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Chenal

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- (54) **SOUND-ATTENUATION SYSTEM**
- (71) Applicant: **JMJ Holdings, LLC**, Frederic, WI (US)
- (72) Inventor: **David M. Chenal**, Frederic, WI (US)
- (73) Assignee: **JMJ Holdings, LLC**, Frederic, WI (US)
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- Related U.S. Application Data**
- (62) Division of application No. 15/566,699, filed as application No. PCT/US2016/027820 on Apr. 15, 2016, now Pat. No. 10,940,043.
- (60) Provisional application No. 62/148,237, filed on Apr. 16, 2015.

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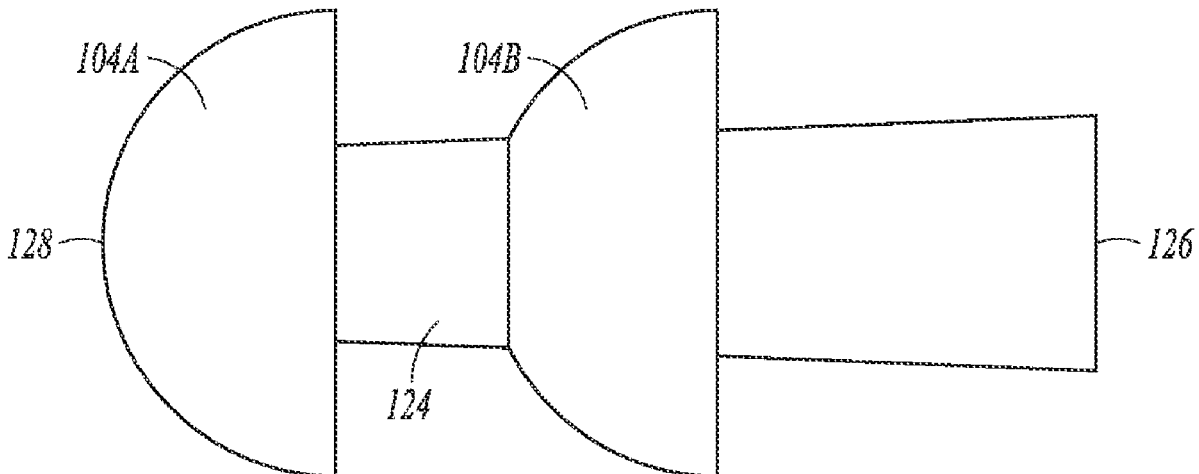
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- (52) **U.S. Cl.**
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Primary Examiner — Camtu T Nguyen
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Jonathan M. Rixen; Charles A. Lemaire; Lemaire Patent Law Firm, P.L.L.C.

- (57) **ABSTRACT**
- A sound attenuation system can include a first end that can include a shaft and a flange, the flange can be coupled to the shaft, and a second end that can include a filter stem and a cap. The filter stem can have a hole. The cap can have a first position in which the cap occludes the hole and can have a second position in which the cap is clear of the hole.

13 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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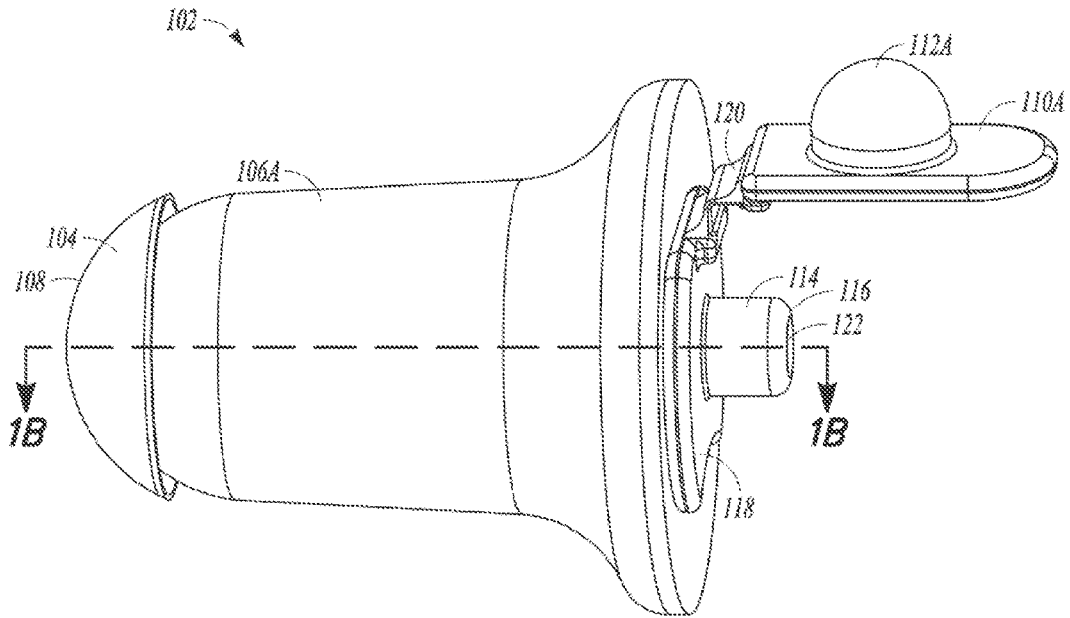


