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(54) **WIRE AND CABLE DISPENSING
CONTAINER AND SYSTEMS**

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See application file for complete search history.

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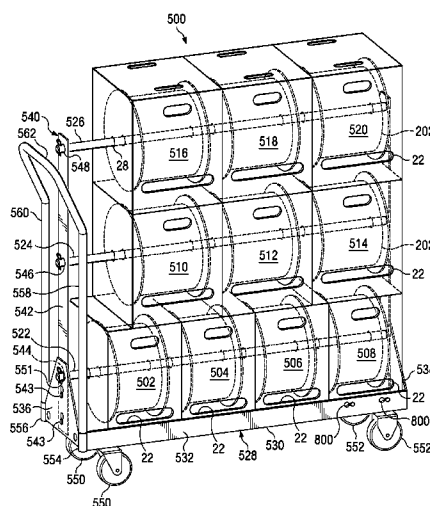
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A container for the dispensing of wire or cable has an external carton which receives a reel of cable as supported by two caddies. Each caddy has an inwardly extending substantially cylindrical bushing which is received in a central hole of a respective cable reel flange. The cylindrical bushings are disposed on an axis which is a first distance from the upper surface of the bottom panel of the carton. The largest radius of each reel flange is preselected to be smaller than this such that the reel may freely rotate inside of the carton on the bushings. Cable is pulled through a slot in the carton's front panel. Preferably, left and right panels of the carton each have an arbor hole formed therein which receives an axial rod, the rod also extending through the reel and caddies. The axial rod may be used to join two or more containers together and may further serve as a support for attachment of a wheel truck on one end of the joined-together containers and a handle at its other end. An alternative, four-wheeled cart has multiple axial rods. An alternative hand truck likewise receives multiple axial rods through respective container passageways. In one embodiment, cable may be pulled through one or more pass-through slots formed in the tops and bottoms of stacked containers, such that cable from multiple containers is drawn through one slot on the top of the stack.

15 Claims, 12 Drawing Sheets



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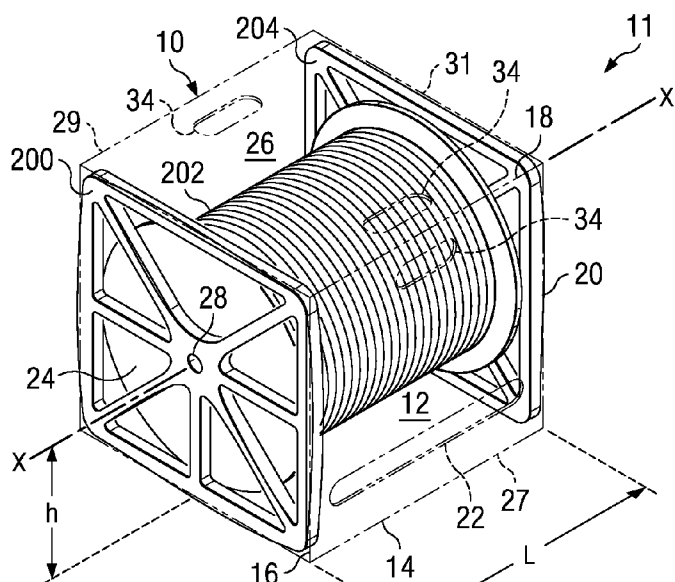


