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REPLACED SHEETS		SG
☒	Description : paged 1 to paged 43	
☒	Claim(s) : paged 44 to paged 49	
☒	Drawing(s) : paged to paged	
☒	Abstract : paged to paged	

- 1 -

ATTORNEY DOCKET NO: TRIN/02

VALVED COUPLING FOR ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

Cross Reference To Related Applications

5 This application is related to a copending
application entitled ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS
DISTRIBUTION COMPONENT WITH INTEGRAL VALVED COUPLING
AND METHODS FOR ITS USE, filed simultaneously
herewith and assigned to the same assignee, and
10 incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

 The present invention relates to gas
distribution systems for ultra-high purity gas, such
as systems used to provide process gasses for
15 semiconductor manufacturing.

Background of the Invention

 High purity gas distribution systems, such
as are used in semiconductor manufacturing or other
thin film coating processes, typically include a

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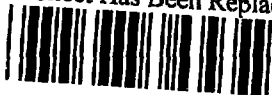


source of high purity gas coupled through a series of gas processing elements such as a mass flow controller, pressure sensor and/or regulator, heater, filters or purifiers, and shutoff valves.

5 In semiconductor processing, a series-connected set of such elements is referred to as a "gas stick". In a typical semiconductor processing apparatus, multiple gas sources are connected to the chamber through multiple gas sticks, which are typically
10 mounted to a frame, forming a complete assembly known as a "gas box".

As the dimensions of semiconductor devices decrease and their density increases, semiconductor manufacturing processes have become increasingly
15 intolerant of particulate contamination. One important source of such contamination is the gasses used during the process, and particularly particulate carried by the wetted surfaces of the gas stick which delivers gas from the source to the
20 chamber. Moisture or dust which accumulates within a gas stick or processing component will be carried with the source gas and deposit onto the semiconductor devices being processed, creating defects. Moisture also may corrode the wetted

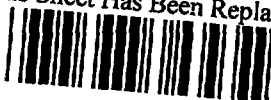
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surfaces, leading to flaking of particles from these surfaces.

To reduce contamination of this sort, gas sticks and gas processing components for semiconductor processing are manufactured in low-dust, low-moisture environments, and purged for lengthy periods of time at elevated pressures after manufacture. Furthermore, gas processing components are typically packaged and sealed in pressurized nitrogen for shipment. As a result, the interior of the component or stick is exposed only to the clean room environment in which the semiconductor processing equipment is located, and only for the brief period of time between removal of the packaging and sealing of the stick or component into the processing equipment.

Despite these careful handling procedures, even brief exposure of a gas stick or component to clean room air results in the accumulation of potentially damaging levels of particulate and moisture within the stick or component, requiring extensive purging of the gas stick after assembly, and prior to further use for semiconductor manufacturing. Because the semiconductor manufacturing equipment cannot operate during



purging, the time needed for purging represents substantial lost revenue.

5 The gas processing components in a gas stick, and other components and connections in the gas distribution system, will wear and need replacement at various frequencies throughout the life of the processing apparatus. Typically, a component is replaced by closing the valves most nearly adjacent to the component, uncoupling and
10 replacing the component, and reopening the adjacent valves. To simplify this operation and minimize the extent of the gas stick exposed to room air during this procedure, each component is typically connected to its neighboring components or tubing
15 with removable couplers, and valves are placed between components at several locations along the stick. Nevertheless, the act of uncoupling a component or portion of the stick and removing it from the stick exposes that component and the
20 replacement component to room air, and also exposes substantial wetted surface between the component and the nearest valves (including the inside of any connecting tubing, and potentially other components), to room air. Thus, the gas stick must



be extensively purged when the components are reassembled.

Summary of the Invention

The difficulties are alleviated in accordance with principles of the present invention, through the use of valved couplers particularly suitable for an ultra-high purity gas distribution system. These valved couplers may be integrally incorporated into a gas processing component and/or connected between such components, to permit replacement of components or changes to connections between components while exposing only a minute wetted surface area of the gas distribution system to room air. As a particular example, valved couplers may be integrally incorporated into the inlet and outlet of a gas stick, to permit replacement of the entire gas stick.

Specifically, a valved coupler in accordance with principles of the present invention has a valve stem/bullnose structure for sealing an aperture of the coupler. The bullnose seals the aperture immediately adjacent the exterior of the coupler; the valve stem and bullnose move on an axis extending through the aperture, and when the bullnose is in position for sealing this aperture,



the end of the bullnose is substantially coplanar with the outside of the housing. As a result, when the bullnose is in this sealed position, only a minimal amount of the wetted surface of the coupler is exposed to the external environment.

In the first embodiment of the invention discussed below, the bullnose seals at an interior side of the aperture, and is withdrawn into the coupler to permit gas flow. In an alternative embodiment, the bullnose seals an exterior side of the aperture, and is moved outwardly from the coupler to permit gas flow.

The valve stem may be pneumatically driven by a piston and cylinder arrangement connected to the coupler housing, or may be manually actuated. The pneumatically-actuated valve described below includes a return spring, which generates a force driving the bullnose into sealing engagement with the aperture, so that the valve is normally sealed in the absence of pneumatic pressure. As an alternative embodiment, the return spring drives the bullnose out of sealing engagement, so that the valve is normally open in the absence of pneumatic pressure. In a second alternative embodiment, a rack-and-pinion arrangement transfers vertically--



directed force from the pneumatic or manual actuator, to a horizontally-oriented valve stem.

In another aspect, the invention features a gas processing component (e.g., a filter), or
5 entire gas stick, which is sealed from the exterior environment at both its inlet and outlet sides, by valved couplers of the kind described above. Because the couplers seal the internal wetted surfaces of the component/gas stick from exposure to
10 the external environment, the entire device can be purged at the manufacturing site and left flooded with a controlled environment (e.g., pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly elevated above atmospheric) during shipment, such that the component/gas stick
15 can be installed and used after only brief purging.

The gas stick described below includes valved couplers integrally manufactured into the housing of the gas stick, and further includes a mass flow controller, dual filters on the inlet and
20 outlet sides of the mass flow controller, a pressure sensor, thermocouple, and heater. Additional elements such as a pressure regulator or purifier could also be integrally included in the gas stick as necessitated by the application.



In a further aspect the invention features methods of using these devices. In particular, when two valved couplers are joined together, they may be used as shutoff valves by the gas processing
5 apparatus. Because two conjoined couplers include two separate valves, and either valve can shut off gas flow through the couplers, wear caused by repetitive cycling of the valves can be distributed between the valves, resulting in increased lifetime
10 of the conjoined couplers as compared to a separate shutoff valve.

In a further aspect the invention features the above-described method of pre-purging a component and shipping the component in a purged,
15 controlled environment between two sealed couplers.

The above and other objects and advantages of the present invention shall be made apparent from the accompanying drawings and the description thereof.

20 Brief Description of the Drawing

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with a general description
25 of the invention given above, and the detailed



description of the embodiments given below, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a schematic perspective view of a gas box formed of integrated gas stick/valved coupler assemblies in accordance with principles of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a partial cross-sectional view of a gas stick of Fig. 1 taken along lines 2-2, but showing pneumatic control lines welded to tube-stub connections on the valved coupler, to illustrate an alternative to the threaded couplers shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is partial cross-sectional detail view of two valved couplers in the gas stick of Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the joint between the two valved couplers of Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of a filter having integrated valved couplers in accordance with a second embodiment of the invention, and showing the uncoupling of such couplers;

Figs. 6 and 7 are partial cross-sectional views of an alternative embodiment of a valved



coupler in accordance with principles of the present invention;

Fig. 8 is an uncoupled view of the alternative valved coupler of Figs. 6 and 7;

5 Fig. 9 is a schematic diagram of a complete gas distribution system using valved couplers in accordance with principles of the present invention.

Detailed Description of Specific Embodiments

10 Referring to Figs. 1 and 2, in accordance with principles of the present invention, a gas box 10 comprises a number, such as 6, of individual and separately controlled gas sticks 12. Each gas stick 12 receives a source gas for a semiconductor process
15 on an input line 14 and outputs gas to the semiconductor processing chamber on an output line 16. Gas flow through each gas stick 12 is controlled by a plurality of valved couplers 20. These valved couplers respond to pneumatic actuation
20 through pneumatic control lines 22, or in some cases may be manually actuated as shown at 220 and discussed in further detail below in Fig. 5.

