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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR UTILIZING
MULTIPLE SENSORS FOR MONITORING
CONTAINER SECURITY, CONTENTS AND
CONDITION**

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17, 2002. Provisional application No. 60/470,435,
filed on May 15, 2003. Provisional application No.
60/556,106, filed on Mar. 24, 2004.

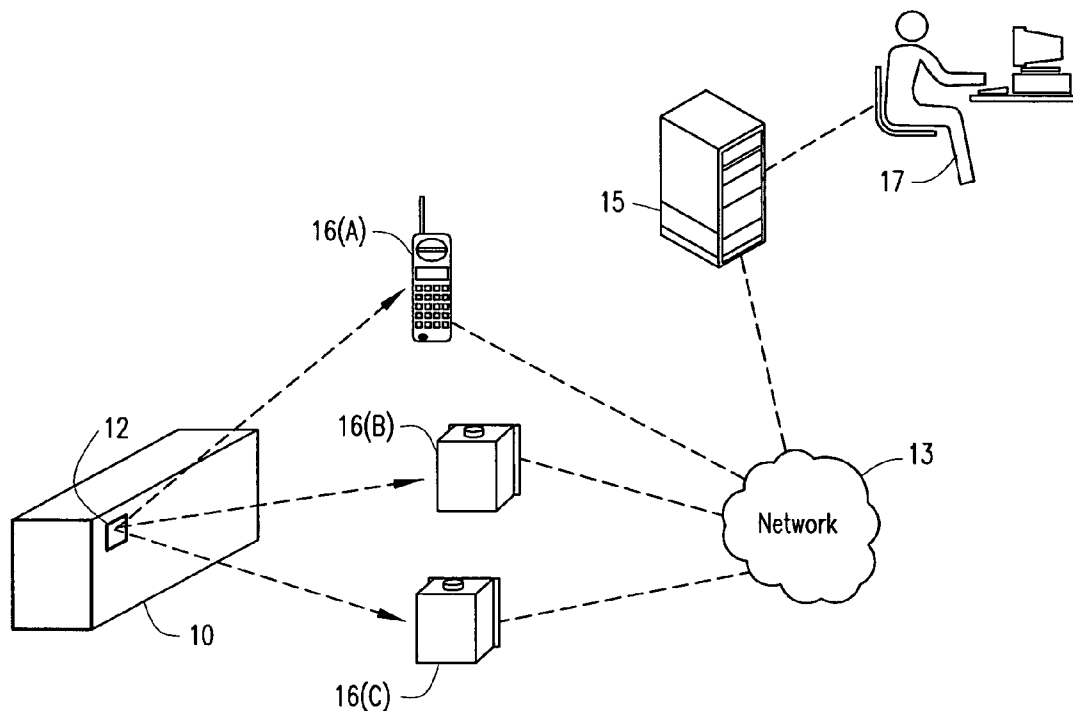
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A container and contents monitoring system includes a device, a reader, a server, a software backbone and a receptacle for housing a plurality of sensors. The device communicates with the plurality of sensors and the reader in order to determine the condition of the container and its contents. The reader transmits the information from the device to the server. The device determines if a container condition has occurred based on at least one sensor located on or in the container.



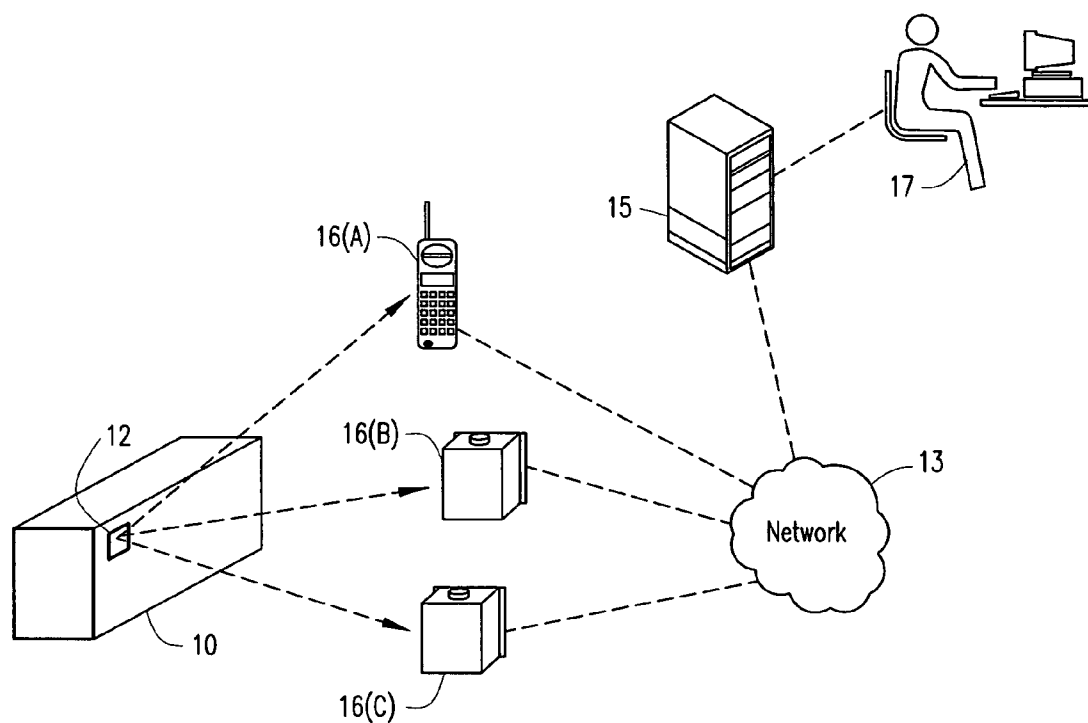


FIG. 1A

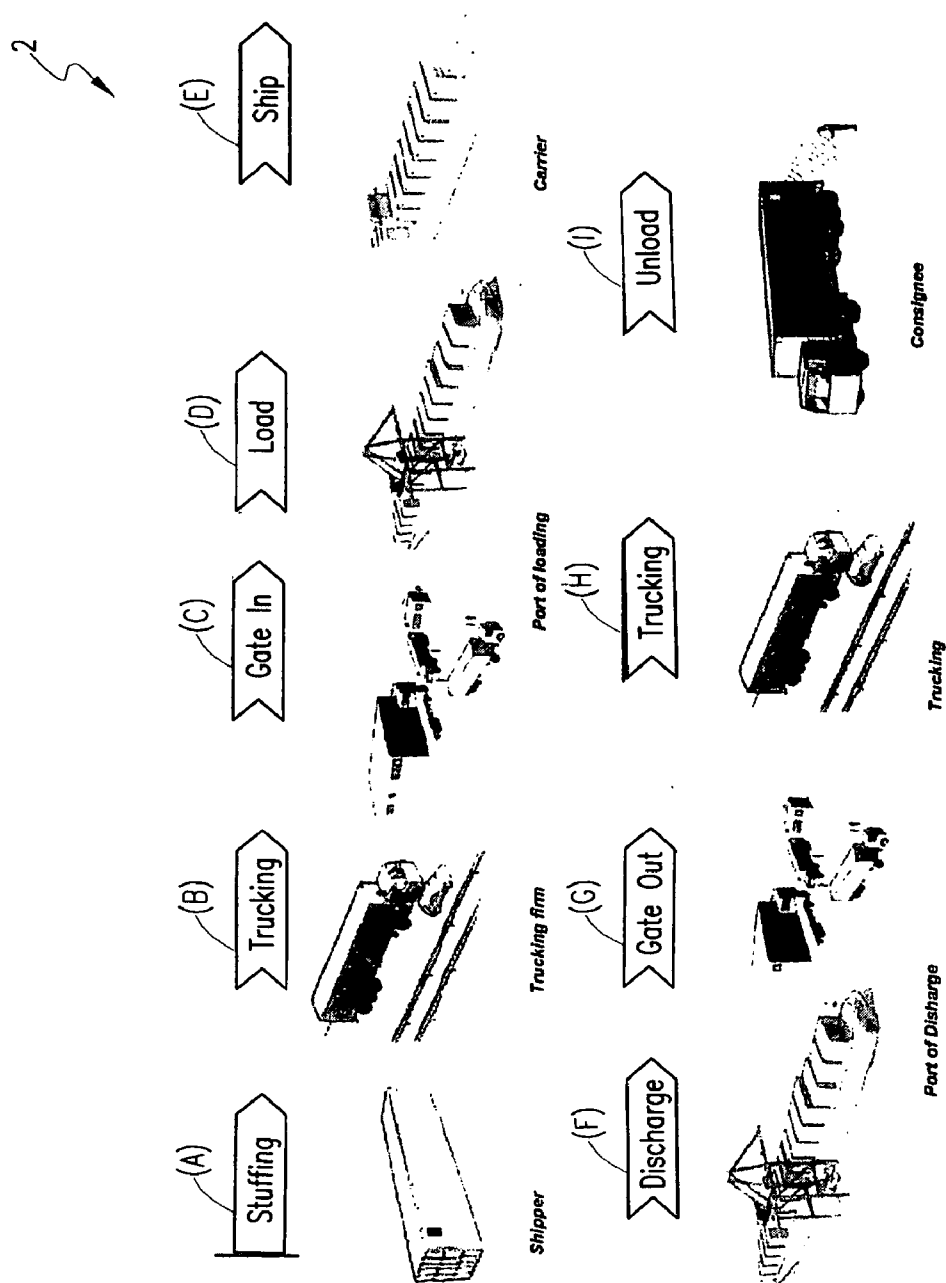


FIG. 1B

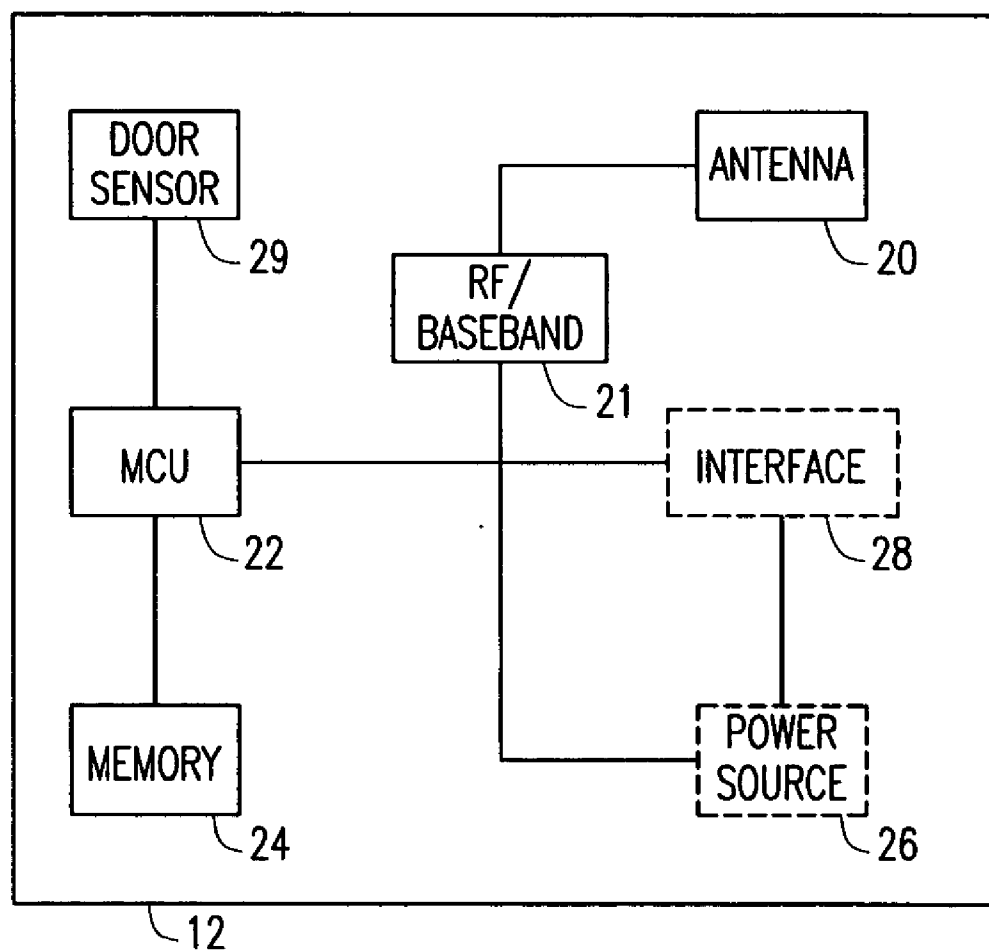
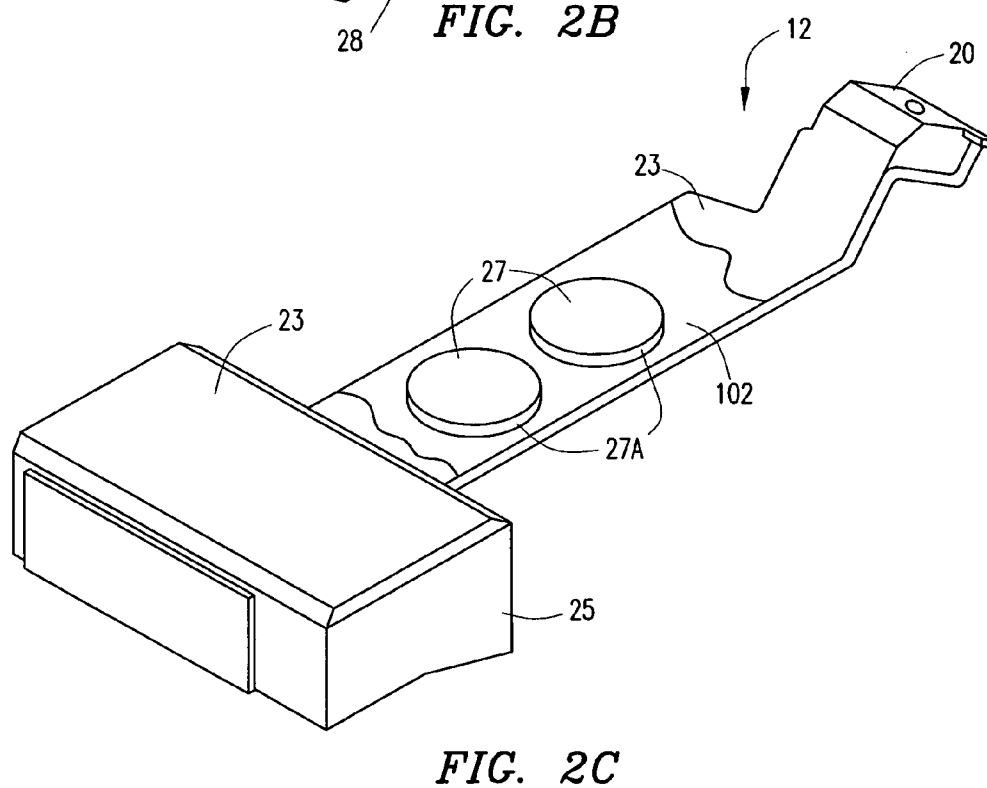
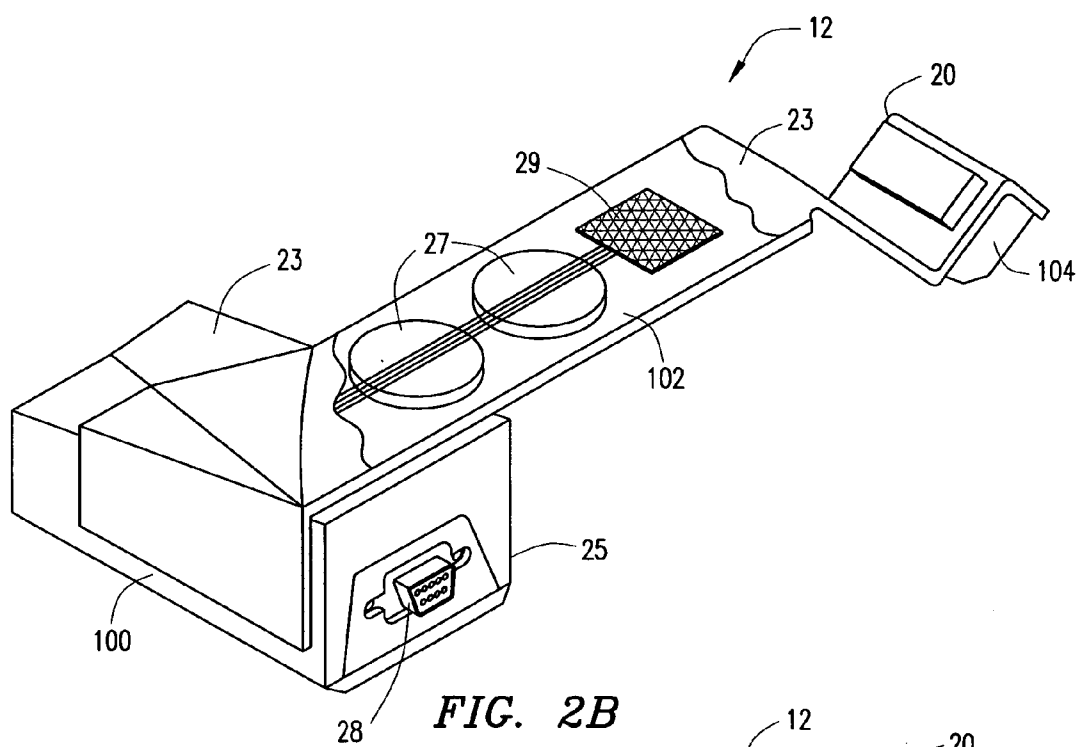
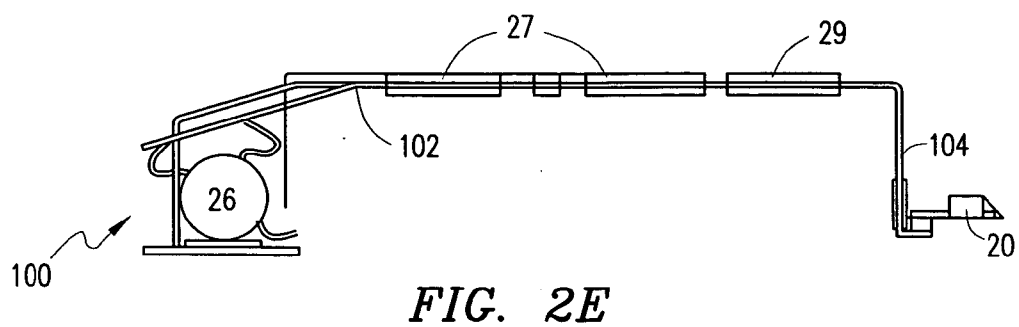
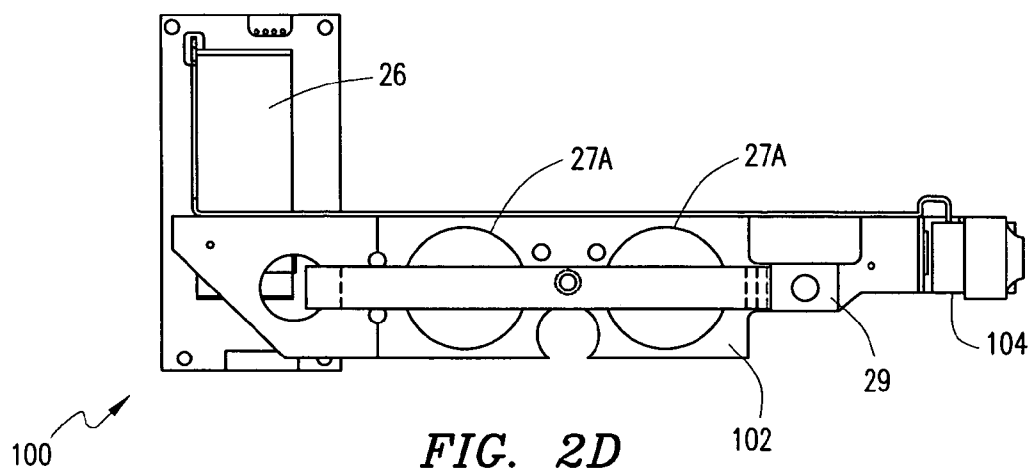