FIG. 1

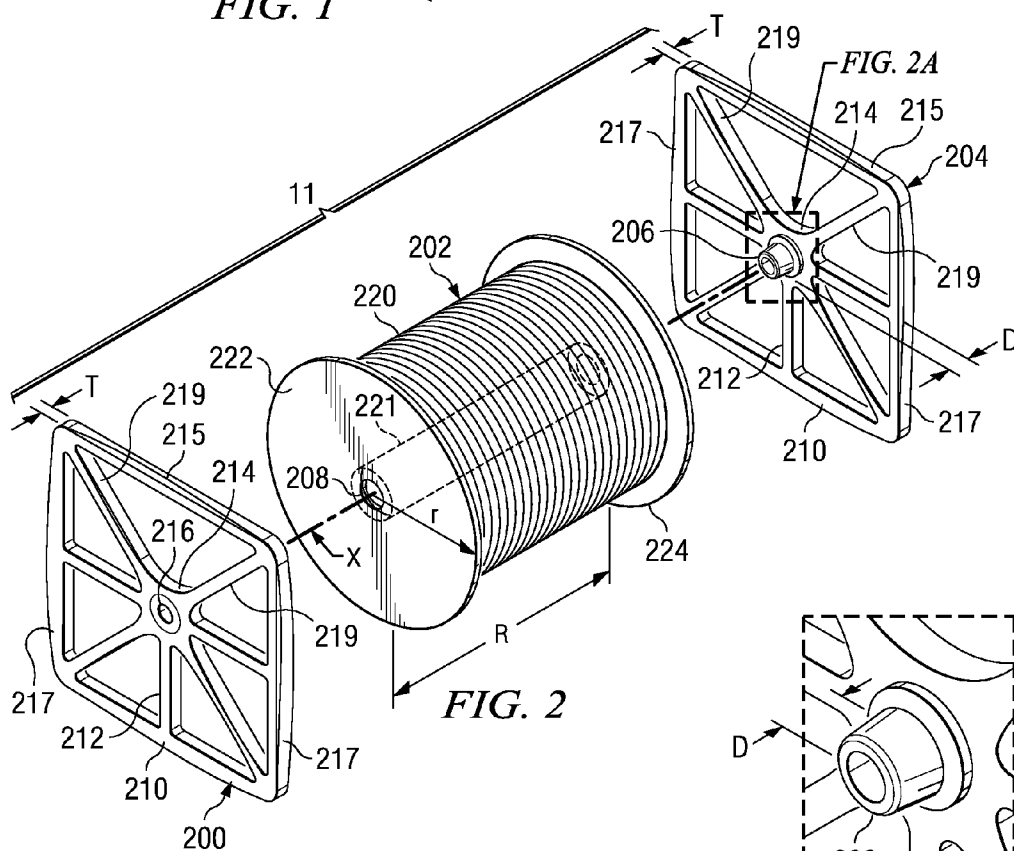
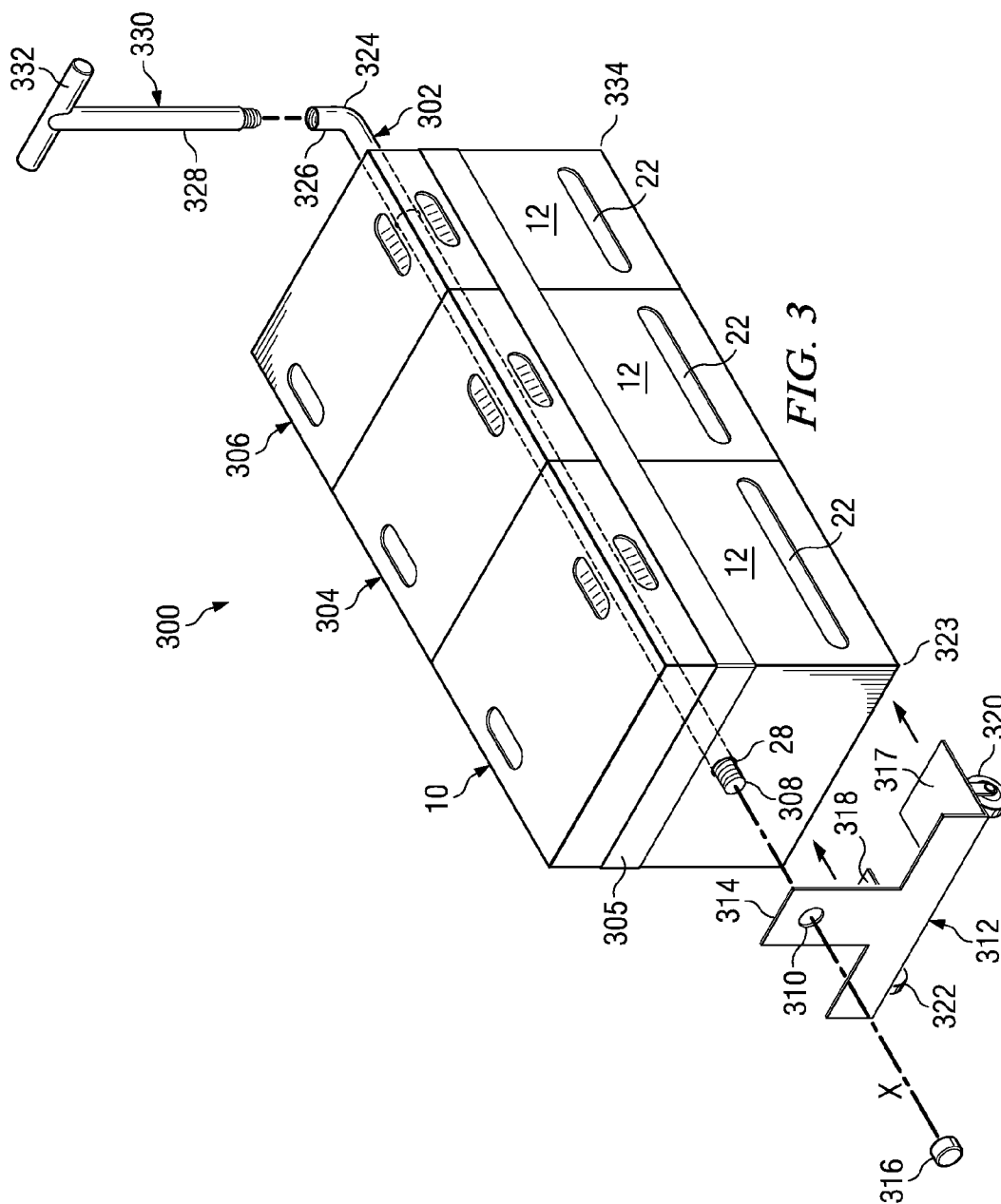
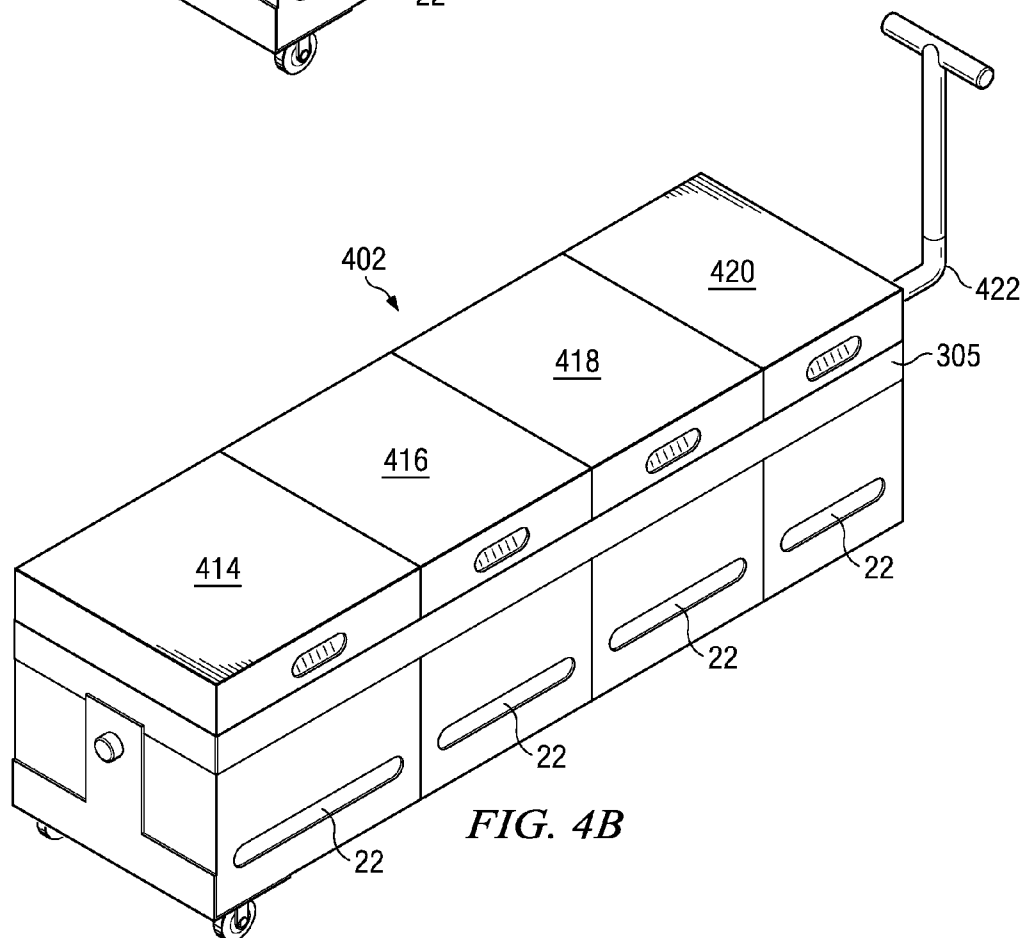
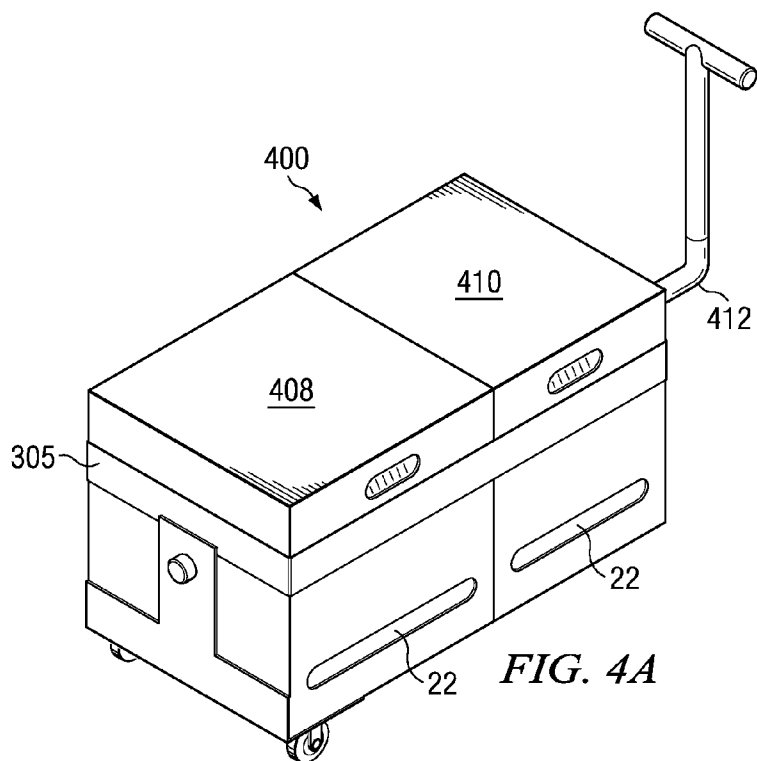
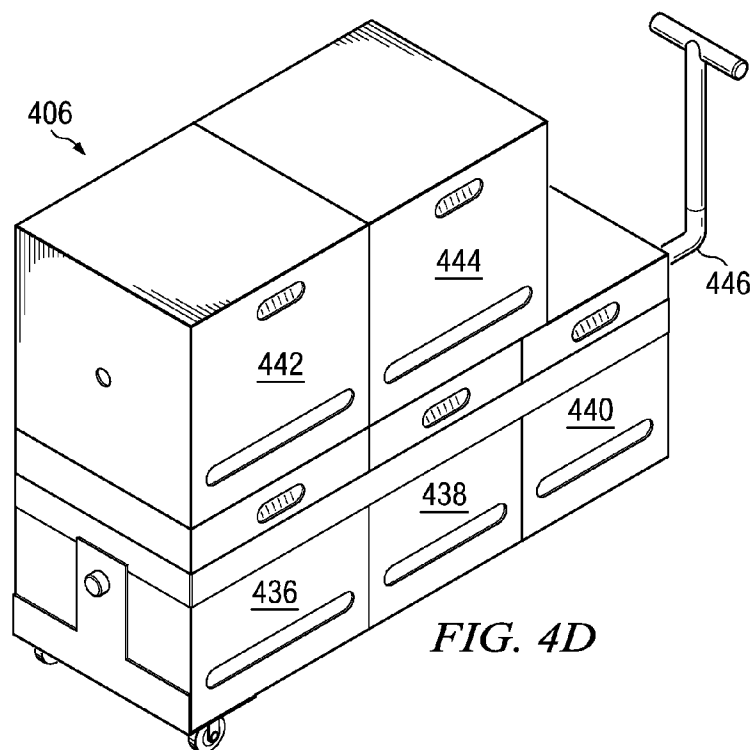
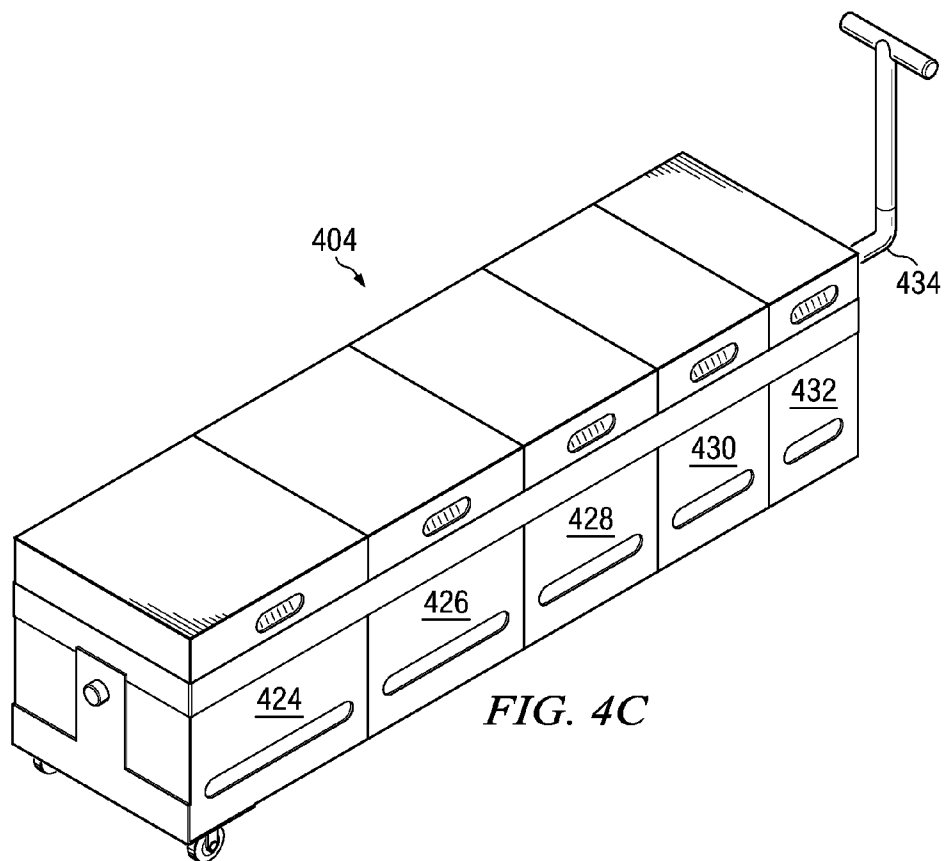