Each gas stick 12 may optionally include additional elements, including a pressure sensor



(transducer) 24, which produces an electrical pressure signal on a line 25, a thermocouple (46, Fig. 2) for detecting temperature of the gas stick 12, as well as heater blankets (bands) (51, 53, Fig. 2) for applying heat to the gas stick. Other elements might include a gas purifier.

Gas sticks 12 are firmly mounted to a support plate 28 which provides mechanical support for each gas stick 12 in the gas box 10. In accordance with principles of the present invention, the dimensions of each gas stick 12 are reduced as compared to typical gas sticks, such that support plate 28 may be attached to or part of existing semiconductor processing equipment in the clean room where the gas sticks are in operation. This substantially reduces the floor space used in the clean room and thereby substantially reduce the cost of its construction and operation.

A second advantage of the smaller gas stick dimensions is the reduction in wetted surface in the gas stick, which implies less opportunity for accumulation of moisture and/or particulate in the gas stick and less area subject to possible corrosion or outgassing.



Furthermore, the reduced size of the gas stick reduces the volume that must be purged, and thus reduces the purging time and the amount of purging gas consumed.

5 Finally, the integral construction of the gas stick provides fewer connections and seals and thus fewer potential leak paths for gasses from the gas stick to the surrounding environment, and also reduces the amount of steel used in the gas
10 distribution system.

 Referring now to Fig. 2, each gas stick incorporates four valved couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d which connect the gas stick 12 to a gas supply and to gas distribution equipment in the processing
15 chamber. The four valved couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d shown in Fig. 2 have similar construction, but are positioned in different orientations, and in some cases integrally attached to housings of adjacent components.

20 In particular, the valving structure in coupler 20a is a mirror image of the structures in couplers 20b, 20c and 20d, although the main housings in each case are slightly differently shaped to accommodate different applications.



In the embodiment shown in Fig. 2, the lower valved couplers 20b and 20c are integrally mounted to the housing of a gas stick (including a mass flow controller 38 and pressure transducer 24) situated therebetween. Accordingly, the gas stick may be removed from the gas distribution system by disconnecting lower couplers 20b and 20c from mating upper couplers 20a and 20d, lifting upper couplers 20a and 20d from connection with lower couplers 20b and 20c, and removing the entire gas stick with lower couplers 20b and 20c attached thereto.

In an alternative embodiment (not shown), upper couplers 20a and 20d are integrally mounted to the gas stick (rather than lower couplers 20b and 20c), and these integral upper couplers 20a and 20d are mounted to separate lower couplers 20b and 20c which connect to input and output lines 14 and 16. In this alternative embodiment, after disconnection, the gas stick and upper couplers 20a and 20d attached thereto may be directly lifted off lower couplers 20b and 20c without requiring movement of lower couplers 20b and 20c.

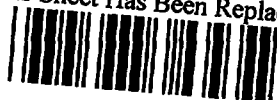
Returning now to the embodiment shown in Fig. 2, a process gas input line 14 connects to the main valve chamber 30a of a first valved coupler



20a. (The connection to input line 14 and output
line 16 may be a threaded joint as shown in Fig. 2,
or lines 14 and 16 may be welded to a tube stub of
the kind used on pneumatic control ports 91a/91b in
5 Fig. 2.) This chamber 30a is cylindrical in
profile, and is shown in cross-section in Fig. 2. A
lower face of chamber 30a includes an aperture 56a
passing through the housing. An axially-positioned
valve stem 32a, terminating at one end in a bull
10 nose 34a, moves along a center axis passing through
aperture 56a such that bull nose may engage and seal
aperture 56a.

Similarly, valved coupler 20b includes an
aperture 56b and a stem 32b which moves along a
15 center axis extending through aperture 56b and
terminates at an end in a bull nose 34b sized for
engagement and sealing of aperture 56b.

When valved couplers 20a and 20b are open,
stems 32a and 32b translate to the positions shown
20 in Fig. 2. In these positions, cylindrical main
chamber 30a of coupler 20a is in fluid communication
with cylindrical main chamber 30b of coupler 20b,
via apertures 56a and 56b. Accordingly, input line
14 is in fluid communication with inlet passage 35
25 formed in the housing of coupler 20b.



Passage 35 is in communication with a mass flow controller 38 (the details of which are not shown) through a top-hat shaped filter 40. Filter 40 is fitted into a matching top-hat shaped chamber in housing 55b of coupler 20b. Filter 40 includes, at its outer periphery, a sealing nib which is engaged between housing 55b of coupler 20b and the housing of mass flow controller 38, to form a seal therebetween.

The outlet of mass flow controller 38 is coupled, through a second filter 42, to an outlet passageway 45 and a main cylindrical valve chamber 30c of a third valved coupler 20c. Filter 42 is mounted within the housing 55c of valved coupler 20c, and housing 55c is sealed to the housing of mass flow controller 38 by a sealing nib 44 on filter 42.

Valved coupler 20c, like valved couplers 20a and 20b, includes an aperture 56c and a valve stem 32c terminating at an interior end in a bull nose 34c. Similarly, valved coupler 20d includes an aperture 56d and a valve stem 32d terminating at its interior end in a bull nose 34d. When valve stems 32c and 32d are in their open positions, as shown in Fig. 2, main valve chamber 30c is in communication



with a main valve chamber 30d of valved coupler 20d through apertures 56c and 56d. Accordingly, in these positions of valve stems 32c and 32d, outlet passageway 45 is in fluid communication via valve chambers 30c and 30d to output line 16 of the gas stick 12.

The pressure sensor 24 (the details of which are not shown) is in fluid communication with outlet passageway 45 via passageway 45a. Electrical signals from pressure sensor 24 are carried on line 25. These signals can be used, for example, to control the pneumatic lines controlling the positions of valve stems 32 so as to close the valved couplers and thereby shut off gas flow if the gas pressure drops below a set point.

Thermocouple 46 is in thermal communication with the wall of housing 55b adjacent to filter 40, and thereby detects the temperature of gas flowing through filter 40 to produce an electrical temperature signal on lines 48. Heater jackets (bands) 51, 53 surrounding inlet passageway 35 and outlet passageway 45 obtain electrical power through lines 50 and 52, respectively, and may be controlled in response to temperatures sensed by thermocouple 46 to regulate the temperature of the



gas stick 12 to prevent gas condensation within the gas stick 12. (Heater cartridges could be used in place of heater bands, if desired.)

Gas stick 12 has an overall length as
5 shown by numeral 54 of approximately nine inches. This dimension is substantially smaller than comparable dimensions of a typical gas stick assembly comprising discrete mass flow, pressure sensor and control valve housings and couplers
10 therebetween.

As noted above, the compact size of the gas stick 12, in accordance with principles of the present invention, permits a substantial reduction in the clean room floor space consumed by the gas
15 box 10. Indeed, in some applications the gas box 10 may be mounted on the processing chamber, thus freeing all floor space formerly required for the gas box. Furthermore, the compact size of the gas stick also advantageously reduces the number of
20 seals in the system, the volume needed to be purged, and the wetted surface area, resulting in fewer opportunities for corrosion or outgassing.

It will be further noted that the gas stick 12 of Fig. 2 is an integral unit containing
25 all processing components needed for gas delivery,



including mass flow controller 38, and pressure
sensor 24. Furthermore, as will be explained in
greater detail in the following figures, the valved
couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d function not only as
5 couplers for the gas stick, but also as
automatically-actuatable shutoff valves which can be
used to initiate and terminate gas flow as called
for by the semiconductor processing "recipe" used
with the processing chamber. The substantial
10 reduction in size and number of seals in the gas
stick 12, resulting from this integration of
functions into a single unit, is a particular
advantage of the present invention.

Now referring to Fig. 3, it can be seen
15 how valved coupler 20a or valved coupler 20b may be
used as a flow control valve during operation of the
gas stick 12. Specifically, comparing Fig. 3 to
Fig. 2, valve stem 32b of valved coupler 20b has
been moved to a closed position seen in Fig. 3. In
20 this position, bull nose 34b engages to aperture 56b
of coupler 20b to seal valve chamber 30b from valve
chamber 30a of coupler 20a. To facilitate such
sealing, each bull nose 34a and 34b includes on its
lower perimeter, a gasket 58a and 58b for sealing
25 against aperture 56a and 56b of housing 55a and 55b.



Additional details of a valved coupler 20
in accordance with one embodiment of the present
invention are illustrated in Fig. 3. These details
will be described in the context of valved coupler
5 20a and the corresponding elements in valved coupler
20b. However, the reader will appreciate that
similar details appear in other valved couplers of
the same type shown in Figs. 2 and 5.