FIG. 2A





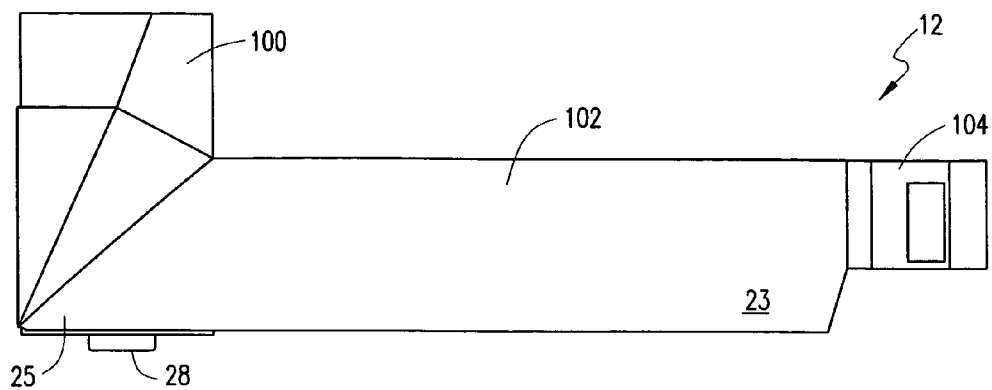


FIG. 2F

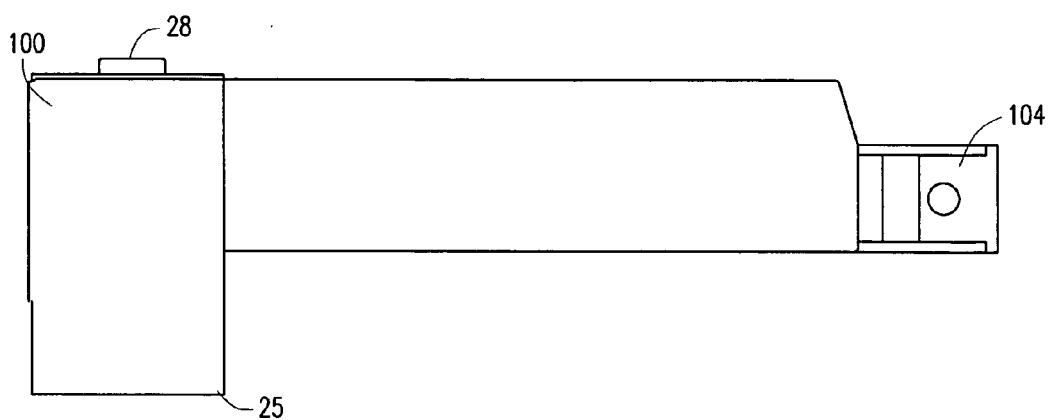


FIG. 2G

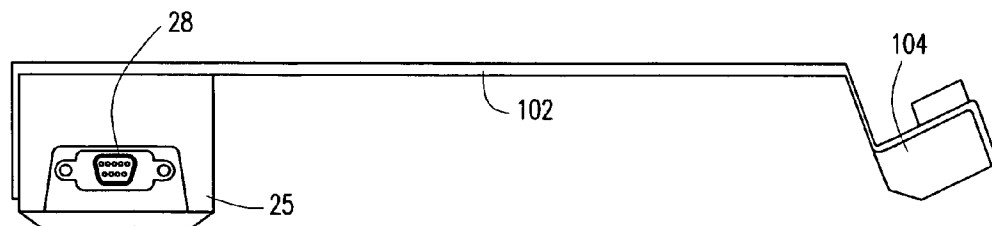


FIG. 2H

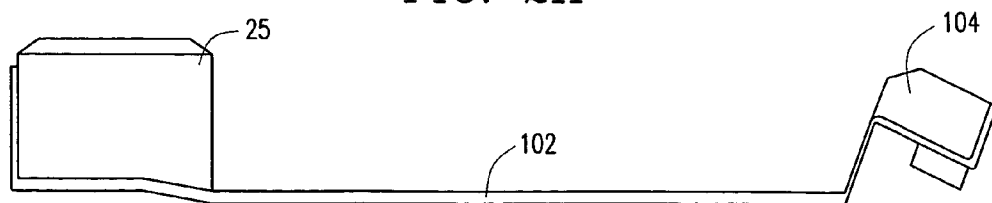


FIG. 2I

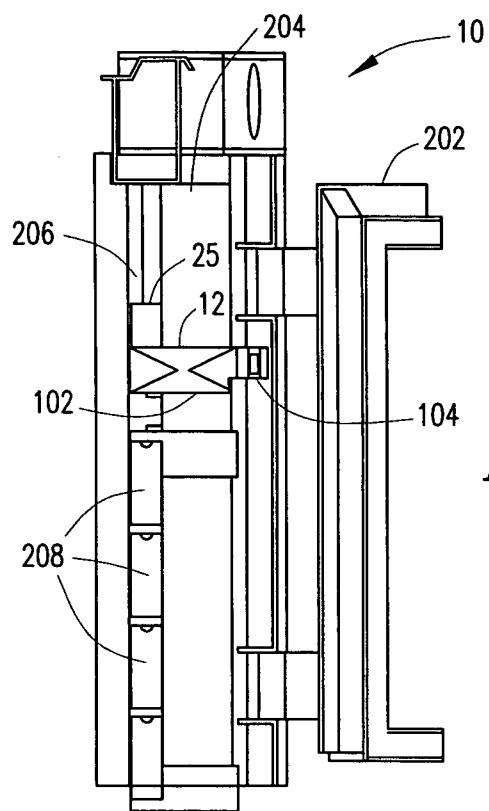


FIG. 2J

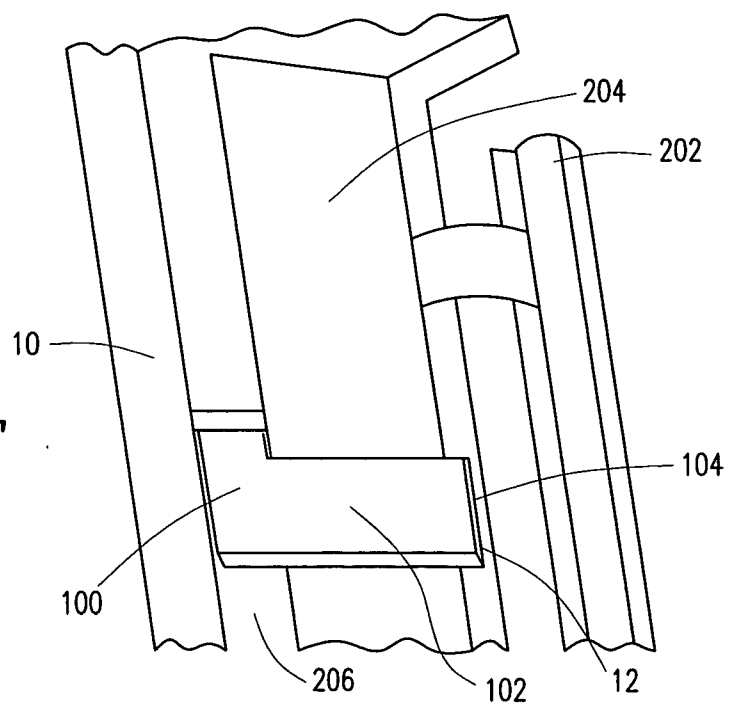


FIG. 2T

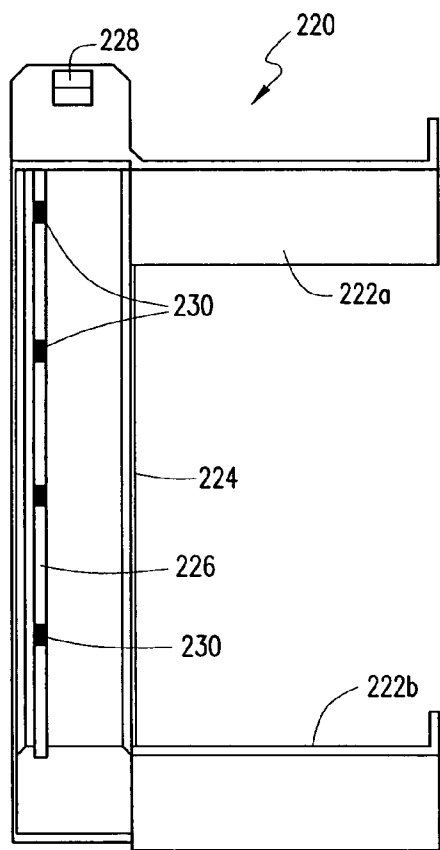


FIG. 2K

