cover 1002 may be positioned to align with corresponding fastener openings 1005 of electronics module 413, such that a fastener may be placed therein to couple sensor cover 1002 with electronics module 413. Regardless of how sensor cover 1002 is coupled to electronics module 413, it may include an opening 1062 that facilitates coupling of a controller in electronics module 413 with sensor element 1015, as described in more detail later.

Second cover cavity 1056 is generally configured to form part of a passageway within sensor module 401 through which conduit part 1004 extends when sensor module 401 is in an assembled state. In that regard, second cover cavity 1056 includes opposing first and second cover sidewalls 1058, 1059, which respectively include a first cover receptacle 1060 and a second cover receptacle 1061. As will be described below, first and second cover receptacles 1060, 1061 are configured to form part of a passageway through which conduit part 1004 can extend when sensor cover 1002 is coupled to sensor base 1003.

In embodiments and as shown in FIGS. 10D and 10E, second cover cavity 1056 may be positioned substantially opposite at least a portion of first cover cavity 1055, with a cover divider wall 1057 therebetween. In embodiments, cover divider wall 1057 preferably defines at least a portion of both first cover cavity 1055 and second cover cavity 1056. For example, and as shown in FIGS. 10D and 10E, cover divider wall 1057 may form at least part of a bottom wall of first cover cavity 1055 and may also form at least part of a top wall of second cover cavity 1056. In any case, an opening 1062 may be formed through cover divider wall 1057 to facilitate coupling of a controller in electronics module 413 with sensor element 1015.

As best shown in FIGS. 10F and 10G, sensor base 1003 includes a base body that defines a base cavity 1063. Like second cover cavity 1056, base cavity 1063 is generally configured to form part of a passageway within sensor module 401 through which conduit part 1004 extends when sensor module 401 is in an assembled state. Base cavity 1063 is defined at least in part by one or more sidewalls of the base body. For example, and as best shown in FIG. 10G, the base body includes opposing first and second base sidewalls 1064, 1065, which respectively include first and second base receptacles 1066, 1067—which are configured to form part of a passageway through which conduit part 1004 can extend when sensor base 1003 and is coupled to sensor cover 1002.

As noted above, sensor base 1003 is configured to couple to sensor cover 1002 to form a passageway for conduit part 1004. The way sensor base 1003 couples to sensor cover 1002 is not limited, and such components may be coupled in any suitable manner. For example, sensor base 1003 may couple to sensor cover 1002 via one or more fasteners, an adhesive, a weld, an interference fit, or the like. In embodiments, sensor base 1003 is configured to couple to sensor cover 1002 using one or more fasteners that extend through one or more fastener openings 1005 on sensor base 1003 and sensor cover 1002, as best shown in FIGS. 10A and 10C. In such instances, at least some fastener openings 1005 of sensor base 1003 may be positioned to align with corre-

sponding fastener openings **1005** of sensor cover **1002**, such that a fastener may be placed therein to couple sensor base **1003** to sensor cover **1002**.

Conduit part **1004** is configured to provide a liquid flow path through which a liquid may flow when system **1000** is in use. Conduit part **1004** is also configured to support and/or position sensor element **1015** relative to the liquid flow path, such that sensor element **1015** can detect a capacitance within the liquid flow path. With that in mind and as best shown in FIGS. **10A** and **10H-10K**, conduit part **1004** has a conduit part body that includes a liquid flow path **405** defined at least in part by an inner wall **1030** of the conduit part body, and which extends from an inlet **1036** to an outlet **1037**. In the embodiment illustrated in FIGS. **10A-10M**, inlet **1036** and outlet **1037** form have a circular-shaped perimeter **1012**, but such openings may have any suitable shape. In the illustrated embodiment inlet **1036** and outlet **1037** are also substantially opposite to one another, such that the course liquid flow path **405** between the inlet and outlet **1036, 1037** is substantially straight. Inlet **1036** and outlet **1037** of liquid flow path **1035** can be sized and positioned differently, resulting in a corresponding difference in the shape and course of the passageway therebetween.