FIG. 1A

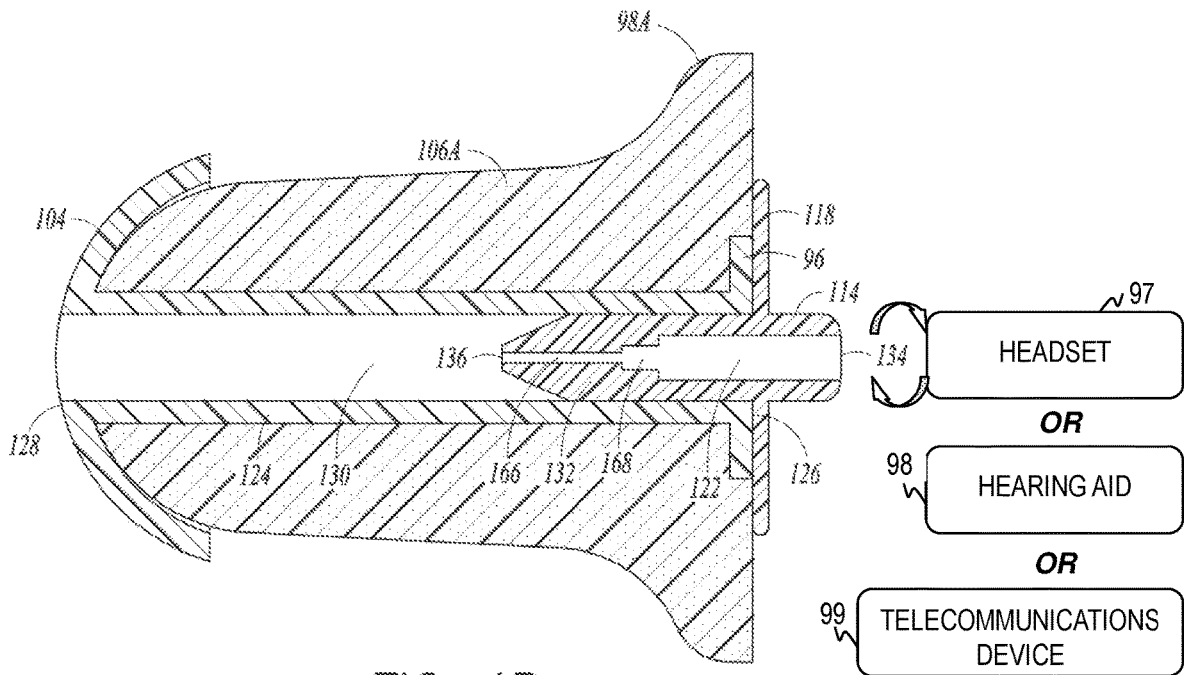


FIG. 1B

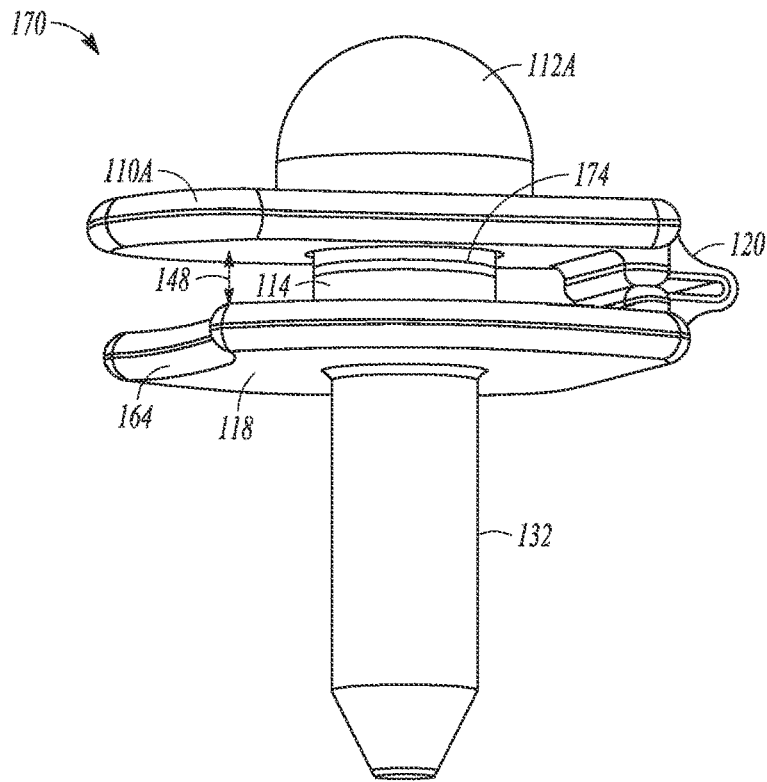


FIG. 2A

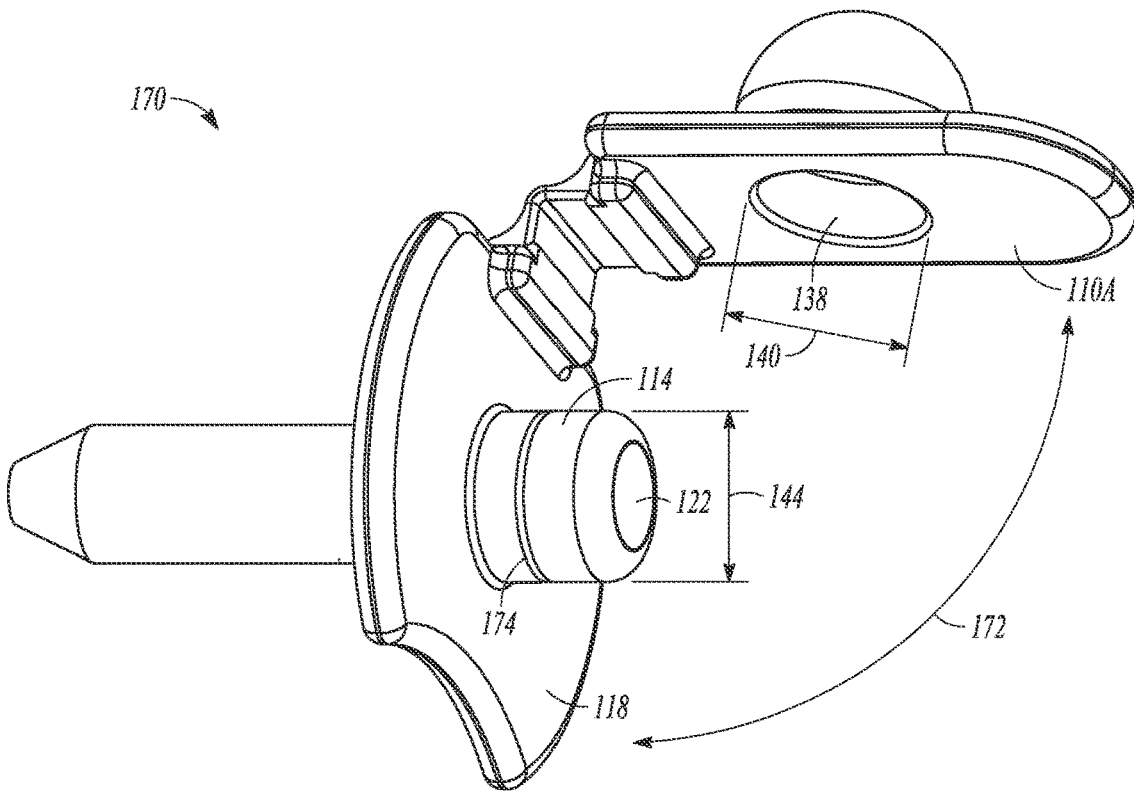


FIG. 2B

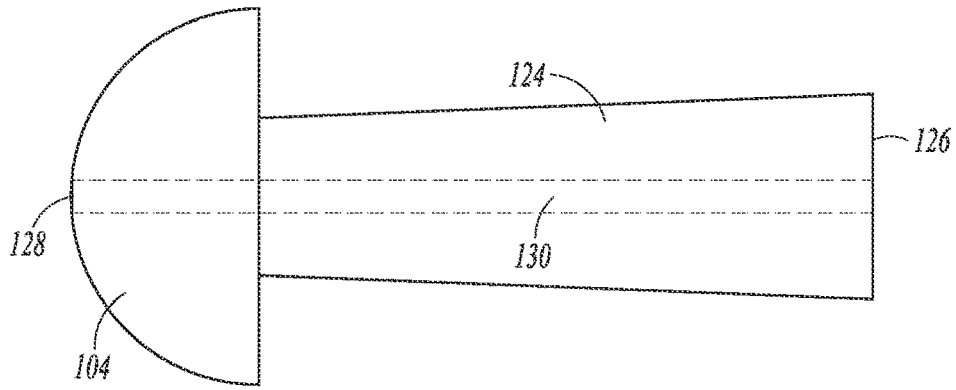


FIG. 3A

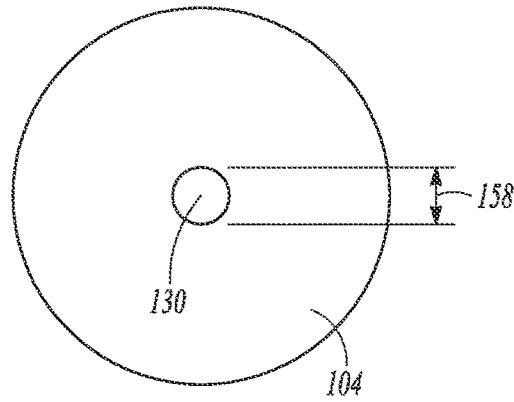


FIG. 3B

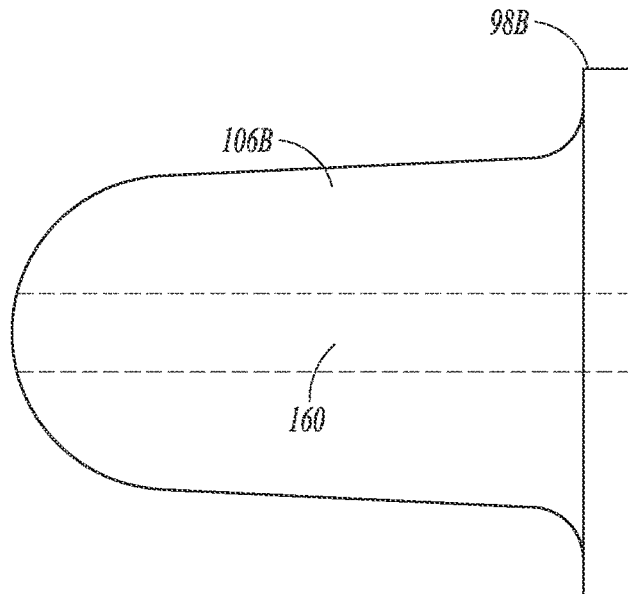


FIG. 4

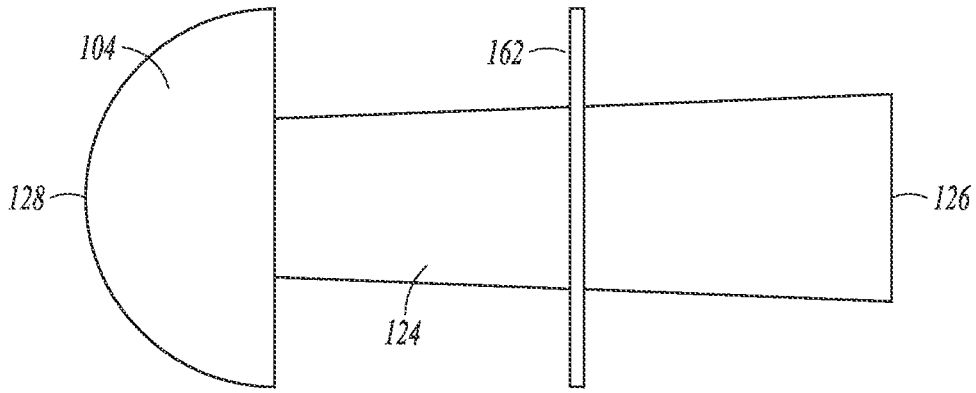


FIG. 5A

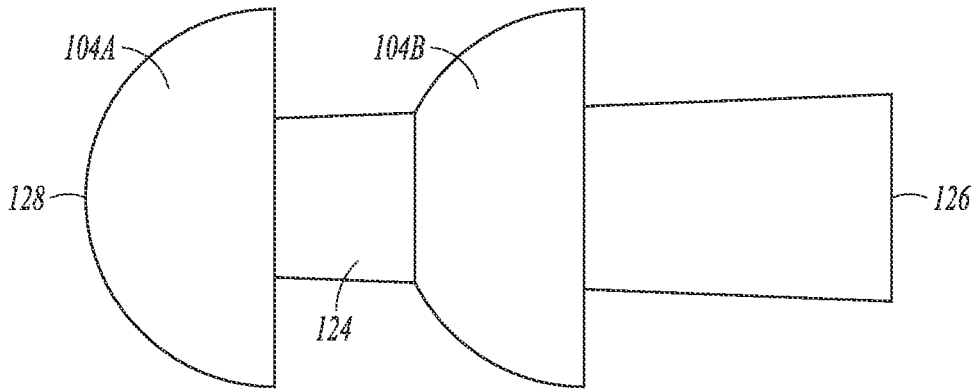


FIG. 5B

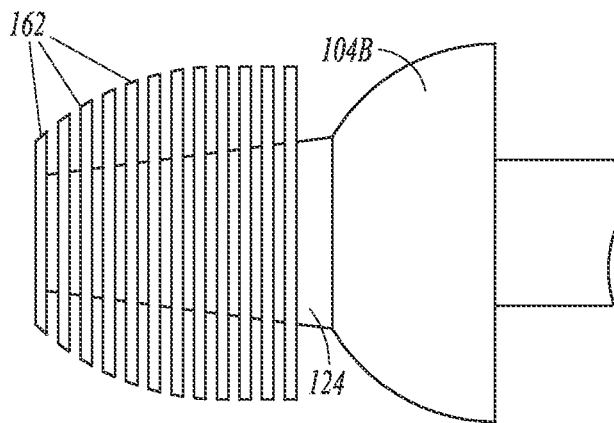


FIG. 5C

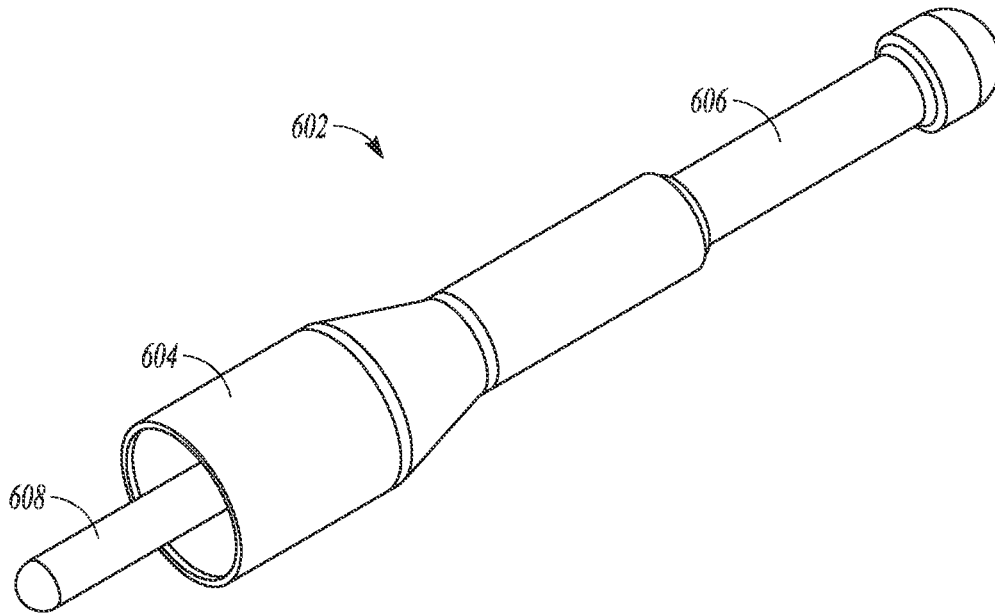


FIG. 6

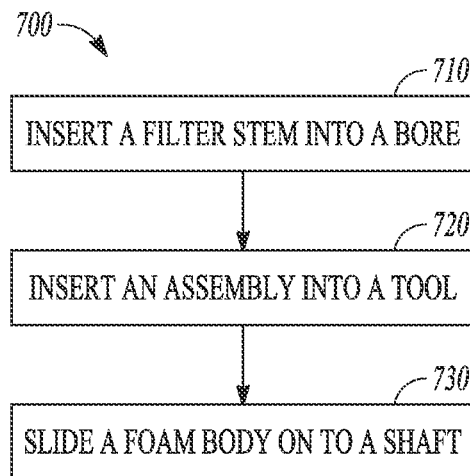


FIG. 7

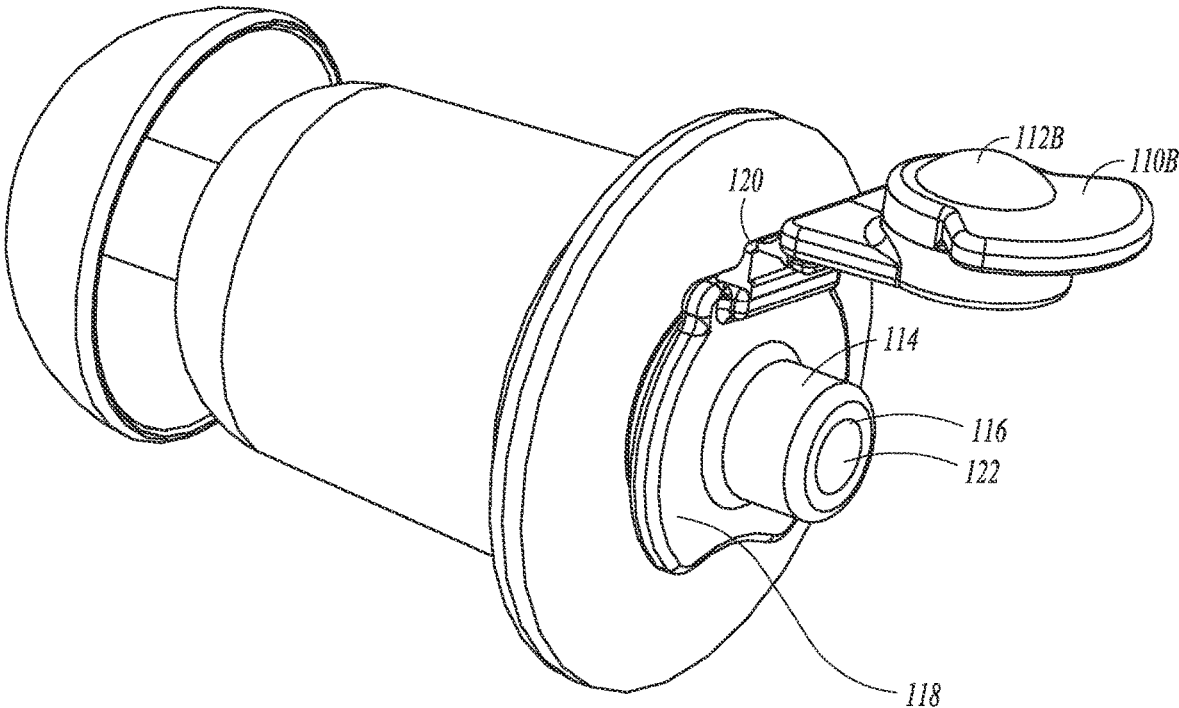


FIG. 8

1

SOUND-ATTENUATION SYSTEM**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/566,699, filed Oct. 14, 2017 by David M. Chenal and titled "Sound attenuation apparatus and method" (which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 10,940,043 on Mar. 9, 2021), which is a national-phase filing of, and claims priority benefit of, PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2016/027820, filed Apr. 15, 2016 by David M. Chenal and titled "Sound attenuation," which claims the benefit of priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 62/148,237, filed Apr. 16, 2015, each of which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. This application is also related to U.S. Pat. No. 9,603,746, which issued Mar. 28, 2017 to David M. Chenal, titled "Sound attenuation."

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to devices and methods for shaping/sizing an earpiece foam part and optionally attaching the shaped part to an earphone or earplug piece and associated storage container, and in particular to a system and method for storing, sizing, and cleaning earphones and earplugs and the foam tips thereof.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

An earplug may be inserted into an ear canal of a user to attenuate sound. An earplug user may desire a particular earplug feature, such as a comfortable configuration, ease of insertion or removal from the ear canal, or an ear canal conforming feature. The earplug may be used in various environments where sound may be undesired or harmful to the auditory health of the user, such as military, music or concerts, industrial, or construction environments. Current techniques are inadequate for retaining the earplug in the ear canal. U.S. Pat. No. 8,161,975 refers to a dual mode impulse noise protecting earplug.