FIG. 2

FIG. 2A







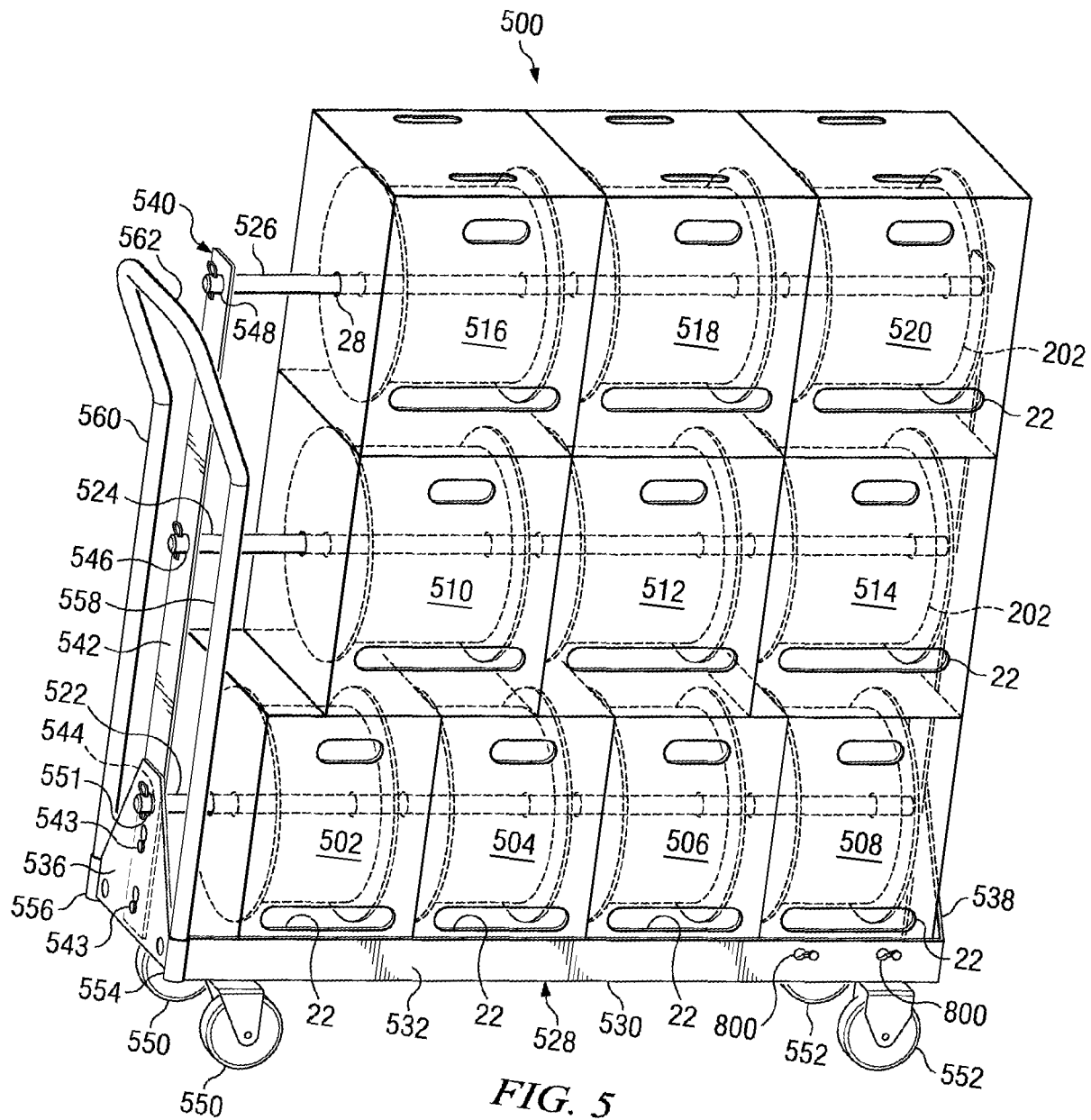


FIG. 5

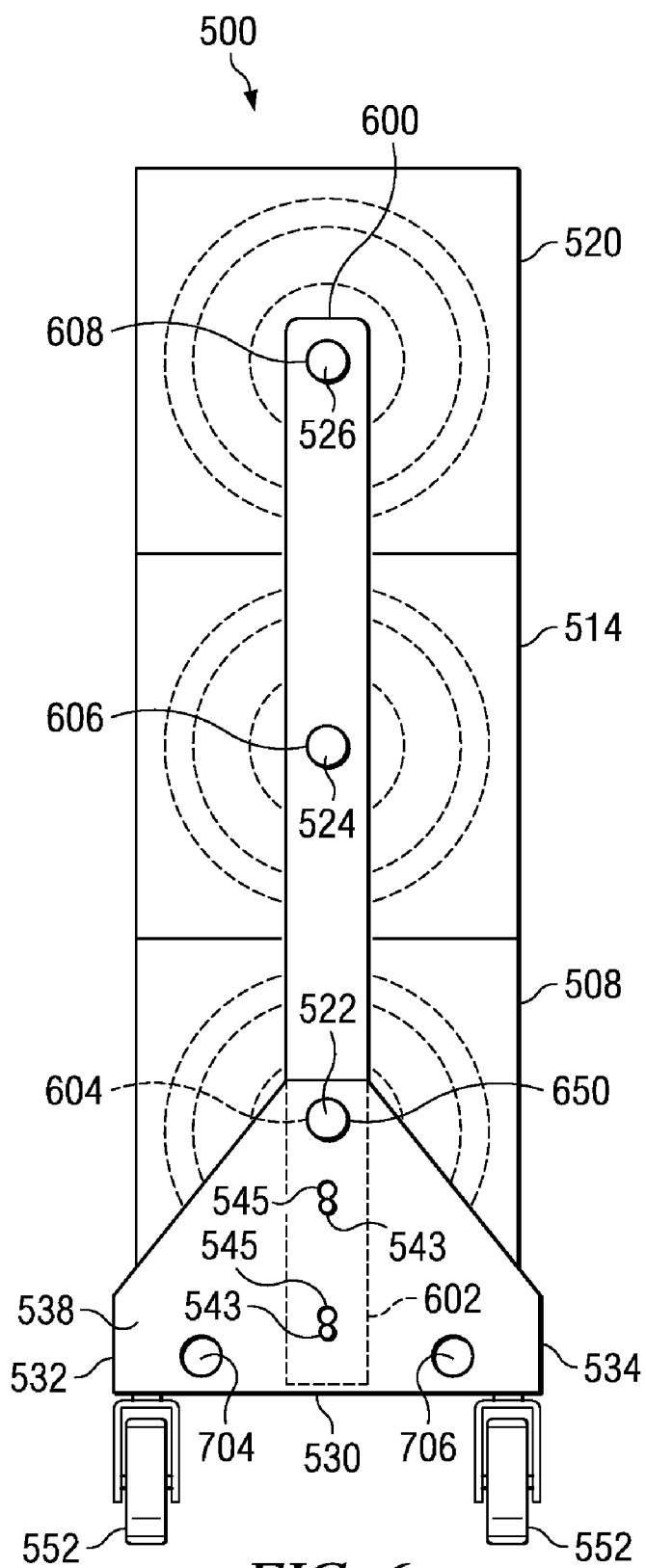


FIG. 6

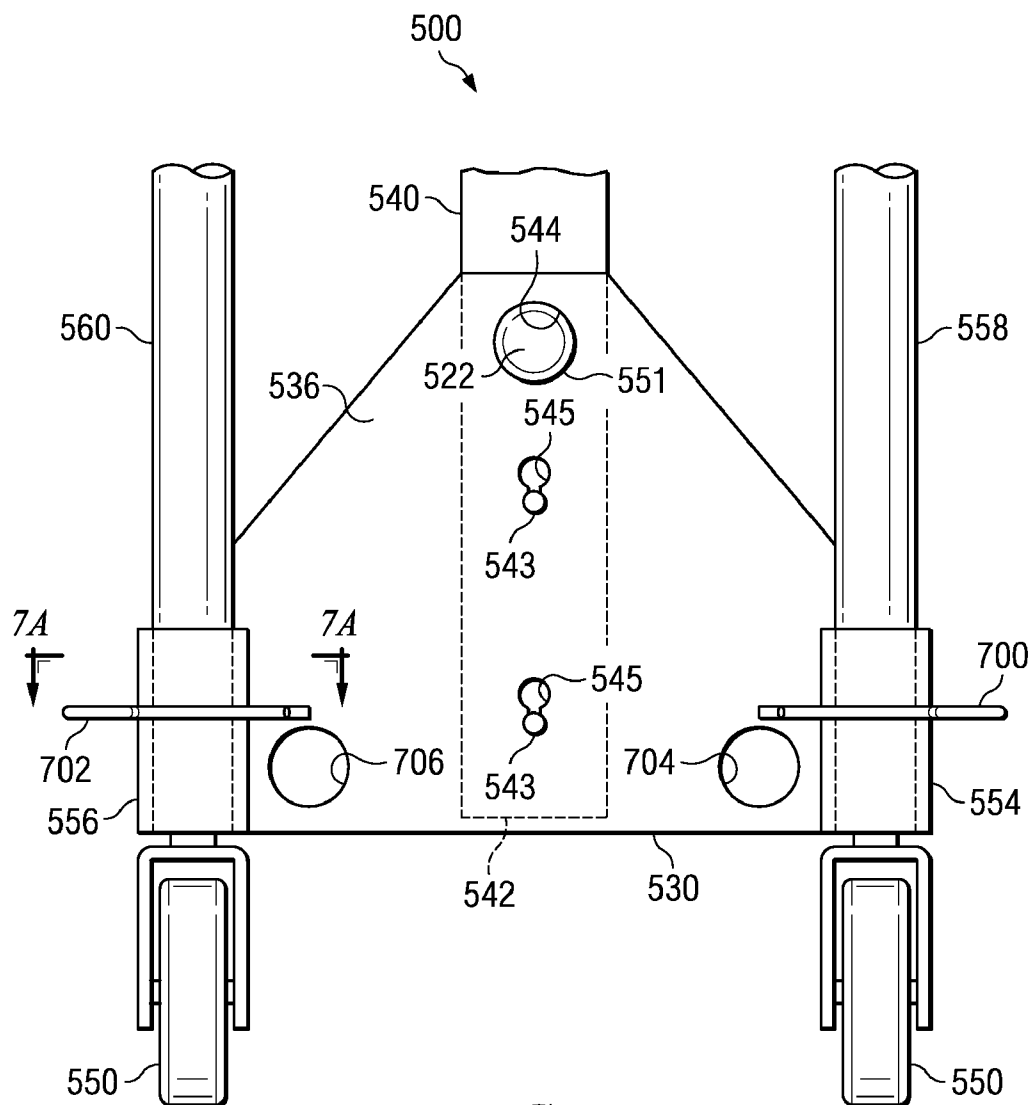


FIG. 7

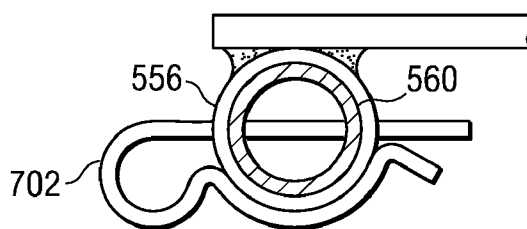
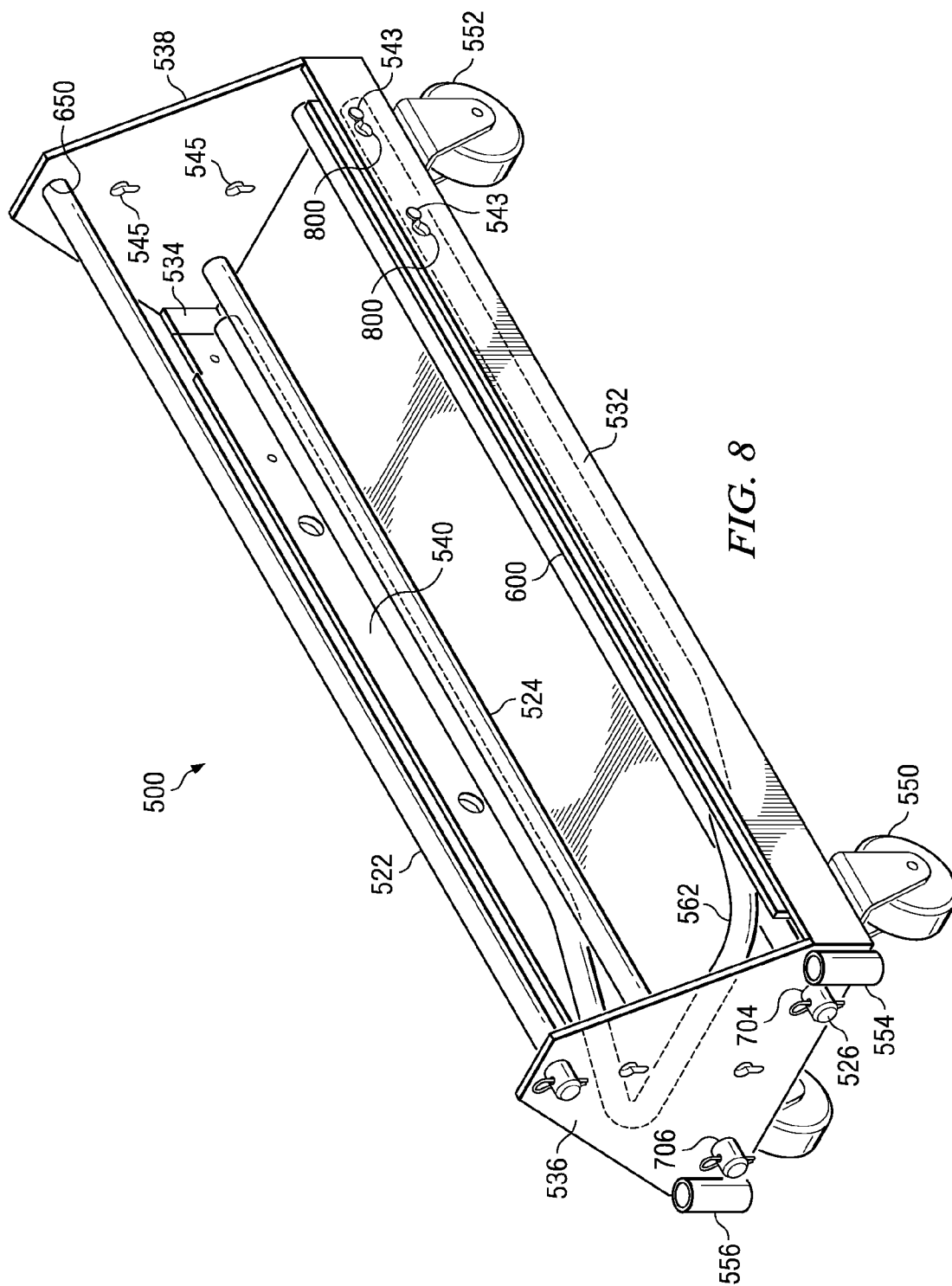


