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Marlin

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(54) **AUTOMATIC NOTIFICATION SYSTEM**

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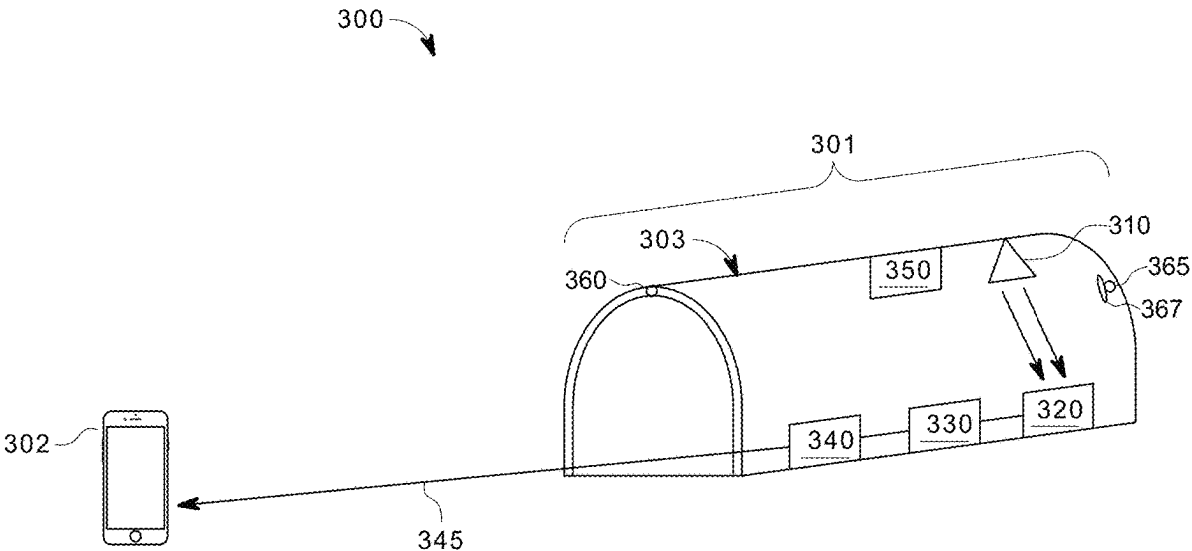
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(57) **ABSTRACT**
Aspects of the disclosure are directed to a container notification system. In accordance with one aspect, the container notification system, includes a sensing device to generate a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based on receipt of one or more content inputted to a container area; and a keep-alive component configured to transmit a diagnostic query based on a timetable to one or more components of the container notification system and further configured to receive one or more self-initiated health signals from at least one of the one or more components.

15 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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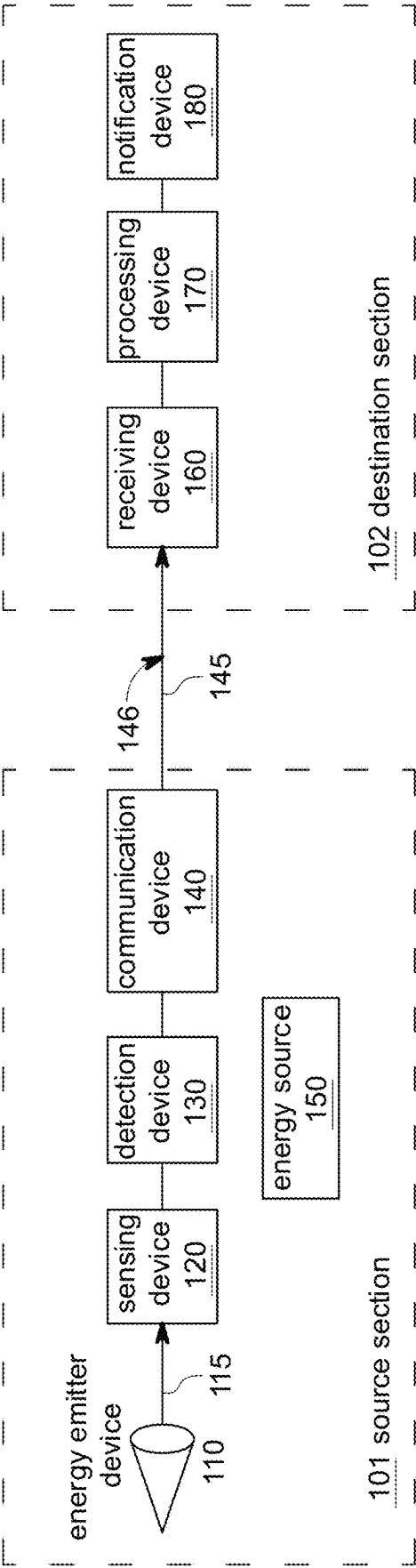
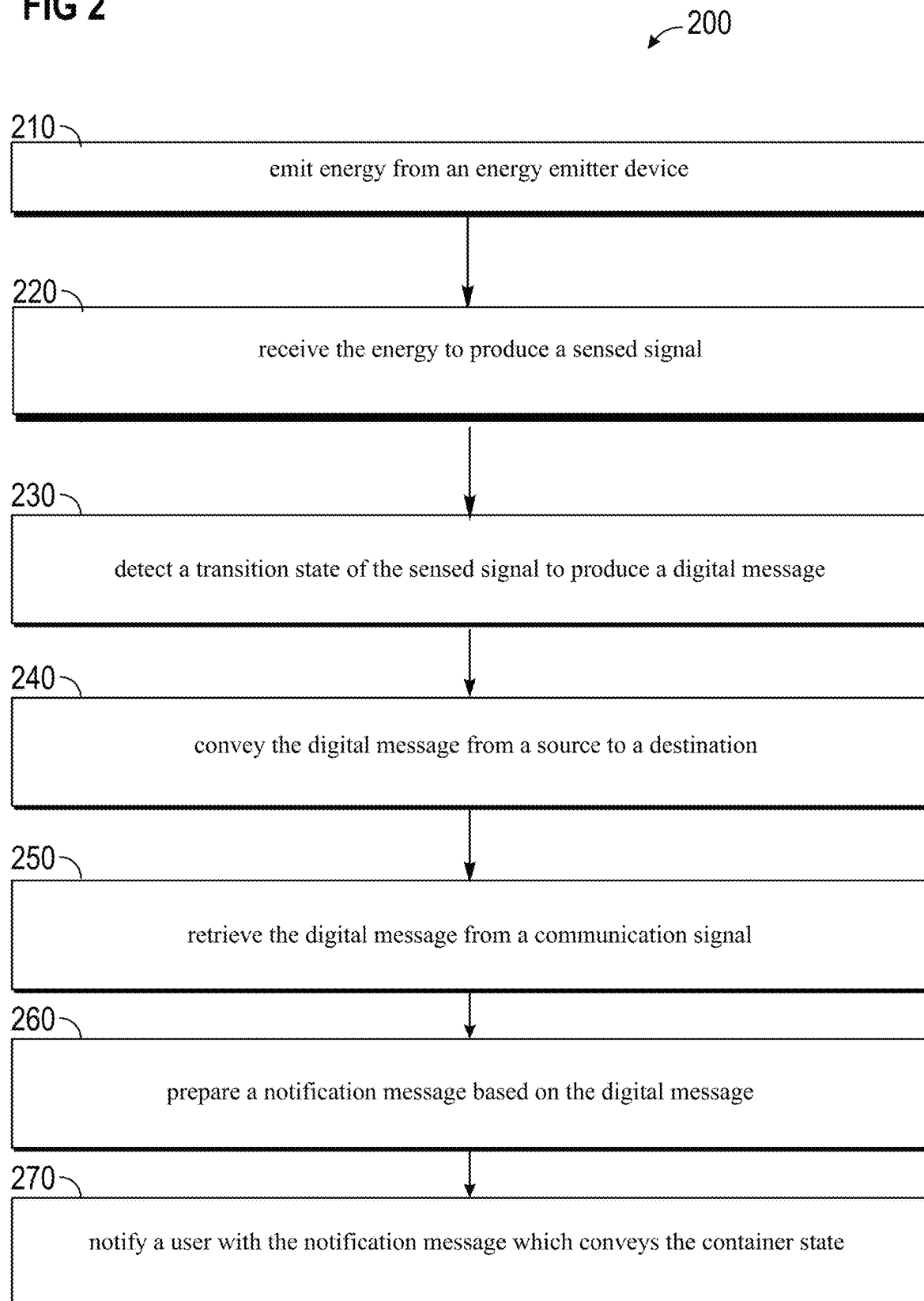