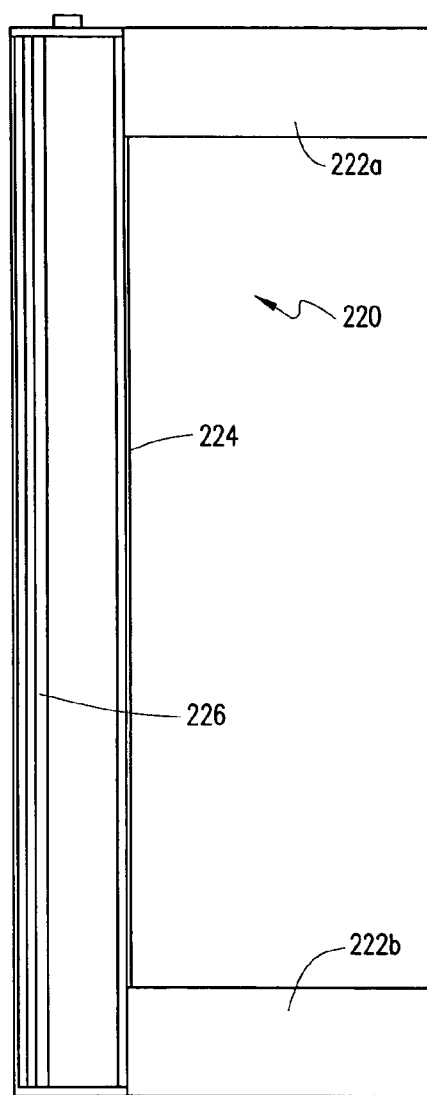


FIG. 2L

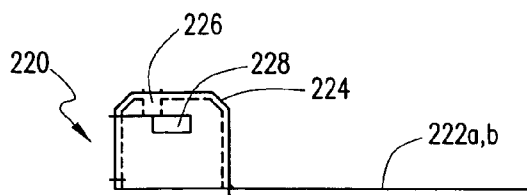


FIG. 2M

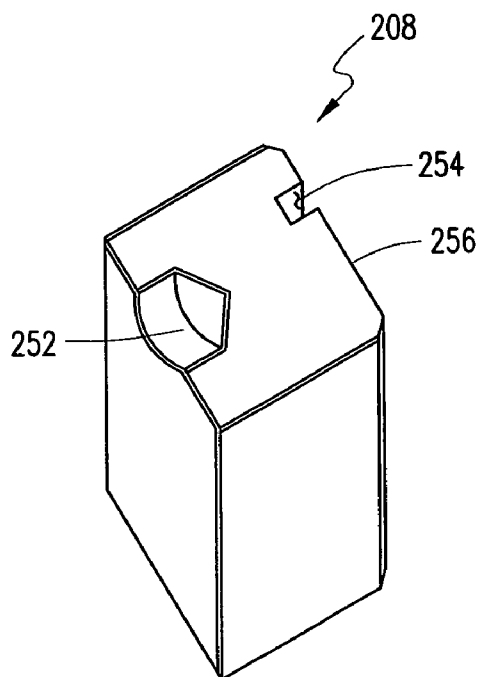


FIG. 2N

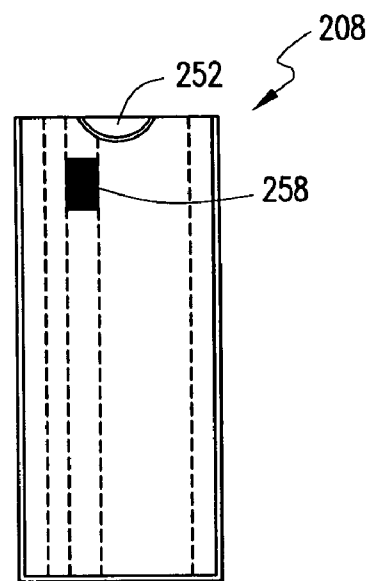


FIG. 2P

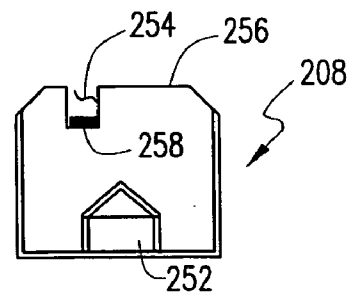


FIG. 2Q

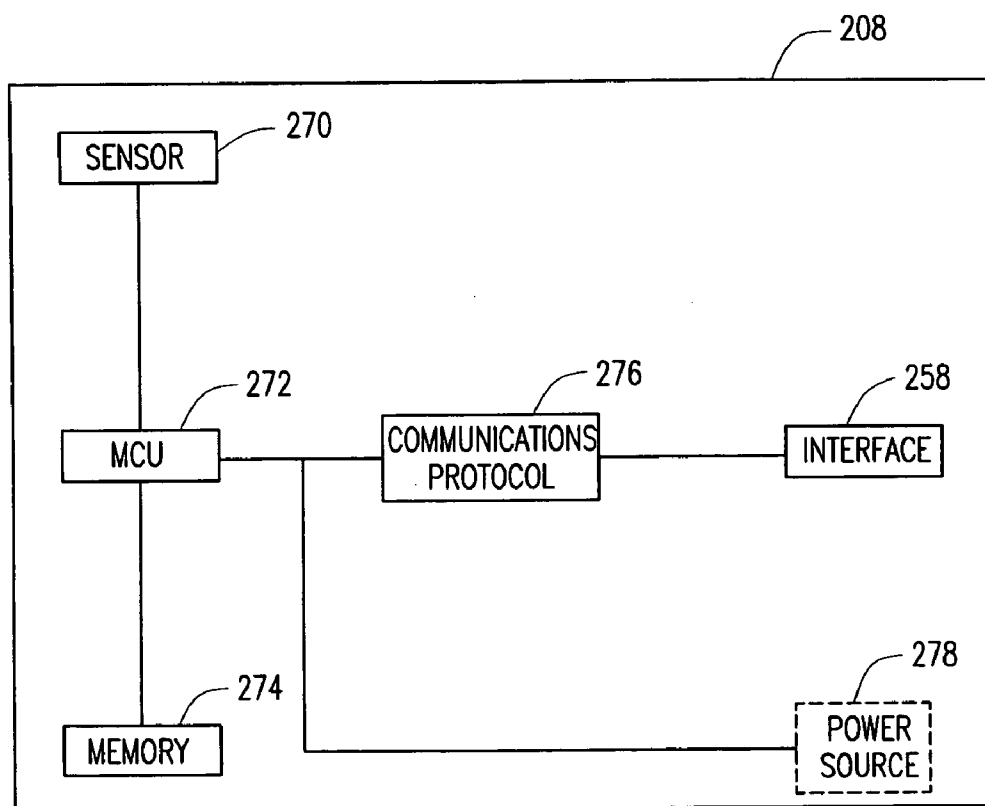


FIG. 2R

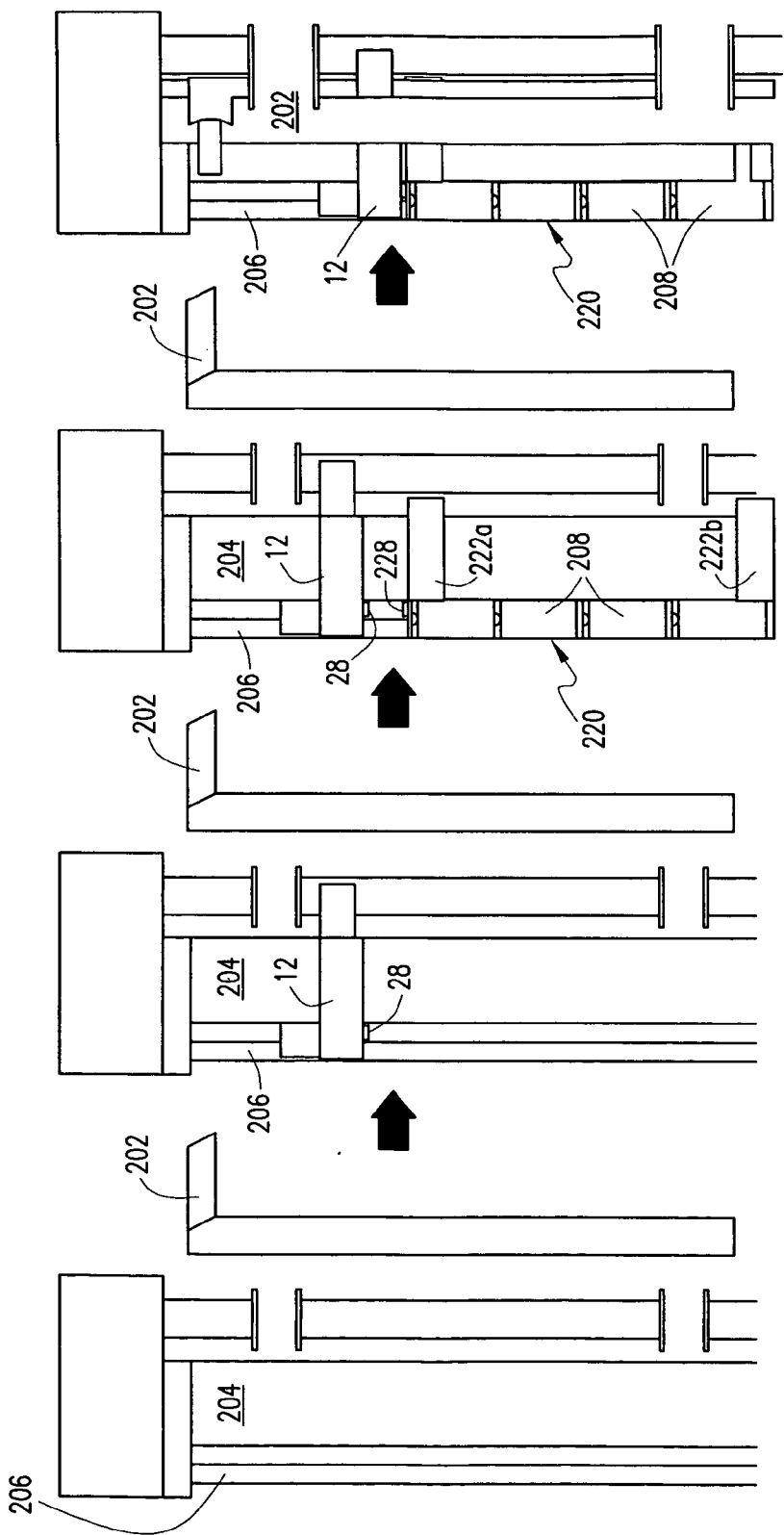


FIG. 2S

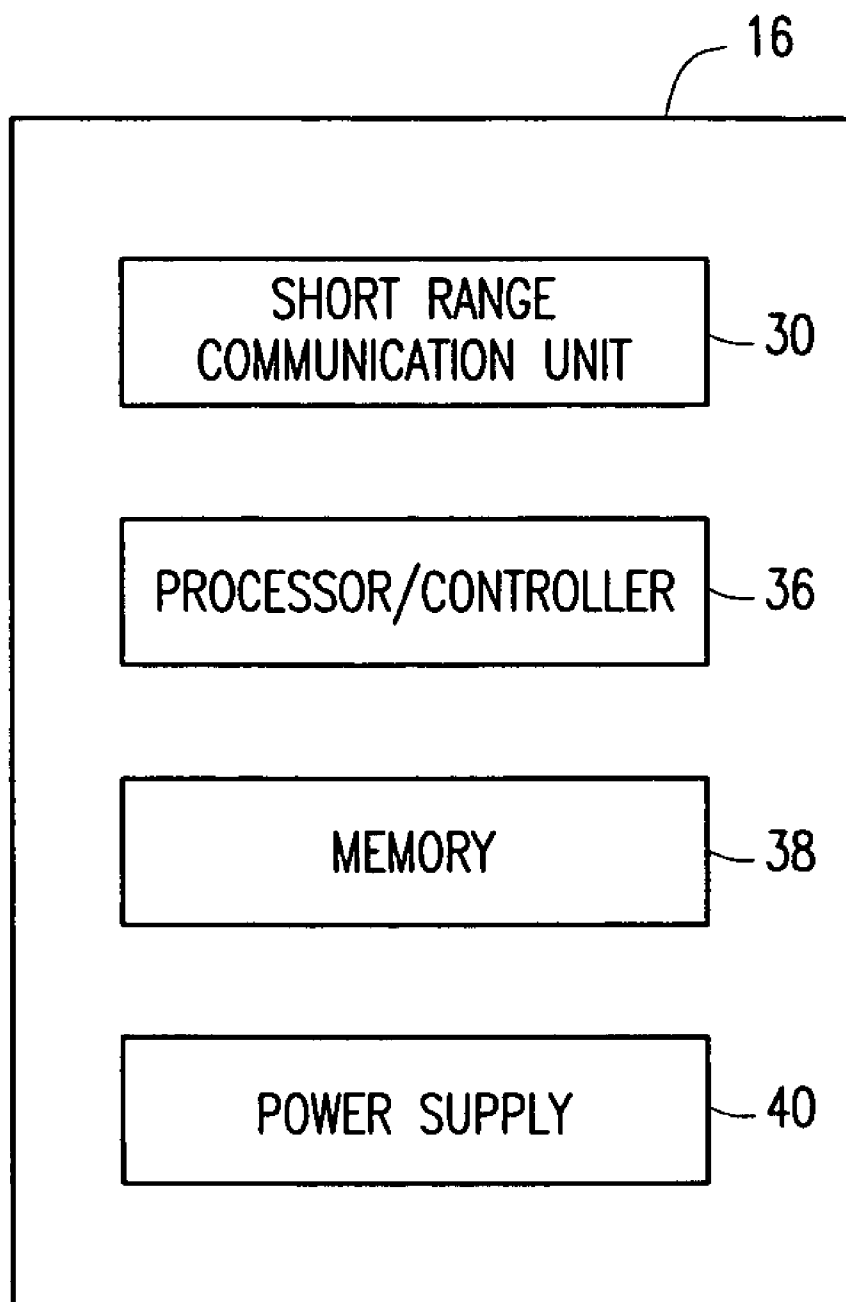