FIG. 7A



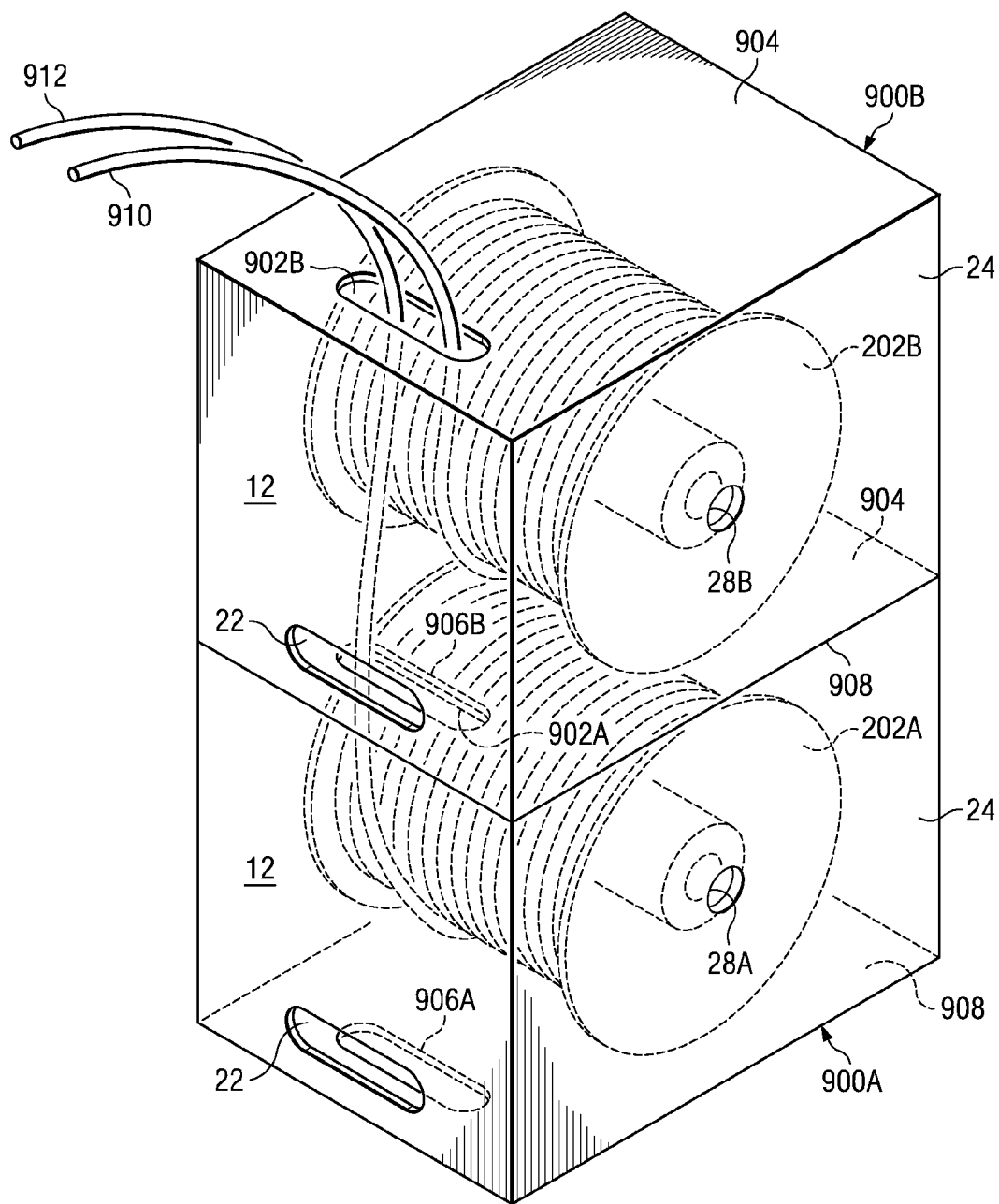
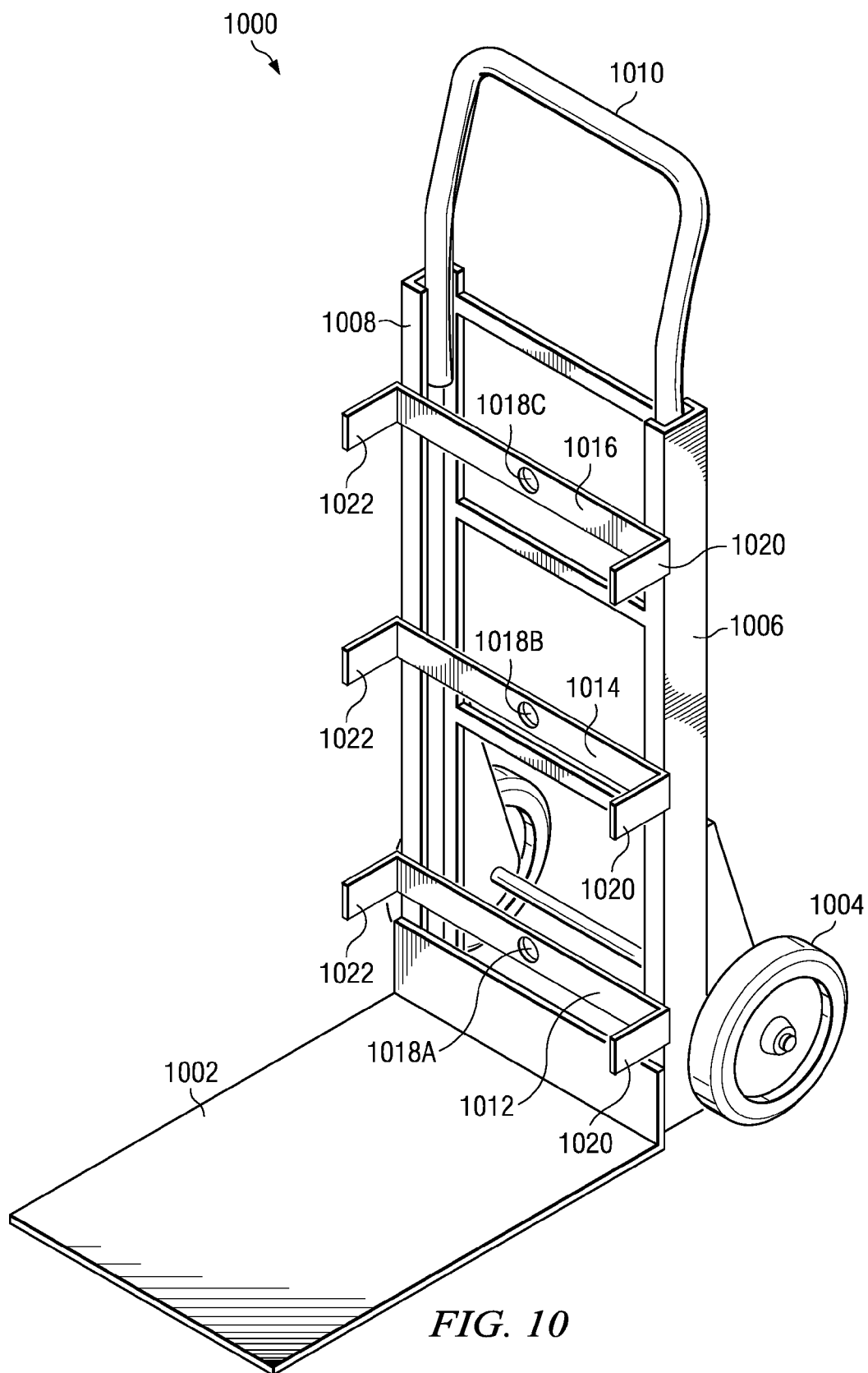