FIG. 1

FIG 2

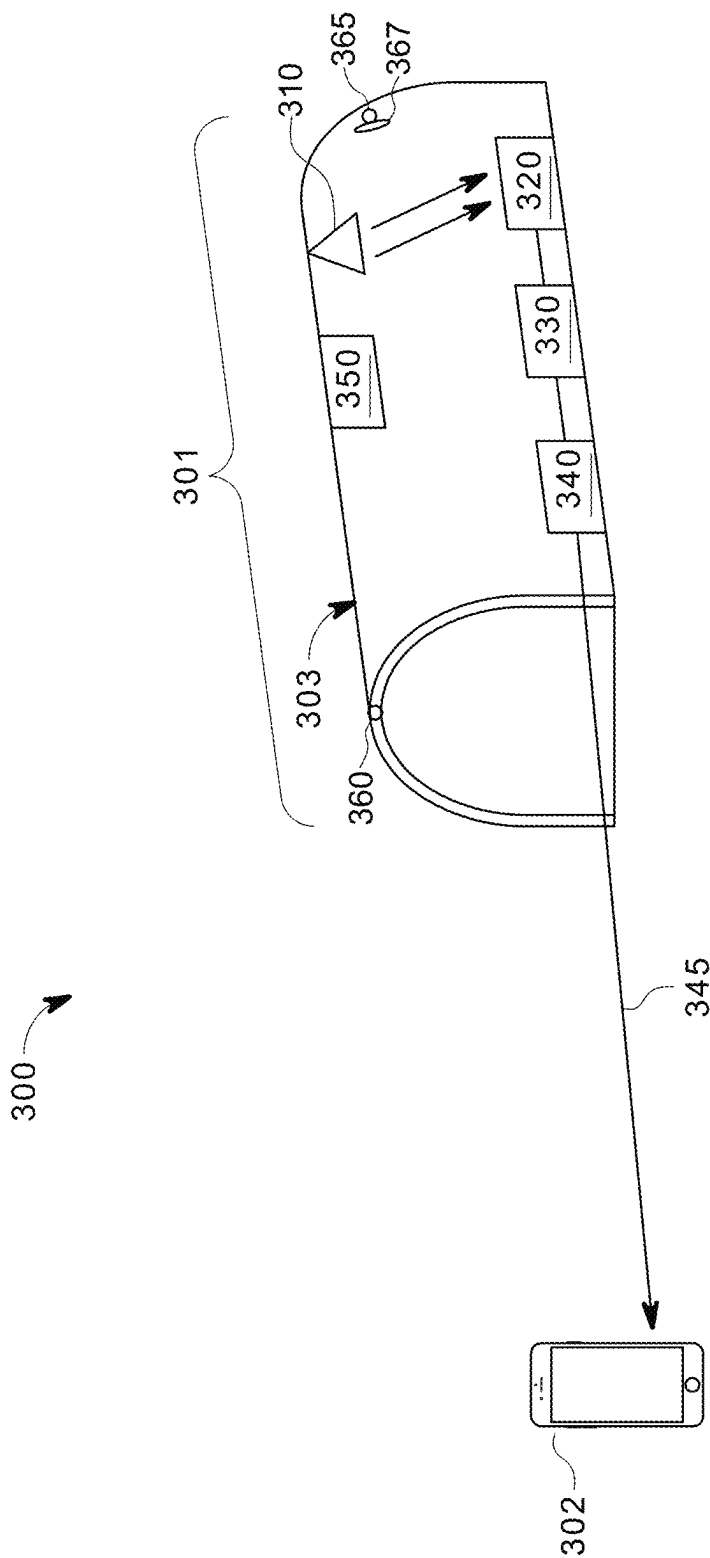


FIG. 3

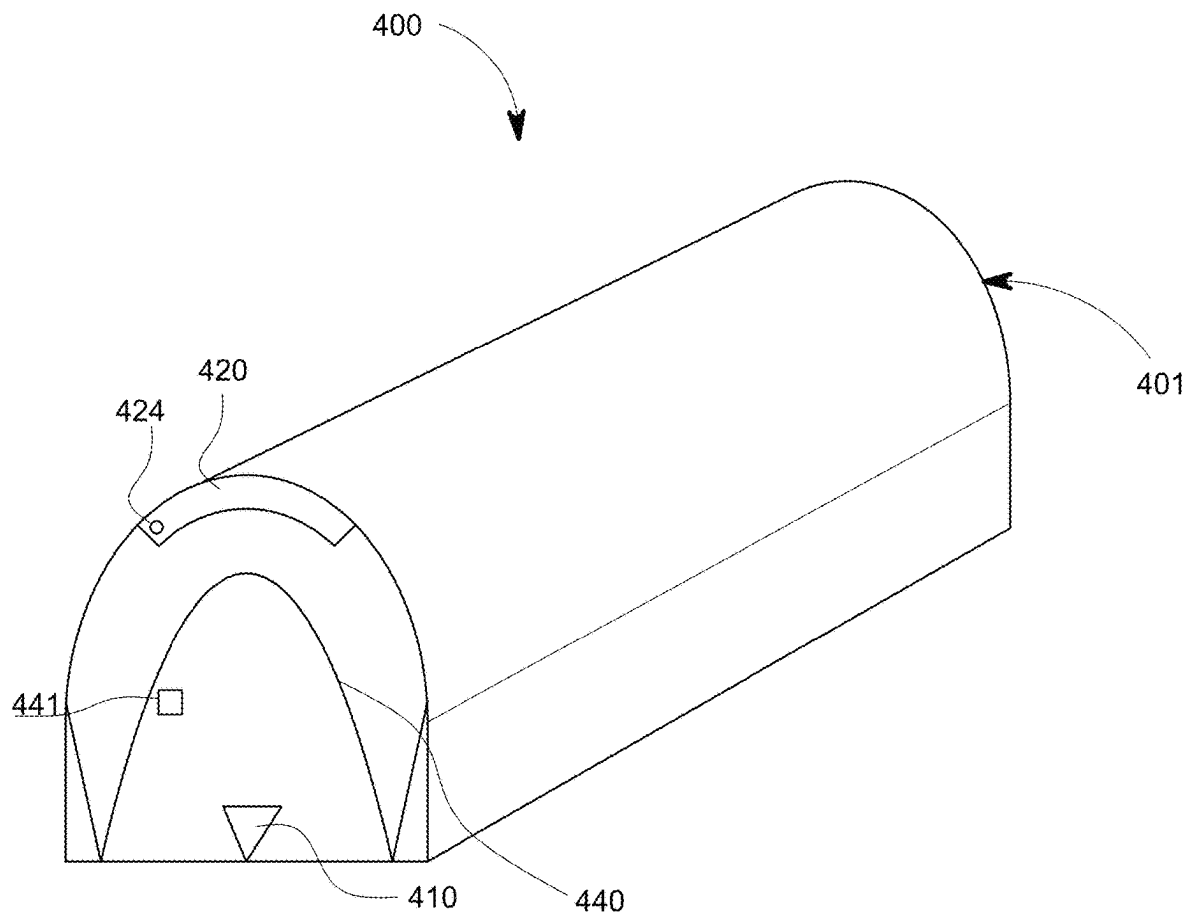


FIG. 4

FIG 6

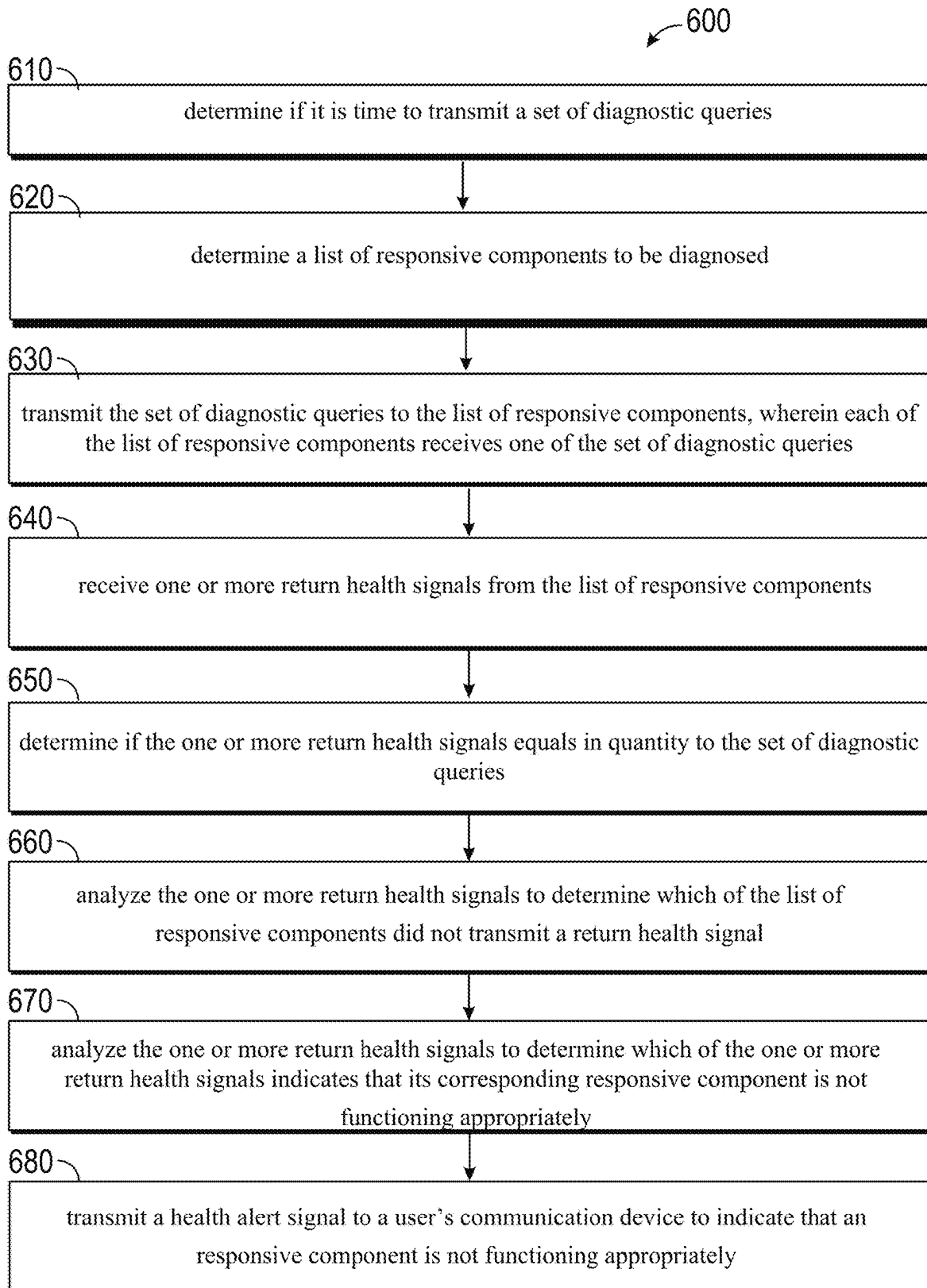


FIG 7

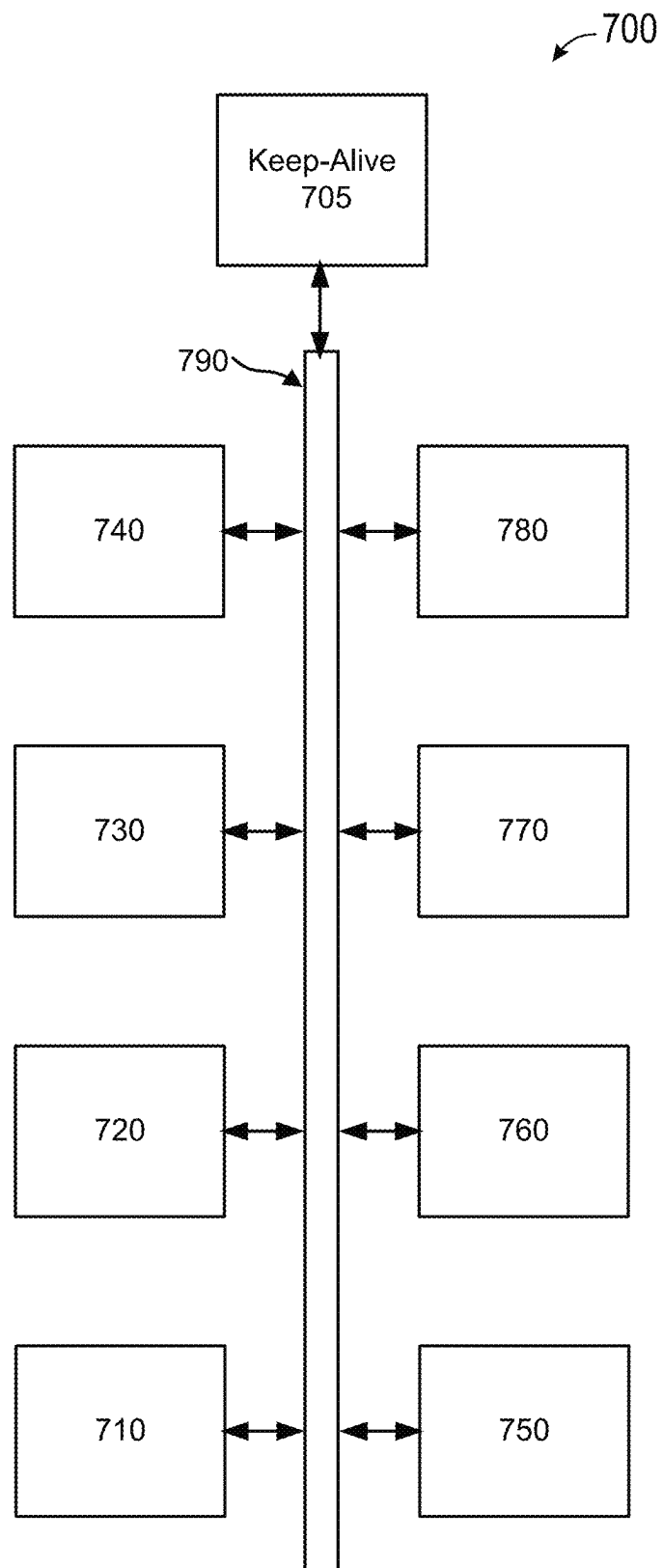
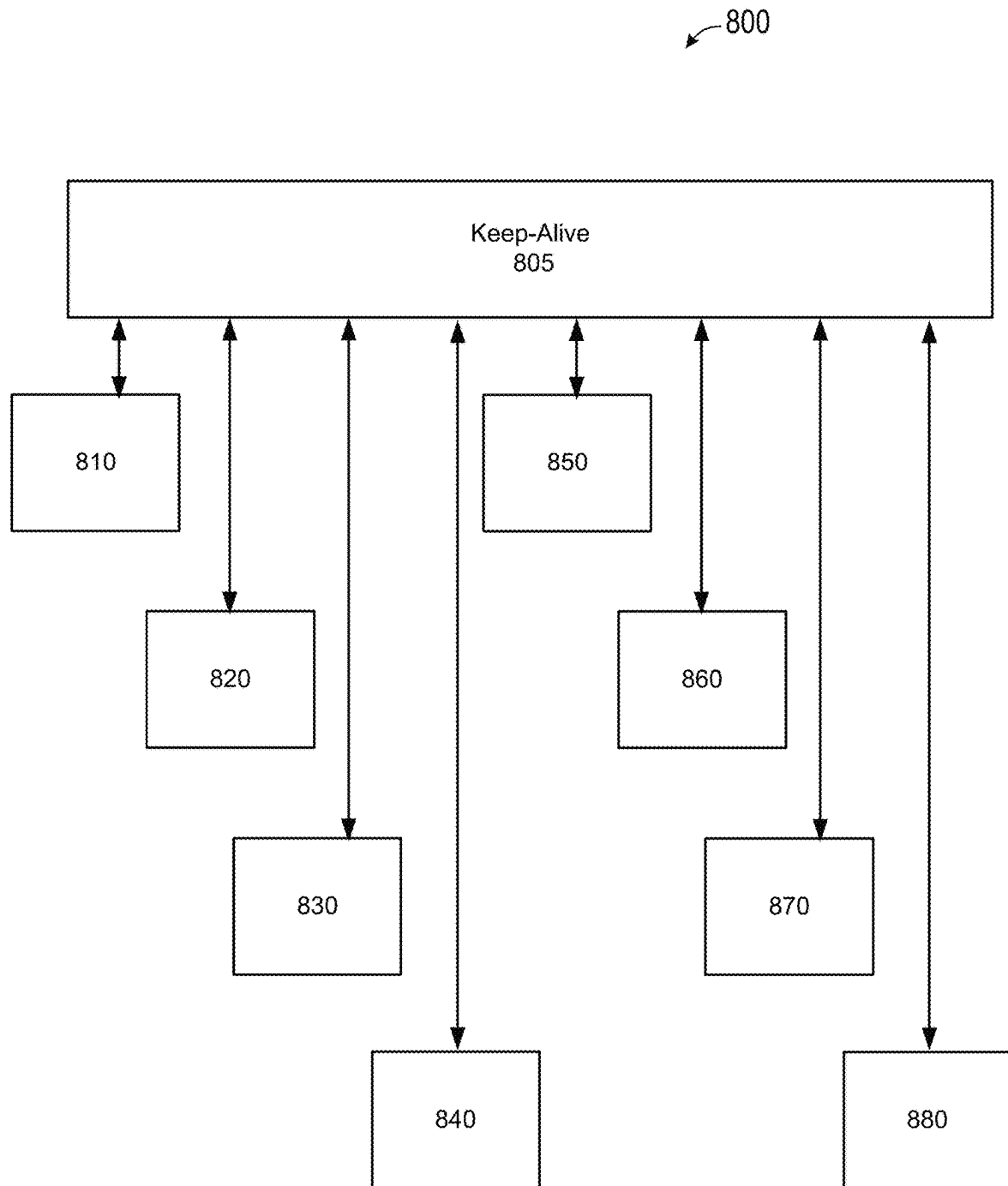


FIG 8



AUTOMATIC NOTIFICATION SYSTEM**CLAIM OF PRIORITY**

This application is a continuation application of patent application Ser. No. 18/649,554 filed Apr. 29, 2024, titled “Automated Mail Notification System” which is a continuation-in-part application of patent application Ser. No. 18/314,507 filed May 9, 2023, titled “Automated Mail Notification System”, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,998,131, issued on Jun. 4, 2024, the entire contents of the prior application are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth below in its entirety and for all applicable purposes.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This disclosure relates generally to the field of notification, and, in particular, to an automatic notification system.