FIG. 3A

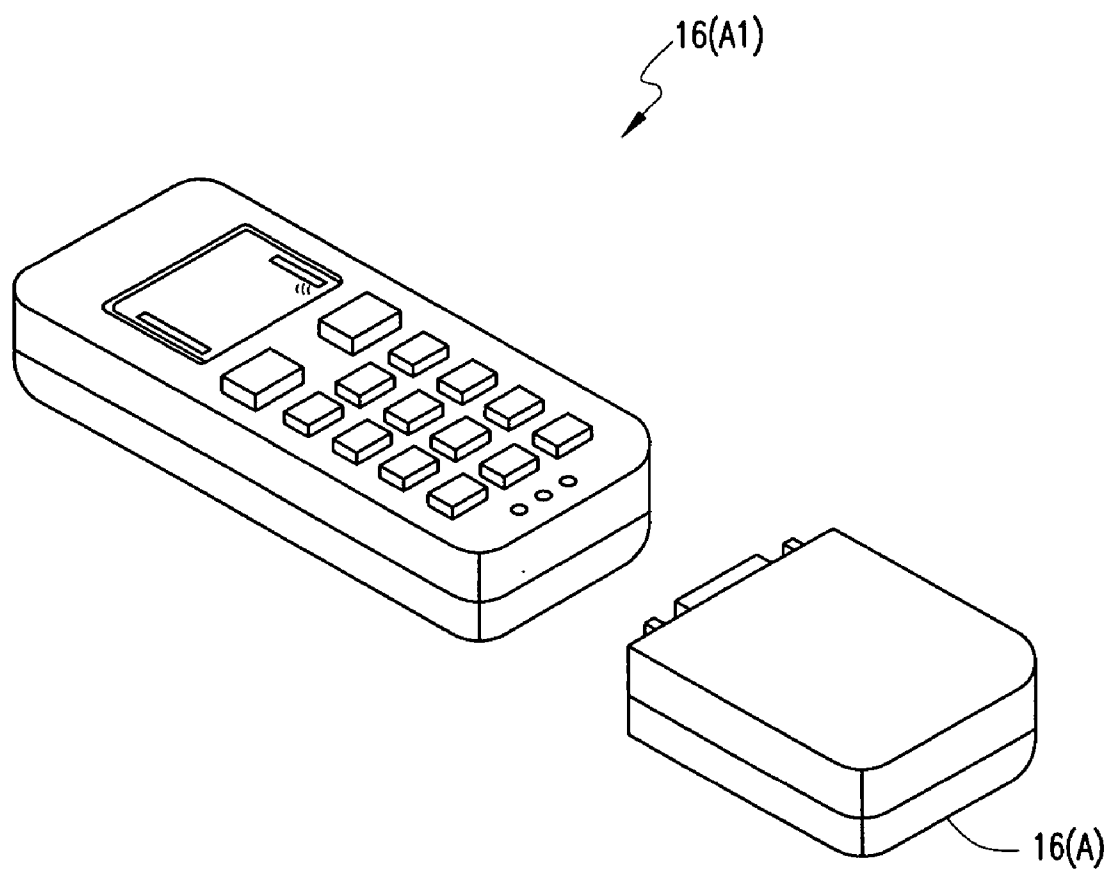


FIG. 3B

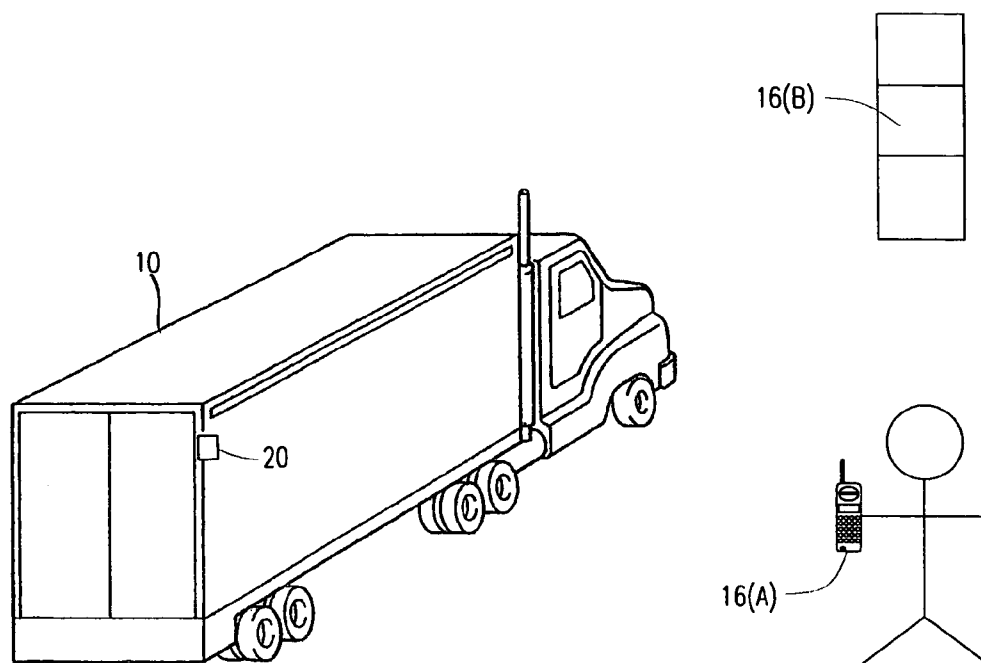


FIG. 4

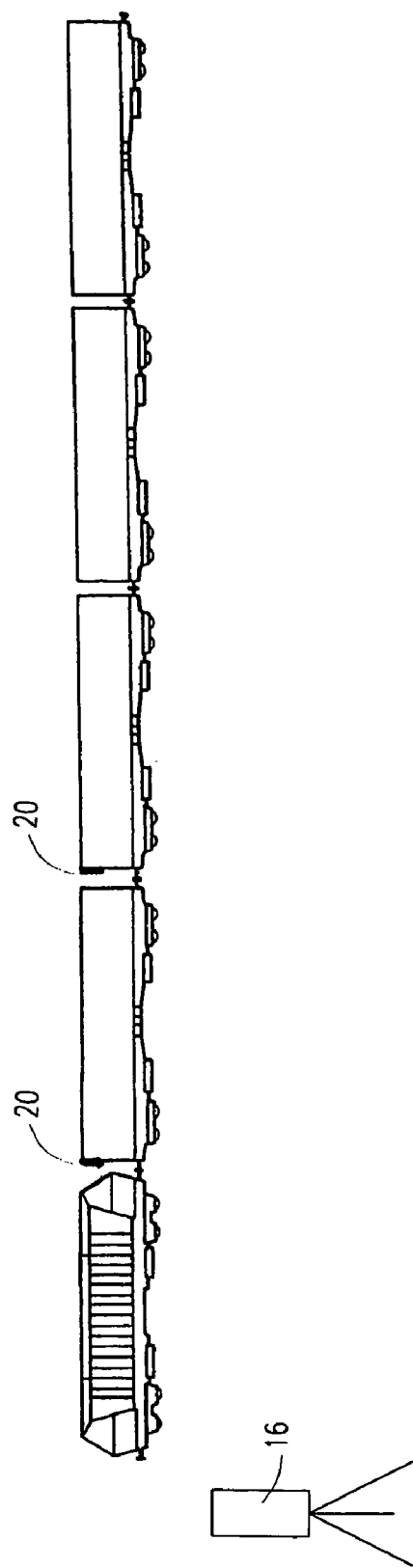


FIG. 5

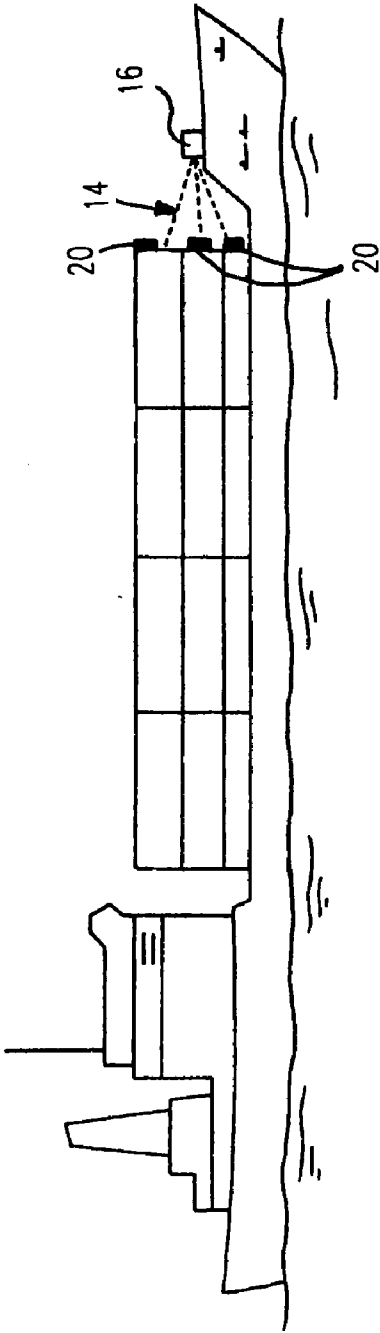
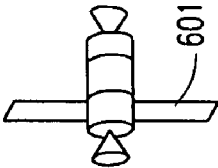


FIG. 6

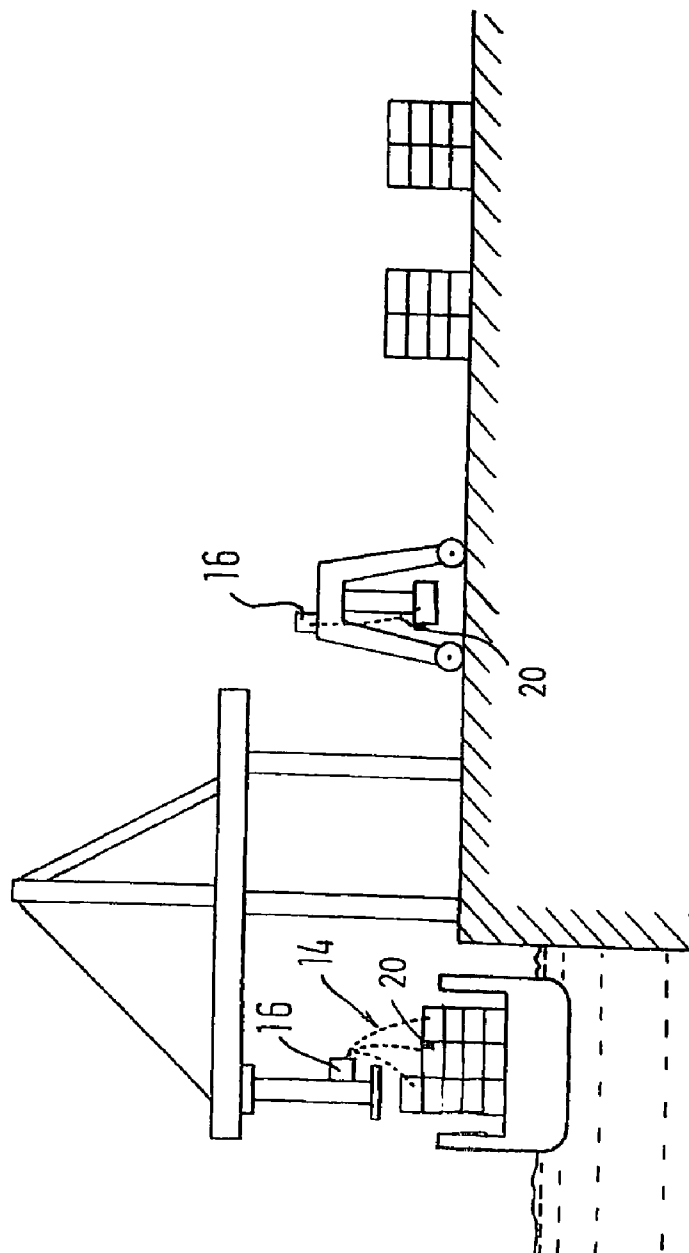
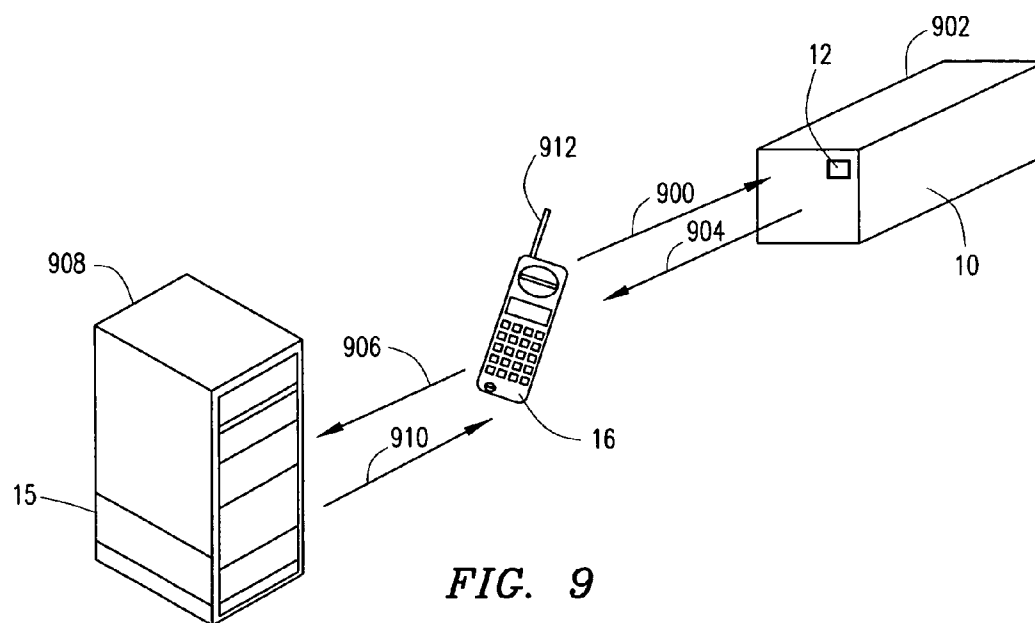
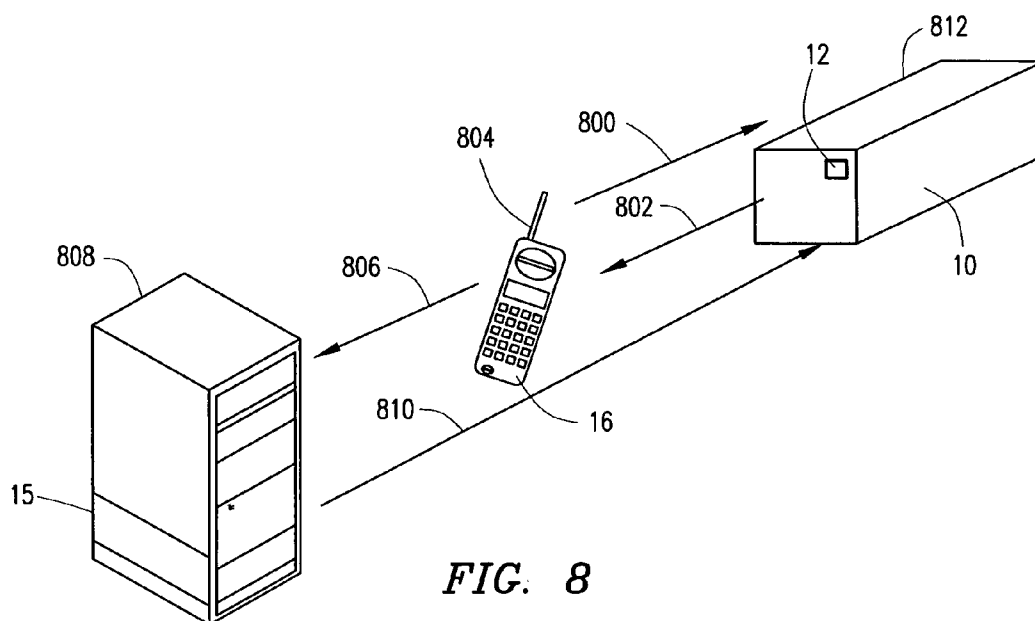