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides an earpiece-foam shaping/sizing system that includes a bottom portion configured to store an earpiece, wherein the earpiece includes at least a foam portion, a cap configured to removably couple to the bottom portion; and a sizer configured to receive the foam portion in order to compress the foam portion such that the foam portion is configured to fit inside an ear of a user.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings, which are not necessarily drawn to scale, like numerals may describe similar components in different views. Like numerals having different letter suffixes may represent different instances of similar components. The drawings illustrate generally, by way of example, but not by way of limitation, various embodiments discussed in the present document.

FIG. 1A includes a view of an example of an earplug.

FIG. 1B includes a cross-section view of an example of an earplug.

FIG. 2A includes a view of an example of a sound filter.

FIG. 2B includes a view of an example of a sound filter.

2

FIG. 3A includes a view of an example of a portion of an earplug.

FIG. 3B includes an end view of an example of a portion of an earplug.

5 FIG. 4 illustrates an example of a foam body.

FIGS. 5A, 5B, and 5C illustrate a portion of an earplug, according to some examples.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example of a tool.

10 FIG. 7 illustrates an assembly method, according to an example.

FIG. 8 illustrates an example of a sound filter.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

15 FIG. 1A includes a view of an example of an earplug **102**. The earplug **102** includes a first end **108** and a second end **116**. The earplug **102** includes a flange **104**, a foam body **106A**, a cap **110A**, a knob **112A**, a port boss **114**, a base plate **118**, a joint **120**, and a hole **122**. The knob **112A** is coupled to the cap **110A**. The knob **112A** helps the user to grasp the earplug **102**.

20 FIG. 1B includes a cross-section view of a portion of an example of the earplug **102**. The earplug **102** includes a tube (e.g., a shaft **124** having a bore **130**). The shaft **124** includes a receiver end **126** and an emitter end **128**. The bore **130** terminates at the receiver end **126** and at the emitter end **128**. The flange **104** is coupled to the shaft **124**.