FIG. 9



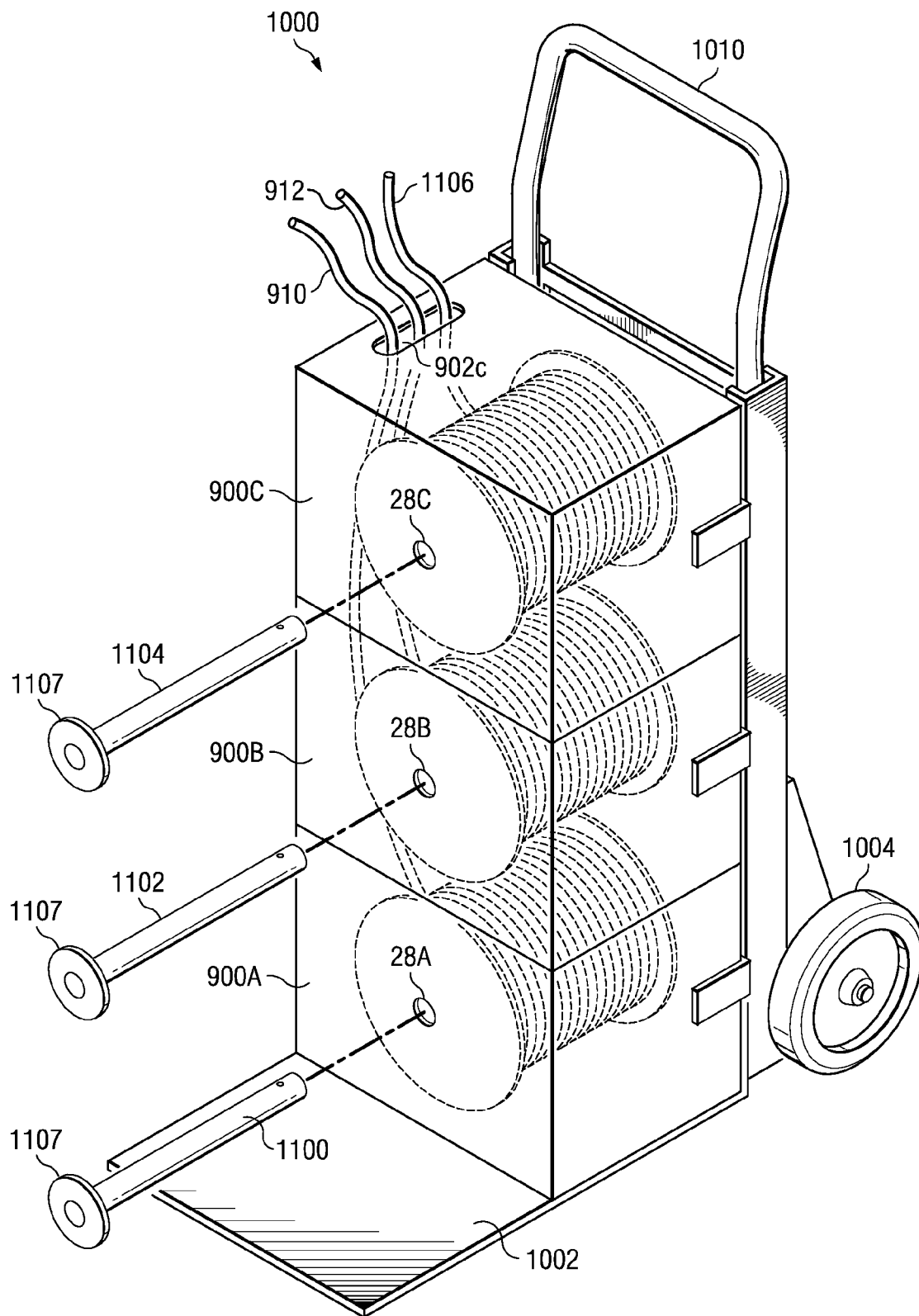


FIG. 11

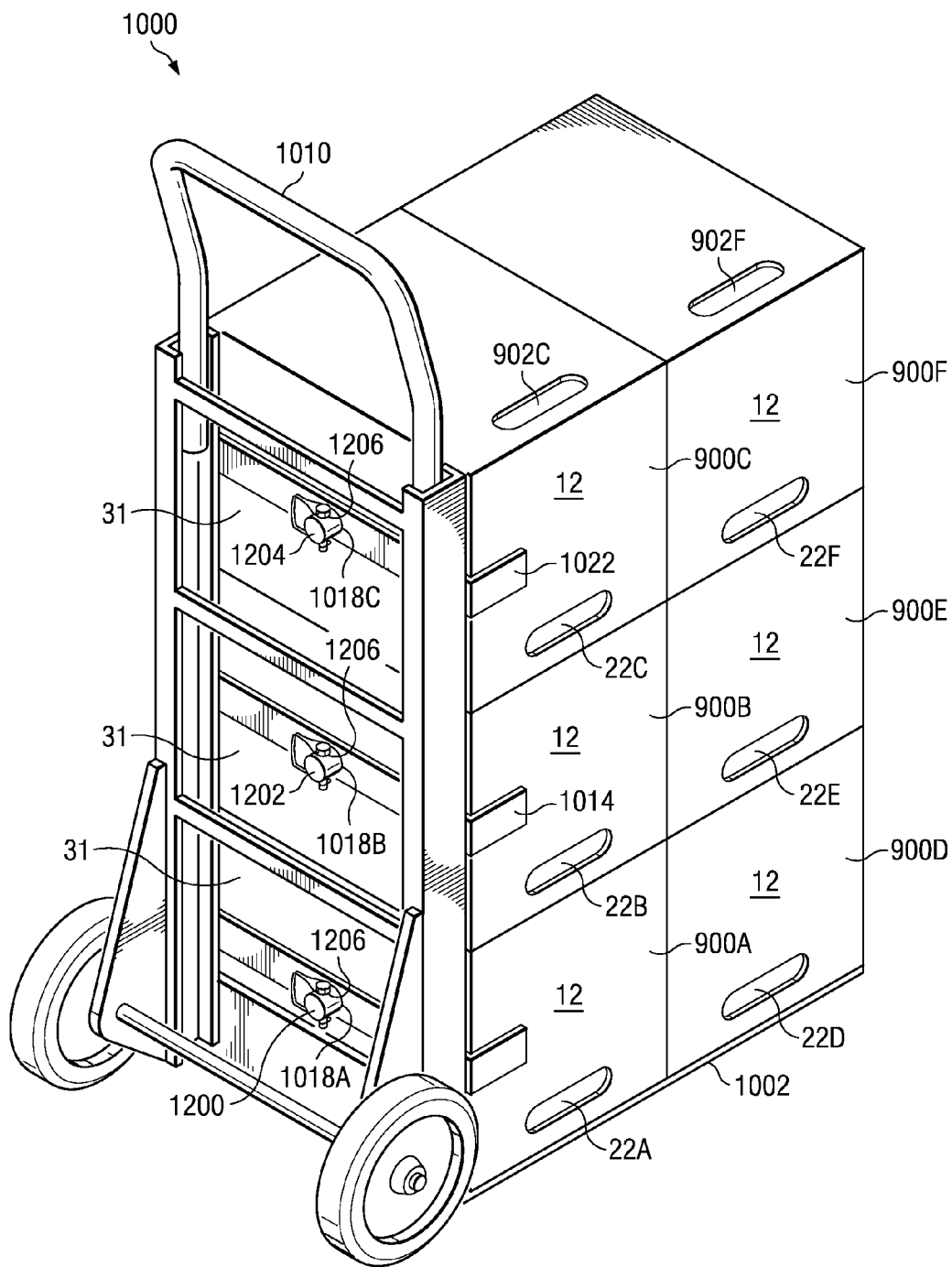


FIG. 12

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WIRE AND CABLE DISPENSING CONTAINER AND SYSTEMS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Wire and cable for installation in residences and buildings typically comes on cable reels. The types of wire and cable so provided are numerous, and include 110V three-conductor wire, "Romex", and many different kinds of low-voltage, multiconductor insulated communications cable, such as that used for setting up Ethernet networks, intercom systems, entertainment systems and the connection of security sensors and devices. A new building under construction will need many kinds of these cables, and several reels of cable will be used by an installer on-site.

One known technique is to provide coils of such cable in boxes, and to create a hole in a front or top panel of the (typically cardboard) box for pulling out a desired length of cable. This conventional method has a drawback in that the cable may kink inside of the box or otherwise resist being pulled out of the box to such an extent that a cable installer or technician finds that he or she is pulling the box across the floor. Oftentimes the installer has to install several different lengths of cable on a single run. To do this, the installer has had to identify which kinds of cable he or she needs, individually pull cable out of separate boxes and estimate as best as he or she can the amount of cable so pulled.

These boxes of cable are heavy and it takes some effort to move them around. In complex jobs it is easy for one needed box of cable to become physically dissociated from one or more other boxes of cable that will supply lengths of different cable for the same run. A need therefore persists for more efficient methods and apparatus for dispensing cable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One aspect of the invention provides a container for the dispensing of cable wound on a cable reel. The container includes a carton having a bottom, left and right panels. A left caddy is disposed in the carton adjacent an interior surface of the left carton panel. A right caddy is disposed in the carton adjacent an interior surface of the right panel. Each of the caddies has a substantially cylindrical bushing surface which extends inwardly along an axis. The axis is parallel to the bottom panel and is disposed at a predetermined first distance therefrom.

The caddies support therebetween a cable reel having a left flange, a right flange and central holes in each. The central flange holes of the cable reel are sized to receive the bushing surfaces of the caddies. The reel flanges have radii which are less than the first distance, permitting the reel of cable to freely rotate inside the carton. Preferably, the front panel of the carton has an elongated slot formed therein to be parallel to the axis, so as to permit the dispensing or drawing out of a length of cable from the reel.

Containers according to the invention may be assembled together to form mobile multiple cable dispensing units or vehicles, from which lengths of several different cables may be withdrawn at the same time. In aid of this each carton preferably has arbor holes in its left and right panels formed on the axis. The left and right caddies of each container likewise have central holes, and a central passageway of the cable reel communicates its central flange holes. Together these holes and reel passageway form an axial passage sized to receive therethrough an axial support rod. Two, three or more cable reel containers are abutted together side by side such that their arbor holes are in axial alignment. An axial

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support rod, preselected to have a length a little longer than combined lengths of the containers, is inserted through all of them. A wheel truck is affixed to one end of the support rod and a handle is affixed to the other, thereby forming a single unit which may be conveniently wheeled from place to place by a cable installer.

The present invention further provides, as an alternative to the foregoing mobile unit, a cart in which at least two rows of reel containers can be placed, wherein each row of containers is supported and joined together by means of a respective axial support rod. The cart has front and rear ends each having a rod holder that receives ends of the support rods. When not in use, the cart may be broken down into a storage configuration by removing the support rods, vertical support rod holders and preferably an upstanding handle, and installing these in storage locations in the frame bottom, all without using tools.

In yet a further embodiment, there is provided a vehicle, such as a dolly or hand truck, which permits cable from several vertically stacked cartons to be pulled upward from a single carton orifice. A carton is provided in this embodiment which includes bottom and top cutouts pass-through slots such that cable from one carton can be passed completely through at least one carton on top of it.

The present invention permits the easy withdrawal of a length of cable from the cable payout slot formed in the front panel of the carton. When the containers are assembled together in at least one row, an installer may withdraw lengths of cable from each of several containers at once. The heavier reaction mass of the assembled containers permits the installer to pull the cable(s) with more tension, as there will be less of a tendency of the assembled unit (or cart) to move in the direction of pull. When different kinds of cable are to be installed in a run in which the cables will all be of the same length, the present invention permits the installer to withdraw the same length of these different kinds of cable from different containers in the unit or cart, all at the same time.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further aspects of the invention and their advantages can be discerned in the following detailed description, in which like characters denote like parts and in which:

FIG. 1 is an isometric view of a single container or carton according to the invention, in which an outer carton wall is shown in phantom to reveal internal components;

FIG. 2 is an exploded view of a cable reel and support caddies used in the container shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 2A is a detail of FIG. 2 showing a preferred caddy bushing;

FIG. 3 is an exploded isometric view of a first mobile cable dispensing system according to the invention, made up in part of cartons similar to those shown in FIGS. 1 and 2;

FIGS. 4A-4D are variations on the system shown in FIG. 3, in which the size and number of joined cartons is varied;

FIG. 5 is an isometric view of a second mobile cable dispensing system according to the invention, as including a cart;

FIG. 6 is a rear end view of the cart shown in FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a detail of the front of the cart shown in FIG. 5;

FIG. 7A is a detail sectional view taken substantially along line 7A-7A of FIG. 7;

FIG. 8 is an isometric view of the cart shown in FIG. 5, in a folded or "broken down" condition in which it can be easily transported or stored;

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FIG. 9 is an isometric view of two stacked cartons according to a further embodiment of the invention, showing the function of vertical cable pass-through;

FIG. 10 is an isometric view of two-wheeled hand truck or dolly for use with the cartons shown in FIG. 9;

FIG. 11 is an exploded isometric view of the hand truck shown in FIG. 10, showing the loading of a single stack of cartons; and

FIG. 12 is an isometric view from another angle of the hand truck shown in FIG. 10, as shown with two stacks of cartons.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIGS. 1 and 2 show a cable reel carton indicated generally at 10, which in turn forms the exterior components of a cable reel container 11. Carton 10 is preferably formed of a single sheet of corrugated cardboard and includes a front panel 12 having a bottom side 14, a left side 16, a top side 18 and a right side 20. The front panel 12 preferably has, in a lower portion thereof, an elongate die-cut cable dispensing or payout slot 22 through which cable or wire may be pulled. The slot 22 is elongate in a direction parallel to a cable reel axis X and is long enough to permit cable to come off the reel at right angles to the reel axis and through the slot 22, no matter where on the reel the cable is presently being unspooled. Preferably the length of the slot 22 is selected to be at least roughly the same as the distance between the internal surfaces of the two cable reel flanges (described below).