In the following, corresponding components
10 in each of couplers 20a and 20b will be described
simultaneously, while identifying the reference
characters for both components.

Now turning to the details shown in Fig.
3, each coupler includes a diaphragm 60a/60b,
15 respectively, which is a disk-shaped sheet of
flexible metal material. Diaphragm 60a/60b seals
the main valve chamber 30a/30b. Valve stem 32a/32b
passes through a central aperture of diaphragm
60a/60b. In an axial region surrounding this
20 central aperture, diaphragm 60a/60b is welded to
bull nose 34a/34b as shown at 62 on diaphragm 60a.

An interior end of valve stem 32a/32b
passes through diaphragm 60a/60b and terminates in a
threaded end as seen at 64 on stem 32a. Bull nose
25 34a/34b includes internal threads for accepting an



internal end of the respective valve stem 32a/32b.
Above this threaded end 64 of valve stem 32a/32b,
valve stem 32a/32b includes a radial projection
66a/66b having an outer diameter matched to an outer
5 diameter of bull nose 34a/34b. Thus, by tightening
the threaded end 64 of valve stem 32a/32b into bull
nose 34a/34b, diaphragm 60a/60b is clamped between
the valve stem projection 66a/66b and the bull nose
34a/34b. The result of this combined clamp and weld
10 forms a positive seal between diaphragm 60a/60b and
bull nose 34a/34b to minimize leakage in the space
therebetween.

Main valve housing 55a/55b includes an
internal annular projection 70a/70b sized for
15 engagement to an outer periphery of diaphragm
60a/60b. A disk-shaped spacer 68a/68b, is inserted
above diaphragm 60a/60b and engages an opposite
peripheral rim of diaphragm 60a/60b. Diaphragm
60a/60b is thereby clamped between projection
20 70a/70b and spacer 68a/68b to positively lock
diaphragm 60a/60b in place and minimize leakage
between diaphragm 60a/60b and main housing 55a/55b.
An outer periphery of diaphragm 60a/60b may also be
welded or brazed to main housing 55a/55b to further
25 reduce leakage therebetween.



Spacer 68a/68b includes, at its radially inwardmost position, a circular aperture as seen at 78 in valved coupler 20b. This aperture 78 has a diameter slightly larger than that of projection 66a/66b on valve stem 32a/32b. Accordingly, as illustrated in valved coupler 20a, when valve stem 32a/32b withdraws into main valve chamber 30a/30b and extracts bull nose 34a from engagement with housing 55a, valve stem projection 66a fits within annular aperture 78 to permit full withdrawal of bull nose 34a away from housing 55a.

Spacer 68a/68b has a concave inner surface conforming to diaphragm 60a/60b when bull nose 34a/34b is in an open position, such as seen in valved coupler 20a of Fig. 3. Spacer 68a/68b thereby provides support for diaphragm 60a/60b against gas pressure and prevents unnecessary flexing thereof.

Main housing 55a/55b includes threads 72a/72b along its cylindrical inner periphery for receiving a cylindrical compression head 74a/74b having mating threads on its exterior periphery. Compression head 74a/74b engages spacer 68a/68b and provides compressive force against spacer 68a/68b to clamp the peripheral rim of diaphragm 60a/60b

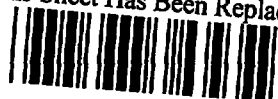


between spacer 68a/68b and housing projection
70a/70b, as noted above.

Spacer 68a/68b further includes air
passages such as 75a/75b passing therethrough in an
5 axial direction. Air passage 75a/75b is in
communication with an annular channel 76a/76b formed
in compression head 74a/74b. A further channel
77a/77b formed in compression head 74a/74b leads
from channel 76a/76b to the clean-room atmosphere
10 surrounding valved coupler 20a/20b. Air passage
75a/75b and channels 76a/76b and 77a/77b permit air
flow from a region behind diaphragm 60b to or from
the clean-room atmosphere outside of valved coupler
20a/20b so that air pressure from a rear side of
15 diaphragm 60a does not inhibit movement of valve
stem 32a/32b.

In pneumatically-actuated embodiments of a
valved coupler, such as are shown in Fig. 3, main
housing 55a/55b attaches to a drive housing 80a/80b.
20 Drive housing 80a/80b is attached to main housing
55a/55b by a drive wire 82a/82b inserted into an
annular channel formed between compression head
74a/74b and drive housing 80a/80b. This drive wire
82a/82b connection permits drive housing 80a/80b to
25 rotate relative to main housing 55a/55b about their

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central axes as needed to permit connection of
pneumatic gas to drive housing 80a/80b.

Drive housing 80a/80b surrounds valve stem
32a/32b and includes a pneumatic piston-and-cylinder
5 for driving stem 32a/32b to an open or closed
position. Specifically, housing 80a/80b defines a
central cylinder 84a/84b. A piston 86a/86b mounted
to stem 32a/32b is slidably positioned within
cylinder 84a/84b. Piston 86a/86b is actuated
10 axially through housing 80a/80b by pneumatic
pressure from pressurized gas injected into cylinder
84a/84b via a pneumatic control line 22 (see Figs. 1
and 2) welded to tube-stub forming a pneumatic
control port 91a/91b. (Alternatively, as seen in
15 Fig. 1, pneumatic control lines may be threadedly
coupled to pneumatic control port 91a/91b, in which
case the port might be smaller in diameter.) Valve
stem 32a/32b carries grooves for retaining annular
locking rings 92a/92b on opposite sides of piston
20 86a/86b, such that valve stem 32a/32b is
mechanically coupled to movements of piston 86a/86b.

A passage 93a/93b carries pressurized gas
from control ports 91a/91b to a front side of piston
86a/86b, so that when pressure is applied, piston
25 86a/86b is driven from the position shown in drive



housing 80b to the position shown in drive housing 80a.

Housing 80a/80b includes interior threads at 94a/94b for receiving a cylindrical cap 96a/96b which is similarly threaded at its exterior cylindrical surface. A helical compression spring 98a/98b is captured between cap 96a/96b and piston 86a/86b. Spring 98a/98b provides an expansive force against piston 86a/86b and stem 32a/32b driving these elements toward main housing 55a/55b to cause sealing engagement of bull nose 34a/34b with aperture 56a/56b of housing 55a/55b. Thus, when pneumatic pressure is removed, spring 98a/98b automatically causes closure of valved coupler 20a/20b.

In accordance with the above description, it will be appreciated that the valve structure shown in Fig. 3 is a "normally closed" valve, i.e., it will close and remain closed when pneumatic pressure is removed. In an alternative embodiment for a specific application, a "normally open" valve could also be fabricated by forming channel 93a/93b to communicate between control ports 91a/91b and the space between a rear side of piston 86a/86b and cap 96a/96b. Also the orientation of piston 86a/86b and



position of spring 98a/98b would be reversed such
that spring 98a/98b is captured between a front side
of piston 86a/86b and housing 80a/80b. Finally, an
air passage from the housing to the external
5 environment would be provided to permit air captured
between a front side of piston 86a/86b and housing
80a/80b to vent to the exterior environment.

Main housing 55b of valved coupler 20b is
permanently mounted to the housing of mass flow
10 controller 38 to form a gas stick 12, as is seen in
its entirety in Fig. 2. Accordingly, housing 55b of
coupler 20b includes passage 35 which connects to
the inlet of the mass flow controller. Furthermore,
main housing 55b includes a heater jacket 51
15 attached to power lines 50. Referring back to Fig.
2, it will be seen that coupler 20c is also
integrally formed with an output side of gas stick
12, and contains structures which are similar, but
mirror-image, to those found in coupler 20b.

20 Referring now to Fig. 4, the details of
the passageway adjoining mating valved couplers can
be examined. This passageway is formed by the
apertures 56a and 56b into housings 55a and 55b of
couplers 20a and 20b. Housings 55a and 55b include,
25 at the outer peripheries of apertures 56a, 56b,



respective annular clamping jaws 99a and 99b. These jaws mate to form a circular clamping structure 102 surrounding apertures 56a and 56b. A packing gland 100 (deformable washer), is inserted into the
5 circular clamp 102 formed by jaws 99a and 99b. Packing gland 100 forms a fluid tight seal preventing seepage of fluid from apertures 56a and 56b and the passageway therebetween, into the joint 104 between housings 55a and 55b. Packing gland 100
10 is permanently deformed between jaws 99a and 99b when housings 55a and 55b are conjoined, and must be replaced after each separation of housings 55a and 55b.