BACKGROUND

Delivery of mail to a user mailbox is a routine activity in contemporary life. However, notification of an actual delivery of mail to the user mailbox requires a user to physically examine the contents of the user mailbox by moving in proximity to the user mailbox and examining its contents, typically outside, without first knowing whether or not delivery has actually occurred. It would be advantageous for the user to be informed automatically of the receipt of mail in the user mailbox prior to physical movement to the location of the user mailbox.

SUMMARY

The following presents a simplified summary of one or more aspects of the present disclosure, in order to provide a basic understanding of such aspects. This summary is not an extensive overview of all contemplated features of the disclosure, and is intended neither to identify key or critical elements of all aspects of the disclosure nor to delineate the scope of any or all aspects of the disclosure. Its sole purpose is to present some concepts of one or more aspects of the disclosure in a simplified form as a prelude to the more detailed description that is presented later.

In one aspect, the disclosure provides an automatic mail notification system. Accordingly, a mail notification system, including an energy emitter device configured to emit energy; a sensing device coupled to the energy emitter device, the sensing device configured to receive the energy from the energy emitter device to produce a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal and configured to produce a digital message; and a housing configured to receive one or more mail, wherein the housing houses the energy emitter device, the sensing device, and the detection device.

In one example, the mail notification system further includes a communication device coupled to the detection device, the communication device configured to convey the digital message from a source to a destination. In one example, the mail notification system further includes an energy source configured to provide electrical energy to one or more of the following: the energy emitter, the sensing device, the detection device and the communication device.

In one example, the source is the housing. In one example, the destination is a receiving device. In one example, the destination is a destination section including a receiving

device, a processing device and a notification device. In one example, the destination is a home or a business location of a user. In one example, the receiving device is configured to retrieve the digital message.

In one example, the processing device is coupled to the receiving device and the processing device is configured to prepare a notification message based on the digital message. In one example, the notification device is coupled to the processing device and the notification device is configured to notify a user with the notification message, and wherein the notification message conveys a container state of the housing.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides a method for implementing an automatic mail notification, the method including emitting energy from an energy emitter device; receiving the energy from the energy emitter device to produce a sensed signal; detecting a transition state of the sensed signal to produce a digital message; and conveying the digital message from a housing to a destination, wherein the housing is configured to receive one or more mail.

In one example, the energy is an electromagnetic energy with one of the following: visible wavelengths, infrared wavelengths, microwave or radio wavelengths. In one example, the energy is an acoustic energy with one of the following: a sonic frequency band, an ultrasonic frequency band or an infrasonic frequency band. In one example, the energy is emitted by a light emitting diode (LED), an acoustic source, an ultrasonic source or an infrasonic source. In one example, the transition state includes a hysteresis logic.

In one example, the method further includes encoding the digital message into a communication signal, wherein the communication signal is configured to convey the digital message to the destination. In one example, the method further includes transporting the communication signal over a wireless communication link, wherein the wireless communication link conforms with one of the following wireless protocols: Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, near field communication (NFC), Infrared Data Association (IrDA), long-term evolution (LTE), a 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) wireless protocol.

In one example, the method further includes retrieving the digital message from the communication signal; and preparing a notification message based on the digital message, wherein the notification message conveys a container state of the housing.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides an apparatus implementing an automatic mail notification, the apparatus including means for emitting energy from an energy emitter device; means for receiving the energy from the energy emitter device to produce a sensed signal; means for detecting a transition state of the sensed signal to produce a digital message; means for encoding the digital message into a communication signal; and means for conveying the digital message from a housing to a destination, wherein the housing is configured to receive one or more mail.

In one example, the apparatus further includes means for retrieving the digital message from the communication signal; and means for preparing a notification message based on the digital message, wherein the notification message conveys a container state of the housing.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides a container notification system, including: a housing configured to receive one or more content; a sensing device to produce a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based

on receipt of the one or more content; and a keep-alive component configured to transmit a diagnostic query and to receive a return health signal, and wherein the housing houses the sensing device, the detection device and the keep-alive component.

In one example, the container further includes a plurality of responsive components, wherein one of the plurality of responsive components is configured to receive the diagnostic query. In one example, at least one of the plurality of responsive components is further configured to transmit the return health signal. In one example, the return health signal indicates whether the one of the plurality of responsive components is functioning appropriately. In one example, the detection device is further configured to generate a digital message based on the transition state.

In one example, the container further includes a communication device coupled to the detection device, the communication device configured to convey the digital message from a source to a destination. In one example, the plurality of responsive components includes one or more of the following: the communication device; the detection device; the sensing device; an energy source; an energy emitter device; a sensor; a tampering sensor; a lock mechanism.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides a container including: a housing configured to receive one or more content; a sensing device to produce a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based on receipt of the one or more content based on a comparison of a sensed signal amplitude to a threshold level; and a first camera coupled to the housing, wherein the first camera includes a first sensor to sense motion and the first camera is configured to record activities when the motion is sensed.

In one example, the first camera is mounted on an interior surface of the housing. In one example, the first camera is mounted on an exterior surface of the housing. In one example, the container further includes a second camera mounted on an interior surface of the housing, wherein the second camera includes a second sensor to sense motion inside the housing. In one example, the second camera is configured to record activities when the motion inside the housing is sensed.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides a container including: a housing configured to receive one or more content, wherein the housing includes a door; a sensing device to produce a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based on receipt of the one or more content; and a tampering sensor configured to detect tampering of the housing.

In one example, the tampering sensor is coupled to the door. In one example, the door includes a lock mechanism. In one example, the tampering sensor is electronically coupled to the lock mechanism. In one example, the tampering sensor is configured to detect if the lock mechanism is being tampered with.

In one example, the container further includes a processor and a transmitter, wherein the tampering sensor is electronically coupled to the processor and the transmitter. In one example, the container further includes an alternative lock on the door, an audio alarm coupled to the housing, an external camera coupled to the housing, and an internal camera coupled to an interior surface of the housing. In one example, the tampering sensor causes the processor and the transmitter to perform one or more of the following; send a

message with an alert of tampering, activate an alternative lock on the door, turn ON the external camera, turn ON the internal camera, activate an audio alarm.

Another aspect of the disclosure provides a container notification system, including: a sensing device to produce a sensed signal; a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based on receipt of one or more content; a keep-alive component configured to receive a self-initiated health signal based on a timetable, and the keep-alive component is further configured to transmit a health alert signal if the self-initiated health signal is not received based on the timetable and based on a quantity of missed self-initiated health signal, and a housing configured to receive the one or more content, and wherein the housing houses the sensing device, the detection device and the keep-alive component.

These and other aspects of the present disclosure will become more fully understood upon a review of the detailed description, which follows. Other aspects, features, and implementations of the present disclosure will become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art, upon reviewing the following description of specific, exemplary implementations of the present invention in conjunction with the accompanying figures. While features of the present invention may be discussed relative to certain implementations and figures below, all implementations of the present invention can include one or more of the advantageous features discussed herein. In other words, while one or more implementations may be discussed as having certain advantageous features, one or more of such features may also be used in accordance with the various implementations of the invention discussed herein. In similar fashion, while exemplary implementations may be discussed below as device, system, or method implementations it should be understood that such exemplary implementations can be implemented in various devices, systems, and methods.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an example block diagram of an automatic mail notification system.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example flow diagram for automatic mail notification.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example of an automatic mailbox notification system.

FIG. 4 illustrates an example of a conformal sensor assembly within a container with a plurality of sensor elements.

FIG. 5 illustrates an example of a conformal sensor assembly within a container with a plurality of sensor elements and a reflective surface.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example flow diagram for diagnostic investigations.

FIG. 7 illustrates a first example configuration of electrical connections of the keep-alive component with a plurality of responsive components.

FIG. 8 illustrates a second example configuration of electrical connections of the keep-alive component with a plurality of responsive components.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The detailed description set forth below in connection with the appended drawings is intended as a description of various configurations and is not intended to represent the only configurations in which the concepts described herein

may be practiced. The detailed description includes specific details for the purpose of providing a thorough understanding of various concepts. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that these concepts may be practiced without these specific details. In some instances, well known structures and components are shown in block diagram form in order to avoid obscuring such concepts.