FIG. 7



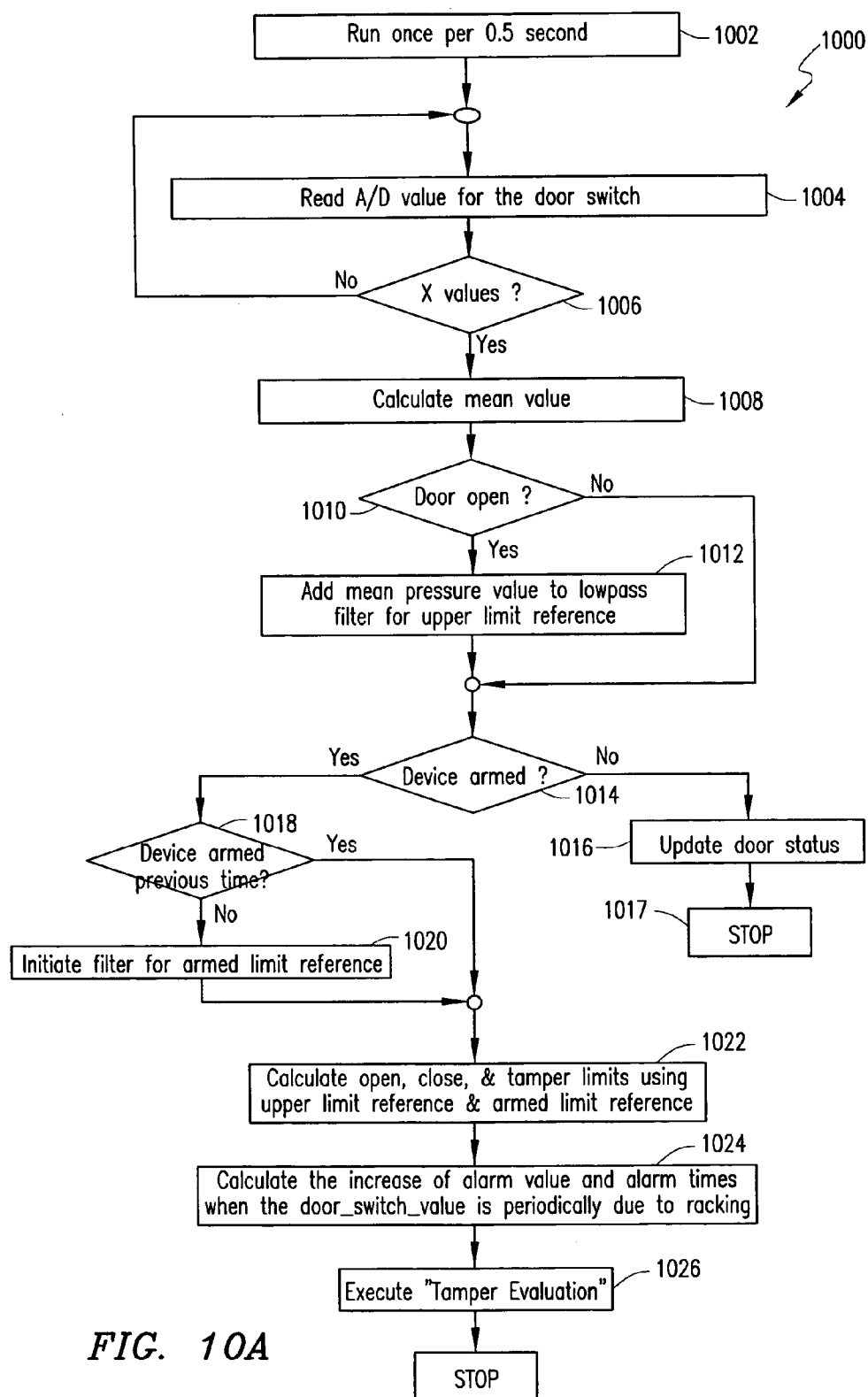


FIG. 10A

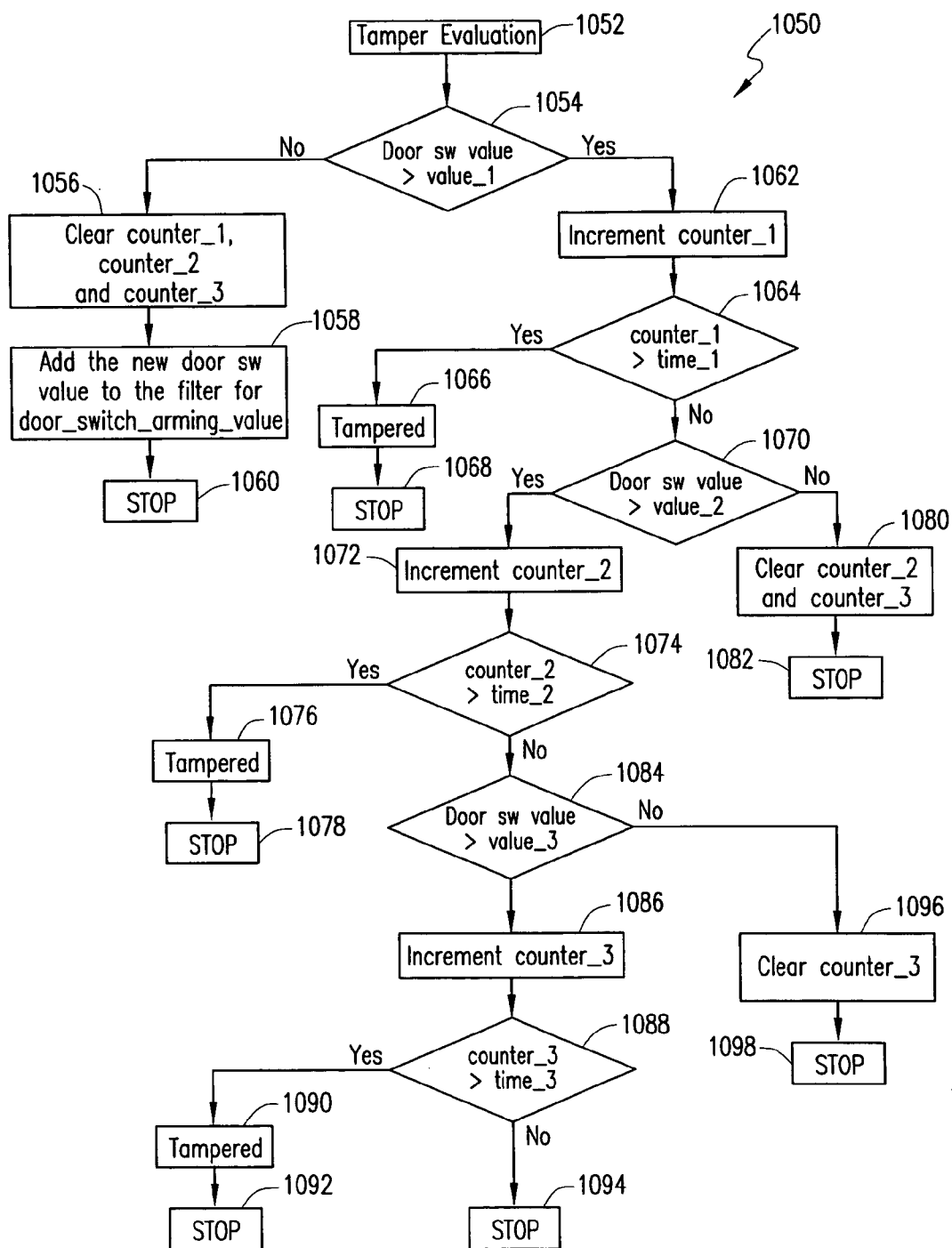


FIG. 10B

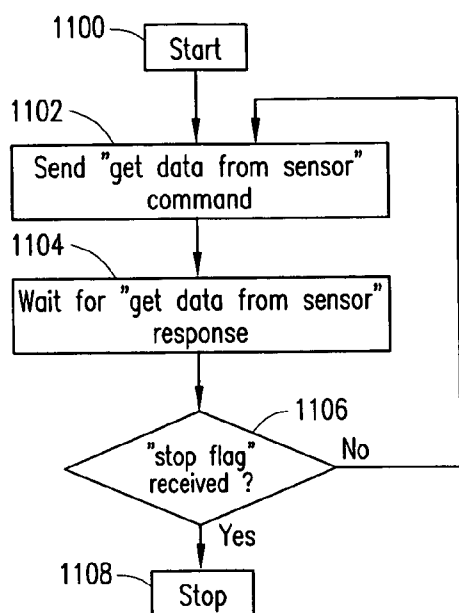


FIG. 11

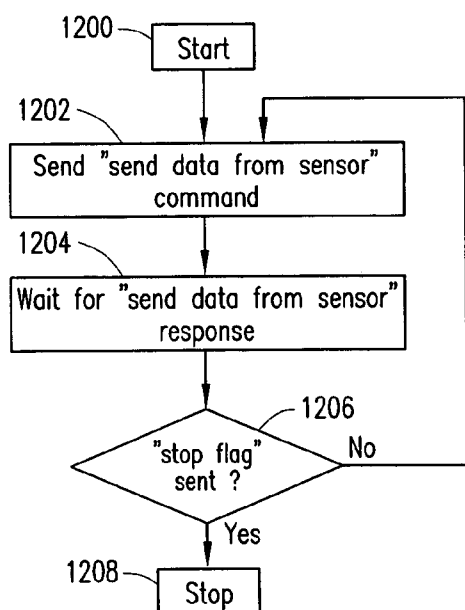


FIG. 12

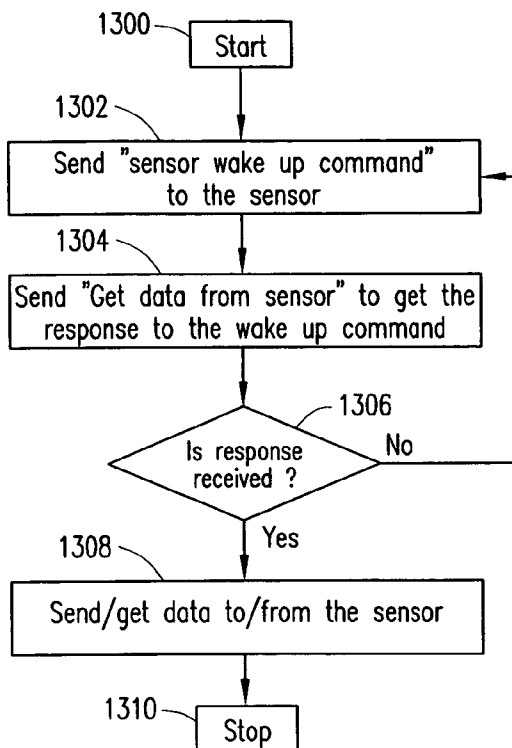


FIG. 13

**METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR UTILIZING
MULTIPLE SENSORS FOR MONITORING
CONTAINER SECURITY, CONTENTS AND
CONDITION**

**CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS**

[0001] This Application for Patent claims priority from, and hereby incorporates by reference for any purpose the entire disclosure of the following: co-pending Provisional Patent Application No. 60/470,435 filed on May 15, 2003, co-pending Provisional Patent Application No. 60/556,106 filed Mar. 24, 2004, and co-pending U.S. Patent Application No. 10/667,282 filed on Sep. 17, 2003 which claims priority to Provisional Patent Application No. 60/411,042 filed on Sep. 17, 2002.

BACKGROUND

[0002] 1. Technical Field

[0003] The present invention relates to a method of and system for monitoring the conditions of the internal environment of a container utilizing multiple sensors and, more particularly, but not by way of limitation, to a method of and system for utilizing multiple sensors for monitoring the conditions of the internal environment of intermodal freight containers throughout a supply chain.

[0004] 2. History of the Related Art

[0005] The vast majority of goods shipped throughout the world are shipped via what are referred to as intermodal freight containers. As used herein, the term "containers" includes any container (whether with wheels attached or not) that is not transparent to radio frequency signals, including, but not limited to, intermodal freight containers. The most common intermodal freight containers are known as International Standards Organization (ISO) dry intermodal containers, meaning they meet certain specific dimensional, mechanical and other standards issued by the ISO to facilitate global trade by encouraging development and use of compatible standardized containers, handling equipment, ocean-going vessels, railroad equipment and over-the-road equipment throughout the world for all modes of surface transportation of goods. There are currently more than 12 million such containers in active circulation around the world as well as many more specialized containers such as refrigerated containers that carry perishable commodities. The United States alone receives approximately six million loaded containers per year, or approximately 17,000 per day, representing nearly half of the total value of all goods received each year.

[0006] Since approximately 90% of all goods shipped internationally are moved in containers, container transport has become the backbone of the world economy.

[0007] The sheer volume of containers transported worldwide renders individual physical inspection impracticable, and only approximately 2% to 3% of containers entering the United States are actually physically inspected. Risk of introduction of a terrorist biological, radiological or explosive device via a freight container is high, and the consequences to the international economy of such an event could be catastrophic, given the importance of containers in world commerce.

[0008] Even if sufficient resources were devoted in an effort to conduct physical inspections of all containers, such an undertaking would result in serious economic consequences. The time delay alone could, for example, cause the shut down of factories and undesirable and expensive delays in shipments of goods to customers.

[0009] Current container designs fail to provide adequate mechanisms for establishing and monitoring the security of the containers or their contents. A typical container includes one or more door hasp mechanisms that allow for the insertion of a plastic or metal indicative "seal" or bolt barrier conventional "seal" to secure the doors of the container. The door hasp mechanisms that are conventionally used are very easy to defeat, for example, by drilling an attachment bolt of the hasp out of a door to which the hasp is attached. The conventional seals themselves currently in use are also quite simple to defeat by use of a common cutting tool and replacement with a rather easily duplicated seal.

[0010] A more advanced solution proposed in recent time is an electronic seal ("e-seal"). These e-seals are equivalent to traditional door seals and are applied to the containers via the same, albeit weak, door hasp mechanism as an accessory to the container, but include an electronic device such as a radio or radio reflective device that can transmit the e-seal's serial number and a signal if the e-seal is cut or broken after it is installed. However, the e-seal is not able to communicate with the interior or contents of the container and does not transmit information related to the interior or contents of the container to another device.

[0011] The e-seals typically employ either low power radio transceivers or use radio frequency backscatter techniques to convey information from an e-seal tag to a reader installed at, for example, a terminal gate. Radio frequency backscatter involves use of a relatively expensive, narrow band high-power radio technology based on combined radar and radio-broadcast technology. Radio backscatter technologies require that a reader send a radio signal with relatively high transmitter power (i.e., 0.5-3 W) that is reflected or scattered back to the reader with modulated or encoded data from the e-seal.

[0012] In addition, e-seal applications currently use completely open, unencrypted and insecure air interfaces and protocols allowing for relatively easy hacking and counterfeiting of e-seals. Current e-seals also operate only on locally authorized frequency bands below 1 GHz, rendering them impractical to implement in global commerce involving intermodal containers since national radio regulations around the world currently do not allow their use in many countries.

[0013] Furthermore, the e-seals are not effective at monitoring security of the containers from the standpoint of alternative forms of intrusion or concern about the contents of a container, since a container may be breached or pose a hazard in a variety of ways since the only conventional means of accessing the inside of the container is through the doors of the container. For example, a biological agent could be implanted in the container through the container's standard air vents, or the side walls of the container could be cut through to provide access. Although conventional seals and the e-seals afford one form of security monitoring the door of the container, both are susceptible to damage. The conventional seal and e-seals typically merely hang on the door

hasp of the container, where they are exposed to physical damage during container handling such as ship loading and unloading. Moreover, conventional seals and e-seals cannot monitor the contents of the container.

[0014] The utilization of multiple sensors for monitoring the interior of a container could be necessary to cover the myriad of possible problems and/or threatening conditions. For example, the container could be used to ship dangerous, radio-active materials, such as a bomb. In that scenario, a radiation sensor would be needed in order to detect the presence of such a serious threat. Unfortunately, terrorist menaces are not limited to a single category of threat. Both chemical and biological warfare have been used and pose serious threats to the public at large. For this reason, both types of detectors could be necessary, and in certain situations, radiation, gas and biological sensors could be deemed appropriate. One problem with the utilization of such sensors is, however, the transmission of such sensed data to the outside world when the sensors are placed in the interior of the container. Since standard intermodal containers are manufactured from steel that is opaque to radio signals, it is virtually impossible to have a reliable system for transmitting data from sensors placed entirely within such a container unless the data transmission is addressed. If data can be effectively transmitted from sensors disposed entirely within an intermodal container, conditions such as temperature, light, combustible gas, proteins (biometric sensors) motion, radio activity, biological and other conditions and/or safety parameters can be monitored. Moreover, the integrity of the mounting of such sensors are critical and require a more sophisticated monitoring system than the aforementioned door hasp mechanisms that allow for the insertion of a plastic or metal indicative "seal" or bolt barrier conventional "seal" to secure the doors of the container.

[0015] In addition to the above, the monitoring of the integrity of containers via door movement can be relatively complex. Although the containers are constructed to be structurally sound and carry heavy loads, both within the individual containers as well as by virtue of containers stacked upon one another, each container is also designed to accommodate transverse loading to accommodate dynamic stresses and movement inherent in (especially) ocean transportation and which are typically encountered during shipment of the container. Current ISO standards for a typical container may allow movement on a vertical axis due to transversal loads by as much as 40 millimeters relative to one another. Therefore, security approaches based upon maintaining a tight interrelationship between the physical interface between two container doors are generally not practicable.

[0016] It would therefore be advantageous to provide a method of and system for both monitoring the movement of the doors of a container relative to the container structure in a cost effective, always available, yet reliable fashion as well as providing for a data path or gateway for multiple sensors placed in a container to detect alternative means of intrusion or presence of dangerous or illicit contents to receivers in the outside world.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0017] These and other drawbacks are overcome by embodiments of the present invention, which provides a

method of and system for utilizing multiple sensors for efficiently and reliably monitoring a container and its contents. More particularly, one aspect of the invention includes a device for housing and communicating with multiple sensors for monitoring the internal conditions of a container. The device includes a receptacle for housing multiple sensors adapted for sensing at least one condition of the container and means for transmitting information relative to the sensors to a location outside the container. The communication from the sensors may include data related to a sensed motion, sensed radiation, sensed chemical, sensed biological agent, sensed heat, sensed gas, etc. or an alert that a predetermined threshold of one or more of such conditions has been met or exceeded.

[0018] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a device for monitoring the condition of a container with a plurality of sensors, the container being of the type having at least one door pivotally mounted thereto. The device includes means for sensing movement of the container door, means for transmitting information relative to the sensed container door movement, a receptacle for housing multiple uses of the sensors, and means for maintaining the receptacle inside the container, adjacent to door in communication with the means for sensing movement. The means for transmitting is disposed relative to the container for transmission of the sensed door movement to a location outside the container.

[0019] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a method of detecting a condition of a container and its contents with a plurality of sensors. The method includes the steps of providing a receptacle for mounting within the container, the receptacle being adapted for receipt and securement of the sensors, placing the plurality of sensors within the receptacle, interfacing the sensors, monitoring the sensors via a data unit located within the container, determining by the data unit whether a change in condition has occurred based on sensed changes in value sensed by the sensor, communicating by the data unit, of a result of the determining step to an antenna interoperably connected to the data unit and located relative to the container in a position for transmitting data to a location outside the container, and transmitting by the antenna of information relative to the communication step.

[0020] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a sensor receptacle for receiving at least one sensor unit. The sensor receptacle includes at least one protrusion extending from the sensor receptacle for abutment to a vertical beam of a container, a conduit for receiving the at least one sensor unit, and at least one connector for interfacing with the at least one sensor unit. The at least one protrusion secures the sensor receptacle via at least one securement means and via pressure generated when a door of the container is closed against the vertical beam.