As is best seen in Fig. 4, when the bull
15 noses 34a and 34b are both in their closed positions shown in Fig. 4, both of apertures 56a and 56b are sealed. Furthermore, the bull noses 34a and 34b are substantially coplanar with the exterior surfaces of the valve housing along joint 104. As a result,
20 only a minuscule volume is contained in the region between bull noses 34a and 34b.

In use, the valved coupler structure shown in the Figs. 1-4 provides a substantially improved coupling and shutoff valve for ultra high purity gas
25 processing applications such as semiconductor



manufacturing. As can be best seen, for example, in Fig. 2, the valved couplers form matable pairs.

When both valves of a matable pair of couplers are in the off position, as seen in Fig. 4,

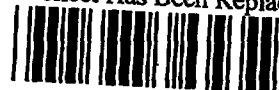
5 substantially no wetted surface of the inside of the valve will be exposed to external air when the coupler is separated (see Fig. 5, discussed below). Thus, the couplers may be separated without leakage of atmosphere into the coupler valve chambers 30a
10 and 30b through apertures 56a and 56b, and thus without accumulation of moisture or dust within the couplers or the attached gas processing elements.

Furthermore, it will be noted that, when the valved couplers are disconnected in the closed
15 position, the only internal wetted surface of the valve which is exposed to atmosphere is a small area at the extreme end of the bull nose. Accordingly, only this small area may accumulate dust or moisture when the valved couplers are disconnected and
20 reconnected. Thus, contamination of internal wetted surface of tubing or gas processing elements connected by the couplers will be substantially reduced and the purging required upon replacement of an element substantially reduced.



Accordingly, in accordance with principles of the present invention, valved couplers are positioned on opposing sides of a gas processing element to facilitate replacement of that element without substantial contamination. Thus, an entire gas stick 12, as seen in Fig. 2, may be surrounded by valved couplers 20 so that the entire gas stick 12 may be replaced without substantial contamination of the attached tubing. In an alternative application, shown in Fig. 5, an individual component of the gas distribution system or gas stick, such as a filter 120 or as an alternative example a gas purifier, is coupled to the remainder of the system or stick by a pair of valved couplers 20b and 20c so that this element may be removed and replaced without substantial contamination of either the filter or the remainder of the gas stick.

For each of these applications, it is contemplated that separate components (Fig. 5), or an entire gas stick (Fig. 2), will be supplied from a manufacturer with the valved couplers surrounding the component factory-sealed, with the component preserved therebetween in a controlled environment, such as in pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly above atmospheric. Furthermore, it is contemplated



that the component will be factory-purged of any impurities prior to factory-sealing of the associated valved couplers.

Specifically, it is contemplated that a
5 gas stick or component will be heated in a vacuum oven to bake out impurities, and then back filled with pure Nitrogen for several cycles to remove all air and moisture. Subsequently, the clean assembly will be charged with Nitrogen and placed in sealed
10 Nitrogen filled bags for shipment. As a result, when the gas stick or component is added to the gas distribution system, it need only be briefly purged to eliminate any impurities acquired by the small wetted surfaces of the end of bullnose 34 during its
15 brief exposure to clean room air, and then immediately thereafter used in processing. Because the individual component or entire gas stick is supplied pre-purged, and internal wetted surfaces thereof are not exposed to contamination from air,
20 delays for purging are substantially reduced as compared to those needed when replacing a component in a typical gas sticks in the prior art.

In an embodiment where, for example, a gas purifier is isolated between valved couplers in this
25 manner, the present invention has particular



advantage, in that purifier elements are often consumed by room air. The isolation procedure described above would prevent even brief exposure of the purifier element to room air and thus substantially reduce consumption of the element by room air during installation. (The use of couplers in accordance with the present invention in conjunction with a gas purifier will be noted below in connection with Fig. 9.)

An additional advantage of the valved coupler structure described herein is the inclusion of dual valves within each coupler joint. Specifically, the valve formed by a bull nose 34 and associated housing aperture 56 may be used as a shutoff valve during semiconductor processing, by automatic or manual (see below) actuation of the valve stem 32 and bull nose 34.

Typically, shutoff valves are positioned on either side of a mass flow controller and both shutoff valves are closed when gas flow is halted. In a typical gas stick, these shutoff valves are coupled to a mass flow controller through separate couplers and tubing.

By providing a combined coupler and shutoff valve, the present invention substantially



reduces the size and complexity of a gas stick. The integration of both functions into a single integral unit such as shown in Fig. 2, permits substantial reduction in the size of a gas stick, with the
5 resulting advantages identified above.

Another advantage arises from the provision for dual shutoff valves at each coupling. Specifically, as can be seen in Fig. 3, one coupler of a pair of valved couplers may be used as a
10 shutoff valve while the other coupler is held in an open position. For example, comparing Fig. 2 to Fig. 3, a shutoff function may be achieved by cycling valved coupler 20b between open and closed positions while holding 20a in an open position. By
15 cycling one coupler in this manner while holding the opposing coupler open, only one coupler accumulates wear while the other coupler remains unused. Accordingly, when coupler 20b nears the end of its useful life, the roles of the couplers may be
20 reversed, and coupler 20a cycled thereafter to provide shutoff valving. As a consequence, the useful life of the shutoff valves in a pair of valved couplers, can be as much as twice the useful life of a single shutoff valve. By thus extending
25 the useful life of the shutoff valves, the valved

coupler structure of the invention may extend the time between refurbishments of the gas stick due to valve wear, and enhance productivity.

Now turning to a detailed discussion of Fig. 5, an alternative embodiment of a valved coupler 20c and 20d provides for manual actuation of the valve stem 32c/32d. In this embodiment, certain parts of the pneumatically actuated valve discussed above are modified to provide manual actuation. As was the case in Fig. 3, elements of couplers 20c and 20d (other than the main housings 55c and 55d) have mirror-image construction, and for clarity like elements from both couplers will be discussed below simultaneously, with reference to corresponding reference numerals.

In this manually-actuated embodiment, the main valve chamber 30c/30d and diaphragm 60c/60d are identical to those used in a pneumatically-actuated valved coupler such as those discussed above with reference to Fig. 3. Furthermore, diaphragm 60c/60d is welded/clamped to bullnose 34c/34d and stem 32c/32d and housing 55c/55d in a manner identical to that discussed above with reference to Fig. 3.

The manually-actuated embodiment differs from the pneumatically actuated embodiment of Fig.



3, in that a modified valve stem 32c/32d is used in conjunction with an alternative compression head 174c/174d and spacer 106c/106d, in place of the stem 32a/32b, compression head 74a/74b, and drive housing 80a/80b shown in Fig. 3. Specifically, the modified spacer 106c/106d has a central aperture sized slightly larger than the outer diameter of handle 112c/112d to fit around the innermost end of handle 112c/112d. As in the prior embodiment, compression head 174c/174d is threaded at its outer periphery for engagement to an inner threaded periphery of housing 55c/55d, and drives spacer 106c/106d into engagement with diaphragm 60c/60d opposite housing projection 70c/70d. Accordingly, spacer 106c/106d compresses and seals diaphragm 106c/106d to main housing 55c/55d and minimizes leakage therebetween.

Compression head 174c/174d is formed with a central cylindrical recess 108c/108d for supporting the manual actuation handle 112c/112d and accompanying bearings, etc. An end of valve stem 32c/32d opposite bull nose 34c/34d extends into this recess 108c/108d. This end of valve stem 32c/32d includes external threads 110c/110d. Handle 112c/112d inserted in recess 108c/108d includes a

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bore 113c/113d having threads matable with threads 110c/110d of valve stem 32c/32d.

Handle 112c/112d also includes an annular projection 117c/117d sized for insertion within
5 recess 108c/108d to axially constrain handle 112c/112d but permit rotation. Annular bearings 114c/114d are fitted on opposing sides of projection 117c/117d to permit rotation thereof while
constraining axial movement of handle 112c/112d. A
10 cap 116c/116d fitted into recess 108c/108d
constrains axial movement of bearings 114c/114d and
handle 112c/112d.

A channel 118c/118d formed in compression
head 174c/174d provides a path for air flow to/from
15 a rearward side of diaphragm 60c/60d through spacer 106c/106d, and thus prevents air compression behind diaphragm 60c/60d that would otherwise inhibit
opening or closing of the valve (as was the case
with channels 75/76/77 of the pneumatically-actuated
20 valve of Fig. 3).

