CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of utilizing an opposed-slip type downhole tool in a subterranean wellbore having a casing, the method comprising the steps of:

positioning the tool in a subterranean wellbore, the tool having an upper slip assembly and a lower slip assembly positioned on opposite sides of a sealing assembly, the sealing assembly having at least one compressible, annular sealing element;

then setting the tool in the wellbore by radially expanding the slip assemblies into gripping engagement with the casing, and by longitudinally compressing and radially expanding the sealing element into sealing engagement with the casing;

then disengaging the sealing element from the casing by relaxing the compression forces on the sealing element;

then disengaging one of the slip assemblies from the casing such that the slip assembly is no longer in gripping engagement with the casing; and

then retrieving the tool from the wellbore.

2. The method of Claim **1**, wherein the step of disengaging one of the slip assemblies comprises disengaging the upper slip assembly.

3. The method as in Claim **2**, further comprising the step of disengaging the lower slip assembly from the casing after the step of disengaging the upper slip assembly from the casing.

4. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element includes radially contracting the sealing element.

5. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element includes longitudinally lengthening the sealing element.

6. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element further comprises moving a sealing element retainer to reduce the compression forces on the sealing

element.

7. The method as in Claim **6**, wherein the sealing element retainer is moved longitudinally, the longitudinal movement of the sealing element retainer relaxing the longitudinal compression on the sealing element.

8. The method as in Claim **7**, wherein the sealing element retainer moves longitudinally upward during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

9. The method as in Claim **8**, wherein the sealing element retainer is an annular member in sliding engagement with a mandrel of the tool, the sealing element retainer connected to the upper wedge assembly by a releasable connection, and wherein the sealing element retainer is released to move with respect to the upper wedge assembly during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

10. The method as in Claim **9**, wherein the releasable connection includes a toothed, collapsible C-ring, the teeth of which engage a corresponding toothed portion of the upper wedge assembly, the C-ring cooperating with and collapsing into a reduced-diameter portion of the outer surface of the tool mandrel during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

11. The method as in Claim **6**, wherein the sealing element has an interior surface, and wherein the sealing element retainer provides compression force, when the tool is set, acting on the interior surface of the sealing element.

12. The method as in Claim **11**, wherein the sealing element retainer is moved longitudinally during the step of disengaging the sealing element, the movement of the retainer relaxing the compression force acting against the interior surface of the sealing element.

13. The method as in Claim **6**, wherein the tool further comprises a mandrel, and wherein the sealing element retainer is a portion of the tool mandrel.

14. The method as in Claim **13**, wherein the tool mandrel has a reduced-diameter portion which is moved into alignment with the sealing element during the step of disengaging the sealing element, thereby reducing the compression force on the sealing element and allowing the sealing element to relax.

15. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the tool includes a tool mandrel, and further comprising the step of cutting the mandrel.

16. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the tool includes a mandrel and a sleeve connected to one another by a releasable connection, and wherein the mandrel and sleeve are released to move relative to one another during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

17. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the sealing assembly includes multiple sealing elements.

18. The method as in Claim **2**, wherein the upper slip assembly is a barrel slip assembly.

19. The method as in Claim **18**, wherein the step of disengaging the upper slip assembly includes the step of moving lugs into contact with a portion of the upper slip assembly and moving the upper slip assembly upward, thereby disengaging the upper slip assembly from the wellbore casing.

20. The method as in Claim **1**, wherein the step of setting the tool further comprises setting the tool using a hydraulic assembly.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of utilizing an opposed-slip type downhole tool in a subterranean wellbore having a casing, the method comprising the steps of: positioning the tool in a subterranean wellbore, the tool having an upper slip assembly and a lower slip assembly positioned on opposite sides of a sealing assembly, the sealing assembly having at least one compressible, annular sealing element; setting the tool in the wellbore by radially expanding the slip assemblies into gripping engagement with the casing, and by longitudinally compressing and radially expanding the sealing element into sealing engagement with the casing; unsetting the tool in the wellbore by doing the following steps, in the order presented: a. first, disengaging the sealing element from the casing by relaxing the compression forces on the sealing element; and then b. second, disengaging one of the slip assemblies from the casing such that the slip assembly is no longer in gripping engagement with the casing; and retrieving the tool from the wellbore.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of disengaging one of the slip assemblies comprises disengaging the upper slip assembly by moving a tool mandrel in a first direction with respect to the one slip assembly, and further comprising the step of further moving the tool mandrel in the first direction until the tool mandrel contacts a member of the one slip assembly; and further comprising the step of further moving the tool mandrel in the first direction, thereby disengaging the one slip assembly from the casing.

3. The method as in claim 2, further comprising the step of disengaging the lower slip assembly from the casing after the step of disengaging the upper slip assembly from the casing, and wherein the lower slip assembly is disengaged by further movement of the tool mandrel in the first direction.

4. The method as in claim 2, wherein the upper slip assembly is a barrel slip assembly.

5. The method as in claim 4, wherein the step of disengaging the upper slip assembly includes the step of moving lugs into contact with a portion of the upper slip assembly and moving the upper slip assembly upward, thereby disengaging the upper slip assembly from the wellbore casing.

6. The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element includes radially contracting the sealing element.

7. The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element includes longitudinally lengthening the sealing element.

8. The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of disengaging the sealing element further comprises moving a sealing element retainer to reduce the compression forces on the sealing element.

9. The method as in claim 8, wherein the sealing element retainer is moved longitudinally, the longitudinal movement of the sealing element retainer relaxing the longitudinal compression on the sealing element.

10. The method as in claim 9, wherein the sealing element retainer moves longitudinally upward during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

11. The method as in claim 10, wherein the sealing element retainer is an annular member in sliding engagement with a mandrel of the tool, the sealing element retainer connected to an upper wedge of the upper slip assembly by a releasable connection, and wherein the sealing element retainer is released to move with respect to the upper wedge during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

12. The method as in claim 11, wherein the releasable connection includes a toothed, collapsible C-ring, the teeth of which engage a corresponding toothed portion of the upper wedge assembly, the C-ring cooperating with and collapsing into a reduced-diameter portion of the outer surface of the tool mandrel during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

13. The method as in claim 8, wherein the sealing element has an interior surface, and wherein the sealing element retainer provides compression force, when the tool is set, acting on the interior surface of the sealing element.

14. The method as in claim 13, wherein the sealing element retainer is moved longitudinally during the step of disengaging the sealing element, the movement of the retainer relaxing the compression force acting against the interior surface of the sealing element.

15. The method as in claim 8, wherein the tool further comprises a mandrel, and wherein the sealing element retainer is a portion of the tool mandrel.

16. The method as in claim 15, wherein the tool mandrel has a reduced-diameter portion which is moved into alignment with the sealing element during the step of disengaging the sealing element, thereby reducing the compression force on the sealing element and allowing the sealing element to relax.

17. The method as in claim 1, wherein the tool includes a tool mandrel, and further comprising the step of cutting the mandrel.

18. The method as in claim 1, wherein the tool includes a mandrel and a sleeve connected to one another by a releasable connection, and wherein the mandrel and sleeve are released to move relative to one another during the step of disengaging the sealing element.

19. The method as in claim 1, wherein the sealing assembly includes multiple sealing elements.

20. The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of setting the tool further comprises setting the tool using a hydraulic assembly.