25 The earplug **102** includes a sound filter, a portion of which is illustrated in the figure. The sound filter includes a filter stem **132**. The filter stem **132** includes an inlet end **134** and an outlet end **136**. The filter stem **132** includes the hole **122**. The hole **122** terminates at the inlet end **134** and at the outlet end **136**. The hole **122** extends through the port boss **114**. The hole **122** includes a first chamber **166** having a first diameter and a second chamber **168** having a second diameter. In the example of FIG. 1B, the first diameter is less than the second diameter. The filter stem **132** is configured to be at least partially inside of the bore **130**. The outlet end **136** is configured to be inside the bore **130**. In an example, the filter stem **132** has a press fit with the bore **130**, such that filter stem **132** can expand the bore **130**. As such, the press fit can use friction to secure the filter stem **132** in the bore **130**. A portion of the filter stem **132** is tapered, such as at the outlet end **136** as shown in the example of FIG. 1B. The taper at the outlet end **136** can aid the insertion of the filter stem **132** into the bore **130** in the assembly of the earplug **102**. The foam body **106A** abuts the base plate **118**.

30 In some examples, the first chamber **166** and second chamber **168** can be positioned, sized, or shaped in different configurations within the hole **122**. The first diameter can be greater than the second diameter. The hole **122** can include one or more chambers (e.g., one, two, three, four, or more).

35 The shaft **124** has a first elastic material. The first elastic material has a first durometer. In one example, shaft **124** includes silicone. The filter stem **132** has a second elastic material. The second elastic material has a second durometer. The first durometer is less than the second durometer. A shape of the ear canal can be non-uniform along its length. The shaft **124** can bend when inserted into the ear canal. The first durometer is configured to allow the shaft **124** to conform to the shape of the ear canal. The present techniques can reduce pressure exerted on the ear canal by the earplug **102**. This is because the first material conforms to the ear canal's shape, rather than a more rigid material such as the second material. The second durometer is configured to have the filter stem **132** substantially retain its shape (e.g., the

filter stem **132** is more rigid than the shaft **124**). In one example, the base plate **118** has the second durometer.