Carton 10 also includes a left panel 24 which extends rearwardly from side 16 and at right angles to the front panel 12, and a top panel 26 which extends rearwardly from top side 18 and at right angles to the front panel 12 and left panel 24. The carton 10 is completed by a bottom panel 27, a rear panel 29 and a right panel 31, the last of which is a mirror image of the left panel 24. An arbor hole 28 is formed in left panel 24 around the horizontal axis X, axis X being a predetermined distance h from an upper surface of the carton bottom panel 27. The cable payout slot 22 is preferably positioned well below the axis X in order to better approximate the point of departure of the cable from the reel, which will be at some nonzero radius from the axis X. Alternatively the cable payout or dispensing slot 22 could be positioned above axis X. Payout slot 22 may be defined by a closed line of perforations in corrugated cardboard front panel 12. In this instance, container 11 would be shipped with the payout slot 22 closed. At the installation site, the installer would open slot 22 by punching out the perforation.

Conveniently, handholes 34 may be die-cut into the cardboard panels 12, 26, 29 for ease in handling. In alternative embodiments the cable payout slot 22 can be repeated in top panel 26 and/or rear panel 29, so as to give the user some flexibility in arranging the cartons in the mobile unit or on the cart (later described) and some ability to select how the cable will exit the carton 10. An embodiment in which the carton has elongate pass-through slots in both the top and bottom panels is described in conjunction with FIG. 9.

The interior components of container 11 are shown in exploded view in FIG. 2. A preferably spoked left caddy 200 is, in use, disposed interiorly adjacent an inner surface of the left carton panel 24. Caddy 200 may be injection-molded from a tough plastic that at the least is capable of suspending half of the weight of a full cable reel 202 without buckling. A right caddy 204 can be formed from the same mold as the one which makes left caddy 200. In use, the right caddy or reel support member 204 is positioned interiorly adjacent an inner surface of the right carton panel 31.

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As best seen in FIG. 2A, each caddy 200, 204 has a substantially cylindrical bushing 206 which extends axially from a general plane in which the remainder of caddy 200, 204 is formed toward the other caddy. The bushing 206 could be formed from a surface of rotation other than a straight cylinder; it could, for example, have a terminal lip of increased radius that would run in an annular groove (not shown) in the reel flange central hole 208. Such a departure from a straight cylinder could allow the caddies 200, 204 to be snapped to the cable reel 202. In the illustrated embodiment the bushing surface 206 is slightly tapered toward its free end and has a terminal curved or rounded surface. For the purpose of defining the surface of bushing 206 as "substantially cylindrical", these departures from a perfect mathematical cylinder are to be included in the definition. The taper and terminal curved or rounded surface aid in registering the bushing 206 within the reel flange central holes 208.

Since caddies 200, 204 are preferably molded of a hard plastic, the surfaces of bushings 206 tend to have a low amount of friction and can be used without augmentation. In alternative embodiments, the bushings 206 can be either coated or sleeved to present surfaces which have an even lower coefficient of friction relative to the cable reel which is rotatably mounted between them. On the other hand, some resistance to rotation of the reel 202 around axis X is desirable, as this mitigates against the spinning of the reel 202 in the absence of tension on the cable being withdrawn. Were reel 202 to continue to spin a long time without such tension, the cable 220 could spool off of the reel 202 inside of the carton 10.

The caddies or cable reel support members 200, 204 have bodies which generally conform in two dimensions to the interior of the carton 10 into which they are designed to be placed, and in general will be of slightly smaller dimension than, but will conform to the shape of, left box panel 24 and right box panel 31. To save weight it is preferred that the caddies 200, 204 be spoked instead of be solid plates. The caddies 200, 204 suspend between them a reel 202 of cable that can weigh many dozens of pounds. Accordingly it is preferred that each caddy 200, 204 have a horizontal base member 210 which is meant to rest on an upper surface of bottom carton panel 27. A central, vertically oriented spoke 212 can be formed to extend from the base member 210 to a central portion 214, from which in turn bushing 206 extends. The spokes 212 will bear most of the weight of the reel 202. Preferably each caddy has a top rail or horizontal member 215 which in use is disposed adjacent an internal surface of top panel 26 of the carton 10. The top rail 215 can in turn be supported by side rails 217 and angled spokes 219. The top rail 215 is useful in accepting a columnar load imposed by other reel containers 11 placed on top of the particular reel container 11 of which the caddies 200, 204 are a part. Such container stacking occurs in the use of the cart illustrated in FIGS. 5 and 6 and described below, and also in the embodiment discussed in conjunction with FIGS. 9-12. In one embodiment (not shown) the spoke 212 is duplicated in a vertical spoke collinear with it which extends from axis X to the top rail 215.

Preferably the panels of carton 10, the caddies 200, 204, the cable reel 202 and the bushings 206 are so sized that the carton interior prevents the reel 202 from coming off of the bushings 206. The carton 10 will have an internal length L in between the internal surfaces of side panels 24 and 31. Most of the distance L will be occupied by the reel 202, which has a predetermined length R between external surfaces of the reel flanges 222, 224. Each caddy 200, 204 will have a general body thickness T. The bushings 206 extend inwardly from the

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general interior surfaces of the caddies **200**, **204** by a distance D. Preferably, the dimensions of these components are selected such that $2T+R$ is slightly less than L. On the other hand, $2T+R+2D$ should be somewhat greater than L, such that the cable reel **202** is forced to ride on the bushings **206** while the caddies **200**, **204** and the reel **202** are inside of the carton **10**. This dimensioning would not be necessary in those embodiments in which the caddies are snapped or otherwise affixed to the reel **202** prior to the insertion of all three components into a carton or box **10**. Further, there will be variations in reel lengths according to the amount and kind of cable wound thereon. In at least many cases, the caddies **200**, **204** will be used in many different carton sizes, so that dimension L of the carton **10** should closely follow cable reel length R.

The cable reel **202** is preselected to have a flange radius r which is smaller than axis height h. This will ensure that the reel **202** can rotate freely inside of carton **10** on bushings **206**.

Each caddy **200**, **204** has a central hole **216** sized to receive an axial support rod (later described) therethrough. Each reel **202** has an axial passageway **221** that joins together reel flange central holes **208**. Conveniently this axial passageway **221** can be formed by an interior volume of a tube which also bears the wound cable **220** on its exterior surface. As assembled and in the condition shown in FIG. 1, each carton **10** therefore has a free passageway all the way along axis X from one side of the box **10** to the other, including a left arbor hole **28**, central hole **216** in caddy **200**, central hole **208** in left cable reel flange **222**, a central passageway between left cable reel flange **222** and right cable reel flange **224**, a central hole **216** in right caddy **204**, and an arbor hole **28** in the right carton panel **31**.

In many instances a user or installer will wish to pull the same length of different kinds of cable at the same time, usually to be installed along the same run. FIG. 3 illustrates a first cart or vehicle **300** which makes this very convenient to do. The center or backbone of the cart **300** is made up by a rigid support rod or pipe **302** that can be formed of tubular steel and in any event is strong enough to withstand buckling when supporting a hundred pounds or more of weight. The support rod **302** is threaded through the arbor holes **28**, central caddy holes **216** and reels **202** of each of a plurality of cartons **10**, **304** and **306** (three shown in FIG. 3). The unit **300** can be formed of containers having different lengths in an axial direction. The length of the axial rod **302** used is preselected to be a little longer than the combined exterior axial length of cartons **10**, **304** and **306**, which are arranged along rod **302** to abut each other and preferably to present front faces or panels **12** in the same direction (although one or more could be reversed). After the user or cable supplier selects cartons **10**, **304**, **306** which are to be combined, they can be taped together with tape **305** or the like to better unify them such that they will not rotate around axis X independently of each other.

A base end **308** of the rod **302** is preferably threaded and is received into a hole **310** in a wheel truck or base **312**. An upstanding panel **314** of the wheel truck **312** is affixed between a left panel **24** of an end carton **10** and a cap **316**, which screws onto the base end **308** of the rod **302**. In an alternative embodiment (not shown), rod **312** may have opposed holes drilled through the sidewall of rod **302**, at right angles to and intersecting rod **302**'s axis, near base end **308**. These holes would receive a cotter pin or clevis of the kind described elsewhere herein. The wheel truck **312**, which conveniently can be fabricated of a single piece of sheet steel, further has at least one horizontal panel **317** (in the illustrated embodiment, there are two such panels **317** and **318**) which receive a lower left corner **323** of the leftmost carton **10**. Separate casters **320**, **322** may be affixed by welding or riv-

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eting to lower surfaces of the horizontal panels **317** and **318**. Once carton **10** has been received by horizontal panels **317** and **318**, the three cartons **10**, **304** and **306** will be prevented from rotating around axis X.

A front end **324** of the axial rod **302** is fitted with or formed to have an ell **326** which may be internally threaded. The ell **326** threadably accepts a vertical member **328** of a handle **330** which may have a horizontal member **332** at its top end. After assembly, an installer can move unit **300** from place to place by pulling up on handle **330**. Half of the weight of the unit **300** will be borne by wheel truck **312**. The installer may set down the unit **300** such that axial rod **302** is at about right angles to the direction of cable pull. Casters **320**, which preferably are of the nonturning type (that is, they stay in alignment with axis X), and the forward corner **334** of carton **306** will exhibit enough friction with the floor surface that the unit **300** will resist being drawn in the direction of the cable pull.

FIGS. 4A-4D show variations on how integrated mobile multicontainer units **400**, **402**, **404** and **406** may be assembled. Unit **400** is composed of just two containers **408**, **410**. The containers **408** and **410** may be of different lengths, as would be the case where cable of smaller length or thickness was being stored in container **410** than in container **408**. A relatively short axial support rod **412** is selected for assembling the unit **400**. In contrast, unit **402** (FIG. 4B) is assembled from four reel containers **414-420** and a longer axial support rod **422**. A five-container unit **404** is shown in FIG. 4C, as composed of containers **424-432** and an even longer axial support rod **434**. FIG. 4D shows a unit **406** in which containers **436-440** are assembled together as supported by axial support rod **446**, while additional containers **442**, **444** are mounted on top of containers **436-440**.

