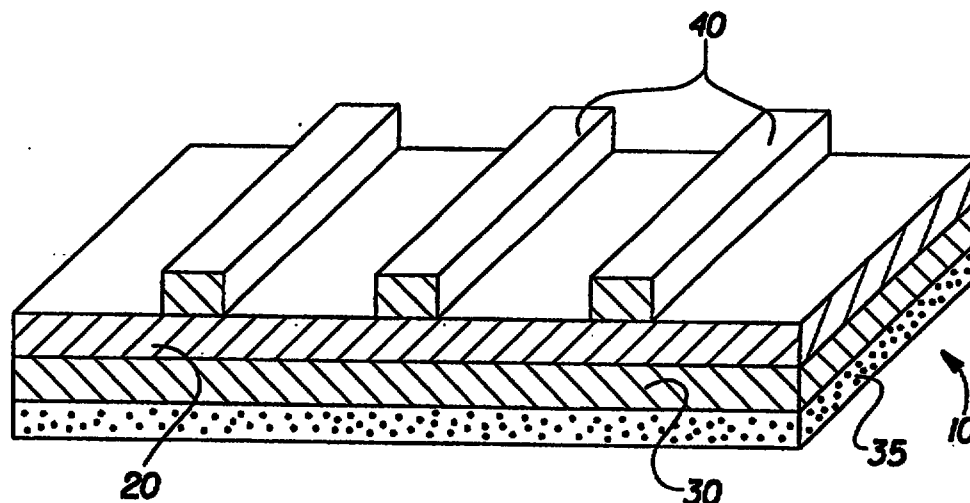


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(54) Title: MULTI-PURPOSE ABSORBENT AND PROTECTIVE SHEET MATERIALS



(57) Abstract

The present invention provides a multi-purpose sheet material (10) comprising an absorbent layer (20) having opposing first and second surfaces, a substantially non-absorbent, substantially fluid-impervious standoff system (40) associated with and extending transversely across the first surface, and a substantially fluid-impervious barrier layer (30) substantially continuously covering the second surface. The standoff system may comprise a plurality of discrete standoff elements or may comprise a continuous standoff network, and may be formed in any desired configuration. Optional adhesive layers (35) or elements on the surface of the barrier layer facing a supporting surface may provide for enhanced stability in use. The standoff system may be unitarily formed with or directly contacting the barrier layer such that forces applied to the standoff system are transmitted to the barrier layer, bypassing the absorbent layer.