While for purposes of simplicity of explanation, the methodologies are shown and described as a series of acts, it is to be understood and appreciated that the methodologies are not limited by the order of acts, as some acts may, in accordance with one or more aspects, occur in different orders and/or concurrently with other acts from that shown and described herein. For example, those skilled in the art will understand and appreciate that a methodology could alternatively be represented as a series of interrelated states or events, such as in a state diagram. Moreover, not all illustrated acts may be required to implement a methodology in accordance with one or more aspects.

FIG. 1 illustrates an example block diagram of an automatic mail notification system 100. The example automatic mail notification system 100 includes a source section 101, where sensing is performed and a notification is generated, and a destination section 102, where the notification may be received. In one example, the source section 101 is a physical mailbox for receiving mail. In one example, mail is one or more letters and/or packages, for example, delivered by a postal carrier or a private delivery personnel. The source section 101 of the automatic mail notification system 100 may have a plurality of source devices such as an energy emitter device 110, a sensing device 120, a detection device 130, a communication device 140 and an energy source 150. The destination section 102 of the automatic mail notification system 100 may have a plurality of destination devices such as a receiving device 160, a processing device 170 and a notification device 180. One skilled in the art would understand that the example components disclosed herein for either the source section 101 or the destination section 102 are not exclusive and that other components may be included within the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. Additionally, in one example, not all the components disclosed herein for the source section 101 are mandatory. Similarly, in one example, not all the components disclosed herein for the destination section 102 are mandatory.

In one example, the energy emitter device 110 may be a visible light source or an infrared light source. In one example, the energy emitter device 110 emits energy to a sensing device 120. In one example, the energy is a sensing signal 115 which is sent to the sensing device 120. For example, the energy emitter device 110 may be a light emitting diode (LED). In one example, the energy emitter device 110 may be an acoustic source. For example, the energy emitter device 110 may be an ultrasonic source (i.e., a source which produces high frequency inaudible sound waves).

In one example, the sensing device 120 receives energy from the sensing signal 115 which is generated by the energy emitter device 110 and produces a sensed signal which depends on the energy level of the sensing signal 115. In one example, the sensed signal is produced by converting the received energy received from the energy emitter device 110 into a sensed electrical signal. The sensed electrical signal, for example, may include a sensed signal amplitude. For example, the sensed signal amplitude is monotonically related to the received energy. That is, as the received energy

increases, the sensed signal amplitude increases. That is, as the received energy decreases, the sensed signal amplitude decreases.

In one example, the sensed signal changes amplitude state when the sensed signal amplitude transitions between two discrete states when an obstruction causes the energy level of the sensing signal to change by at least a minimum energy differential. For example, the minimum energy differential is equivalent to when the energy level of the sensing signal changes by an amplitude transition greater than a predefined amplitude threshold. That is, a changed sensed signal is a sensed signal from the sensing device 120 with an energy level change with an amplitude transition greater than the predefined amplitude threshold. In one example, the predefined amplitude threshold may be defined as greater than 50% change from a nominal amplitude level. One skilled in the art would understand that the percentage of change may be a value other than 50%. For example, the percentage of change may be set by a user and/or may be dependent one or more factors, such as the sensitivity of one or more component of the source section 101.

In one example, the sensing device 120 may be a light sensor. For example, the sensing device 120 may be sensitive to visible wavelengths (e.g., between 400 nm and 700 nm wavelengths) generated by the energy emitter device 110. For example, the sensing device 120 may be sensitive to infrared wavelengths (e.g., greater than 700 nm wavelength) generated by the energy emitter device 110. In one example, the light sensor is a photodetector. For example, the light sensor may be sensitive to visible wavelengths. For example, the light sensor may be sensitive to infrared (IR) wavelengths. In one example, the sensing device 120 may be an acoustic sensor for example, a sonic sensor, an ultrasonic sensor, etc. In one example, the sensing device 120 is matched to the energy emitter device 110. That is, if the energy emitter device 110 generates electromagnetic energy within a spectral band, then the sensing device 120 is sensitive to electromagnetic energy in that spectral band. If the energy emitter device 110 generates acoustic energy within an acoustic frequency band, then the sensing device 120 is sensitive to acoustic energy within that acoustic frequency band.

In one example, the sensing device 120 is vibration-tolerant. For example, a vibration-tolerant sensing device does not produce a changed sensed signal when a mechanical vibration occurs at the sensing device 120.

In one example, the sensing device 120 may be a photodiode. In one example, the photodiode is a light sensitive detector which absorbs incident photons and produces a photodiode electrical current which depends on the photon rate or input power level. In one example, the light sensitive detector may be sensitive to a spectral band (e.g., visible, ultraviolet, infrared, etc.). For example, the photon rate may be expressed in photons/see or in watts. For example, the electrical current may be expressed in amperes (A), milliamperes (mA), microamperes (μ A), etc. In one example, the photodiode electrical current may be proportional to the photon rate or input power level. For example, a ratio of photodiode electrical current over input power level may be denoted as responsivity R in units of amperes per watt (A/W).

In one example, the detection device 130 detects a transition state from the sensed signal from the sensing device 120 to produce a digital message. In one example, the detection device 130 compares the sensed signal from the sensing device 120 to a threshold level. For example, the detection device 130 compares the sensed signal amplitude

to the threshold level. For example, the detection device **130** may be coupled to the sensing device **120** to determine whether or not the sensed signal (e.g., the sensed signal amplitude) has changed state and to indicate a transition state. In one example, the transition state may be represented by the digital message. The digital message may be generated by the detection device **130**. For example, the digital message may be a binary indication of whether the transition state indicates a change from an empty state to a non-empty state. For example, the transition state may be an indication of a change from an empty container to a non-empty container. For example, the container may be a user mailbox which is a repository for received mail. In one example, the container may be a locker and the container state is an indication of an empty locker or a non-empty locker in which the content may include mail, clothing, books, boxes, etc. In one example, the container may be a house or a dwelling and the container state is an indication of an empty house or a non-empty house in which the container state may include whether or not a person or an animal has entered the house.

In one example, the detection device **130** may include hysteresis logic. For example, hysteresis logic includes a logical dependence on its state history. That is, the detection of the transition state depends not only on the comparison of the sensed signal amplitude to the threshold level, but also on the state history of the sensed signal. For example, the state history may include a finite time duration of the sensed signal prior to a present time.

In one example, the communication device **140** encodes the digital message from the detection device **130** into a communication signal **145** which conveys the digital message from a source to a destination. For example, the communication signal **145** may be transmitted from a user mailbox to a receiver in a home. For example, the communication signal **145** may be transported over a wireless communication link **146** which conforms with a wireless protocol. In another example, the communication signal **145** may be transported over a wired link (not shown).

In one example, the wireless communication link **146** may be based on a short-range wireless system which conforms with a wireless protocol such as Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, near field communication (NFC), Infrared Data Association (IrDA), etc. or on a long-range wireless system which conforms with a wireless protocol such as, long-term evolution (LTE), a 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) wireless protocol (e.g., 5G, 6G, etc). For example, a short-range wireless system may be used for propagation distances much less than 100 m, i.e., within a home, small business, local environment, etc. For example, a long-range wireless system may be used for propagation distances much greater than 100 m, i.e., over a neighborhood, town, city, etc.

In one example, a Wi-Fi system conforms with an IEEE 802.11 wireless protocol which uses microwave frequency bands (e.g., 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, etc.) to cover short ranges (e.g., <100 m propagation distance). For example, there are a plurality of Wi-Fi versions which use different modulation types and formats.

In one example, a Bluetooth system conforms with a Bluetooth wireless protocol which uses microwave frequency bands (e.g., 2.4 GHz) to cover very short ranges (e.g., <10 m propagation distance).

In one example, an IrDA system conforms with an IrDA wireless protocol which uses near-IR frequency bands (e.g., 300-400 THz) to cover very short ranges (e.g., <10 m propagation distance).

In one example, the energy source **150** may be a battery (e.g., a chargeable battery or a non-chargeable battery), a solar cell, etc. For example, the energy source **150** may be used to provide electrical energy for the plurality of devices (e.g., one or more of: an energy emitter device **110**, a sensing device **120**, a detection device **130**, a communication device **140** and/or an energy source **150**) in the automatic mail notification system **100**.

In one example, the receiving device **160** retrieves the digital message from the communication signal **145** using a receiver. In one example, the receiving device **160** is in a home or a business location. In one example, the receiving device **160** decodes the communication signal **145** to retrieve the digital message created by the detection device **130**.

In one example, the processing device **170** accepts the retrieved digital message from the receiving device **160** and prepares a notification message to be presented to the user. In one example, the notification message may be a binary message which indicates a container state (e.g., user mailbox state). For example, the container state may indicate a change from an empty state to a non-empty state.