In one example, shaft **124** has a durometer of between 30 and 40 on the shore A scale. In one example, shaft **124** has a durometer of 35 on the shore A scale.

The earplug **102** is inserted into an ear canal of a user to attenuate sound. The user holds the cap **110A** of the earplug **102** for inserting the first end **108** into the ear canal. In an example, the user can hold the cap **110A** between a finger and thumb. The finger can engage the knob **112A**. The thumb can cover the cavity **138**. A portion of the thumb can occlude the hole **122** during the insertion of the earplug **102** into the ear canal. In an example, the user presses the thumb onto a portion of the port boss **114** to occlude the hole **122**. With the thumb occluding the hole **122**, the user can hear that the earplug **102** is positioned at a location that attenuates sound.

In some examples, the knob **112A** has various shapes and sizes. The knob **112A** is rounded, such as a hemisphere in the example of FIG. 1A. The knob **112A** is a cylinder or a box according to some examples. The knob **112A** can include multiple units, such as multiple bumps on a surface of the cap **110A** configured to help the user grasp the earplug **102**. Knob **112A** can provide tactile feedback to aid the user in gripping and positioning earplug **102**. In one example, knob **112A** can provide audible feedback to aid the user positioning earplug **102** with the ear canal. A soft ‘pop’ can be felt and heard when the knob **112A** is moved into a position to occlude the port boss.

In some examples, the knob **112A** is optional. In various examples, an elbow component or interface device can engage with the port boss **114**, with filter stem **132**, or with bore **130** to allow attachment of a headset **97**, a hearing aid **98**, an interruptible foldback (IFB) device, or a telecommunications device **99**.

The base plate **118** is configured to maintain a position of the foam body **106A** along the length of the shaft **124**. The filter stem **132** is positioned inside the bore **130**, such that the receiver end **126** is configured to abut the base plate **118**.

Flange **98A**, in the example shown in FIG. 1B, has a radius on an inner edge. The outer edge is squared and, in some examples, provides a feature that can engage a prominence on the inner side of the ear anatomy and facilitate device retention. In some users, flange **98A** engages the tragus or other anatomic feature. In some configurations, flange **98A** is fabricated of a material to mitigate or eliminate abrasion of skin surfaces proximate the foam body. Flange **98A** can have a thin cross-section that is configured to deflect under a small force.

In one example, flange **96** is provided at an end of shaft **124**. Flange **96** can facilitate retention of foam body **106A** on shaft **124** or otherwise limit relative movement, in an axial direction, as to foam body **106A** and shaft **124**. In one example, flange **96** can be configured to provide a friction fit to retain a filter stem **132** or retain a headset **97**, hearing aid **98**, IFB, or telecommunications device **99**. Flange **96** can take the form of a ring or a raised feature.

FIG. 2A includes a view of an example of the sound filter **170**. The cap **110A** can be in one or more positions. The cap **110A** can be in a first position, as shown in FIG. 2A, such that the cap **110A** occludes the hole **122** (not visible in this view). The filter stem **132** is coupled to the base plate **118**. The cap **110A** is coupled to the base plate **118** by the joint **120**. The cap **110A** can be moved from the first position, such as by the user lifting the cap **110A**. The joint **120** can include one or more components. In an example, the joint

120 is movable, and can be described as a hinge configured to allow the cap **110A** to be in the one or more positions.

In an example, the joint **120** is a living hinge. The living hinge can have the same material as two rigid members it connects.

In the first position, a gap **148** is between the base plate **118** and the cap **110A**. A height of the gap **148** is the axial distance between the base plate **118** and the cap **110A**, as shown in FIG. 2A. The gap **148** is configured to aid the user in moving the cap **110A** from the first position. The height is configured such that a finger or fingernail can engage and separate the cap **110A** from the port boss **114**. The base plate **118** includes a notch **164**. The notch **164** is configured to aid the user in moving the cap **110A**, such as to allow easier access for a user’s thumb or finger. The gap **148** and the notch **164** can each aid the user in moving the cap **110A** individually or jointly. The port boss **114** is positioned at the inlet end **134** (not visible in this view), such that the port boss **114** includes a portion of the hole **122**. In an example, the port boss **114** includes a ring **174**. The ring **174** can be raised on the port boss **114** or recessed into the port boss **114**.

FIG. 2B includes a view of an example of the sound filter **170**. The cap **110A** can be in a second position, as shown in FIG. 2B, such that the cap **110A** is clear of the hole **122**. The cap **110A** includes a cavity **138**. The cavity **138** has a cavity diameter **140**. The port boss **114** has an outer diameter **144**. The cavity diameter **140** corresponds to the outer diameter **144**. In the second position, there is a space **172** between the base plate **118** and the cap **110A**. The space **172** can allow the user to grasp the cap **110A**.

Outer diameter **144** and port boss **114** can provide an interference fit aid in retention of cap **110A** in an occluded position. In one example, ring **174** can provide an interference fit with cap **110A**.

In an example, in the first position, an angle between the base plate **118** and the cap **110A** can be 0 degrees (e.g., the base plate **118** is parallel to the cap **110A**). The angle can be along the space **172**, such as shown in FIG. 2B. In an example, the first position can include an angle greater than 0 degrees, such that the cap **110A** occludes the hole **122**. In an example of the second position, the angle between the base plate **118** and the cap **110A** can range from greater than zero degrees to 180 degrees or more, such that the cap **110A** is clear of the hole **122**. In an example, when the angle is 90 degrees, the cap **110A** is perpendicular to the base plate **118**. The position of the cap **110A** can be moved along the space **172**.

The space **172** of the second position can be configured to allow an attachment to couple to the port boss **114**. The attachment can be a speaker, a transducer, tubing, or another unit. The ring **174** can aid in coupling (e.g., securing) the attachment to the port boss **114**.

In the first position (e.g., FIG. 2A), the knob **112A** is configured to aid in attenuating sound. In an example, a thickness of the knob **112A** is configured to increase sound blockage into the hole **122**. The knob **112A** is coupled to the cap **110A**, such that the knob **112A** is an external feature of the cap **110A**, and the cavity **138** is an internal feature of the cap **110A**. The port boss **114** is configured to be at least partially inside the cavity **138** when the cap **110A** is in the first position as shown in FIG. 2A. The user can move the cap **110A** from the first to the second position while the earplug **102** remains in the ear canal, such as to engage in conversation. Likewise, the user can move the cap **110A** from the second to the first position while the earplug **102** is in the ear canal, such as to block high intensity sound.

In some examples, the sound filter 170 can be coupled with a variety of other units to attenuate sound. Such units can include an attachment as described above, or a different type of tube or earplug.

FIG. 3A includes a view of an example of a portion of the earplug 102. The shaft 124 is coupled to the flange 104. In one example, the flange 104 is positioned at the emitter end 128. The bore 130 extends through a center of the shaft 124, as shown in FIG. 3A. In the example shown, the shaft 124 is tapered. The outer diameter of the shaft 124 at the receiver end 126 is greater than the outer diameter of the shaft 124 at the emitter end 128. The flange 104 can be configured with faces that are straight, conical, or curved. A shape of the flange 104 can be curved, such as the cup-like shape shown in the example of FIG. 3A. An inner concave surface of the flange 104 can be configured to accommodate the foam body 106A, and an external surface of flange 104 can be configured to engage the ear canal.