[0021] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a system for monitoring a plurality of conditions of a container. The system includes at least one sensor for monitoring a condition of the container, a Radio Frequency ID reader for sensing information from tags associated with a particular piece of cargo, and a sensor receptacle for housing the at least one sensor.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0022] A more complete understanding of exemplary embodiments of the present invention can be achieved by reference to the following Detailed Description of Exemplary Embodiments of the Invention when taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings, wherein:

[0023] **FIG. 1A** is a diagram illustrating communication among components of a system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0024] **FIG. 1B** is a diagram illustrating an exemplary supply chain;

[0025] **FIG. 2A** is a schematic diagram of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0026] **FIG. 2B** is a top view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0027] **FIG. 2C** is a side view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0028] **FIG. 2D** is a first perspective cut-away view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0029] **FIG. 2E** is a second perspective cut-away view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0030] **FIG. 2F** is a front view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0031] **FIG. 2G** is a back view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0032] **FIG. 2H** is a bottom view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0033] **FIG. 2I** is a top view of a device utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0034] **FIG. 2J** is a front view of the device of **FIG. 2F** as installed on a container;

[0035] **FIG. 2K** is a perspective view of a sensor receptacle according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0036] **FIG. 2L** is a side plan view of the sensor receptacle of **FIG. 2K**;

[0037] **FIG. 2M** is a top plan view of the sensor receptacle of **FIG. 2K**;

[0038] **FIG. 2N** is a perspective view of a sensor according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0039] **FIG. 2P** is a side plan view of the sensor of **FIG. 2N**;

[0040] **FIG. 2Q** is a top plan view of the sensor of **FIG. 2N**;

[0041] **FIG. 2R** is a block diagram of the sensor of **FIGS. 2N-2Q**;

[0042] **FIG. 2S** is an illustration diagram depicting installation of the sensor receptacle and sensors according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0043] **FIG. 2T** is a perspective view of the device of **FIG. 2F** as installed on a container;

[0044] **FIG. 3A** is a schematic diagram of a reader utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0045] **FIG. 3B** is a diagram of a reader utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0046] **FIG. 4** is a first application scenario of the system of **FIG. 1A** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0047] **FIG. 5** is a second application scenario of the system of **FIG. 1A** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0048] **FIG. 6** is a third application scenario of the system of **FIG. 1A** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0049] **FIG. 7** is a fourth application scenario of the system of **FIG. 1A** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0050] **FIG. 8** is a diagram illustrating a container-securing process utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0051] **FIG. 9** is a diagram illustrating a container-security-check process utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0052] **FIG. 10A** is a flow diagram illustrating a door-sensor calibration process utilized in conjunction with an embodiment of the present invention;

[0053] **FIG. 10B** is a flow diagram for evaluating a tampering event;

[0054] **FIG. 11** is a flow diagram illustrating a sensor check process according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0055] **FIG. 12** is a flow diagram illustrating a sensor check process according to an alternate embodiment of the present invention; and

[0056] **FIG. 13** is a flow diagram illustrating a sensor check process according to an alternate embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0057] It has been found that a container security device of the type set forth, shown, and described below, may be positioned in and secured to a container for effective monitoring of the integrity and condition thereof and its contents. As will be defined in more detail below, a device in accordance with principles of the present invention is constructed for positioning within a pre-defined structural portion of the container which generally manifests minimal structural movement due to routine loading and handling and extending through a conventional interface between the container frame and door region therealong. An elastomeric gasket is conventionally placed around the door and extends through the interface region to ensure the container is watertight and the goods thus protected from weather. The device is adapted for: (a) easy tool-free installation; (b) self powered intermittent signal transmission; and (c) sensing of the pressure of the elastomeric door seal relative thereto for

transmitting deviations thereof indicative of door movements of the container, including an intrusion therein.

[0058] FIG. 1A is a diagram illustrating communication among components of a system in accordance with principles of the present invention. The system includes a device 12, at least one variety of reader 16, a server 15, and a software backbone 17. The device 12 ensures that the container has not been breached after the container 10 has been secured. The container 10 is secured and tracked by a reader 16. Each reader 16 may include hardware or software for communicating with the server 15 such as a modem for transmitting data over GSM, CDMA, etc. or a cable for downloading data to a PC that transmits the data over the Internet to the server 15. Various conventional means for transmitting the data from the reader 16 to the server 15 may be implemented within the reader 16 or as a separate device. The reader 16 may be configured as a handheld reader 16(A), a mobile reader 16(B), or a fixed reader 16(C). The handheld reader 16(A) may be, for example, operated in conjunction with, for example, a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, or a laptop computer. The mobile reader 16(B) is basically a fixed reader with a GPS interface, typically utilized in mobile installations (e.g., on trucks, trains, or ships using existing GPS, AIS or similar positioning systems) to secure, track, and determine the integrity of the container in a manner similar to that of the handheld reader 16(A). In fixed installations, such as, for example, those of a port or shipping yard, the fixed reader 16(C) is typically installed on a crane or gate. The reader 16 serves primarily as a relay station between the device 12 and the server 15.

[0059] The server 15 stores a record of security transaction details such as, for example, door events (e.g., security breaches, container security checks, securing the container, and disarming the container), location, as well as any additional desired peripheral sensor information (e.g., temperature, motion, radioactivity). The server 15, in conjunction with the software backbone 17, may be accessible to authorized parties in order to determine a last known location of the container 10, make integrity inquiries for any number of containers, or perform other administrative activities.

[0060] The device 12 communicates with the readers 16 via a short-range radio interface such as, for example, a radio interface utilizing direct-sequence spread-spectrum principles. The radio interface may use, for example, BLUETOOTH or any other short-range, low-power radio system that operates in the license-free Industrial, Scientific, and Medical (ISM) band, which operates around e.g. 2.4 GHz. Depending on the needs of a specific solution, related radio ranges are provided, such as, for example, a radio range of up to 100 m.

[0061] The readers 16 may communicate via a network 13, e.g. using TCP/IP, with the server 15 via any suitable technology such as, for example, Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS), Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA), Time Division Multiple Access (TDMA), Pacific Digital Cellular System (PDC), Wideband Local Area Network (WLAN), Local Area Network (LAN), Satellite Communications systems, Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), or Mobitex. The server 15 may communicate with the

software backbone 17 via any suitable wired or wireless technology. The software backbone 17 is adapted to support real-time surveillance services such as, for example, tracking and securing of the container 10 via the server 15, the readers 16, and the device 12. The server 15 and/or the software backbone 17 are adapted to store information such as, for example, identification information, tracking information, door events, and other data transmitted by the device 12 and by any additional peripheral sensors interoperably connected to the device 12. The software backbone 17 also allows access for authorized parties to the stored information via a user interface that may be accessed via, for example, the Internet.

[0062] Referring now to FIG. 1B, there is shown a diagram illustrating a flow 2 of an exemplary supply chain from points (A) to (I). Referring first to point (A), a container 10 is filled with cargo by a shipper or the like. At point (B), the loaded container is shipped to a port of embarkation via highway or rail transportation. At point (C), the container is gated in at the port of loading such as a marine shipping yard.

[0063] At point (D), the container is loaded on a ship operated by a carrier. At point (E), the container is shipped by the carrier to a port of discharge. At point (F), the container is discharged from the ship. Following discharge at point (F), the container is loaded onto a truck and gated out of the port of discharge at point (G). At point (H), the container is shipped via land to a desired location in a similar fashion to point (B). At point (I), upon arrival at the desired location, the container is unloaded by a consignee.

[0064] As will be apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art, there are many times within the points of the flow 2 at which security of the container could be compromised without visual or other conventional detection. In addition, the condition of the contents of the container could be completely unknown to any of the parties involved in the flow 2 until point (H) when the contents of the container are unloaded.

[0065] FIG. 2A is a block diagram of the device 12. The device 12 includes an antenna 20, an RF/baseband unit 21, a microprocessor (MCU) 22, a memory 24, and a door sensor 29. The device 12 may also include an interface 28 for attachment of additional sensors to monitor various internal conditions of the container such as, for example, temperature, vibration, radioactivity, gas detection, and motion. The device 12 may also include an optional power source 26 (e.g., battery); however, other power arrangements that are detachable or remotely located may also be utilized by the device 12. When the power source 26 includes a battery (as shown herein), inclusion of the power source 26 in the device 12 may help to prolong battery life by subjecting the power source 26 to smaller temperature fluctuations by virtue of the power source 26 being inside the container 10. The presence of the power source 26 within the container 10 is advantageous in that the ability to tamper with or damage the power source 26 is decreased. The device 12 may also optionally include a connector for interfacing directly with the reader 16. For example, a connector may be located on an outer wall of the container 10 for access by the reader 16. The reader 16 may then connect via a cable or other direct interface to download information from the device 12.

[0066] The microprocessor 22 (equipped with an internal memory) discerns door events from the door sensor 29, including, for example, container-security requests, container-disarming requests, and container-security checks. The discerned door events also include security breaches that may compromise the contents of the container 10, such as opening of a door after the container 10 has been secured. The door events may be time-stamped and stored in the memory 24 for transmission to the reader 16. The door events may be transmitted immediately, periodically, or in response to an interrogation from the reader 16. The door sensor 29 shown herein is of the pressure sensitive variety, although it may be, for example, an alternative contact sensor, a proximity sensor, or any other suitable type of sensor detecting relative movement between two surfaces. The term pressure sensor as used herein thus includes, but is not limited to, these other sensor varieties.

[0067] The antenna 20 is provided for data exchange with the reader 16. In particular, various information, such as, for example, status and control data, may be exchanged. The microprocessor 22 may be programmed with a code that uniquely identifies the container 10. The code may be, for example, an International Standards Organization (ISO) container identification code. The microprocessor 22 may also store other logistic data, such as Bill-of-Lading (B/L), a mechanical seal number, a reader identification with a time-stamp, etc. A special log file may be generated, so that tracking history together with door events may be recovered. The code may also be transmitted from the device 12 to the reader 16 for identification purposes. The RF/baseband unit 21 upconverts microprocessor signals from baseband to RF for transmission to the reader 16.

[0068] The device 12 may, via the antenna 20, receive an integrity inquiry from the reader 16. In response to the integrity query, the microprocessor 22 may then access the memory to extract, for example, door events, temperature readings, security breaches, sensor alarms, or other stored information in order to forward the extracted information to the reader 16. The reader 16 may also send a security or disarming request to the device 12. When the container 10 is secured by the reader 16, the MCU 22 of the device 12 may be programmed to emit an audible or visual alarm when the door sensor 29 detects a material change in pressure after the container is secured. The device 12 may also log the breach of security in the memory 24 for transmission to the reader 16. If the reader 16 sends a disarming request to the device 12, the microprocessor 22 may be programmed to disengage from logging door events or receiving signals from the door sensor 29 or other sensors interoperably connected to the device 12.

[0069] The microprocessor 22 may also be programmed to implement power-management techniques for the power source 26 to avoid any unnecessary power consumption. In particular, one option is that one or more time window(s) are specified via the antenna 20 for activation of the components in the device 12 to exchange data. Outside the specified time windows, the device 12 may be set into a sleep mode to avoid unnecessary power losses. Such a sleep mode may account for a significant part of the device operation time, the device 12 may as a result be operated over several years without a need for battery replacement.

[0070] In particular, according to the present invention, the device 12 utilizes a “sleep” mode to achieve economic

usage of the power source 26. In the sleep mode, a portion of the circuitry of the device 12 is switched off. For example, all circuitry may be switched off except for the door sensor 29 and a time measurement unit (e.g., a counter in the microprocessor 22) that measures a sleep time period t_{sleep} . In a typical embodiment, when the sleep time period has expired or when the door sensor 29 senses a door event, the remaining circuitry of the device 12 is powered up.

[0071] When the device 12 receives a signal from the reader 16, the device 12 remains active to communicate with the reader 16 as long as required. If the device 12 does not receive a signal from the reader 16, the device 12 will only stay active as long as necessary to ensure that no signal is present during a time period referred to as a radio-signal time period or sniff “period” (“ t_{sniff} ”).

[0072] Upon t_{sniff} being reached, the device 12 is powered down again, except for the time measurement unit and the door sensor 29, which operate to wake the device 12 up again after either a door event has occurred or another sleep time period has expired.

[0073] In a typical embodiment, the reader-signal time period is much shorter (e.g., by several orders of magnitude less) than the sleep time period so that the lifetime of the device is prolonged accordingly (e.g., by several orders of magnitude) relative to an “always on” scenario.

[0074] The sum of the sleep time period and the reader-signal time period (cycle time”) imposes a lower limit on the time that the device 12 and the reader 16 must reach in order to ensure that the reader 16 becomes aware of the presence of the device 12. The related time period will be referred to as the passing time (“ t_{pass} ”).

[0075] However, a passing time (“ t_{pass} ”) is usually dictated by the particular situation. The passing time may be very long in certain situations (e.g., many hours when the device 12 on a freight container is communicating with the reader 16 on a truck head or chassis carrying the container 10) or very short in other situations (e.g., fractions of a second when the device 12 on the container 10 is passing by the fixed reader 16(C) at high speed). It is typical for all the applications that each of the devices 12 will, during its lifetime, sometimes be in situations with a greater passing time and sometimes be in situations with a lesser passing time.

[0076] The sleep time period is therefore usually selected such that the sleep time period is compatible with a shortest conceivable passing time, (“ $t_{\text{pass,min}}$ ”). In other words, the relation—

$$t_{\text{sleep}} \leq t_{\text{pass,min}} - t_{\text{sniff}}$$

[0077] should be fulfilled according to each operative condition of the device. Sleep time periods are assigned to the device in a dynamic matter depending on the particular situation of the device (e.g., within its life cycle).

[0078] Whenever the reader 16 communicates with the device 12, the reader 16 reprograms the sleep time period of the device 12 considering the location and function of the reader 16, data read from the device 12, or other information that is available in the reader 16.

[0079] For example, if the container 10 equipped with device 12 is located on a truck by a toplifter, straddle carrier,

or other suitable vehicle, the suitable vehicle is equipped with the reader 16, whereas the truck and trailer are not equipped with any readers 16. It is expected that the truck will drive at a relatively-high speed past the fixed reader 16(C) at an exit of a port or a container depot. Therefore, the reader 16(C) on the vehicle needs to program the device 12 with a short sleep time period (e.g., ~0.5 seconds).

[0080] Further ramifications of the ideas outlined above could be that, depending on the situation, the reader 16 may program sequences of sleep periods into the device 12. For example, when the container 10 is loaded onboard a ship, it may be sufficient for the device 12 to wake up only once an hour while the ship is on sea. However, once the ship is expected to approach a destination port, a shorter sleep period might be required to ensure that the reader 16 on a crane unloading the container 10 will be able to establish contact with the device 12. The reader 16 on the crane loading the container 10 onboard the ship could program the device 12 as follows: first, wake up once an hour for three days, then wake up every ten seconds.

[0081] In another scenario, the reader 16 is moving together with the device 12 and could modify the sleep time period in dependence on the geographical location. For example, it may be assumed that the device 12 on the container 10 and the reader 16 of a truck towing the container 10 may constantly communicate with each other while the container 10 is being towed. As long as the container 10 is far enough away from its destination, the reader 16 could program the device 12 to be asleep for extended intervals (e.g., one hour.) When the reader 16 is equipped with a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or other positioning equipment, the reader may determine when the container 10 is approaching its destination. Once the container approaches the destination, the reader 16 could program the device 12 to wake up more frequently (e.g., every second).

[0082] While the above-described power-management method has been explained with respect to the device 12 in the context of trucking of freight containers or other cargo in transportation by sea, road, rail or air, it should be understood for those skilled in the art that the above-described power-management method may as well be applied to, for example, trucking of animals, identification of vehicles for road toll collection, and theft protection, as well as stock management and supply chain management.

[0083] Referring now to FIG. 2B, there is shown a first perspective view of the device 12. The device 12 includes a housing 25 containing the data unit 100 (not shown), a support arm 102 extending therefrom, and an antenna arm 104 extending outwardly thereof in an angular relationship therewith. As will be described below, the size of the housing 25, the length of the support arm 102, and the configuration of the antenna arm 104 are carefully selected for compatibility with conventional containers. The housing 25, the support arm 102, and the antenna arm 104 are typically molded within a polyurethane material 23 or the like in order to provide protection from the environment.

[0084] Still referring to FIG. 2B, a portion of material 23 of the support arm 102 is cut away to illustrate placement of at least one magnet 27 therein and at least one door sensor 29 thereon. The magnet 27 permits an enhanced securement of the device 12 within the container as described below,

while the door sensor 29 detects variations in pressure along a sealing gasket (not shown) of the container discussed below.