When the valve has been manually actuated
to a fully open position, as shown in coupler 20d,
diaphragm 60d abuts an underside of handle 112d and
spacer 106d. This prevents further rotation of
25 handle 112d and over-travel of diaphragm 60d.



In use of the foregoing structure,
rotation of handle 112c/112d causes axial
translation of valve stem 32c/32d axially toward or
away from housing 55c/55d to or from an open end
5 closed position. Thus, the valve of the valved
coupler may be manually actuated using handle.

Manually actuatable valved couplers may be
used in applications where a pneumatically actuatable
shutoff valve is not needed. For example, in the
10 embodiment shown in Fig. 5, housing 55b of valved
coupler 20b and housing 55c of valved coupler 20c
are integrally formed with a housing for supporting
a filter 120, which filters gas flow between main
valve chamber 30b and main valve chamber 30c.
15 Since, in a typical application, only one
pneumatically-actuated shutoff valve is used on each
side of the mass flow controller in a gas stick,
there is no need for two pneumatically actuated
shutoff valves on each side of filter 120.
20 Accordingly, couplers 20a and 20b are configured for
pneumatic control whereas couplers 20c and 20d are
configured for manual control. In such an
application, couplers 20c and 20d would be manually
placed in a closed position only when the filter or
25 an adjoining element is detached therefrom;



otherwise, the manually actuated couplers 20c and 20d would remain in an open position.

As before, a filter element 120 and adjoining integral valved couplers could be supplied from the manufacturer in a controlled environment (e.g., in pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly elevated above atmospheric) and pre-purged of impurities, permitting rapid installation of the filter into the gas stick and use after only a brief purging.

It is contemplated that other gas processing elements may similarly be isolated between valved couplers, or incorporated integrally into the housings of adjoining valved couplers, to obtain the advantages noted above. For example, as noted above, a purifier, or in-line regulator, might be positioned between or valved couplers, or the valved couplers might be integrally incorporated into the housings of these elements. Various embodiments and applications of this sort are discussed below in connection with Fig. 9.

Another application in which manually-actuated valved couplers might be used, is where a valved coupler is used to control flow of a high-pressure gas. In such a case, it may be impractical



to use a pneumatically actuated valved coupler. For example, referring to Fig. 2, if a high pressure gas is input to coupler 20a via inlet line 14, when coupler valve stem 32a is in the open position, a
5 large force would need to be applied (by spring 98b) to valve stem 32b to overcome the gas pressure and hold coupler 20b closed, i.e., in the position shown in Fig. 3. However, a large force of this kind, is likely to unacceptably deform gasket 58b over a few
10 open-close cycles, and thereby dramatically reduce the number of cycles that could be obtained from the valve.

Accordingly, where a high pressure gas is in use, the input-side coupler 20b may be a
15 manually-actuated coupler such as those shown in Fig. 5, which is opened after coupler 20b has been connected to coupler 20a, and left open throughout later processing. Coupler 20a (which is not subject to the pressures described in the previous
20 paragraph) could then be cycled to provide a shut-off capability. As noted above, an example of a gas stick using a manually-actuated coupler is shown in Fig. 1, coupler 220.

In high-pressure applications, it is
25 particularly important to incorporate a heater into



the coupler such as heater 51 shown in Fig. 2. A pressure drop is likely to be experienced in the coupler, which will cause a temperature drop through the effect known as Joule-Thompson cooling. The temperature drop can be significant for particular gasses used in semiconductor processing. Accordingly, it is important to heat the coupler housing to prevent the condensation of gas or formation of icicles in the coupler.

Now referring to Fig. 6, an alternative embodiment of the present invention includes a horizontally disposed valve stem 130 which engages a main valve housing 132 at a gasket 134. Valve stem 130 moves horizontally through housing 132. A disc-shaped diaphragm 136 is welded and clamped between valve stem 130 and an actuator 138, in a manner discussed above. Diaphragm 136 is further clamped at its outer peripheral edge between main housing 132 and actuator housing 133, providing a fluid-tight seal.

Actuator 138 includes a rack 140 of teeth engageable with a pinion 142. Pinion 142 is actuated by an actuator with a second rack of teeth 144, which is in turn coupled to, for example, a pneumatically actuated piston and cylinder assembly



146. Assembly 146 may include a spring return to return stem 130 to the closed position shown in Fig. 6, so that the valve returns to a seal when pneumatic pressure is removed. Alternatively,
5 assembly 146 may return stem 130 to the open position in the absence of pneumatic pressure. As a second alternative, assembly 146 may include a manually-controlled actuator.

As seen by comparison of Fig. 6 and Fig.
10 7, when the valve is moved to an open position, rack 144 is ejected outward from assembly 146 in response to pneumatic actuation, causing rotation of pinion 142 clockwise about its axis and thereby causing horizontal movement of valve stem 130 away from
15 gasket 134.

The main housing 132 may be coupled to a gas processing component such as a mass flow controller 38 or other component. Mass flow controller 38 includes an outer housing 148 having a
20 substantially planar surface 160 for mating with main valve housing 132. A bull nose 150 is supported within outer housing 148 for actuation by valve stem 130. Bull nose 150 is spring biased into contact with outer housing 148 by a spider (annular
25 spring) 152. Bull nose 150 carries a gasket 154 for



sealing to outer housing 148 when in engagement therewith.

5 - Outer housing 148 is held in engagement with main housing 132 by a nut 156 having an internal threaded surface 158 matable with external threads on main valve housing 132. Planar surface 160 of outer housing 148 mates to a similar planar surface 160 of main valve housing 132. A packing gland (deformable metal gasket) 162 inserted between
10 outer housing 148 and main housing 132 provides a seal preventing fluid flow from inside of the valve housing.

As before, mass flow controller 38 may be integrally constructed with a filter 162, as well as
15 other components such as a mass flow controller or a pressure sensor, and/or other components.

In use, comparing Fig. 6 to Fig. 7, it will be seen that horizontal actuation of valve stem 130 causes stem 130 to abut bullnose 150, and
20 overcome the spring force of spider 152 to push bullnose 150 out of engagement with outer housing 148. Thus, in the position shown in Fig. 7, gas flow is permitted through the valve structure whereas in the position shown in Fig. 6, gas flow is
25 inhibited.



As can be seen in Fig. 8, the valved coupling of Figs. 6-7 may be disconnected along surfaces 160 and separated. In such a situation, valve stem 130 and bull nose 150 seal the interior wetted surfaces of the housings and adjacent structures so that, as before, moisture and dust are prevented from contacting those interior wetted surfaces.

Here, as in the first embodiment described with reference to Figs. 1-5, the advantages of the present invention are obtained because valve stem 130 and bull nose 150, which move along a center axis extending through the aperture in the valve housings 132 and 148, come to rest at a position where the outer surface of the stem 130 and bull nose 150 is approximately coplanar with the adjoining surfaces 160 of the two sides of the coupler, so that a minimal wetted surface of the valve is exposed when the coupler is disconnected.

While the present invention has been illustrated by a description of various embodiments and while these embodiments have been described in considerable detail, it is not the intention of the applicants to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional



advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art.

As one example, the gas stick illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2 may be integrally combined with a pressure regulator, for example in place of pressure sensor 24 or in addition thereto. Further, the valved couplers may have a second inlet aperture, for example for purging gas.

As a second example, the disclosed valved couplers could be advantageously used in connection with other components in a gas distribution system to permit high-purity coupling/uncoupling of gas lines from these components.

Referring to Fig. 9, valved couplers 220 might be used at the connection of tubing to a gas source, e.g. a gas cylinder in a cylinder cabinet 170 or a tank on a gas pad 172. In these cases, a valved coupler in accordance with principles of the present invention might be formed integrally with or connected by tubing to a standard gas coupling.

Additional valved couplers 220 might be provided on either side of a purifier 174 and 176 to facilitate replacement of the purifier. Further valved couplings 220 might be provided on either side of a manifold box 178 and 180 which distributes



gas from one of the sources 170 and 172 to multiple gas boxes 10. Also, couplers 20 might be used at the connections leading from a gas box to process equipment 182 and 184.

5 In a typical application, couplers 220 connected to the gas sources 170 and 172, purifier 174 and 176 and manifold boxes 178 and 180 would be manually-actuated couplers, as these connections are not typically opened and closed regularly during
10 processing. However, couplers 20 attached to the gas boxes 10 and connected to the process equipment 182 and 184 would be pneumatically actuated since these connections are regularly opened and closed during processing.