In one example, the notification device **180** accepts the notification message from the processing device **170** and notifies the user of the container state. In one example, the user notification may be a visual display (e.g., graphical icons) which indicates the container state. In one example, the user notification may be a text message or an electronic mail (email) message sent to the user. In one example, the user notification may be an audio indication which indicates the container state.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example flow diagram **200** for automatic mail notification. In block **210**, emit energy from an energy emitter device. That is, an energy emitter device emits energy. In one example, the energy may include a sensing signal. In one example, the energy is electromagnetic energy. For example, the electromagnetic energy may include visible wavelengths. For example, the electromagnetic energy may include infrared wavelengths. For example, the electromagnetic energy may include microwave or radio wavelengths. In one example, the energy is acoustic energy. For example, the acoustic energy may include a sonic frequency band. For example, the acoustic energy may include an ultrasonic frequency band. For example, the acoustic energy may include an infrasonic frequency band. In one example, the energy may include a sensing signal. For example, the energy may be generated by a light emitting diode (LED). For example, the energy may be generated by an acoustic source. For example, the energy may be generated by an ultrasonic source. For example, the energy may be generated by an infrasonic source.

In block **220**, receive the energy from the energy emitter device to produce a sensed signal using a sensing device. That is, a sensing device receives the energy from the energy emitter device to produce a sensed signal. In one example, the received energy is the sensing signal generated by the energy emitter device. In one example, the received energy is used to produce a sensed signal which depends on the energy level of the sensing signal. In one example, the sensing device is a light sensor. For example, the light sensor is a photodiode. In one example, the sensing device is an acoustic sensor. For example, the acoustic sensor is a sonic sensor, an ultrasonic sensor, an infrasonic sensor, etc.

In block **230**, detect a transition state of the sensed signal using a detection device to produce a digital message. That is, a detection device detects a transition state of the sensed signal and produces a digital message. In one example,

detecting the transition state determines whether or not the sensed signal has changed state. In one example, the transition state may be represented by the digital message. In one example, detecting a transition state from the sensed signal may include hysteresis logic. For example, hysteresis logic may detect the transition state in accordance with its state history. That is, the detection of the transition state depends not only on the comparison of the sensed signal amplitude to the threshold level, but also on the state history of the sensed signal.

In block 240, convey the digital message from a source to a destination using a communication device. That is, a communication device conveys the digital message from a source to a destination. In one example, the source is a transmitter. For example, the transmitter is within a container, e.g., a user mailbox or a mailbox for housing (e.g., receiving) one or more letters and/or packages. In one example, a physical mailbox is a housing for containing one or more devices of the source section 101 illustrated in FIG. 1. In one example, the devices of the source section 101 include an energy emitter device 110, a sensing device 120, a detection device 130, a communication device 140 and an energy source 150. In one example, the destination is a receiving device. For example, the receiving device is within a home or a business location. In another example, the destination is the destination section 102 illustrated in FIG. 1, wherein the destination section includes one or more of a receiving device 160, a processing device 170 and a notification device 180. In one example, the destination is a house or a business location of a user.

In one example, the communication device encodes the digital message into a communication signal which conveys the digital message from a source to a destination. For example, the communication signal may be transported over a wireless communication link which conforms with a wireless protocol. In one example, the wireless communication link may be based on a short-range wireless system which conforms with a wireless protocol such as Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, near field communication (NFC), Infrared Data Association (IrDA), etc. or on a long-range wireless system which conforms with a wireless protocol such as LTE, 5G, 6G, etc. In another example, the communication signal may be transported directly from a source to a destination over a direct wired link.

In block 250, retrieve the digital message using a receiving device. That is, a receiving device retrieves the digital message. In one example, retrieve the digital message from the communication signal using a receiving device. That is, a receiving device retrieves the digital message from a communication signal since the communication device encodes the digital message into the communication signal. In one example, the receiving device retrieves the digital message from the communication signal using a receiver. In one example, the receiving device is in a home (e.g., house) or a business location of a user. In one example, the receiving device decodes the communication signal to retrieve the digital message created by the detection device.

In block 260, prepare a notification message based on the digital message using a processing device. That is, a processing device prepares a notification message based on the digital message. In one example, accept the digital message from the receiving device. In one example, the notification message may be a binary message which indicates the container state (e.g., user mailbox state). For example, the notification message indicates whether there is or is not mail inside a user's mailbox. In one example, the mailbox is a housing for one or more of the devices (e.g., an energy

emitter device 110, a sensing device 120, a detection device 130, a communication device 140 and/or an energy source 150) of the source section 101 in FIG. 1. In one example, the mailbox is a physical mailbox.

In block 270, notify a user with the notification message which conveys the container state using a notification device. That is, a notification device notifies a user with a notification message which conveys the container state. In one example, a notification device accepts the notification message from the processing device. In one example, the user notification may be a visual display (e.g., graphical icons) which indicates the container state. In one example, the user notification may be a text message or an electronic mail (email) message sent to the user. In one example, the user notification may be an audio indication which indicates the container state.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example of an automatic mailbox notification system 300. In one example, a user mailbox 303 is a repository for mail delivered by a mail carrier. In an initial state, the user mailbox 303 is empty and the purpose of the automatic mailbox notification system is to notify a user of receipt of mail upon delivery. For example, the user may be notified of receipt of mail on a mobile device 302, for example, a mobile phone. The user notification may be executed by a software application (e.g., an app) on the mobile device 302 as text message, email, graphical icon, audio indication, etc. In one example, the mobile device 302 is a destination section (e.g., destination section 102 shown in FIG. 1) for the automatic mailbox notification system 300.

In one example, a source section 301 of the automatic mailbox notification system 300 may be retrofitted into an existing user mailbox where the source section 301 is added onto an already manufactured existing user mailbox. In one example, the source section 301 of the automatic mailbox notification system 300 may be integrated into an user mailbox where the source section 301 is manufactured along with the rest of the user mailbox. For example, the source section 301 may have a plurality of source devices such as an energy emitter device 310, a sensing device 320, a detection device 330, a communication device 340 and an energy source 350. For example, a communication signal between the communication device 340 and the mobile phone 320 may be transported over a wireless communication link 345 which conforms with a wireless protocol. One skilled in the art would understand that the example components disclosed herein for the source section 301 are not exclusive and that other components may be included within the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. Additionally, in one example, not all the components disclosed herein for the source section 301 are mandatory.

In one example, the sensing device 320 may be a conformal sensor assembly. In one example, the conformal sensor assembly is a geometric arrangement of a plurality of sensor elements which conforms (i.e., follows) to a pre-defined shape. In one example, the conformal sensor assembly in a user mailbox may conform to a non-planar surface area by a congruent geometric shape.

In one example, the automatic mailbox notification system 300 includes an external camera 360 mounted on an external surface of the user mailbox 303. The external camera may be configured to record when motion is detected, wherein the external camera includes a motion detector (not shown). Once turned ON, the external camera may be programmed to stay ON to record for a preset time period or the external camera may be programmed to stay ON to record until motion is no longer detected. In another example, the external camera may be configured to record

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when turned ON by a user, either through a remote control via a wireless signal or manually by the user. In one example, once the external camera 360 is turned ON, it may be turned OFF either by the user or it may be turned OFF after a preset time period or until motion is no longer detected. In one example, the time duration the external camera 360 stays turned ON may be preset or it may be programmable.

In one example, the automatic mailbox notification system 300 includes an internal camera 365 mounted on an internal surface of the user mailbox 303. In one example, the internal camera 365 is coupled to a light 367. In one example, the internal camera 365 includes a motion detector (not shown). The internal camera 365 may be triggered to turn ON in one or more of the following ways: turned ON manually by a user, turned ON by a user through a remote control via a wireless signal, turned ON with an opening motion of the user mailbox 303, turned ON when there's motion within the user mailbox 303, such as the deposit of a content (e.g., letter, package, etc.) to within the user mailbox 303. In one example, the time duration that the internal camera 365 stays turned ON may be preset (i.e., a preset time period) or may be programmable. In one example, the internal camera 365 may stay turned ON as long as motion is detected by its motion detector.

In one example, the light 367 is turned ON when the internal camera 365 is turned ON. In one example, the light 367 turns ON when motion is detected by the motion detector. In one example, the light 367 turns ON when motion is detected by the motion detector, even if the internal camera 365 is OFF. In one example, the light 367 may be turned ON manually. The time duration of the light 367 staying ON may be preset, pre-programmed or it may stay ON as long as the internal camera 365 is ON or as long as motion is detected. In one example, the light 367 may be preprogrammed to stay ON for a quantity of time following a specified event, such as but not limited to: internal camera turning OFF, ceased of motion within the user mailbox 303, closing of a door of the user mailbox 303, etc. One skilled in the art would understand that other conditions (not specified herein) for keeping the light 367 ON or turning OFF the light 367 may be within the scope and spirit of the present disclosure.

In one example, recording data captured by either the external camera 360 or the internal camera 365, or both, may be stored for a time duration at a remote memory unit, for example, via Internet cloud storage. In another example, storage of camera information may be done by a memory unit coupled to the external camera 360 and/or internal camera 365. In one example, the memory unit (not shown) may be a component of the user mailbox 303.