FIGS. 5-8 show a four-wheeled cart **500** to which containers **502-520** can be mounted in up to three parallel rows, one each for respective axial support rods **522**, **524** and **526**. The support rods **522-526** are preferably parallel to but vertically spaced apart from each other so as to each be coaxial with a respective row of containers through which they are inserted. FIG. 5 shows cart **500** in a use configuration; when not in use it may be collapsed to a storage configuration, as explained in conjunction with FIG. 8. The cart **500** is built on an elongate rectangular frame **528** which has a bottom plate **530**, left and right side panels or plates **532** and **534** which extend upwardly from the longitudinal edges of bottom panel **530** and which are preferably orthogonal to panel **530**, and front and rear panels **536** and **538** which extend upwardly from the transverse edges of bottom panel **530** and preferably are orthogonal to plates **530-534** and parallel to each other. Panels **530-538** can be formed from a single blank of sheet steel and together form a shallow box sized to receive the first row of reel containers **502-508**. The height of left side panel **532** is chosen to be somewhat less than the height of cable payout slots **22** above the bottom panels of the containers **502-508**, such that the cables being withdrawn from slots **22** will not be occluded or abraded by the side panel **532**. The height of right side panel **534** can be preselected to be taller than this, or can be the same height, in case that the installer chooses to face the slots **22** (or even just some of them) the opposite way.

A vertical, elongate, preferably flat front support rod holder **540** can have its lower end **542** affixed as by riveting or welding to front panel **536**. The front support rod holder more preferably is affixed to the front panel **536** by flat-headed studs **543** formed to extend from a front flat surface of holder **540** and keyed slots **545** formed in panel **536** which have top openings sized and shaped to receive therethrough a head of a respective stud **543**, and a slot depending from this opening which accepts only a shaft of the stud **543**. Other user-oper-

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able fasteners such as pins or nuts and bolts could alternatively be employed. As assembled to cart 500, the front support rod holder 540 extends upwardly from the front panel 536 at least beyond the horizontal level of the third and highest support rod 526. Holes 544, 546, 548 are made in support rod holder 540 to be sized and positioned to slidably receive ends of respective ones of the axial support rods 522, 524, 526. The support rods 522-526 are preferably straight and have through-holes drilled through their sidewalls near their ends, so as to receive clevis pins (not shown; see FIG. 8) after insertion of the rods through respective holder holes 544-548. In an alternative embodiment (not shown); see FIG. 3) the rods are threaded on the ends, so as to threadably receive female threaded caps after insertion through respective holder holes 544-548.

Similarly, in a use configuration a vertical elongate rear support rod holder 600 (FIG. 6) has a lower end 602 affixed to rear plate 538 as by riveting, welding or (preferably) user-operable fasteners such as studs 543 received into respective keyed slots 545. The rear support rod holder extends upwardly from the rear panel 538 at least beyond the horizontal level of the third support rod 526. Holes 604, 606 and 608 are made in support rod holder 600 and are sized and positioned to slidably receive rear ends of the respective ones of the axial support rods 522, 524 and 526. Clevis pins (not shown; see FIG. 8) may be inserted through diametrically opposed holes drilled in the sidewalls of the rods near their ends in order to fasten the rods in place. Alternatively caps (not shown; see representative cap 316 in FIG. 3) may be threaded onto the (in this instance, threaded) rear ends of the support rods 522-526 so as to secure the reel containers 502-520 between rod holders 540 and 600.

In a preferred embodiment, the front panel 536 and the rear panel 538 extend upwardly beyond the level of the lowest axial support rod 522. Holes 551, 650 are made in the front and rear panels 536, 538 to slidably receive therethrough the axial support rod 522. Extending the front and rear panels 536, 538 upwardly in this manner obviates any transverse deflection of the support rod holders 540, 600 at this height, and enhances the resistance to such deflection at locations higher up on the support rod holders 540, 600. The upward extension of front and rear panels 536, 538 also permits the formation of holes 551, 650 therein to receive the lowest support rod 522 therethrough while the cart 500 is in a storage configuration, as will be hereinafter described.

The bottom panel 530 of the cart 500 has affixed thereto, as by riveting or welding, two front casters 550 which turn on their vertical axes, and two rear casters 552 which don't. In one embodiment some or all of the casters 550-552 may be of the type which are equipped with foot-actuated brakes (not shown), so that the cart 500 may be parked in one place.

At the front corner of left panel 532 and front panel 536 there is provided a left socket 554, which may be joined to left panel 532 and front panel 536 by welding. Similarly, at the front corner of right panel 532 and front panel 536 there is provided a right socket 556. Sockets 554 and 556 are vertical cylindrical sleeves meant to slidably receive respective left and right legs 558, 560 of a handle 562.

As shown in the detail of FIG. 7, the left and right legs 558, 560 of the handle 562 can be affixed to respective sockets 554, 556 by means of cotter or clevis pins 700, 702. A shaft of each clevis pin 700, 702 is inserted into a hole in a respective socket 554 or 556, a hole in a respective handle leg 558 or 560 (which conveniently can be formed of tubular steel), and finally through an inboard hole in a respective socket 554 or 556. Another, curved leg of each clevis pin 700, 702 meanwhile fits around

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the curved external surface of socket 554 or 556, thereby locking the pin 700 or 702 in place.

FIG. 7 also provides a close-up view of left and right storage holes 704, 706 which are not used when the cart 500 is loaded with cartons, but which are used to receive ends of support rods 524, 526 when the cart 500 is being separately transported or stored.

FIG. 8 shows cart 500 in a "knocked down" condition. The support rod holders 540, 600 are stored on the left and right sides of the cart interior. Keyed storage slots 800 are formed in sides 532, 534 so as to receive studs 543 of the support rod holders 540, 600, affixing them in place in a storage configuration. Support rods 526, 528 are threaded through storage holes 704, 706, and like storage holes in the rear panel 538, and affixed in place as by means of cotter or clevis pins, so they don't slide out. The legs 558, 560 of cart handle 562 are removed from respective sockets 554, 556 and laid into the interior of the cart 500. The lowest support rod 522 is reattached in the same position that it takes when cartons are mounted to it, but is now used as a handle to carry the cart 500.

Returning to FIGS. 5 and 6, cart 500 permits the stacking of containers 502-520 three rows high, and in alternative embodiments (not shown) a fourth or even more rows could be added, as long as the entire cart 500 is not in danger of tipping over. The containers 502-520 have a lessened danger of tipping over when cable is pulled from them than they otherwise would, as during a cable pull the cable is being pulled off of rotating spools 202 internal to the cartons 502-520. The rotation of spools in the cartons 502-520 around their respective axes relieves most of the tension caused by pulling the cables, and as such the shear force experienced by the whole structure will be less than it otherwise would be. The combination of the cart 500 and the containers 502-520 create a wall or two-dimensional array of reels from which cable may be pulled.

In use, the installer installs one, two or three rows of containers 502-520 on cart 500, employing one, two or three axial support rods 522-526. If only one row of containers 502-508 is to be used, the support rod holders 540 and 600 aren't necessary and don't have to be installed. Otherwise the support rod holders 540 and 600 are bolted on or otherwise fastened to the front and rear plates 536 and 538, preferably in advance of loading a first row of reel containers 502-508 onto the bottom plate 530. The lowest support rod 522 is then threaded through plate 536, support rod holder 540, containers 502-508, rear plate 538 and rear support rod holder 600, and is fastened in place by means of threaded end caps (not shown) or clevis pins. Then, a second row of containers 510-514 is installed in a similar manner, using second support rod 524. If needed, a third row of containers 516-520 is installed using third support rod 526. Legs 558, 560 of the handle 562 are then installed in respective sleeves 554 and 556.

The cart 500 is then rolled to a desired location and is parked (as by setting its caster brakes) such that its long axis (and therefore the axes of the support rods) is at a substantial angle (such as a right angle) to the direction of cable pull. The combined mass of cart 500 and its payload provides a massive anchor against which cable can be pulled out of containers 502-520 through slots 22.

FIGS. 9-12 depict an embodiment permitting the dispensing of cable from each reel in a vertical stack of containers 900A, 900B. Each container 900A,B is like container 10 (FIG. 1) in most respects and each such container 900A, 900B houses a reel 202A, 202B of cable as supported by reel caddies or mounting plates (omitted from FIGS. 9-12 for clarity). Each container 900A,B has an arbor hole 28A or 28B

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in each of its side panels and a clear passageway between them, as before. Each container 900A,B further has a front panel cable dispensing slot 22.

The containers 900A,B are different from containers 10 in that each additionally has an elongate top pass-through slot 902A or 902B in a top panel 904 thereof, and an elongate bottom pass-through slot 906A, 906B in a bottom panel 908 thereof. The top pass-through slot 902A, 902B should be positioned in top panel 904 in a way which is similar to the positioning of bottom pass-through slot 906A, 906B in bottom panel 908. This is so a top pass-through slot 902A in one container 900A will communicate with a bottom pass-through slot 906B in the container 900B immediately on top of it. As in front slots 22, it is preferred that top and bottom slots 902A,B, 906A,B be offset from the middle of the panel and to be parallel to but offset from the vertical plane which the reel axes will tend to occupy. Said another way, a plane containing the centers of all pass-through slots 902-906 in the stack will be parallel to but spaced from the plane containing the reel axes in the stack.

The pass-through slots 902A,B, 906A,B permit cables from different reels to exit out the top one of the slots 902B in common. By way of example, in FIG. 9 a first cable 910 originates from a lower cable reel 202A. The cable 910 is fed through a pass-through slot 902A prior to the upper container 900B being placed all the way onto the lower container 900A. The cable 910 is fed through the bottom pass-through slot 906B in the upper container 900B, and thence out the top pass-through slot 902B. A cable 912 originates from an upper reel 202B, and is simply threaded out of the top slot 902B. The wide extent of the slots 902A,B, 906A,B allows multiple cables 910, 912 (only two such shown here) to be pulled out of the top of the stack with little resistance and with little interference with each other.

FIG. 10 shows a two-wheeled dolly or hand truck 1000 adapted to receive and hold at least one vertical stack of the containers 900A,B. The hand truck 1000 has a bottom shelf 1002 which will receive most or all of the weight of the containers, wheels 1004, a left vertical frame member 1006 and a right vertical frame member 1008, both extending upwardly from the shelf 1002. The left and right vertical frame members 1006, 1008 may be terminated at their upper ends by a handle 1010 which may, as shown, join together the vertical frame members 1006, 1008.

The hand truck 1000 further includes horizontally disposed cross members 1012, 1014, 1016 each of which join together and bridge vertical frame members 1006 and 1008. The elevations of the cross members 1012, 1014 and 1016 are chosen to be at about the centers of the first, second and third containers stacked on the shelf 1002; the containers (such as containers 900A,B in FIG. 9) should therefore be of uniform height, even if they can be of different widths. In the center of each elongate horizontal cross member 1012-1016 there is formed a hole 1018A, 1018B, 1018C for the receipt of a respective support rod, as will be described below.