15 Thus, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details, representative apparatus and method, and illustrative example shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such
20 details without departing from the spirit or scope of applicant's general inventive concept.

What is claimed is:

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Claims

1. A valved coupler for ultra high purity gas distribution, comprising

a valve housing having an external surface, an internal surface defining a gas-carrying chamber, and first and second aperture-defining surfaces extending from said inner surface to said outer surface and defining first and second apertures permitting gas flow between said gas-carrying chamber and an external environment to which the external surface of the housing is exposed,

a valve stem having proximal and distal ends slidably mounted within said housing for linear movement between a first position and a second position, along an axis extending through said first aperture, said valve stem having a sealing surface at said distal end,

a substantially planar flexible diaphragm having an outer periphery and an inner periphery, said inner periphery sealingly engaged to said valve stem, said outer periphery sealingly engaged to said internal surface of said housing, dividing said internal surface of said housing into two sections, said aperture-defining surfaces communicating

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between said outer surface and a common section of said internal surface of said housing,

wherein at said first position, said sealing surface of said valve stem engages said first aperture-surrounding surface of said housing, and a distal end of said valve stem is substantially coplanar with said outer surface of said housing in a region bordering said first aperture-defining surface, whereby when said first aperture is sealed by said bullnose only a minimal fraction of said inner surface of said housing is exposed to the external environment.

2. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein said sealing surface engages said aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said inner surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface of said valve stem withdraws into said housing and away from said outer surface of said housing.

3. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein





said sealing surface engages said aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said outer surface of said housing, and

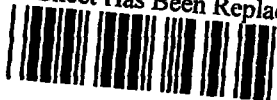
moving said valve stem from said first position to said second position comprises moving said sealing surface outwardly from said housing such that said distal end of said valve stem extends beyond said outer surface of said housing.

4. The valved coupler of claim 1, further comprising a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and further defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said actuating cylinder,

wherein said valve stem further comprises a piston at said proximal end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder, and

further comprising a spring applying a force between said drive housing and said valve stem to move said valve stem toward said first position,

whereby said valve stem may be actuated from said first position to said second position by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture.





5. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein
said sealing surface engages said
aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said inner
surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing
surface of said valve stem withdraws into said
housing and away from said outer surface of said
housing, and

said spring urges said valve stem toward
said first aperture and said surface into engagement
with said aperture-surrounding surface.

6. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein
said sealing surface engages said
aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said outer
surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing
surface extends outwardly from said housing such
that said distal end of said valve stem extends
outside said outer surface of said housing, and

said spring urges said valve stem inwardly
into said housing and said surface into engagement
with said aperture-surrounding surface.

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7. The valved coupler of claim 1, further comprising

a pinion journaled for driven rotation in said housing, wherein

said valve stem includes a toothed surface at its proximal end engaging said pinion,

whereby rotation of said pinion causes motion of said stem between said first and second positions.

8. The valved coupler of claim 7, further comprising

a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said cylinder, and further comprising

an actuator carrying a piston at an end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder for movement along a second axis, and including a toothed surface engaging said pinion,

whereby said second stem is actuated along said second axis by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture,





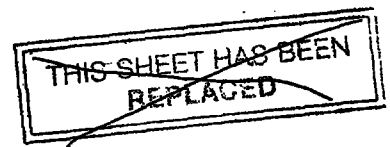
to cause rotation of said pinion and motion of said valve stem between said first and second positions.

9. The valved coupler of claim 8 further comprising

a spring applying a force between said housing and said actuator to move said actuator toward a starting position.

10. The valved coupler of claim 8 wherein said second axis and said axis extending through said first aperture are orthogonal to each other.





VALVED COUPLING FOR ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS
DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

Abstract of the Disclosure

Valved couplers 20 and gas processing components particularly suitable for ultra-high purity gas distribution for use in semiconductor manufacturing. In the couplers, a valve stem/bullnose 34 seals the aperture of the coupler 56 immediately adjacent the exterior of the coupler, so that only a minimal amount of the wetted surface of the coupler is exposed to the external environment. A gas processing component (e.g., a filter 120), or an entire integrated gas stick assembly 12, may be sealed from the exterior environment at both its inlet and outlet sides, by these valved couplers. As a result, the entire device can be purged after manufacture and left in a controlled environment during shipment and installation, reducing the need for purging after installation.

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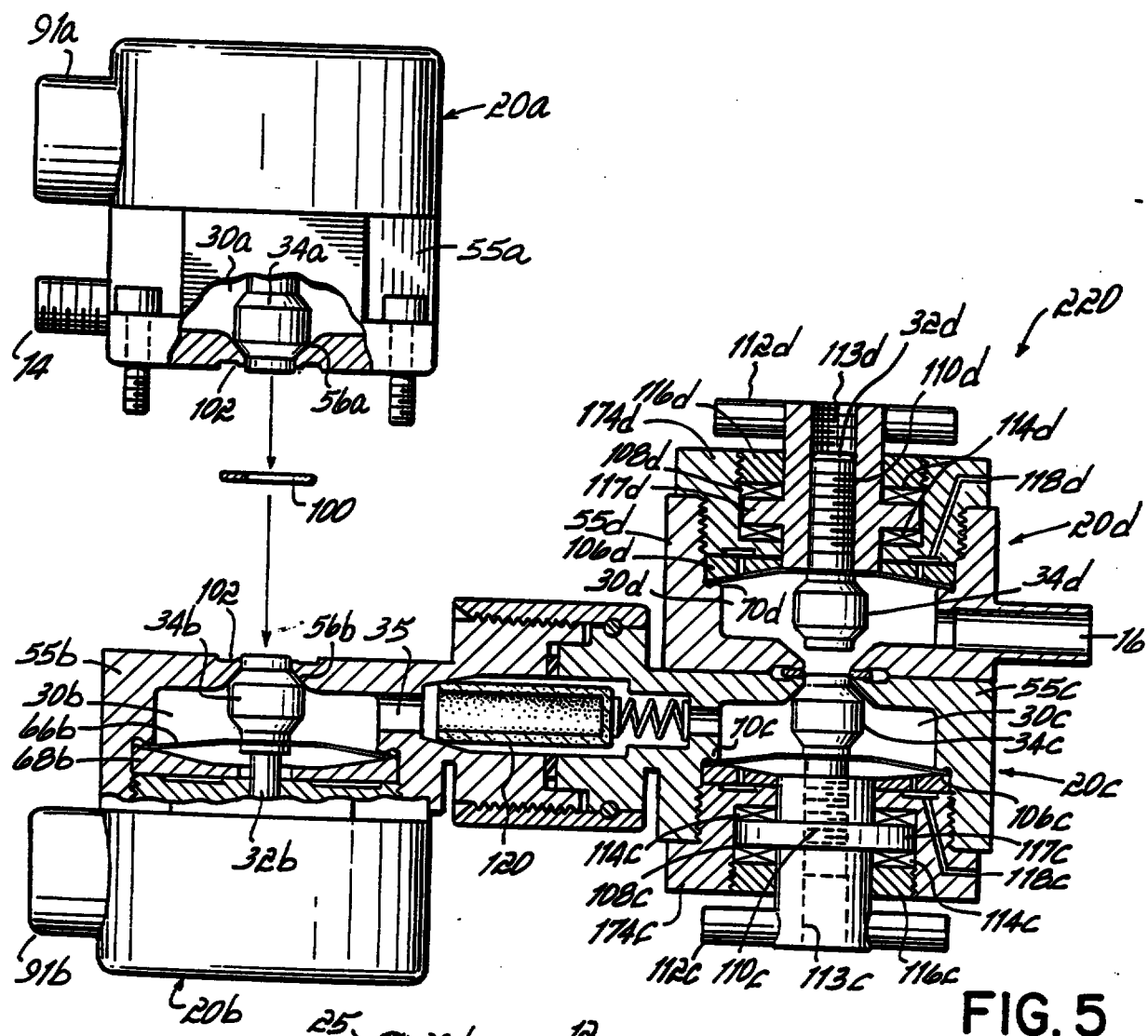