[0085] A second perspective view of the device 12 as illustrated in FIG. 2C, further illustrates the placement of the magnet 27 in the support arm 102. The magnet 27 is positioned within corresponding apertures 27A formed in the support arm 102 and are bonded thereto in a manner facilitating the installation of the device 12.

[0086] Now referring to FIG. 2D, a top view of the device 12 is illustrated before any of the molding material 23 has been applied. In this way, the position of the power source 26, the data unit 100, and the antenna 20 are shown more clearly. The device 12 includes the data unit 100 and power source 26, the microprocessor 22 (not shown), the memory 24 (not shown), and the optional interface 28 (not shown). The support arm 102 extends from the data unit 100 and includes the apertures 27A to house the at least one magnet 27 as well as a support surface to which the door sensor 29 is attached. Extending from the support arm 102 is the antenna arm 104 for supporting the antenna 20.

[0087] Now referring to FIG. 2E, a side view of the device 12 before any of the molding material 23 has been applied is illustrated. As shown, the support arm 102 extends upwardly and outwardly from the data unit 100. The support arm 102 is relatively thin and substantially horizontal, although other configurations are available. As more clearly indicated in FIG. 2E, the antenna arm 104 extends angularly from the support arm 102.

[0088] Referring now to FIG. 2F, there is shown a front view of the device 12 after the molding material 23 has been applied. The device 12 is illustrated with the molded material 23 that forms the housing 25 encapsulating the device 12. The molding material 23 extends from the antenna arm 104 across the support arm 102 and around the data unit 100. The particular shape and configuration shown herein is but one embodiment of the device 12 and no limitation as to the precise shape of the device 12 is suggested herein.

[0089] Referring now to FIG. 2G, there is shown a back view of the device 12 according to FIG. 1A. The angular configuration of the antenna arm 104 is likewise seen in a more simplified format for purposes of illustration in FIGS. 2H and 2I, which represent bottom and top views of the device 12.

[0090] FIG. 2J illustrates a front view of the device 12 as installed on the container 10. The container 10 is shown with a door 202 of the container 10 in an open position to show the orientation of the device 12 in greater detail. The device 12 is mounted to an area adjacent to the door 202 of the container 10. The device 12 may be mounted via a magnetic connection (as previously illustrated), an adhesive connection, or any other suitable connection, on a vertical beam 204 of the container 10. As can be seen in FIG. 2J, the device 12 is mounted so that, when the door 202 is closed, the antenna arm 104 is located on the exterior of the container 10, the door sensor 29, located within the support arm 102, is directly adjacent to a portion of the door 202, and the data unit 100 is located on the interior of the container 10. The device 12 may detect, via the door sensor 29, deviations of pressure to determine whether a door event (e.g., relative and/or absolute pressure change) has occurred. The device

12 may transmit data relative to the status of the door 202 via the antenna 20 to the server 15 as previously described. In addition, the interface 28 may be connected to any number of the external sensor units 208 in order to capture information relative to internal conditions of the container 10 and the information obtained via the sensor units 208 transmitted to the server 15.

[0091] Remaining with FIG. 2J, the device 12 is oriented within the container 10 so that the data unit 100 is disposed within a generally C-shaped recess or channel 206. The support arm 102, including the door sensor 29, extends across the vertical beam 204 between it and a portion of the door 202. When the door 202 is closed, pressure is maintained at the door sensor 29. When the door 202 is opened, the pressure is relieved, thereby alerting the microprocessor 22 that a door event has occurred. An electronic security key stored in the memory 24 will be erased or changed to indicate a "broken" seal or tampering event. For example, when the door sensor 29, or any other internal or external sensor connected to the container security device 12 senses a value that is outside a predetermined threshold, then the electronic security key may be erased and the key is not able to be re-created. In this case, when a reader sends a request to the container security device 12, the container security device 12 will be unable to respond with the correct electronic security key, thereby informing the reader and the appropriate authorities that the container is in an alarm or warning condition.

[0092] FIGS. 2K-2M illustrate various views of a sensor receptacle 220 for receiving the external sensor units 208. The sensor receptacle 220 includes at least one, and in this embodiment two, protrusions 222a, 222b for securement to the vertical beam (not shown) of the container. The protrusions 222a, 222b may be secured in a manner similar to the container security device 12 as noted above, such as via magnets or fasteners. The protrusions 222a, 222b may also provide additional securement via pressure applied by the door pressing against the protrusions 222a, 222b which in turn press against the vertical beam of the container when the door is in the closed position. The sensor receptacle 220 includes a conduit 224 for receiving the sensor units 208. The conduit 224 is oriented such that the conduit 224 resides within the C-channel (not shown) of the container. The sensor units 208 snap in place without further securement means, however, the sensor units 208 may be secured with additional securement means in alternate embodiments of the invention. The length of the sensor receptacle 220 may also be varied in order to house various numbers and types of sensor units 208. For example, the length of some sensor receptacles 220 may allow for placement of two sensor units 208 and other lengths of sensor receptacles 220 may allow for placement of, for example, five or more sensor units 208. Although the preferred embodiment illustrates a specific length, various sizes may be implemented without departing from embodiments of the present invention as noted above.

[0093] The sensor receptacle 220 also includes a plurality of connectors 230 along a rear channel 226 of the conduit 224 and an interface 228 for connecting to and interfacing with interface 28 of the container security device 12. The connectors 230 connect the sensor units 208 to a serial bus (not shown), such as a bus based on I²C and/or the RS485 standard. The connectors 230, serial bus, and the interfaces 28, 228 allow for exchange of information and/or battery

power between any additional sensor units 208 and the container security device 12. For example, an additional sensor unit 208, such as a radioactivity sensor unit, may sense a radioactivity level that is transferred to the container security device 12 via the connector 230 and interfaces 28, 228. The container security device 12 transmits the radioactivity level or data associated therewith to a reader. Alternatively, or in addition, the radioactivity level may be received by the container security device 12 and the device 12 then determines if the radioactivity level is outside of a predetermined safe range. If so, then the container security device 12 may transmit an alarm in addition to, or in place of, the radioactivity level data. In alternate embodiments, a sensor unit 208 may be a wireless device (e.g., utilizing RFID/Bluetooth/Zigbee/Ultra-Wide Band) enabling an internal wireless sensor network using the container security device 12 as an access gateway.

[0094] In alternate embodiments of the present invention, the sensor receptacle 220 may include at least one additional port extending outside of the container for personnel to access the sensors, download data, check for warnings, reset thresholds, etc. The additional port may be utilized in addition to, or in place of, the interface 228 that connects to the container security device 12.

[0095] FIGS. 2N-2Q illustrate various views of additional sensor units 208 for placement in the sensor receptacle 220. In the illustrated embodiment, each sensor unit 208 is substantially rectangular with a notch 252 located at an upper end of the sensor 208. The notch 252 allows for easy removal and placement of the sensor unit 208 in the sensor receptacle 220. Although the sensor unit 208 is shown having a generally rectangular shape, other shapes of sensors are equally applicable to the present invention. For example, some sensor units 208 may be square in shape and may or may not have the notch 252 at the upper end. In addition, the sensor units 208 may be hour-glass shaped to allow for placement and removal of the sensor units 208 and, in this case, the notch 252 would be unnecessary.

[0096] The sensor units 208 also include a recess 254 along their back side 256. The recess 254 may be offset from center in order to prevent sensor units 208 from being installed incorrectly. In this recess 254 is an interface 258, such as a D-sub connector. The interface 258 couples to the connector 230 of the sensor receptacle 220. The recess also guides the sensor units 208 in place and helps to align the interface 258 with the connector 230 of the sensor receptacle.

[0097] Referring now to FIG. 2R, a block diagram of an exemplary sensor unit 208 is illustrated. Each sensor unit 208 includes a sensor 270, a microprocessor 272, a memory 274, a communications protocol unit 276, an interface 258, and an optional power source 278. As set forth above, the sensor 270 may sense any number of characteristics, such as radioactivity, humidity, shock, vibration, temperature, light, ammonia, combustible gas, etc. The microprocessor 272 and the memory 274 work in conjunction with each other to determine acceptable thresholds and determine when the sensor 270 senses a characteristic that is outside of the acceptable threshold. The memory may also store various readings from the sensor 270 or other information. The communications protocol unit 276 allows the sensor unit 208 to communicate on the serial bus of the sensor receptacle 220 via the interface 258.

[0098] The sensor units **208** may provide a variety of data related to the contents or the conditions of the containers as noted above. Each type of sensor may be identified by color, international symbology, and/or other identification means for ease of installation for any type of personnel in a variety of environments. In addition, one of the sensor units **208** may be formed as an additional battery pack for providing battery power to one or more of the additional sensor units **208** and/or the container security device **12**. Alternatively, each sensor unit **208** may have an internal battery supply as noted by optional power source **278**. One of the sensor units **208** may also be a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) reader or an RFID reader gateway. The RFID reader may sense RFID tags on cargo that is loaded or unloaded from each container independent of whether the container is sealed or unsealed. RFID tags may be placed on individual items, pallets, etc. In this way, cargo shipments can be monitored to determine what cargo has been placed in or removed from a container. Furthermore, one or more of the sensor units **208** may be equipped for wireless communication inside the container via Bluetooth, infrared, or other wireless communication technologies. In this way, a sensor unit **208** may be mounted on a wall or ceiling inside a container remote from the container security device **12** and the sensor receptacle **220**. The remote sensor unit **208** may then transmit data to a sensor unit **208** within the sensor receptacle **220**. The information, such as any resulting alarms and/or the sensed data itself, may then be forwarded to the container security device **12** and/or a reader. For example, a sensor unit **208** may detect a characteristic (e.g., light, gas, radioactivity, etc.) outside of a predetermined threshold. The sensor unit **208** may then send a warning or alarm that is transmitted outside the container by the container security device **12**. The container may then be flagged for inspection or quarantine. Similarly to the container security device **12**, in some embodiments, the sensor units **208** may also use a unique secure key that is erased, from the memory **24** of the container security device **12**, when the sensed characteristic is outside of a predetermined threshold (described in further detail with reference to FIG. 10B using a different sensor as input in steps 1054, 1070, and 1084).

[0099] FIG. 2S illustrates a plurality of diagrams for installing the sensor receptacle **220** and additional sensor units **208** in the C-channel **206** of the container. The door **202** of the container is open to illustrate the vertical beam **204** and the C-channel **206** located in the interior of the container. The container security device **12** may be positioned, as noted above, with a portion of the container security device **12** in the C-channel **206** and another portion across the vertical beam **204**. The sensor receptacle **220** is also placed with the conduit **224** within the C-channel **206** and the protrusions **222a**, **222b** across the vertical beam **204**. The sensor units **208** may be placed in the conduit **224** and connected to the interface **228** for transmitting information to the container security device **12**. The container security device **12** may receive the information from the sensor units **208** and transmit the information to a reader.

[0100] FIG. 2T is a perspective view of the device **12** of FIG. 2D as installed on the container **10**. The device **12** is shown attached to the vertical beam **204** so that the door sensor **29** (not shown) within the support arm **102** is adjacent to the vertical beam **204**, the antenna arm **104** is positioned in an area of the hinge channel of the container **10**, and the data unit **100** is positioned inside the C-channel **206** of the

container **10**. As more clearly shown herein, the antenna arm **104** protrudes from the support arm **102** to an area substantially near the hinge portion of the container **10** in order to remain on the exterior of the container **10** when the door **202** is closed.

[0101] By placing the data unit **100** on the interior of the container **10**, opportunities for tampering and/or damage to the device **12** are reduced. Because the data unit **100** is disposed in the C-channel **206**, even though the contents of the container **10** may shift during transport, the contents are not likely to strike or damage the device **12**.

[0102] Although the above embodiment is shown as a single unit including at least one sensor and an antenna **20** for communicating with the reader **16**, the present invention may be implemented as several units. For example, a light, temperature, radioactivity, etc. sensor may be positioned anywhere inside the container **10**. The sensor takes readings and transmits the readings via BLUETOOTH, or any short range communication system, to an antenna unit that relays the readings or other information to the reader **16**. The sensors may be remote and separate from the antenna unit. In addition, the above embodiment illustrates a device **12** that includes a door sensor **29** for determining whether a security breach has occurred. However, an unlimited variety of sensors may be employed to determine a security condition in place of, or in addition to, the door sensor **29**. For example, a light sensor may sense fluctuations in light inside the container **10**. If the light exceeds or falls below a predetermined threshold, then it is determined a security breach has occurred. A temperature sensor, radioactivity sensor, combustible gas sensor, etc. may be utilized in a similar fashion.

[0103] The device **12** may also trigger the physical locking of the container **10**. For instance, when a reader **16** secures, via a security request, the contents of the container **10** for shipment, the microprocessor **22** may initiate locking of the container **10** by energizing electromagnetic door locks or other such physical locking mechanism. Once the container is secured via the security request, the container **10** is physically locked to deter theft or tampering.

[0104] As shown in FIG. 3A, the reader **16** includes a short range antenna **30**, a microprocessor **36**, a memory **38**, and a power supply **40**. The short range antenna **30** achieves the wireless short-range, low-power communication link to the device **12** as described above with reference to FIG. 2A. The reader **16** may include or separately attach to a device that achieves a link to a remote container-surveillance system (e.g., according to GSM, CDMA, PDC, or DAMPS wireless communication standard or using a wired LAN or a wireless local area network WLAN, Mobitex, GPRS, UMTS). Those skilled in the art will understand that any such standard is non-binding for the present invention and that additional available wireless communications standards may as well be applied to the long range wireless communications of the reader **16**. Examples include satellite data communication standards like Inmarsat, Iridium, Project 21, Odyssey, Globalstar, ECCO, Ellipso, Tritium, Teledesic, Spaceway, Orbcom, Obsidian, ACeS, Thuraya, or Aries in cases where terrestrial mobile communication systems are not available.

[0105] The reader **16** may include or attach to a satellite positioning unit **34** is for positioning of a vehicle on which

the container 10 is loaded. For example, the reader 16 may be the mobile reader 16(B) attached to a truck, ship, or railway car. The provision of the positioning unit 34 is optional and may be omitted in case tracking and positioning of the container 10 is not necessary. For instance, the location of the fixed reader 16(C) may be known; therefore, the satellite positioning information would not be needed. One approach to positioning could be the use of satellite positioning systems (e.g., GPS, GNSS, or GLONASS). Another approach could be the positioning of the reader 16 utilizing a mobile communication network. Here, some of the positioning techniques are purely mobile communication network based (e.g., EOTD) and others rely on a combination of satellite and mobile communication network based positioning techniques (e.g., Assisted GPS).

[0106] The microprocessor 36 and the memory 38 in the reader 16 allow for control of data exchanges between the reader 16 and the device 12 as well as a remote surveillance system as explained above and also for a storage of such exchanged data. Necessary power for the operation of the components of the reader 16 is provided through a power supply 40.

[0107] FIG. 3B is a diagram of a handheld reader 16(A) in accordance with the principles of the present invention. The handheld reader 16(A) is shown detached from a mobile phone 16(A1). The handheld reader 16(A) communicates (as previously mentioned) with the device 12 via, for example, a short-range direct sequence spread spectrum radio interface. Once the handheld reader 16(A) and the device 12 are within close range of one another (e.g., <100 m), the device 12 and the handheld reader 16(A) may communicate with one another. The handheld reader 16(A) may be used to electronically secure or disarm the container via communication with the device 12. The handheld reader 16(A) may also be used to obtain additional information from the device 12 such as, for example, information from additional sensors inside the container 10 or readings from the door sensor 29.

[0108] The handheld reader 16(A) shown in FIG. 3B is adapted to be interfaced with a mobile phone shown as 16(A1) or PDA. However, as will be appreciated by those having skill in the art, the handheld reader 16(A) may be a standalone unit or may also be adapted to be interfaced with, for example, a personal digital assistant or a handheld or laptop computer. The reader 16 draws power from the mobile phone and utilizes Bluetooth, or any similar interface, to communicate with the mobile phone.