As best shown in FIG. **10J**, conduit part **1004** includes a groove **1014** (which may also be referred to as a sensor channel) that extends at least partially (and preferably fully) around the outer wall **1031**. The groove **1014** includes at least one groove sidewall and a bottom defined at least in part by outer wall **1031**. The depth of groove **1014** (i.e., the height of one or more of the groove sidewalls) is not limited, and in some embodiments is greater than or equal to the thickness of sensor element **1015**. In embodiments and as also shown in FIG. **10J**, at least one of the sidewalls of the groove **1014** is or is adjacent to a ridge **1032** that extends radially outward from the surface of outer wall **1031**. Regardless of its configuration, groove **1014** is configured to position sensor element **1015** at a desired location. In embodiments, ridge **1032** is configured to align sensor element **1015** within the sensor housing, e.g., to facilitate coupling of sensor element **1015** with a controller **419** in electronics module **413** via an electronics terminal **1025**. Conduit part **1004** also includes first and second alignment rings **1068, 1069**, as shown in FIG. **10J**. In general, first alignment ring **1068** is positioned and configured to receive at least a portion of an edge of first cover receptacle **1060** and first base receptacle **1066** when fluid detection system **1000** is in an assembled state. Similarly, second alignment ring **1069** is positioned and configured to receive at least a portion of an edge of second cover receptacle **1061** and second base receptacle **1067** when fluid detection system **1000** is in an assembled state. In that way, first and second alignment rings **1068, 1069** can facilitate alignment of sensor element **1015** within the sensor housing.

The function of sensor element **1015** is the same as sensor elements **407** and **515** described above, and so is not reiterated in detail. That is, sensor element **1015** is generally configured to detect the capacitance within liquid flow path **405** of conduit part **1004**. As shown in FIG. **10I**, sensor element **1015** may be a band that is formed from or includes a conductive material, such as copper, aluminum, gold, or any other suitably conductive material. In any case, sensor element **1015** is configured to extend around the outer wall **1031** of conduit part **1004**, e.g., within groove **1014**.

Groove **1014** and outer wall **1031** may be configured to position sensor element **1015** such that sensor element **1015** can detect the capacitance (or a change in capacitance)

within liquid flow path **405**. More specifically, the groove **1014** and outer wall **1031** may be configured such a thickness R1 is defined between outer wall **1031** within groove **1014** and inner wall **1030** of liquid flow path **405** (best shown in FIG. **10K**), wherein R1 is selected to space sensor element **1015** at a desired distance from the inner wall **1030**. That concept is best shown in FIG. **10K**, which illustrates an embodiment in which the distance R1 is equivalent to the thickness between inner wall **1030** and the surface of outer wall **1031** within groove **1014**. The value of R may vary depending on the size of liquid flow path **405**, the size of sensing element **1015**, and other parameters. In embodiments, R1 is in a range of about 0.1 inches (2.5 millimeters (mm)) to about 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), such as about 0.15 inches (3.8 mm) to about inches (7.6 mm), or even about 0.2 inches (5.1 mm) to about 0.25 inches (6.4 mm). Without limitation, R1 is preferably about 0.2 to 0.3 inches (5.1-7.6 mm) when an internal diameter (ID1) of liquid flow path **405** is about 1 inch (25.4 mm). Of course, R1 is not limited to such ranges and liquid flow path **405** may have any suitable internal diameter.

As best shown in FIGS. **10H** and **10I**, sensor element **1015** preferably extends around substantially all ($\geq 95\%$) of outer wall **1031**. With reference to FIG. **10I**, at least a portion of sensor element **1015** has a shape that substantially corresponds to a shape of the liquid flow path **1035** or, more specifically, the shape of the side of outer wall **1031** within groove **1014**. For example, when liquid flow path **1035** or outer wall **1031** has a circular cross-sectional shape, a D shape, a C-shape, a 4 or more-sided shape, or the like, at least a portion of sensor element **1015** may have a corresponding shape. Notably, no portion of sensor element **1015** is present within liquid flow path **405**.

In this embodiment electronics module **413** includes an electronics cover **1071** that is configured to couple to sensor cover **1002**, e.g., via one or more fasteners as described above. Electronics module **413** further includes electronics circuitry **1073** (e.g., a controller), which is configured to be disposed between electronics cover **1071** and sensor cover **1002**, e.g., within first cover cavity **1055**. As best shown in FIG. **10M**, electronics module **413** further includes an electronics terminal **1025** that is configured to communicatively couple a controller within electronics module **413** to sensor element **1015** when fluid detection system **1000** is in an assembled state. Electronics terminal **1025** may have any suitable configuration and may be formed of or include any suitable electrically conductive material (e.g., metals such as copper, aluminum, gold, and the like). In embodiments, electronics terminal **1025** is in the form of a pin that is configured to extend through opening **1062** within cover divider wall **1057**, such that a first end of the pin electrically contacts electronics circuitry **1073** and a second end of the pin electrically contacts a portion of sensor element **1015**. Without limitation, electronics terminal **1025** is preferably biased towards sensor element **1015**, e.g., with a spring or other biasing mechanism. In such instances, electronics terminal **1025** may be referred to as a spring-loaded pin.