FIG. 3B includes an end view of an example of a portion of the earplug 102. The bore 130 has a bore diameter 158.

FIG. 4 illustrates an example of the foam body 106B. The foam body 106B has a channel 160 extending through its center as shown in the example of FIG. 4. The shaft 124 extends into the channel 160. A diameter of the channel 160 corresponds to an outer diameter of the shaft. In one example, the diameter of the channel 160 is less than the outer diameter of the shaft, such that the channel 160 is expanded from its resting state. In another example, the diameter of the channel 160 can be the same as or larger than the outer diameter of the shaft. In one example, the foam body 106B comprises memory foam such as polyurethane (PU). In various examples, foam body 106B is fabricated of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or phthalate-free vinyl.

A shape of the foam body 106B has a larger outer diameter at one end, as shown in FIG. 4. The size and shape of the foam body 106B is configured to fit inside the ear canal. The foam body 106B can have a compressed state or an expanded state. The foam body 106B can become compressed when the user presses the foam body 106B between two fingers, for example. The foam body 106B expands from the compressed state and returns to a natural configuration when the external compression is removed.

In FIG. 4, flange 98B is squared at both the inner edge and at the outer edge. Flange 98B can aid in device retention. In some examples, flange 98B can be positioned behind the tragus.

The foam body 106B abuts the inner concave surface of the flange 104, such as shown in the example of FIG. 1A. The user can compress the foam body 106B for insertion into the ear canal. In the compressed state, the foam body 106B allows for easier insertion. The first end of the earplug 102 is inserted into the ear canal. The earplug 102 is placed at a desired position in the ear canal. The flange 104 is configured to anchor (e.g., hold in place) the earplug 102. The foam body 106B can expand from the compressed state to engage the ear canal. The flange 104 anchors the earplug 102 in place by engaging the ear canal. The flange 104 has an outer surface (e.g., opposite the inner concave surface). The outer surface of the flange 104 presses against the ear canal having a diameter less than a flange diameter. One or more seals can be created in the ear canal. A seal can be created by a component of the earplug 102 engaging (e.g., pressing against, held in place by friction, or touching) the ear canal.

The flange 104 engages the ear canal, and creates a first flange seal in the ear canal. The first flange seal anchors the earplug in place during insertion, and attenuates sound. A

potential advantage of the present subject matter can include that the user may not need to hold the earplug in place while waiting for the foam body 106B to expand. Flange 104, in one example, is self-centering in the ear canal and compressive forces exerted by the foam body are sufficient to maintain an open path for audio frequency vibrations notwithstanding contortions of the path of shaft 124.

The foam body 106B can expand to a size and shape of the ear canal. As such, an outer surface of the foam body 106B engages the ear canal. The foam body 106B creates a foam body seal. The foam body seal can aid in anchoring the earplug in place during use, and can attenuate sound. The user can wear the earplug 102 for long periods of time (e.g., an hour, multiple hours, or for a day), without removing the earplug 102 from the ear.

In an example, the outer diameter of the shaft can be different at the receiver end 126 and the emitter end 128 due to the taper of the shaft 124. In an example, the shaft 124 is configured to passively push (e.g., due to the taper) the foam body 106B toward the first end 108. The foam body 106B is passively pushed toward the flange 104. This enhances the first flange seal by encouraging the flange 104 to press into (e.g., expand into) the ear canal.

The first durometer allows the shaft 124 to bend to conform to a non-uniform shape of the ear canal. The foam body 106B is configured to support the shaft 124, such as to prevent the bore 130 from collapsing. As such, the foam body 106B can aid in preventing a blockage of sound through bore 130.

FIG. 5A illustrates a portion of the earplug 102, according to an example. The flange 104 is coupled to the shaft 124. In one example, the flange 104 and the shaft 124 are molded out of the same material as single piece. The earplug 102 includes a member configured to position the foam body at a desired location along the shaft 124. In an example, the member is a secondary flange 162. In other examples, the member is a stud, a pin, or other protrusion.

FIG. 5A is a side view of the shaft. In an end view, the secondary flange 162 has a circular shape. The secondary flange 162 is fixed at an axial position on the shaft 124. In one example, secondary flange 162 is affixed along a length of shaft 124 and in other examples, secondary flange 162 is affixed at or near an end of the length of shaft 124 (receiver end 126).

In an example, the foam body 106B (not shown in this view) is positioned between the secondary flange 162 and the base plate 118 (not shown in this view). When the earplug 102 is in the ear canal, the resulting space (e.g., air gap, air, opening, or recess) between the flange 104 located at the emitting end 128 and the foam body 106B can aid in reducing the sound reaching the eardrum.

In an example, a portion of the flange 104 (e.g., the portion of the flange 104 between the secondary flange 162 and emitter end 128 in the example of FIG. 5A) is configured to conform to a shape of the ear canal. The shape of the ear canal can bend or can narrow. As such, the portion of the flange 104 is configured to be flexible to fit into the shape of the ear canal.

In an example, the ear canal can have an oblong narrowing portion. The flange 104 can be configured to aid in centering the emitter end 128 in the ear canal, such as to aid in sound blockage.

FIG. 5B illustrates a portion of the earplug 102, according to an example. In one example, the earplug 102 includes multiple flanges, such as an end-flange 104A and a middle-flange 104B. The middle-flange 104B is positioned between the receiver end 126 and the emitter end 128. The end-flange

104A is positioned at the emitter end **128**. The end-flange **104A** and the middle-flange **104B** are configured to create a seal in the ear canal. The end-flange **104A** has the same or similar shape as the middle-flange **104B**. In another example, end-flange **104A** has a shape or size different than the middle-flange **104B**.

In one example, the earplug **102** can include an arrangement along the shaft **124** including the foam body **106B** (not shown) between the end-flange **104A** and the middle-flange **104B**.

FIG. 5C illustrates a portion of the earplug **102**, according to an example. The secondary flange **162** is positioned at a desired location along the length of the shaft **124**. In an example, the earplug **102** can include multiple secondary flanges **162**, such as illustrated in FIG. 5C. The multiple secondary flanges **162** can have varying shapes along the length of the shaft **124**. In an example, each of the multiple secondary flanges **162** creates a seal in the ear canal. In an example, a space can be between each of the multiple secondary flanges **162**. In an example, the multiple secondary flanges **162** can be molded with the shaft **124** as a single piece, such as shown in FIG. 5C.

In another example, the multiple secondary flanges **162** can be separate pieces from the shaft **124**. The multiple secondary flanges **162** can include a circular opening. In this example, the multiple secondary flanges **162** can be coupled to the shaft **124**. The multiple secondary flanges **162** can be positioned on the shaft **124** using the circular opening. The multiple secondary flanges **162** can be stacked, such as to provide an arrangement like that of the example of FIG. 5C. The multiple secondary flanges **162** are stacked by placing a secondary flange on top of another with a spacer member in between.

In an example, the foam body **106B** is made of a single piece of foam. Or, for example, the foam body **106B** can be comprised out of multiple pieces of foam, such that there are multiple foam members positioned along the length of the shaft **124**. In one example, the multiple foam members can be positioned next to one another. In an example, the multiple foam members can be separated, such as by the middle-flange **104B** or the secondary flange **162**. In an example, the foam body **106B** is replaceable, such that the user can select a different foam body **106B** for different uses of the earplug **102**.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example of a tool **602**. The tool **602** includes a flange-compression member **604**, a handle **606**, and a bore-pin **608**. The handle **606** is coupled to the flange-compression member **604**. The bore-pin **608** is coupled to the handle **606**. The bore-pin **608** is positioned at least partially inside of the flange-compression member **604**, as illustrated in FIG. 6. The tool **602** has a metal material. A size of the bore-pin **608** corresponds to the bore **130**. A size of the flange-compression member **604** corresponds to the flange **104**. A diameter of the flange-compression member **604** is less than a diameter of the flange **104**. In one example, bore-pin **608** is omitted and a flanged structure can be folded into cylinders to allow for replacement or customization. In one example foam body **106B** can be replaced from the filter end using tool **602**.