Preferably at the same elevations as horizontal cross members 1012-1016 are left and right side retaining plates 1020, 1022. Each side retaining plate 1020 or 1022 is joined to one of the vertical frame members 1006 and 1008, has a flat and vertical inwardly facing surface, and extends forwardly therefrom in a direction orthogonal to the plane in which cross members 1012-1016 reside. The retaining plates 1020, 1022 help keep the containers mounted the cart 1000 from sliding off in a transverse direction.

FIG. 11 shows cart 1000 as holding a single stack of the containers 900A-900C. For this use a set of relatively short support rods 1100, 1102 and 1104 are used to mount the

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containers 900A-900C to the cart 1000. First, a container 900A is placed on shelf 1002. If vertical dispensing is desired from this stack, a cable 910 from container 900A is threaded through a top pass-through slot such as 902A in FIG. 9, and thence into a bottom slot 906B in container 900B. Container 900B is then stacked on container 900A. A cable or conductor 912 is threaded through a top pass-through slot 902B together with cable 910. Then both cables 910, 912 are fed through a bottom pass-through slot (not shown; similar to slots 906A,B) in a third container 900C. Container 900C is then placed on top of container 900B. Cables 910 and 912, respectively originating from containers 900A and 900B, are joined by a further cable or conductor 1106 and all are threaded through a top pass-through slot 902C.

To firmly secure the containers 900A-C to the hand truck 1000, rod 1100 is inserted through arbor hole 28A, rod 1102 is inserted through arbor hole 28B and rod 1104 is inserted through arbor hole 28C. The rods 1100-1104 continue to be inserted through the caddy holes, reel flange holes, and communicating reel passageways to and through the opposing carton sides and into and through respective cross member holes 1018A, 1018B and 1018C. The inserted ends of the rods 1100-1104 may be drilled to receive respective clevis pins (not shown) to prevent their withdrawal. At the other end thereof, each of the rods 1100-1104 has an enlargement 1106 (such as a disk) that is large enough to not be admitted into a respective arbor hole 28A-C, and which is also large enough to sufficiently distribute some of the weight of the loaded container (which the rod enlargement 1106 may experience if the hand truck 1000 is tipped forwardly) throughout its disk area without tearing or "perforating through" the typically cardboard carton panel which will be pressing against it.

FIG. 12 shows hand truck 1000 as loaded with two stacks of containers 900A-C and 900D-F. The reel axis inside of container 900A should be substantially coaxial with the reel axis inside of container 900D, and this coaxial pairing should also take place for containers 900B, 900E and 900C, 900F. This will create a continuous straight passageway for an axial rod 1200, 1202 or 1204 from a cross member hole 1018A-C, through all intervening carton walls, caddies, reel flanges and reel passageways, and out an arbor hole 28 located on the remote side of the remoter one 900 D-F (with respect to the cross member) of the two containers. Axial rods 1200-1204, which are in general similar to axial rods 1100-1104 but longer, can be inserted through respective ones of these continuous horizontal passageways. A remote end of each of the axial rods 1200-1204 will have an enlargement like enlargement 1107 on rods 1100-1104, and a near end of the axial rods 1200-1204 will be drilled to receive a respective clevis pin 1206 after the near end has been inserted through a respective one of the cross member holes 1018A-C.

The cables from the reels inside of containers 900A-C may be fed through a top pass-through slot 902C, after being threaded through zero, one or two intervening pairs of pass-through slots in the containers 900A-C, depending on the identity of the reel from which the cable is being paid off. Alternatively, the cables from respective containers 900A-C may be threaded in parallel out respective front slots 22A, 22B, 22C. Cable from containers 900D-F may similarly all be drawn through top pass-through slot 902F, or alternatively through the front slots 22D, 22E and 22F thereof. The way in which cable is drawn from each stack may be the same as the way used for the other stack, or intentionally may be chosen to be different.

The pass-through-slotted containers 900 A-F may also be used with the four-wheeled cart 500, with cables drawn out of

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top pass-through slots in the top row of containers affixed together by top support rod 526.

In summary, a cable container has been provided in which a reel of cable rotates freely on caddies inside of a carton as cable is being drawn out of an offset elongate slot provided for this purpose. With the aid of an axial support rod threaded through multiple ones of these containers, two or more such containers can be combined into a single mobile cable pulling unit. For larger jobs, a cart is provided by which multiple rows of such containers are secured to the cart by respective axial support rods. A dolly or hand truck is also provided to create one or two stacks of these containers, and pass-through slots may be formed in the stacked containers to permit the pulling of all cables in the stack in a vertical direction out of one top slot.

While illustrated embodiments of the present invention have been described and illustrated in the appended drawings, the present invention is not limited thereto but only by the scope and spirit of the appended claims.

We claim:

1. A system for dispensing wire or cable from reels, comprising:

a plurality of cable reel cartons each containing a reel of wire or cable, each carton having a bottom panel with opposing left and right sides, a left panel extending upwardly from the left side and a right panel extending upwardly from the right side, arbor holes formed in each of the left and right panels and around an axis so that for each carton, the arbor holes are disposed at a single predetermined first distance from an upper surface of the bottom panel, arbor holes formed in each of the left and right panels and around an axis, an outer surface of the right panel being a predetermined length from an outer surface of the left panel, each carton having a front panel parallel to the axis and extending upwardly from the bottom panel and connecting the left and right panels, a cable payout slot formed in the front panel so as to permit the withdrawal of cable from the carton at a substantial angle to the axis;

each reel having an axial passageway therethrough to communicate with the arbor holes;

at least first and second ones of the cable reel cartons positioned side by side such that the arbor holes thereof are aligned on the axis, a first axial rod inserted through the arbor holes and the axial passageways of the cable reels of the first and second ones of the cable reel cartons, the cable reel cartons having respective lengths in the axial direction, a length of the first axial rod preselected to be longer than the sum of the lengths of said least first and second ones of the cable reel cartons so as to define first and second free ends of the axial rod which extend beyond said at least first and second ones of the cable reel cartons; and

a cart frame which is elongate in the axial direction, a plurality of wheels mounted to the cart frame, ones of the wheels being fixed to roll in the axial direction, the cart frame having opposed, axially spaced apart front and rear ends, a first upstanding rod holder affixed to the front end of the frame, a second upstanding rod holder affixed to the rear end of the frame, a first end of the axial rod affixed to the first rod holder, a second end of the first axial rod affixed to the second rod holder, such that the first and second ones of the cable reel cartons through which the first axial rod is inserted are mounted thereby to the cart, an elongate bottom panel of the frame extending between the front end of the frame and the rear end of the frame, bottom panels of said at least first and

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second cable reel cartons supported by the bottom panel of the frame so as to prevent rotation of said at least first and second cable reel cartons around the axis; such that wire or cable can be withdrawn simultaneously from the first and second ones of the cable reel cartons in a direction which is at a substantial angle to the axis.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein each of said cable reel cartons comprises

a left caddy disposed in the carton adjacent the left panel and to extend upwardly from an upper surface of the bottom panel, a substantially cylindrical bushing of the left caddy extending inwardly toward the right panel, the bushing formed around an axis which is parallel to the bottom panel and which is disposed at a first distance measured orthogonally from the upper surface of the bottom panel, the bushing being formed substantially at a first radius from the axis;

a right caddy disposed in the carton to be adjacent the right panel and to extend upwardly from the upper surface of the bottom panel, a substantially cylindrical bushing of the right caddy extending inwardly toward the left panel and formed around the axis, the bushing of the right caddy being formed substantially at the first radius from the axis;

the reel having spaced-part left and right flanges, the left flange having a central hole, the right flange having a central hole, the central holes of the left and right flanges each formed around the axis and having a second radius which is greater than said first radius, such that the bushing of the left caddy may be received in the central hole of the left flange and the bushing of the right caddy may be received in the central hole of the right flange, a greatest radius of the left flange and a greatest radius of the right flange being less than said first distance so as to permit the rotation of the reel around the axis inside of the carton;

wherein an inner surface of the left panel is spaced from an inner surface of the right panel by an internal carton length, the left and right caddies each having a general thickness, the bushings of the caddies extending axially inwardly by a second distance beyond the general thickness, the cable reel having a reel length as measured from an outer surface of the left flange to an outer surface of the right flange, the sum of the general thicknesses of the caddies and the reel length being less than the internal carton length, the sum of the general thicknesses of the caddies, the reel length and twice the second distance being greater than the internal carton length.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein the caddies are formed of plastic.

4. The system of claim 2, wherein each caddy has a base extending along the upper surface of the bottom panel and at least one spoke extending from the base to the bushing surface.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the bottom, front, left and right panels of each carton are formed of corrugated cardboard.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the slot in the front panel of each cable reel carton is elongate in an axial direction, a height of the elongated slot above the upper surface of the bottom panel being less than a vertical distance from the upper surface of the bottom panel to an axis passing through the arbor holes of the carton.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the first axial rod is inserted through more than two cable reel cartons.

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8. The system of claim 1, and further comprising:

At least third and fourth ones of the cable reel cartons positioned side by side such that the arbor holes and axial cable reel passageways thereof are aligned on a second axis vertically spaced from and parallel to said axis, the second axis vertically spaced from said axis by a distance substantially equal to twice said predetermined first distance, a second axial rod inserted through the arbor holes of the third and fourth ones of the cable reel cartons, a length of the second axial rod inserted through the arbor holes and the axial passageways of the cable reels of the third and fourth ones of the cable reel cartons, a length of the second axial rod preselected to be longer than the sum of the lengths of said at least third and fourth ones of the cable reel cartons so as to define first and second free ends of the second axial rod which extend beyond said at least third and fourth ones of the cable reel cartons.

9. The system of claim 8, and further comprising at least a fifth cable reel carton, a third axial rod inserted through arbor holes and an axial passageway of a cable reel of the fifth cable reel carton, a first end of the third axial rod affixed to the first rod holder, a second end of the third axial rod affixed to the second rod holder, such that the fifth cable reel carton is affixed by the third axial rod to the cart, the third axial rod being disposed in parallel to the first and second axial rods

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and vertically spaced from the second axial rod by a distance substantially equal to twice said first predetermined distance.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the fifth cable reel carton is one of a plurality of cartons through which the third axial rod is inserted, axial passageways of the last said plurality of cartons being in alignment with each other.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the third axial rod is inserted through more than two cable reel cartons.

12. The system of claim 8, wherein bottoms of the third and fourth cable reel cartons rest on tops of the first and second cable reel cartons.

13. The system of claim 1, wherein ones of the wheels mounted to the frame of the cart are casters.

14. The system of claim 1, wherein the lengths of the cable reel cartons may be preselected to be different from each other.

15. The system of claim 1, wherein the bottom panel of the frame has parallel sides extending between the front and rear ends, an upstanding side panel of the frame extending upwardly from one of the parallel sides of the bottom panel of the frame, each cable payout slot being elongate in an axial direction, a height of the side panel preselected to be less than a height of said cable payout slot, such that cable may be pulled out of the slot without occlusion or abrasion by the side panel of the frame.

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