In an assembled state (as shown in FIG. **10A**), sensor base **1003** and sensor cover **1002** are coupled to one another and define a passageway through which conduit part **1004** extends. An edge of first cover receptacle **1060** and an edge of first base receptacle **1066** are disposed within first alignment ring **1068**, and an edge of second cover receptacle **1061** and an edge of second base receptacle **1067** are disposed within second alignment ring **1069**. When conduit part **1004** is so positioned, at least a portion of sensor element **1015** within groove **1014** is aligned with the open-

ing 1062 in cover divider wall 1057. Electronics module 413 is coupled to sensor cover 1002 via one or more fasteners as described above. When electronics module 413 is so coupled, electronics terminal 1025 (e.g., a spring-loaded pin) extends through opening 1062 to contact a portion of the surface of sensor element 1015 as described above. In that way, sensor element 1015 is communicatively coupled to the controller within electronics module 413 by electronics terminal 1025. The fluid sensor system 1000 may then be used to detect the presence or absence of fluid in liquid flow path 405, e.g., in the same manner as described above connection with fluid detection systems 400, 600, and 800.

Although not shown, fluid detection system 1000 may include a cable, e.g., for providing power to the components of electronics module 413, and optionally to provide a wired connection to a communications system that may be sued to send notifications in response to a detected wet and/or flood event. The cable may also provide a connection to earth ground for sensor element 1015. However, sensor element 1015 may be ground in another manner as discussed above in connection with sensor element 407.

FIG. 13 depicts one example of a valve leak detection system that includes a fluid detection system 1000 consistent with the present disclosure. As shown, valve leak detection system 1400 includes a fluid detection system 1000 coupled to a valve system 1301. In this case valve system 1301 is in the form of a temperature and pressure (T & P) relief valve that includes a thermal actuator 1303, e.g., as described in U.S. Pre-Grant Publication No. 2020/0141773, which is incorporated herein by reference. More particularly, valve system includes and inlet proximate to thermal actuator 1303, an outlet fluidly coupled to fluid detection system 1000, and a control valve (not shown) that is located between the inlet and the outlet and is configured to fluidly couple the inlet to the outlet upon the detection of at least one fluid condition, such as a fluid overpressure or over temperature condition. In operation, the inlet of valve system 1301 may be coupled to a water storage device, such as a water heater, such that thermal actuator 1303 extends into the water storage device. So connected, valve system 1301 may monitor fluid conditions within the water storage device, such as fluid pressure and fluid temperature. When fluid conditions are within acceptable parameters, a control valve within valve system 1301 may be in a closed state, preventing a flow of fluid from the inlet of valve system 1301 to the outlet of valve system 1301 and thus, preventing the flow of fluid into the liquid flow path 405 of fluid detection system 1000. When fluid conditions are outside acceptable parameters (e.g., in an over pressure or over temperature condition), the control valve within valve system 1301 may move to an open state, fluidly coupling the inlet and outlet of valve system 1301. In that state, fluid may flow through valve system 1301 and into the liquid flow path 405 fluid detection system 1000.

Consistent with the foregoing disclosure, fluid detection system 1000 may monitor the capacitance of liquid flow path 405 to determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path—which may be indicative of a faulty condition of valve system 1301 or fluid conditions within the water storage device that are out of specification. To accomplish that function, when fluid detection system 1000 is installed as shown in FIG. 13, a calibration operation may be executed to establish a baseline capacitance within liquid flow path 405. Alternatively, the baseline capacitance may be pre-set. In any case, the sensor element 1015 within fluid detection system 1000 may monitor the capacitance of liquid flow path 405 and provide a sensor signal indicative of that

capacitance to a controller, e.g., within electronics module 413. The controller may then determine the detected capacitance in the liquid flow path 405, and determine whether a wet, dry, and/or flood event is occurring in liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on the detected capacitance as previously described. The controller may also perform recording and reporting operations as previous described.