FIG. 5

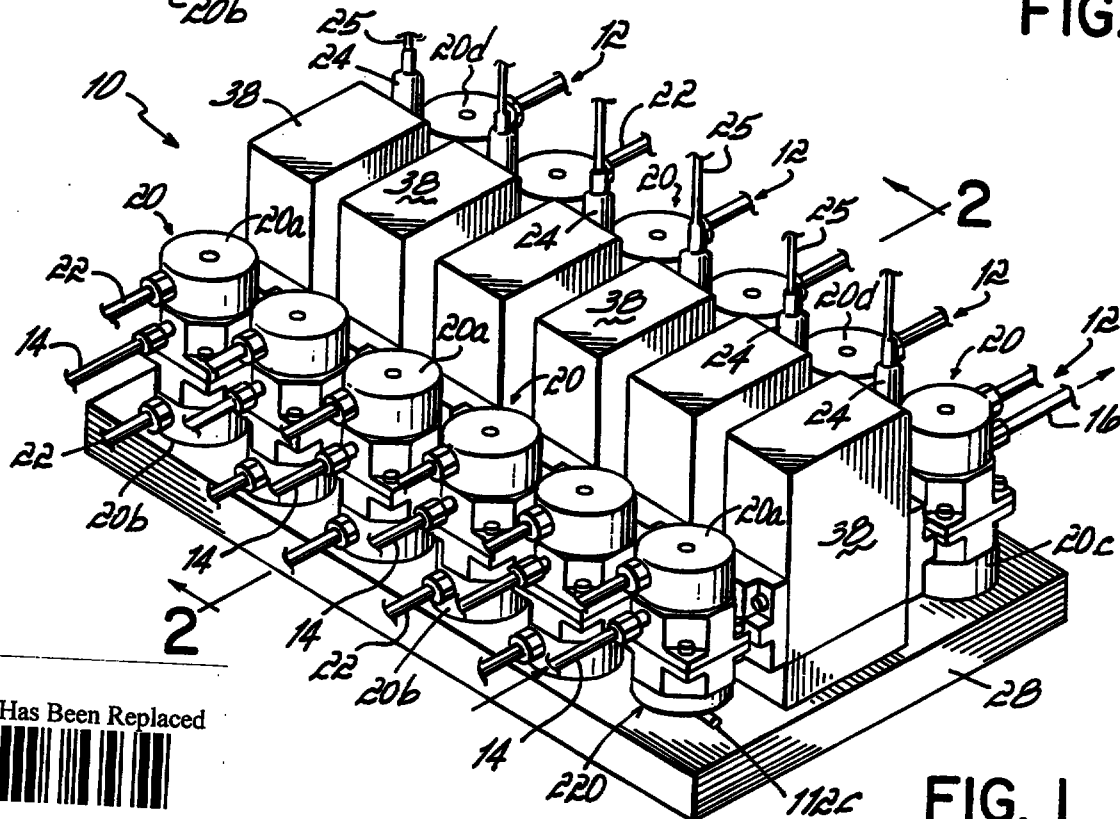


FIG. 1

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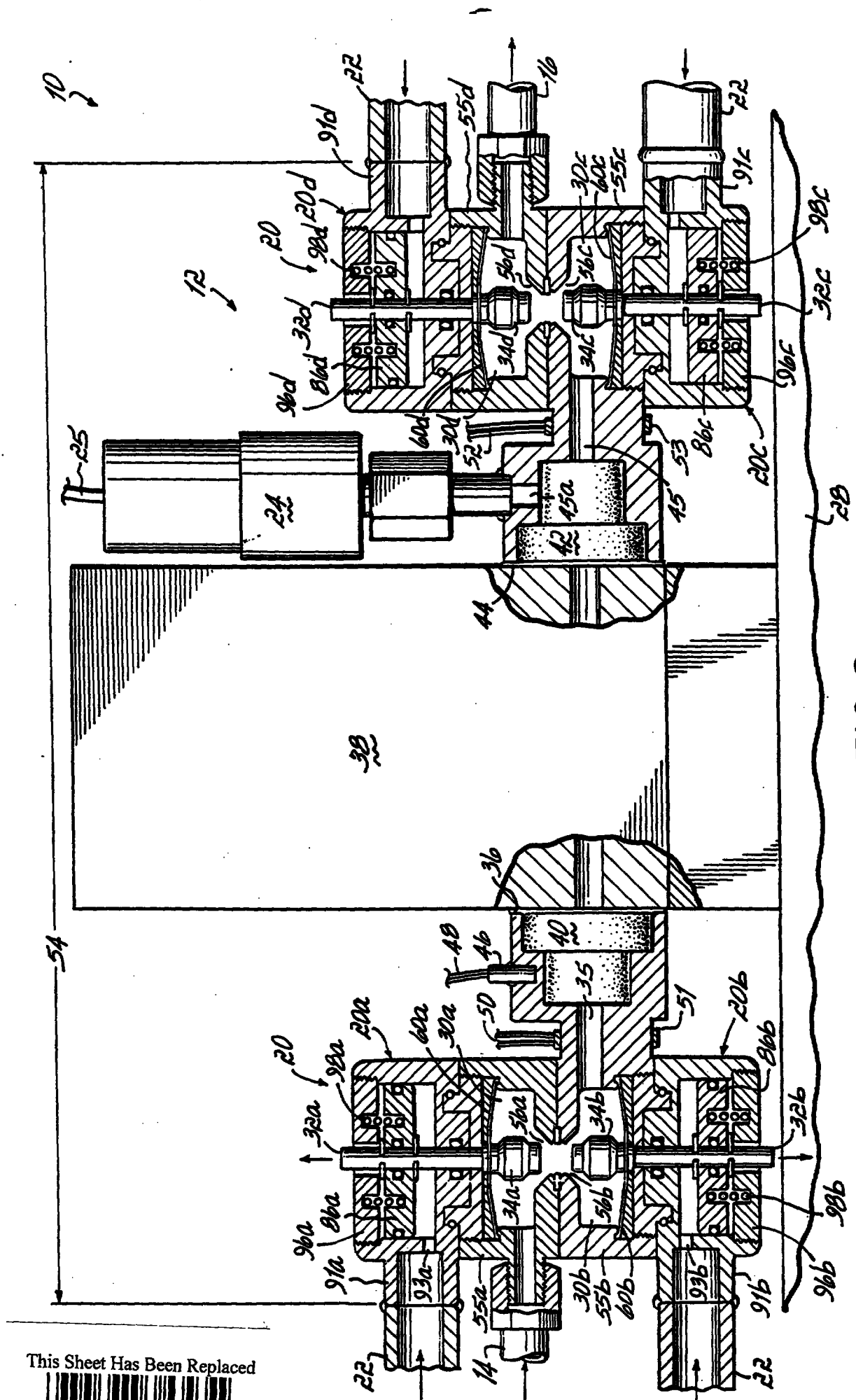
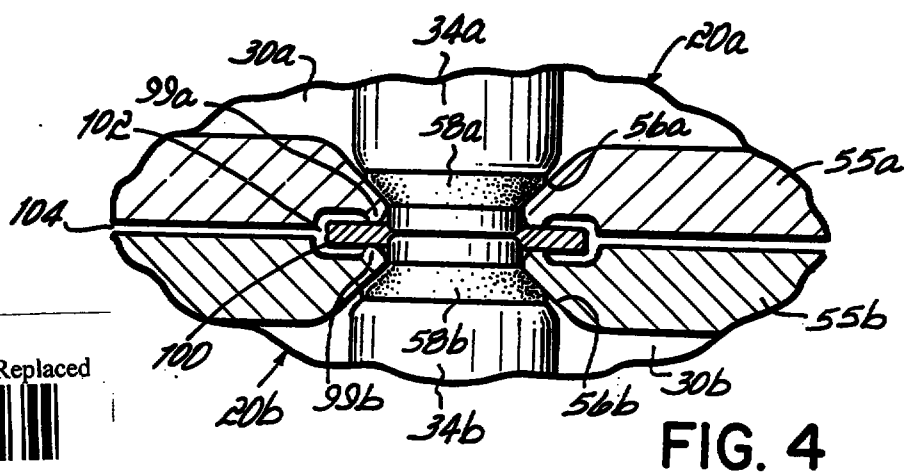
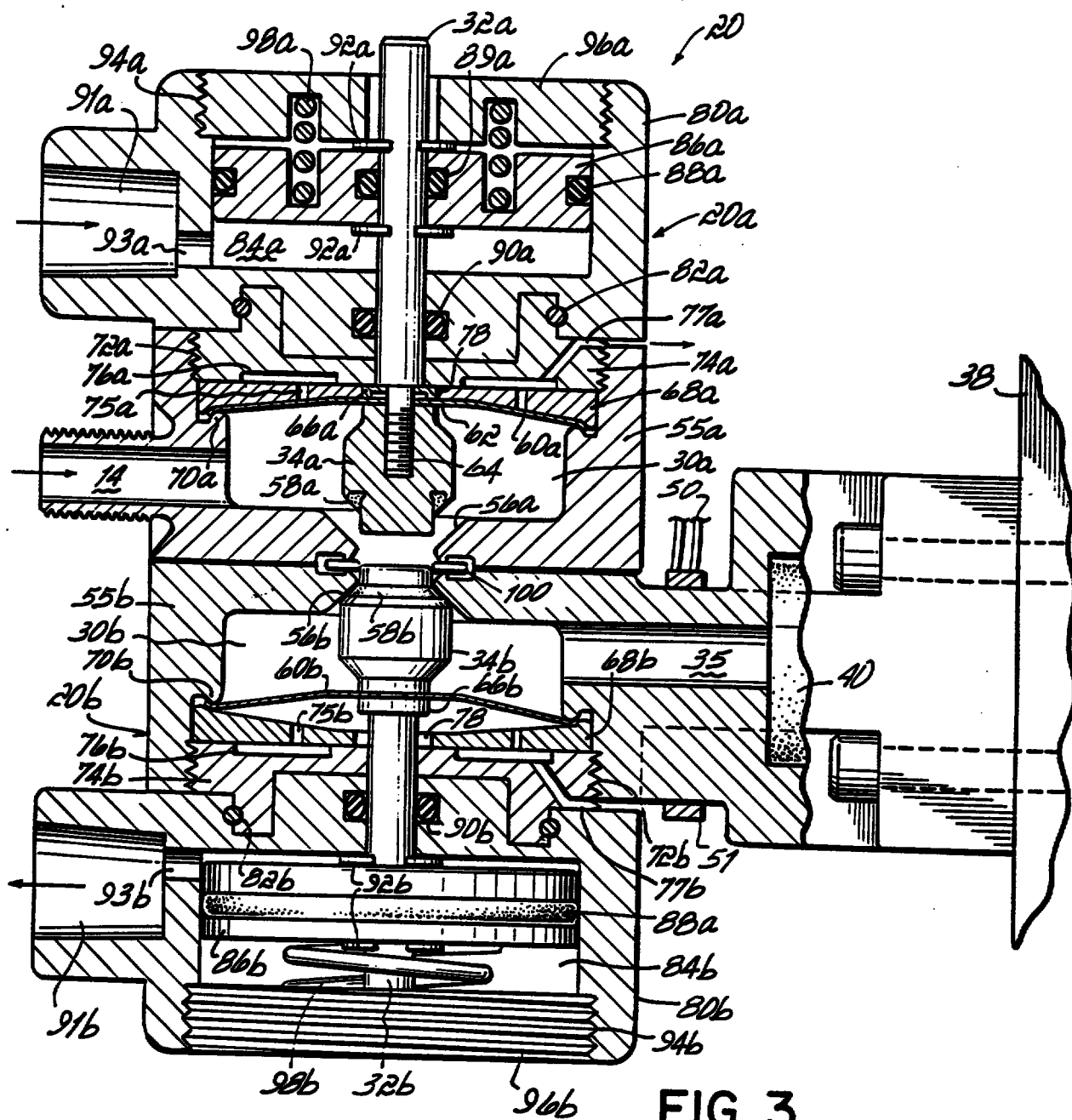