FIG. 4 illustrates an example of a conformal sensor assembly 400 within a container 401 (e.g., a user mailbox) with a plurality of sensor elements 420. In one example, the plurality of sensor elements 420 may be light sensors (e.g., visible light sensor, infrared light sensor, etc.) such as photodetectors, photodiodes, etc. In one example, the plurality of sensor elements 420 receives energy directly from an energy emitter device 410. In addition, the container 401 includes a detection device (e.g., detection device 130 of FIG. 1), a communication device (e.g., communication device 140 of FIG. 1), an energy source (e.g., an energy source 150 of FIG. 1), etc.

The container 401 includes a door 440. In one example, one of the plurality of sensor elements is a tampering sensor 424 and is configured to detect tampering of the container 401. In one example, the tampering sensor 424 is further

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configured to detect tampering of the door 440. In one example, the container 401 is the user mailbox 303. In one example, the tampering sensor 424 is coupled electronically to the door 440, particularly to a lock mechanism 441 of the door 440.

In one example, the tampering sensor 424 is electronically coupled to a processor and a transmitter. In one example, the transmitter is a communication device (e.g., the communication device 140 of FIG. 1). In the event the tampering sensor 424 senses that the lock mechanism 441 is being tampered with, the tampering sensor 424 may cause the processor and the transmitter to perform one or more of the following: send a message with an alert of tampering, activate a second lock (not shown) on the door 440, turn ON the external camera 360, and/or turn ON the internal camera 365, activate an alarm (not shown) with audio (i.e., audio alarm). In one example, the second lock is an alternative lock which has not been tampered with.

In one example, the message with the alert of tampering may be sent to a preset designation, such as a mobile phone or computer of the user of the container 401. In one example, the alarm with audio is a component coupled to the container 401.

In one example, the energy from the energy emitter device 410 is radiated directly towards the plurality of sensor elements 420. For example, if the container 401 is empty (i.e., no mail has been delivered), the plurality of sensor elements 420 will receive an energy level greater than a predefined threshold. For example, if the container 401 is not empty (i.e., mail has been delivered), the plurality of sensor elements 420 will receive an energy level less than the predefined threshold. In one example, the container 401 is a housing.

FIG. 5 illustrates an example of a conformal sensor assembly 500 within a container 501 (e.g., a user mailbox, a safe deposit box, a locker, etc.) with a plurality of sensor elements 520 and a reflective surface 521. In one example, the plurality of sensor elements 520 may be light sensors (e.g., visible light sensor, infrared light sensor, etc.) such as photodetectors, photodiodes, etc. In one example, the plurality of sensor elements 520 receives energy indirectly from an energy emitter device 510 by receiving reflected energy off the reflective surface 521. Although the reflective surface 521 is shown in FIG. 5 as lining the entire curved portion 530 of container 501, one skilled in the art would understand that the reflective surface 521 may also line just portions of the curved portion 530 (i.e., not the entire curved portion 530) of the container 501 within the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. In addition, the container 501 includes a detection device (e.g., detection device 130 of FIG. 1), a communication device (e.g., communication device 140 of FIG. 1), an energy source (e.g., an energy source 150 of FIG. 1), etc. In one example, the container 501 is a housing.

In one example, the energy from the energy emitter device 510 is radiated toward the reflective surface 521 which reflects the energy towards the plurality of sensor elements 520. For example, if the container 501 is empty (i.e., no mail has been delivered), the plurality of sensor elements 520 will receive an energy level greater than a predefined threshold. For example, if the container 501 is not empty (i.e., mail has been delivered), the plurality of sensor elements 520 will receive an energy level less than the predefined threshold.

In one example, the user mailbox 303 (of FIG. 3), the container 401 (of FIG. 4) or the container 501 (of FIG. 5) includes a keep-alive function. In one example, the keep-alive function is provided by a keep-alive component. In one example, the keep-alive component is coupled to one or

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more of the sensors of the plurality of sensors **420**, **520** or to the sensing device **320**. The keep-alive component uses one or more sensors to monitor the various components of the user mailbox **303** or the containers **401**, **501**. For example, notification(s) may be sent, in any of the following: either of the external camera or the internal camera is not working, energy level is less than a predefined threshold, memory unit or cloud storage is full or nearing a threshold, the light **367** is not working, the energy emitter device **110**, **310**, **410**, **510** is malfunctioning, the communication device **340** is malfunctioning, any sensor that's malfunctioning, etc. In one example, the notification(s) is sent to a mobile device (e.g., mobile device **302**) or a computer of a user of the user mailbox **303** or the container **401**, **501**.

In one example, the keep-alive component provides periodic diagnostic investigations of any responsive components of the user mailbox **303** or the container **401**, **501**. The periodic diagnostic investigations may be preprogrammed or may be operated manually. And, in one example, selective responsive components may be diagnosed. And, which responsive component is diagnosed and when may be preprogrammed. That is, the diagnostic investigations are programmable, for example, by a user, using a processor within a mobile device (e.g., mobile device **302**) or a computer. In one example, each responsive component includes a capability to receive a diagnostic query and to respond to the diagnostic query with a return health signal.

Examples of responsive components include communication device **340**; detection device **330**; sensing device **320**; energy source **350**; energy emitter device **310**, **410**, **510**; sensors **420**, **520**; tampering sensor **424**; lock mechanism **441**, etc. In one example, each sensor of the plurality of sensors **420**, **520** includes a communication receiver to receive diagnostic queries and a transmitter to transmit a return health signal.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example flow diagram **600** for diagnostic investigations. In one example, the diagnostic investigations is performed by the keep-alive component. In block **610**, determine if it is time to transmit a set of diagnostic queries. In one example, the set of diagnostic queries is transmitted via hardwire. In one example, some of the set of diagnostic queries are transmitted wirelessly. In one example, the set has a quantity of one.

In block **620**, determine a list of responsive components to be diagnosed. In one example, each responsive component includes a time schedule for diagnostic investigation which may be preset. In one example, the determination of whether an responsive component is diagnosed or not is based on a previous diagnosis of that responsive component. For example, if the previous diagnosis indicates that the responsive component may be near malfunctioning, the time schedule for a future diagnosis may be accelerated. In another example, if the previous diagnosis indicates that the responsive component is functioning near 100%, the next diagnosis may be skipped. Or, if a large quantity of previous diagnosis indicates that the responsive component is functioning near 100%, the next diagnosis may be skipped.

In block **630**, transmit the set of diagnostic queries to the list of responsive components, wherein each of the list of responsive components receives one of the set of diagnostic queries.

In block **640**, receive one or more return health signals from the list of responsive components. In one example, each return health signal includes a unique identification to indicate that it corresponds to a particular responsive component.

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In block **650**, determine if the one or more return health signals equals in quantity to the set of diagnostic queries. If yes, proceed to block **670**. If no, proceed to block **660**.

In block **660**, analyze the one or more return health signals to determine which of the list of responsive components did not transmit a return health signal. Following block **660**, proceed to block **670**.

In block **670**, analyze the one or more return health signals to determine which of the one or more return health signals indicates that its corresponding responsive component is not functioning appropriately.

In block **680**, transmit a health alert signal to a user's communication device to indicate that an responsive component is not functioning appropriately. In one example, the user's communication device may be a mobile device or a computer. In one example, the health alert signal may be a text message or an email message, for example, to the user.

In one example, each responsive component includes sending a self-initiated health signal to the keep-alive component without receiving a diagnostic query. In one example, each responsive component is programed with a timetable of when to send a self-initiated health signal. The timetable of each responsive component is also known to the keep-alive component, and when a responsive component fails to send its self-initiated health signal to the keep-alive component per its timetable, the keep-alive component will in turn send a health alert signal to a user's communication device to indicate that the responsive component, which did not send a self-initiated health signal, is not functioning appropriately. In one example, the user may program the keep-alive component to send the health alert signal only after more than one self-initiated health signal is missed from a particular responsive component, for example, the exact quantity of consecutively missed self-initiated health signals may be determined by the user or by what the responsive component is. For example, for a responsive component whose function is only moderately critical to the functionality of the container, the exact quantity of consecutively missed self-initiated health signals may be set lower than if the responsive component's function is highly critical to the functionality of the container. In one example, the timetable of each responsive component may be programmable and may depend on the criticality of the responsive component's function.

FIG. 7 illustrates a first example configuration **700** of electrical connections of the keep-alive component **705** with a plurality of responsive components **710**, **720**, **730**, **740**, **750**, **760**, **770**, **780**. The first example configuration **700** illustrates that the keep-alive component is electrically coupled to each responsive component via a databus **790**.

FIG. 8 illustrates a second example configuration **800** of electrical connections of the keep-alive component **805** with a plurality of responsive components **810**, **820**, **830**, **840**, **850**, **860**, **870**, **880**. The second example configuration **800** illustrates that the keep-alive component **805** is serially (e.g., independently) coupled to each responsive component.