FIGS. 11A-11O illustrate another example of a fluid detection system consistent with the present disclosure. As 10 shown, fluid detection system 1100 includes a sensor module 401 and an electronics module 413. A liquid flow path 405 extends through the sensor module 401. The function of sensor module 401 and electronics module 413 are largely the same as described above in connection with FIG. 4, and 15 so are not reiterated. This embodiment is also functionally similar to system 500 described above, but lacks an air flow path 423. Like fluid detection system 1000, fluid detection system 1100 may be particularly useful for detecting leaks from smaller water systems, such as residential and RV 20 water systems, hot water heaters, and the like.

As best shown in FIGS. 11A and 11O, electronics module 413 is separable from sensor module 401. That is, electronics module 413 may be physically connected and disconnected from sensor module 401, such that fluid detection system 1100 is in an assembled state (FIG. 11A) or in a disassembled state (FIG. 11O). In the assembled state a controller (e.g., a controller 419 as described above in connection with FIG. 4) is present within electronics module 413 and is communicatively coupled to a sensor element 30 1115 in sensor module 401. The controller within electronics module 413 may be communicatively coupled to sensor element 1115 in any suitable manner. For example, and as will be described later, when system 1100 is in an assembled state, a proximal portion 1143 of sensor element 1115 may 35 be communicatively coupled to a controller in electronics module 413 by at least one electronics terminal 1125 that couples to electronics circuitry 1173 in electronics module 413.

As best shown in FIGS. 11A-11H, sensor module 401 40 includes a sensor cover 1102 and a sensor base 1103, which are separable from one another. When assembled as shown in FIGS. 11B-11H, the sensor cover 1102 and sensor base 1103 form a sensor housing 1104. The way sensor cover 1102 and sensor base 1103 can be coupled to one another is not limited. In embodiments, sensor cover 1102 and sensor base 1103 are coupled by one or more fasteners (e.g., screws), a weld, an interference fit between corresponding parts of sensor cover 1102 and sensor base 1103, combinations thereof, and the like. As best shown in FIG. 10H, sensor cover 1002 and sensor base 1003 may include one or 45 more fastener openings 1105 that are configured facilitate coupling of sensor cover 1102 to sensor base 1103 and/or another structure, e.g., with one or more fasteners. The number of fastener openings 1105 is not limited, and any of 50 such openings may be omitted.

As shown in FIG. 11I, sensor cover 1102 includes a cover body (not labeled) that includes a cover inner wall 1130, a cover outer wall 1131, a first cover cavity 1155, and a second cover cavity 1156. The first cover cavity 1155 is generally 55 configured to receive or otherwise couple to electronics module 413. The way sensor cover 1102 (and, more particularly, first cover cavity 1155) couples to electronics module 413 is not limited, and such components may be coupled in any suitable manner. For example, sensor cover 1102 may couple to electronics module 413 via one more 60 fasteners, an adhesive, a weld, an interference fit, or the like. In embodiments, electronics module 413 includes an elec- 65

liquid flow path—which may be indicative of a faulty condition of valve system 1501. To accomplish that function, when fluid detection system 1200 is installed as shown in FIG. 15, a calibration operation may be executed to establish a baseline capacitance within liquid flow path 405. Alternatively, the baseline capacitance may be pre-set. In any case, the sensor element 1215 within fluid detection system 1200 may monitor the capacitance of liquid flow path 405 and provide a sensor signal indicative of that capacitance to a controller, e.g., within electronics module 413. The controller may then determine the detected capacitance in the liquid flow path 405, and determine whether a wet, dry, and/or flood event is occurring in liquid flow path 405 based at least in part on the detected capacitance as previously described. The controller may also perform recording and reporting operations as previously described.

EXAMPLES

The following are additional example embodiments of the present disclosure.

Example 1: According to this example there is provided a fluid detection system, including: a sensor module including: a sensor housing, the sensor housing including a liquid flow path that extends through the sensor housing; and a sensor element outside the liquid flow path, at least portion of the sensor element extending at least partially around a perimeter of the liquid flow path; wherein: the sensor element is configured to detect a capacitance within the liquid flow path and to provide a detection signal indicative of a detected capacitance within the liquid flow path; and the sensor element is configured to communicatively couple to a controller within an electronics module.

Example 2: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 1, wherein the sensor module further includes an air flow path extending through the sensor housing.

Example 3: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 2, wherein at least a portion of the liquid flow path and at least a portion of the air flow path extend parallel or substantially parallel to each other.

Example 4: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 1, wherein: the sensor module further includes a sensor channel; the sensor channel is at least partially disposed around the perimeter of the liquid flow path; and at least a portion of the sensor element is within the sensor channel.