Tool **602** can be provided as a component of a kit including various size foam body elements, shafts, filters and other components. A kit can allow a user to customize an ear plug to accommodate a wide variety of ear canal sizes, shapes, and suited for a specific sound environment.

In an example, the tool **602** has a plastic material (e.g., the second material).

FIG. 7 illustrates an assembly method **700**, according to an example. At **710**, the filter stem **132** is inserted into the bore **130**.

At **720**, an assembly is inserted onto the tool **602**. The assembly includes a first portion that can include the shaft **124** and the flange **104**, and a second portion that can include the filter stem **132** and the cap **110A**. The emitter end **128** of the shaft **124** is slid onto the bore-pin **608**, and the flange **104** is compressed into the flange-compression member **604**. The bore-pin **608** is positioned inside the bore **130**. The bore-pin **608** is configured to support the shaft **124**.

At **730**, the foam body **106B** is slid onto the shaft **124**. For example, the foam body **106B** is inserted onto the handle **606**, such that the handle **606** is inside of the channel **160**. The foam body **106B** is pushed over the flange-compression member **604**, and then the foam body **106B** is pushed onto the shaft **124**. The assembly is removed from the tool **602**.

Notes & Examples

The sound attenuation system can include one or more components, such as the earplug **102** or a pair of earplugs coupled to each other by a cord.

In an example, the flange **104** is a separate piece from the shaft **124**.

In an example, the cap **110A** can be coupled to the base plate **118** using one or more connectors. In an example, the connector can include a plastic member having a spring constant. In an example, the earplug **102** can include two or more plastic members positioned along a circumference of the cap **110A**. The plastic member can be configured such that the cap **110A** is substantially parallel to the base plate **118** in the first position and in the second position. In this example, the space **172** is a space between the port boss **114** and the cavity **138** in the second position. The cap **110A** can be pushed onto the port boss **114**, to configure the cap in the first position. There can be a friction connection between the cavity **138** and the port boss **114** in the first position. The friction connection can oppose the force of the plastic member having the spring constant, such as to retain the cap **110A** in the first position. The user can move the cap **110A** to the second position, such as by overcoming the friction connection.

In an example, the connector can include a cord.

In an example, the cap **110A** is removable from the earplug **102**.

FIG. 8 illustrates an example of a sound filter. In the example illustrated, joint **120** is coupled to cap **110B** and coupled to knob **112B**. Cap **110B**, in the example shown has an offset portion. The offset portion provides a gap between base plate **118** and cap **110B** to facilitate manipulation by a user.

The above detailed description includes references to the accompanying drawings, which form a part of the detailed description. The drawings show, by way of illustration, specific embodiments in which the invention can be practiced. These embodiments are also referred to herein as "examples." Such examples can include elements in addition to those shown or described. However, the present inventors also contemplate examples in which only those elements shown or described are provided. Moreover, the present inventors also contemplate examples using any combination or permutation of those elements shown or described (or one or more aspects thereof), either with respect to a particular example (or one or more aspects

thereof), or with respect to other examples (or one or more aspects thereof) shown or described herein. Some examples include the following.

Example 1 can include or use subject matter (such as an apparatus, a method, or a means for performing acts) such as can include or use a sound attenuation system comprising a first end including a shaft and a flange. The flange is coupled to the shaft. The shaft has a first durometer. The shaft having a bore between a receiver end and an emitter end. The system comprising a second end including a filter stem coupled to a cap by a joint. The filter stem has a second durometer. The filter stem has a hole between an inlet end and an outlet end. The filter stem has a port boss. The outlet end is coupled to the receiver end. The cap includes a cavity having a cavity diameter that corresponds to an outer diameter of the port boss. The joint is configured to allow the cap to have a first position in which the cap occludes the hole and to have a second position in which the cap is clear of the hole.

Example 2 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of Example 1, to optionally include a foam body having a channel, the shaft extending into the channel.

Example 3 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1 or 2 wherein an outer diameter of the shaft is tapered.

Example 4 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-3, wherein the outer diameter of the shaft at the receiver end is greater than the outer diameter of the shaft at the emitter end.

Example 5 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-4, further comprising a base plate coupled to the filter stem.

Example 6 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-5, wherein the joint is coupled to the base plate.

Example 7 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-6, further comprising a gap between the base plate and the cap when in the first position.

Example 8 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-7, further comprising a secondary flange coupled to the shaft.

Example 9 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-8, wherein the filter stem is at least partially inside of the bore.

Example 10 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-9, wherein the flange is curved.

Example 11 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-10, further comprising a foam body having a channel, the shaft extending into the channel.

Example 12 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-11, wherein the foam body abuts a concave portion of the flange.

Example 13 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 1-12, wherein a diameter of the channel corresponds to an outer diameter of the shaft.

Example 14 can include or use subject matter (such as an apparatus, a method, or a means for performing acts), such as can include or use a sound filter for an earplug, the sound filter comprising a filter stem coupled to a cap by a joint. The filter stem has a hole between an inlet end and an outlet end. The filter stem has a port boss. The joint is configured to

allow the cap to have a first position in which the cap occludes the hole and to have a second position in which the cap is clear of the hole.

Example 15 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of Example 14, wherein the cap includes a cavity having a cavity diameter that corresponds to an outer diameter of the port boss.

Example 16 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14 or 15, wherein a portion of the filter stem is tapered.

Example 17 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-16, wherein the hole includes a first chamber having a first diameter and a second chamber having a second diameter.

Example 18 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-17, wherein the hole includes a third chamber having a third diameter.

Example 19 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-18, wherein the first diameter is less than the second diameter.

Example 20 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-19, further comprising a knob coupled to the cap, the knob on an opposite side of the cap as the cavity.

Example 21 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-20, further comprising a base plate coupled to the filter stem, a gap between the base plate and the cap, wherein the joint is coupled to the base plate and wherein the gap is present in the first position.

Example 22 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 14-21, wherein the base plate includes a notch.

Example 23 can include or use subject matter (such as an apparatus, a method, or a means for performing acts), such as can include or use a sound attenuation system comprising a foam body having an inner channel extending between a receiver end and an emitter end. The body has a cylindrical portion coaxial with the channel. The body includes an elastic foam configured to return to a natural configuration after an external compressive force is applied and removed. The system includes a shaft configured for placement within the channel between the receiver end and the emitter end. The shaft includes an inner bore aligned axially and includes a flange affixed proximate the emitter end, and wherein the shaft is configured to maintain a configuration determined by the foam body and wherein the inner bore remains open.

Example 24 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of Example 23, wherein the foam body includes polyvinyl chloride or polyurethane.

Example 25 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23 or 24, wherein the foam body has a flange at the receiver end.

Example 26 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-25, wherein the shaft includes silicone.

Example 27 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-26, wherein the flange is curved.

Example 28 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-27, further comprising a filter coupled to engage with the bore, the filter having an axial lumen configured to convey audio frequency vibrations.

11

Example 29 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-28, wherein the axial lumen includes an orifice.

Example 30 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-29, wherein the axial lumen includes at least two chambers.