[0109] Additional application scenarios for the application of the device 12 and reader 16 will now be described with respect to FIGS. 4-8. Insofar as the attachment and detachment of the reader 16(B) to different transporting or transported units is referred to, any resolvable attachment is well covered by the present invention (e.g., magnetic fixing, mechanic fixing by screws, rails, hooks, balls, snap-on mountings, further any kind of electrically achievable attachment, e.g., electro magnets, or further reversible chemical fixtures such as adhesive tape, scotch tape, glue, pasted tape).

[0110] FIG. 4 shows a first application scenario of the device 12 and the reader 16. As shown in FIG. 4 one option related to road transportation is to fix the reader 16 to the gate or a shipping warehouse or anywhere along the supply

chain. In such a case, the reader 16 may easily communicate with the device 12 of the container 10 when being towed by the truck when exiting the shipping area. Another option is to provide the reader 16 as a handheld reader 16(A) as described above and then either scan the device 12 as the truck leaves the area or carry the hand-held reader 16(A) within the cabin of the truck during surveillance of the container 10.

[0111] FIG. 5 shows a second application scenario for the device 12 and the reader 16 as related to rail transportation. In particular, FIG. 5 shows a first example where the reader 16 is attachably fixed along the rail line for short-range wireless communication to those containers located in the reach of the reader 16. The reader 16 may then achieve a short range communication with any or all of the devices 12 of the containers 10 that are transported on the rail line.

[0112] The same principles apply to a third application scenario for the container surveillance components, as shown in FIG. 6. Here, for each container to be identified, tracked, or monitored during sea transport, there must be provided a reader 16 in reach of the device 12 attached to the container 10. A first option would be to modify the loading scheme according to the attachment schemes for the wireless communication units. Alternatively, the distribution of the readers 16 over the container ship could be determined in accordance with a loading scheme being determined according to other constraints and parameters. Again, the flexible attachment/detachment of readers 16 for the surveillance of containers allows to avoid any fixed assets that would not generate revenues for the operator. In other words, once no more surveillance of containers is necessary, the reader 16 may easily be detached from the container ship and either be used on a different container ship or any other transporting device. The reader 16 may also be connected to the AIS, based on VHF communication, or Inmarsat satellites, both often used by shipping vessels.

[0113] While above the application of the inventive surveillance components has been described with respect to long range global, regional or local transportation, in the following the application within a restricted area will be explained with respect to FIG. 7.

[0114] In particular, the splitting of the short range and long range wireless communication within a restricted area is applied to all vehicles and devices 12 handling the container 10 within the restricted area such as a container terminal, a container port, or a manufacturing site in any way. The restricted area includes in-gates and out-gates of such terminals and any kind of handling vehicles such as top-loaders, side-loaders, reach stackers, transtainers, hustlers, cranes, straddle carriers, etc.

[0115] A specific container is not typically searched for using only a single reader 16; rather, a plurality of readers 16 spread over the terminal and receive status and control information each time a container 10 is handled by, for example, a crane or a stacker. In other words, when a container passes a reader 16, the event is used to update related status and control information.

[0116] FIG. 8 illustrates a flow diagram of a securing process in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. First, at step 800, identification is requested from the device 12 by the reader 16. At step 802, the device 12

transmits the identification to the reader 16 and, at step 804, the reader 16 selects a container 10 to secure. A request is sent from the reader 16 to the server 15 at step 806. At step 808, the server 15 generates a security key and encrypts the security key with an encryption code. At step 810, the encrypted security key is transmitted to the device 12 via the reader 16 in order to secure the container 10. At step 812, the security key is decrypted and stored in the device 12. A similar procedure may be initiated to disarm the container 10. The container 10 may be secured automatically when passing in range of a reader 16, or a user may secure or disarm specific chosen containers 10 at a time.

[0117] FIG. 9 illustrates a security-check process in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. At step 900, the reader 16 transmits a challenge to the container 10 in question. At step 902, the device 12 of the container 10 generates a response using a security key and an encryption code. At step 904, the response is sent from the device 12 to the reader 16. At step 906, the reader 16 also sends a challenge to the server 15. The challenges to the server 15 and the device 12 may be transmitted substantially simultaneously or at alternate points in time. The server 15 generates and sends a response utilizing the security key and an encryption code to the reader 16 at steps 908 and 910 respectively. At step 912, the reader 16 determines if the responses are equal. If the responses are equal, then the container 10 remains safely secured. Alternatively, if the responses are not equal, then a security breach (i.e., door event) of the container 10 has occurred. Similarly to the securing and disarming processes, a security-check may be performed automatically as the container 10 passes in range of a reader 16 or a user may initiate a security-check at any time during transport.

[0118] FIG. 10 is a flow diagram 1000 of a calibration and filter process for the door sensor 29 is illustrated. At step 1002, the door sensor 29 is activated to sense a current pressure value every 0.5 seconds, although other time increments may be implemented. The current pressure value is read from the door sensor 29 at step 1004. At step 1006, a number of readings (X), with a time distance of 30 microseconds between each, are accumulated in order to calculate a mean pressure value at step 1008. At step 1010, it is determined whether the door is open. The door is considered open if the mean value is above an open threshold calculated in previous iterations at step 1022 and 1024 below. If the door is open, then the flow proceeds to step 1012, at which step the mean pressure value is added to a slow low pass filter to get the value for the sensor without any pressure attached (upper limit reference). If it is determined that the door is closed at step 1010, then the flow proceeds to step 1014, at which it is determined whether the device 12 is currently in an armed state (i.e., whether the container 10 has been secured). If the device 12 is not armed, then the door status is updated at step 1016. If the device 12 is armed, then it is determined at step 1018 whether the device 12 was previously armed. If the device 12 was not previously armed, then at step 1020, an armed limit reference is set to the current mean pressure value from step 1008. At step 1022, open, close, and tamper thresholds are calculated using the upper limit reference from step 1012 and the armed limit reference from step 1020. The open, close, and tamper thresholds are used to determine if the door is opened or closed at step 1010 and 1026. At step 1026, it is determined whether the current pressure value exceeds the open or

tamper limits. In some embodiments, the tamper evaluation may involve determining if the mean value from step 1008 exceeds the open or tamper limits. If the mean value does exceed the open or tamper limits, then the tamper alarm may be set to alert the system and/or user that a security breach has occurred. If the mean value does not exceed the open or tamper limits, then no alarm may be generated.

[0119] FIG. 10B is a flow diagram illustrating a tamper evaluation subroutine 1050 that may be utilized as the tamper evaluation of step 1026 of FIG. 10A. In the subroutine 1050, three pairs of level and time limits are used, however, any other appropriate number of pairs of level and time limits may be utilized. The tamper evaluation subroutine is initiated at step 1052. At step 1054, a determination is made whether the door sw value, or any other sensor value, is greater than a first value. If, at step 1054, it is determined that the door sw value is not greater than the first value, then execution proceeds to step 1056. At step 1056, a counter 1, a counter 2, and a counter 3 are all cleared. At step 1058, a new door sw value is added to the filter for the armed limit reference value. At step 1060, execution ends.

[0120] If, at step 1054, it is determined that the door sw value is greater than a first value, execution proceeds to step 1062. At step 1062, the counter 1 is incremented. At step 1064, a determination is made whether the counter 1 is greater than time 1. If it is so determined at step 1064, execution proceeds to step 1066. At step 1066, it is determined that the event is a tampering event. At step 1068, execution ends.

[0121] If, at step 1064, it is not determined that the counter 1 is greater than the time 1, execution proceeds to step 1070. At step 1070, a determination is made as to whether the door sw value is greater than a second value. If it is so determined at step 1070, then execution proceeds to step 1072. At step 1072, the counter 2 is incremented. At step 1074, a determination is made as to whether the counter 2 is greater than time 2. If it is so determined, then execution proceeds to step 1076, at which step it is determined that the event is a tampering event. At step 1078, execution ends.

[0122] If, at step 1070, the door sw value is not found to be greater than a second value, the execution proceeds to step 1080. At step 1080, the counter 2 and the counter 3 are each cleared. At step 1082, execution ends.

[0123] If, at step 1074, it is not determined that the counter 2 is greater than time 2, execution proceeds to step 1084. At step 1084, a determination is made as to whether the door sw value is greater than a third value. If it is so determined, then execution proceeds to step 1086. At step 1086, the counter 3 is incremented. At step 1088, a determination is made as to whether the counter 3 is greater than time 3. If it is so determined, then execution proceeds to step 1090, at which it is determined that the event is a tampering event. At step 1092, execution ends. If, at step 1088, it is determined that the counter 3 is not greater than time 3, then the execution ends at step 1094.

[0124] If, at step 1084, it is determined that the door sw value is not greater than the third value, then counter 3 is cleared at step 1096. At step 1098, execution ends.

[0125] FIG. 11 illustrates a flow diagram for requesting data from a sensor unit 208. At step 1100, the procedure is started at, for example, a reader. At step 1102, a "get data

from sensor” command is sent to the container security device 12 which forwards the command to the sensor 270. At step 1104, the container security device 12 waits for a “get data from sensor” response. The response may include raw data from the sensor 270 or other pertinent information such as time stamps, threshold values, etc. At step 1106, it is determined whether a stop flag has been received. If a stop flag has not been received then the procedure begins again at step 1102. If a stop flag has been received, then the procedure is ended at step 1108.

[0126] FIG. 12 illustrates a flow diagram for sending data to a sensor unit 208. For example, data may be sent to the sensor unit 208 in order to configure the sensor unit 208 or make commands to the sensor unit 208. The sensor unit 208 may be configured, for example, to have specific allowable thresholds for acceptable sensed data. At step 1200, the procedure is started in a manner similar to that of FIG. 11. At step 1202, a “send data to sensor” command is sent to the container security device 12. At step 1204, the container security device 12 waits for a “send data to sensor” response. The response may be an acknowledgment that the thresholds are set correctly or another type of response may be generated based on the type of data sent to the sensor unit 208. At step 1206 it is determined whether a stop flag has been sent. If the stop flag has not been sent, then the procedure begins again at step 1202. If the stop flag has been received, then the procedure is ended at step 1208.

[0127] FIG. 13 illustrates a flow diagram for executing a wake up procedure for a sensor 270. At step 1300, the procedure is started at, for example, a reader or user application. At step 1302, a “sensor wake up command” is sent to the sensor 270. At step 1304, the “get data from sensor” command is sent to the sensor to receive data from the sensor 270 in a manner similar to that of FIGS. 11 and 12. At step 1306, it is determined whether a response has been received from the sensor 270. If the response has not been received, the procedure begins again at step 1302. If a response has been received then, at step 1308, the data is sent from the sensor 270 to the container security device 12. At step 1310, the procedure is ended.

[0128] Although embodiment(s) of the present invention have been illustrated in the accompanying Drawings and described in the foregoing Detailed Description, it will be understood that the present invention is not limited to the embodiment(s) disclosed, but is capable of numerous rearrangements, modifications, and substitutions without departing from the invention defined by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A device for monitoring a plurality of conditions of a container, the device comprising:

a plurality of sensors for sensing at least one condition of the container;

a receptacle for housing the plurality of sensors;

means for interfacing the plurality of sensors within the receptacle; and

means for transmitting information relative to the sensed at least one condition to a location outside the container.

2. The device as set forth in claim 1, wherein the container includes at least one door and the device is adapted for

mounting relative to the container between a region of the door and an adjacent region of the container.

3. The device as set forth in claim 2, wherein the adjacent region of the container comprises a vertical beam and adjacent C-channel and the location within the container for mounting at least a portion of the device comprises an area across the vertical beam and adjacent C-channel.

4. The device as set forth in claim 3, wherein the receptacle comprises an elongated housing adapted for receipt within and mounting to the C-shaped channel adjacent the vertical beam.

5. The device as set forth in claim 1, wherein the receptacle includes magnetic mounting means for securement of the receptacle within a C-shaped channel of the container.

6. The device as set forth in claim 1, wherein the plurality of sensors comprises at least one of a pressure sensor, a light sensor, a motion sensor, a radioactivity sensor, a temperature sensor, a proximity sensor, a biometric sensor, an ammonia sensor, a shock sensor, a vibration sensor, a carbon dioxide sensor, a fire sensor, a smoke sensor, a noise sensor, a humidity sensor, a digital camera, and a combustible gas sensor.

7. The device as set forth in claim 1, wherein the receptacle includes at least one power source.

8. The device as set forth in claim 1, wherein the device further comprises a container security device for monitoring the security of the container, and wherein if the container security device determines that at least one of the plurality of sensors indicates signals outside a predetermined threshold, thus indicating that a security breach has occurred, then an electronic security key is erased from a memory.

9. A device for monitoring the condition of a container with a plurality of sensors, the container being of the type having at least one door pivotally mounted thereto, the device comprising:

means for sensing movement of the container door;

means for transmitting information relative to the sensed container door movement;

a receptacle for housing multiple uses of the sensors;

means for maintaining the receptacle inside the container, adjacent to door in communication with the means for sensing movement; and

wherein the means for transmitting is disposed relative to the container for transmission of the sensed door movement to a location outside the container.

10. The device as set forth in claim 9, wherein the sensors comprise at least two of a pressure sensor, light sensor, radioactivity sensor, temperature sensor, motion sensor, combustible gas sensor, a biometric sensor, a proximity sensor, shock sensor, vibration sensor, ammonia sensor, carbon dioxide sensor, fire sensor, smoke sensor, noise sensor, humidity sensor, and a digital camera.

11. The device as set forth in claim 9, wherein the device further comprises a container security device for monitoring the security of the container, and wherein if the container security device determines that a security breach has occurred, then an electronic security key is erased from a memory.

12. A method of detecting a condition of a container and its contents with a plurality of sensors, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a receptacle for mounting within the container, the receptacle being adapted for receipt and securement of the sensors;

placing the plurality of sensors within the receptacle;

interfacing the sensors;

monitoring the sensors via a data unit located within the container;

determining by the data unit whether a change in condition has occurred based on sensed changes in value sensed by the sensor;

communicating by the data unit, of a result of the determining step to an antenna interoperably connected to the data unit and located relative to the container in a position for transmitting data to a location outside the container; and

transmitting by the antenna of information relative to the communication step.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:

providing a container security device for monitoring the security of the container;

determining, by the container security device, whether a security breach has occurred; and

erasing an electronic security key from a memory if it is determined that a security breach has occurred.

14. A sensor receptacle for receiving at least one sensor unit, the sensor receptacle comprising:

at least one protrusion extending from the sensor receptacle for abutment to a vertical beam of a container;

a conduit for receiving the at least one sensor unit;

at least one connector for interfacing with the at least one sensor unit; and

wherein the at least one protrusion secures the sensor receptacle via at least one securement means and via pressure or magnetic field generated when a door of the container is closed against the vertical beam.

15. The sensor receptacle of claim 14, further comprising a channel protruding from a rear interior face of the conduit, wherein the channel is offset from center.

16. The sensor receptacle of claim 15, wherein the channel houses the at least one connector.

17. The sensor receptacle of claim 14, further comprising a data bus for transmitting information from the at least one sensor unit to a container security device.

18. The sensor receptacle of claim 14, further comprising first and second protrusions disposed along, and extending outwardly of, opposite ends of the sensor receptacle.

19. A system for monitoring a plurality of conditions of a container, the system comprising:

at least one sensor for monitoring a condition of the container;

a Radio Frequency ID reader for sensing information from tags associated with at least one of a particular piece of cargo, pallet, load unit, and returnable transport unit; and

a sensor receptacle for housing the at least one sensor.

20. The system of claim 19, further comprising a container security device for transmitting information from the at least one sensor to a device outside of the container.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein the device is a reader.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein one of the at least one sensor unit comprises a communications gateway to the Radio Frequency ID reader.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the communications gateway is a wireless gateway.

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