Example 5: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 1, wherein:

the sensor element includes a first portion and a second portion; the first portion of the sensor element is disposed around at least a portion of the perimeter of the liquid flow path; and the second portion of the sensor element is configured to communicatively couple to the controller.

Example 6: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 1, further including the electronics module, wherein: the controller is within the electronics module; and the electronics module is configured to physically couple to the sensor housing such that the sensor element is communicatively coupled to the controller.

Example 7: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 5, wherein the controller is configured to receive the detection signal from the sensor module, and to determine whether a liquid is present within the liquid flow path based at least in part on the detection signal.

Example 8: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 7, wherein the controller is configured to: determine the detected capacitance at least in part from the detection signal; compare the detected capacitance to a capacitance threshold; and determine whether liquid is present within the liquid flow path based at least in part on comparing the detected capacitance to the capacitance threshold, and to determine whether a wet event has occurred based on the determination.

Example 9: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 8, wherein the controller is configured to determine that a wet event has occurred when the detected capacitance is less than or equal to the capacitance threshold.

Example 10: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 7, wherein the controller is further configured to: compare a total number of wet events occurring within a measurement period to a threshold number of wet events for the measurement period; and determine that a flood event has occurred when the total number of wet events occurring within a measurement period meets or exceeds the threshold number of wet events for the measurement period.

Example 11: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 10, further including communications circuitry (COMMS), wherein the controller is configured to cause the COMMS to issue a flood notification via a wired or wireless communication protocol in response to detection of a flood event.

Example 12: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 8, further including a calibration module in communication with the controller, wherein: the calibration module is configured to cause the controller to establish a baseline capacitance within the liquid flow path; and the controller is configured to set the capacitance threshold relative to the baseline capacitance.

Example 13: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 12, wherein the electronics module includes the calibration module.

Example 14: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 12, wherein the calibration module includes a calibration button, wherein actuation of the calibration button causes the calibration module to establish the baseline capacitance based at least in part on the detection signal provided by the sensor element.

Example 15: According to this example there is provided a method of fluid detection, including, with a fluid detection system including a sensor module and an electronics module, the sensor module including a sensor housing, a liquid flow path extending through the sensor housing, and a sensor element disposed at least partially around a perimeter of the liquid flow path, the electronics module including a controller communicatively coupled to the sensor element: detecting, with the sensor element, a capacitance within the liquid flow path; conveying a sensor signal indicative of the capacitance to the controller; determining a detected capacitance within the liquid flow path with the controller; comparing, with the controller, the detected capacitance to a capacitance threshold; and determining, with the controller, whether a wet event has occurred in the liquid flow path based at least in part on the comparing the detected capacitance to the capacitance threshold.

Example 16: This example includes any or all of the elements of example 15, wherein the fluid detection system further includes an air flow path extending through the sensor housing, and at least a portion of the liquid flow path

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11. The fluid detection system of claim **1**, further comprising the electronics module comprising said controller and said pin, wherein:

a proximal portion of the sensor element extends from the first cavity through the opening and into the second cavity; and

the electronics module is coupled to the second cavity such that at least a proximal portion of the pin contacts the proximal portion of the sensor element.

12. The fluid detection system of claim **11**, wherein at least a portion of the liquid flow path is defined by an inner wall of said sensor cover.

13. The fluid detection system of claim **12**, wherein the sensor cover further comprises at least one standoff to position the distal portion of the sensor element in the sensor channel.

14. The fluid detection system of claim **12**, wherein: the sensor cover comprises a cover outer wall and a cover inner wall;

the cover inner wall defines at least a portion of the liquid flow path; and

the at least one divider comprises first and second dividers that each extend from the cover outer wall.

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15. The fluid detection system of claim **12**, wherein said pin is a spring loaded pin.

16. The fluid detection system of claim **11**, wherein: said sensor cover comprises the first cavity and the second cavity;

the sensor cover comprises a sensor channel around the liquid flow path; and at least a distal portion of the at least one conductor is disposed in the sensor channel.

17. The fluid detection system of claim **16**, wherein: the sensor base comprises a base cavity; the electronics module comprises an electronics base comprising a first receptacle;

the base cavity and the second cavity at least partially define a second receptacle; and

the electronics module is coupled to sensor module by coupling the first receptacle to the second receptacle.

18. The fluid detection system of claim **17**, wherein the electronics module is coupled to the sensor module by receiving the second receptacle in the first receptacle.

19. The fluid detection system of claim **11**, wherein the at least one conductor comprises a first bend in the first cavity and a second bend in the second cavity.

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