Example 31 can include, or can optionally be combined with the subject matter of any one of Examples 23-30, further including a base plate coupled to a receiver end of the filter.

In the event of inconsistent usages between this document and any documents so incorporated by reference, the usage in this document controls.

In this document, the terms “a” or “an” are used, as is common in patent documents, to include one or more than one, independent of any other instances or usages of “at least one” or “one or more.” In this document, the term “or” is used to refer to a nonexclusive or, such that “A or B” includes “A but not B,” “B but not A,” and “A and B,” unless otherwise indicated. In this document, the terms “including” and “in which” are used as the plain-English equivalents of the respective terms “comprising” and “wherein.” Also, in the following claims, the terms “including” and “comprising” are open-ended, that is, a system, device, article, composition, formulation, or process that includes elements in addition to those listed after such a term in a claim are still deemed to fall within the scope of that claim. Moreover, in the following claims, the terms “first,” “second,” and “third,” etc. are used merely as labels, and are not intended to impose numerical requirements on their objects.

The above description is intended to be illustrative, and not restrictive. For example, the above-described examples (or one or more aspects thereof) may be used in combination with each other. Other embodiments can be used, such as by one of ordinary skill in the art upon reviewing the above description. The Abstract is provided to allow the reader to quickly ascertain the nature of the technical disclosure. It is submitted with the understanding that it will not be used to interpret or limit the scope or meaning of the claims. Also, in the above Detailed Description, various features may be grouped together to streamline the disclosure. This should not be interpreted as intending that an unclaimed disclosed feature is essential to any claim. Rather, inventive subject matter may lie in less than all features of a particular disclosed embodiment. Thus, the following claims are hereby incorporated into the Detailed Description as examples or embodiments, with each claim standing on its own as a separate embodiment, and it is contemplated that such embodiments can be combined with each other in various combinations or permutations. The scope of the invention should be determined with reference to the appended claims, along with the full scope of equivalents to which such claims are entitled.

What is claimed is:

1. A sound-attenuation system for placement at least partially in an ear canal of a person, the system comprising:
 a shaft having a first durometer and having a bore between a receiver end of the shaft and an emitter end of the shaft;
 a middle flange positioned on the shaft between the receiver end and the emitter end, wherein the middle flange has a cup-like shape having a convex external surface facing the emitter end of the shaft and configured to engage the ear canal to create a seal in the ear canal and wherein the middle flange has a concave inner surface facing the receiver end of the shaft; and

12

a foam body having a channel, wherein the foam is replaceably mounted on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the emitter end of the shaft with the shaft extending through the channel, wherein the foam body is configured to support the shaft to prevent the bore from collapsing.

2. The sound-attenuation system of claim 1, wherein the first durometer is between shore 30 and 40 to allow the shaft to bend to conform to a non-uniform shape of the ear canal.

3. The sound-attenuation system of claim 1, wherein the foam body includes a plurality of pieces of foam positioned next to each other on the shaft.

4. A sound-attenuation system for placement at least partially in an ear canal of a person, the system comprising:
 a shaft having a first durometer and having a bore between a receiver end of the shaft and an emitter end of the shaft;

a middle flange positioned on the shaft between the receiver end and the emitter end, wherein the middle flange has a cup-like shape having a convex external surface facing the emitter end of the shaft and configured to engage the ear canal to create a seal in the ear canal and wherein the middle flange has a concave inner surface facing the receiver end of the shaft; and

a foam body having a channel, wherein the foam is replaceably mounted on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the emitter end of the shaft with the shaft extending through the channel, wherein the shaft further includes a second curved flange located at the emitter end of the shaft and having a convex external surface facing the emitter end and a concave inner surface towards the receiver end, and wherein the foam body is mounted on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the concave inner surface of the second flange.

5. A sound-attenuation system for placement at least partially in an ear canal of a person, the system comprising:

a shaft having a first durometer and having a bore between a receiver end of the shaft and an emitter end of the shaft;

a middle flange positioned on the shaft between the receiver end and the emitter end, wherein the middle flange has a cup-like shape having a convex external surface facing the emitter end of the shaft and configured to engage the ear canal to create a seal in the ear canal and wherein the middle flange has a concave inner surface facing the receiver end of the shaft; and

a foam body having a channel, wherein the foam is replaceably mounted on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the emitter end of the shaft with the shaft extending through the channel, wherein the shaft is tapered from a first outer diameter at the receiver end of the shaft to a second outer diameter at the emitter end of the shaft, wherein the second outer diameter is smaller than the first outer diameter.

6. The system of 5, wherein the first durometer is between shore 30 and 40 to allow the shaft to bend to conform to a non-uniform shape of the ear canal.

7. A sound-attenuation system for placement at least partially in an ear canal of a person, the system comprising:

a shaft having a first durometer and having a bore between a receiver end of the shaft and an emitter end of the shaft;

a middle flange positioned on the shaft between the receiver end and the emitter end, wherein the middle

13

flange has a cup-like shape having a convex external surface facing the emitter end of the shaft and configured to engage the ear canal to create a seal in the ear canal and wherein the middle flange has a concave inner surface facing the receiver end of the shaft;

a foam body having a channel, wherein the foam is replaceably mounted on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the emitter end of the shaft with the shaft extending through the channel;

a filter stem having a second durometer, wherein the filter stem includes:

a hole between an inlet end and an outlet end, wherein the outlet end of the filter stem is coupled to the receiver end of the shaft, and

a port boss; and

a cap coupled to the filter stem by a joint, wherein the cap includes a cavity having a cavity diameter that corresponds to an outer diameter of the port boss, and wherein the joint is configured to allow the cap to have a first position in which the cap occludes the hole and to have a second position in which the cap is clear of the hole.

8. A method for assembling a sound-attenuation earplug, the method comprising:

forming a first piece that includes a shaft and a middle flange, wherein the shaft has a first durometer and a bore between a receiver end of the shaft and an emitter end of the shaft, wherein the middle flange is formed on the shaft between the receiver end and the emitter end, wherein the middle flange has a cup-like shape having a convex external surface facing the emitter end of the shaft and configured to engage the ear canal to create a seal in the ear canal, and wherein the middle flange has a concave inner surface facing the receiver end of the shaft;

forming a foam body having a channel that fits over the shaft; and

replaceably mounting the foam body on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the emitter end of the shaft with the shaft extending

14

through the channel, wherein the foam body is configured to support the shaft to prevent the bore from collapsing.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the first durometer is between shore 30 and 40 to allow the shaft to bend to conform to a non-uniform shape of the ear canal.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the forming of the first piece includes making a second curved flange at the emitter end of the shaft, wherein the second curved flange has a convex external surface facing the emitter end and a concave inner surface towards the receiver end, and wherein the mounting of the foam body includes coupling the foam body on the shaft between the convex external surface of the middle flange and the concave inner surface of the second flange.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the forming of the first piece includes tapering the shaft from a first outer diameter at the receiver end of the shaft to a second outer diameter at the emitter end of the shaft, wherein the second outer diameter is smaller than the first outer diameter.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the forming of the foam body includes positioning a plurality of pieces of foam next to each other on the shaft.

13. The method of claim 8, further comprising:

forming a filter stem having a second durometer, wherein the filter stem includes:

a hole between an inlet end and an outlet end, wherein the outlet end of the filter stem is coupled to the receiver end of the shaft, and

a port boss;

forming a cap, wherein the cap includes a cavity having a cavity diameter that corresponds to an outer diameter of the port boss; and

coupling the cap to the filter stem by a joint, wherein the joint is configured to allow the cap to have a first position in which the cap occludes the hole and to have a second position in which the cap is clear of the hole.

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