In a first example, the keep-alive component is housed within the user mailbox **303** or containers **401**, **501**. Communication between the keep-alive component and the responsive components may be achieved either through a wired connection as illustrated in either the examples of FIG. 7 or FIG. 8. Additionally, the keep-alive component may communicate wirelessly (e.g., via Bluetooth, WiFi, etc.) with the responsive components.

In another example, the keep-alive component is physically separated from the user mailbox **303** or containers **401**, **501**. Wired connections between the keep-alive component

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and the responsive components may be achieved through either the examples of FIG. 7 or FIG. 8. Or, the keep-alive component may communicate wirelessly (e.g., via Bluetooth, WiFi, etc.) with the responsive components.

In one example, the user mailbox 303 (of FIG. 3), the container 401 (of FIG. 4) or the container 501 (of FIG. 5) is a physical object that can be used to hold or transport something. In one example, a purpose of the user mailbox 303 or the containers 401, 501 is for depositing one or more physical content. For example, the physical content may be letters, documents, packages, notebooks, clothes, shoes, jewelries, bags, briefcases, or any physical item that can fit within the container. For example, the user mailbox 303 or the containers 401, 501 may be a safe deposit box or a locker. In one aspect, the various features disclosed for the user mailbox 303 may apply to the containers 401, 501. In one aspect, the various features disclosed for the container 401 may apply to the user mailbox 303 or the container 501. In one aspect, the various features disclosed for the container 501 may apply to the user mailbox 303 or the container 401.

In one aspect, one or more of the steps for providing an automatic mail notification system in FIG. 2 may be executed by one or more processors which may include hardware, software, firmware, etc. The one or more processors, for example, may be used to execute software or firmware needed to perform the steps in the flow diagram of FIG. 2. Software shall be construed broadly to mean instructions, instruction sets, code, code segments, program code, programs, subprograms, software modules, applications, software applications, software packages, routines, subroutines, objects, executables, threads of execution, procedures, functions, whether referred to as software, firmware, middleware, microcode, hardware description language, or otherwise.

The software may reside on a computer-readable medium. The computer-readable medium may be a non-transitory computer-readable medium. A non-transitory computer-readable medium includes, by way of example, a magnetic storage device (e.g., hard disk, floppy disk, magnetic strip), an optical disk (e.g., a compact disc (CD) or a digital versatile disc (DVD)), a smart card, a flash memory device (e.g., a card, a stick, or a key drive), a random access memory (RAM), a read only memory (ROM), a programmable ROM (PROM), an erasable PROM (EPROM), an electrically erasable PROM (EEPROM), a register, a removable disk, and any other suitable medium for storing software and/or instructions that may be accessed and read by a computer. The computer-readable medium may also include, by way of example, a carrier wave, a transmission line, and any other suitable medium for transmitting software and/or instructions that may be accessed and read by a computer. The computer-readable medium may reside in a processing system, external to the processing system, or distributed across multiple entities including the processing system. The computer-readable medium may be embodied in a computer program product. By way of example, a computer program product may include a computer-readable medium in packaging materials. The computer-readable medium may include software or firmware. Those skilled in the art will recognize how best to implement the described functionality presented throughout this disclosure depending on the particular application and the overall design constraints imposed on the overall system.

Any circuitry included in the processor(s) is merely provided as an example, and other means for carrying out the described functions may be included within various aspects of the present disclosure, including but not limited to

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the instructions stored in the computer-readable medium, or any other suitable apparatus or means described herein, and utilizing, for example, the processes and/or algorithms described herein in relation to the example flow diagram.

Within the present disclosure, the word “exemplary” is used to mean “serving as an example, instance, or illustration.” Any implementation or aspect described herein as “exemplary” is not necessarily to be construed as preferred or advantageous over other aspects of the disclosure. Likewise, the term “aspects” does not require that all aspects of the disclosure include the discussed feature, advantage or mode of operation. The term “coupled” is used herein to refer to the direct or indirect coupling between two objects. For example, if object A physically touches object B, and object B touches object C, then objects A and C may still be considered coupled to one another-even if they do not directly physically touch each other. The terms “circuit” and “circuitry” are used broadly, and intended to include both hardware implementations of electrical devices and conductors that, when connected and configured, enable the performance of the functions described in the present disclosure, without limitation as to the type of electronic circuits, as well as software implementations of information and instructions that, when executed by a processor, enable the performance of the functions described in the present disclosure.

One or more of the components, steps, features and/or functions illustrated in the figures may be rearranged and/or combined into a single component, step, feature or function or embodied in several components, steps, or functions. Additional elements, components, steps, and/or functions may also be added without departing from novel features disclosed herein. The apparatus, devices, and/or components illustrated in the figures may be configured to perform one or more of the methods, features, or steps described herein. The novel algorithms described herein may also be efficiently implemented in software and/or embedded in hardware.

It is to be understood that the specific order or hierarchy of steps in the methods disclosed is an illustration of exemplary processes. Based upon design preferences, it is understood that the specific order or hierarchy of steps in the methods may be rearranged. The accompanying method claims present elements of the various steps in a sample order, and are not meant to be limited to the specific order or hierarchy presented unless specifically recited therein.

The previous description is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to practice the various aspects described herein. Various modifications to these aspects will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other aspects. Thus, the claims are not intended to be limited to the aspects shown herein, but are to be accorded the full scope consistent with the language of the claims, wherein reference to an element in the singular is not intended to mean “one and only one” unless specifically so stated, but rather “one or more.” Unless specifically stated otherwise, the term “some” refers to one or more. A phrase referring to “at least one of” a list of items refers to any combination of those items, including single members. As an example, “at least one of: a, b, or c” is intended to cover: a; b; c; a and b; a and c; b and c; and a, b and c. All structural and functional equivalents to the elements of the various aspects described throughout this disclosure that are known or later come to be known to those of ordinary skill in the art are expressly incorporated herein by reference and are intended to be encompassed by the claims. Moreover, nothing disclosed herein is intended to be

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dedicated to the public regardless of whether such disclosure is explicitly recited in the claims. No claim element is to be construed under the provisions of 35 U.S.C. § 112, sixth paragraph, unless the element is expressly recited using the phrase “means for” or, in the case of a method claim, the element is recited using the phrase “step for.”

One skilled in the art would understand that various features of different embodiments may be combined or modified and still be within the spirit and scope of the present disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A container notification system, comprising:
 - a sensing device to generate a sensed signal;
 - a detection device coupled to the sensing device, the detection device configured to detect a transition state of the sensed signal wherein the transition state is based on receipt of one or more content inputted to a container area; and
 - a keep-alive component configured to transmit a diagnostic query based on a timetable to one or more components of the container notification system and further configured to receive one or more self-initiated health signals from at least one of the one or more components;
 wherein the keep-alive component is further configured to send a health alert signal to a user's communication device to indicate that one of the one or more components is not functioning appropriately if a self-initiated health signal is not received from the one of the one or more components.
2. The container notification system of claim 1, wherein the user's communication device is one or more of the following: a mobile device such as a smart phone, a computer, a receiving device located in a home or business location of a user.
3. The container notification system of claim 1, wherein each of the one or more components, if functioning appropriately, sends its self-initiated health signal to the keep-alive component upon receipt of the diagnostic query.
4. The container notification system of claim 3, wherein the detection device is further configured to generate a digital message based on the transition state.
5. The container notification system of claim 4, further comprising a communication device coupled to the detection

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device, the communication device configured to convey the digital message to the user's communication device.

6. The container notification system of claim 1, wherein each of the one or more components is programmed with the timetable of when to send its self-initiated health signal to the keep-alive component, even if the diagnostic query is not received.

7. The container notification system of claim 6, wherein the timetable is preset.

8. The container notification system of claim 7, wherein the detection device is further configured to generate a digital message based on the transition state.

9. The container notification system of claim 8, further comprising a communication device coupled to the detection device, the communication device configured to convey the digital message to a user's communication device.

10. The container notification system of claim 1, wherein the timetable is programmable.

11. The container notification system of claim 10, wherein each of the one or more components is programmed with the timetable of when to send its self-initiated health signal to the keep-alive component, even if the diagnostic query is not received.

12. The container notification system of claim 11, wherein the keep-alive component is further configured to send a health alert signal to a user's communication device to indicate that one of the one or more components is not functioning appropriately if, based on the timetable, the keep-alive component has not received a consecutive quantity of self-initiated health signals from the one of the one or more components, wherein the consecutive quantity is defined in the timetable.

13. The container notification system of claim 12, wherein the detection device is further configured to generate a digital message based on the transition state.

14. The container notification system of claim 13, further comprising a communication device coupled to the detection device, the communication device configured to convey the digital message to the user's communication device.

15. The container notification system of claim 14, wherein the user's communication device is one or more of the following: a mobile device such as a smart phone, a computer, a receiving device located in a home or business location of a user.

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