FIG. 2





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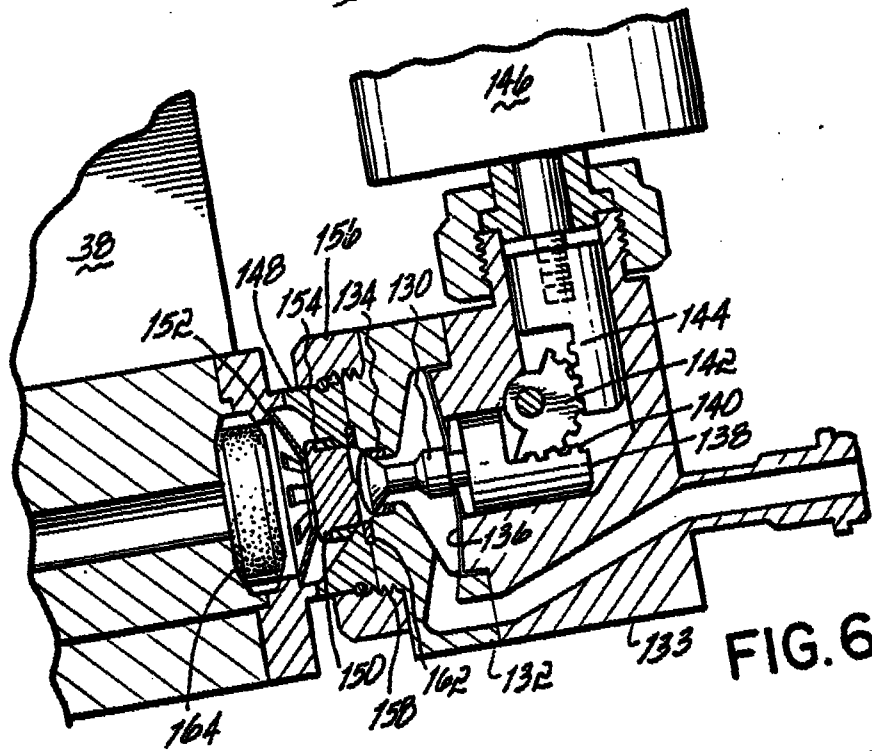


FIG. 6

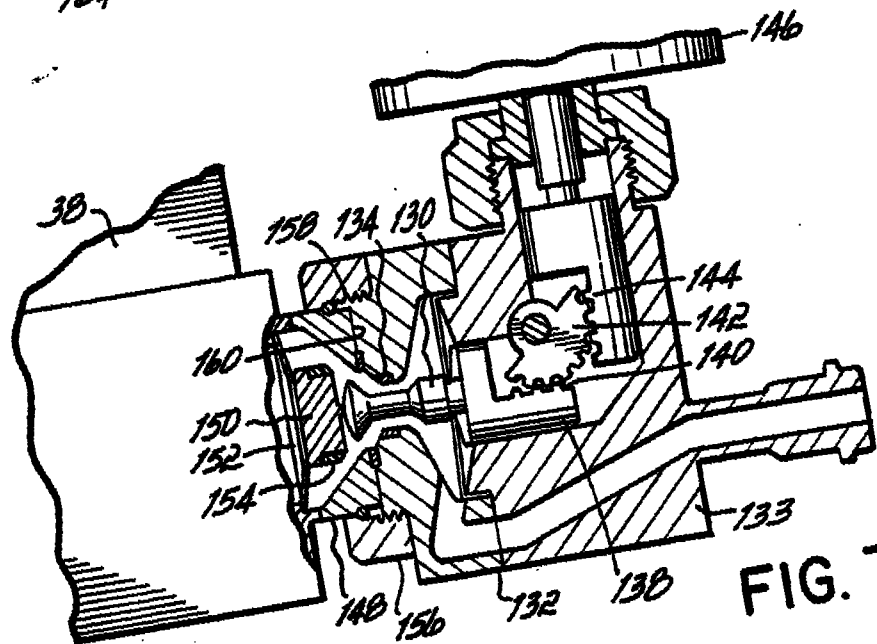


FIG. 7

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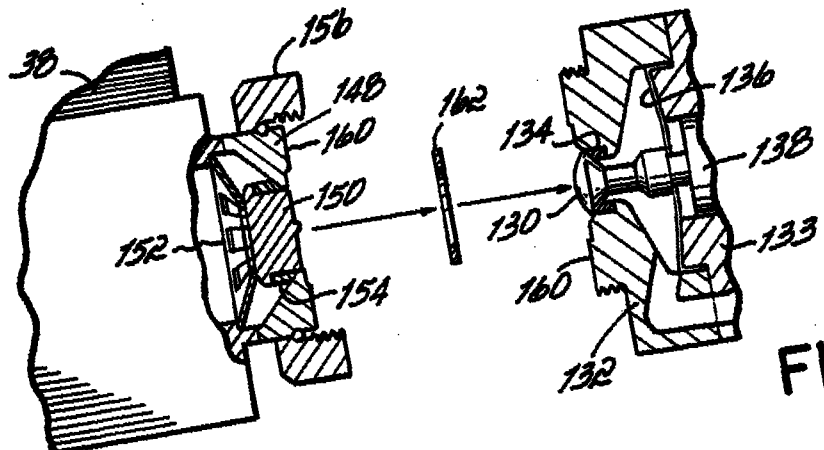


FIG. 8

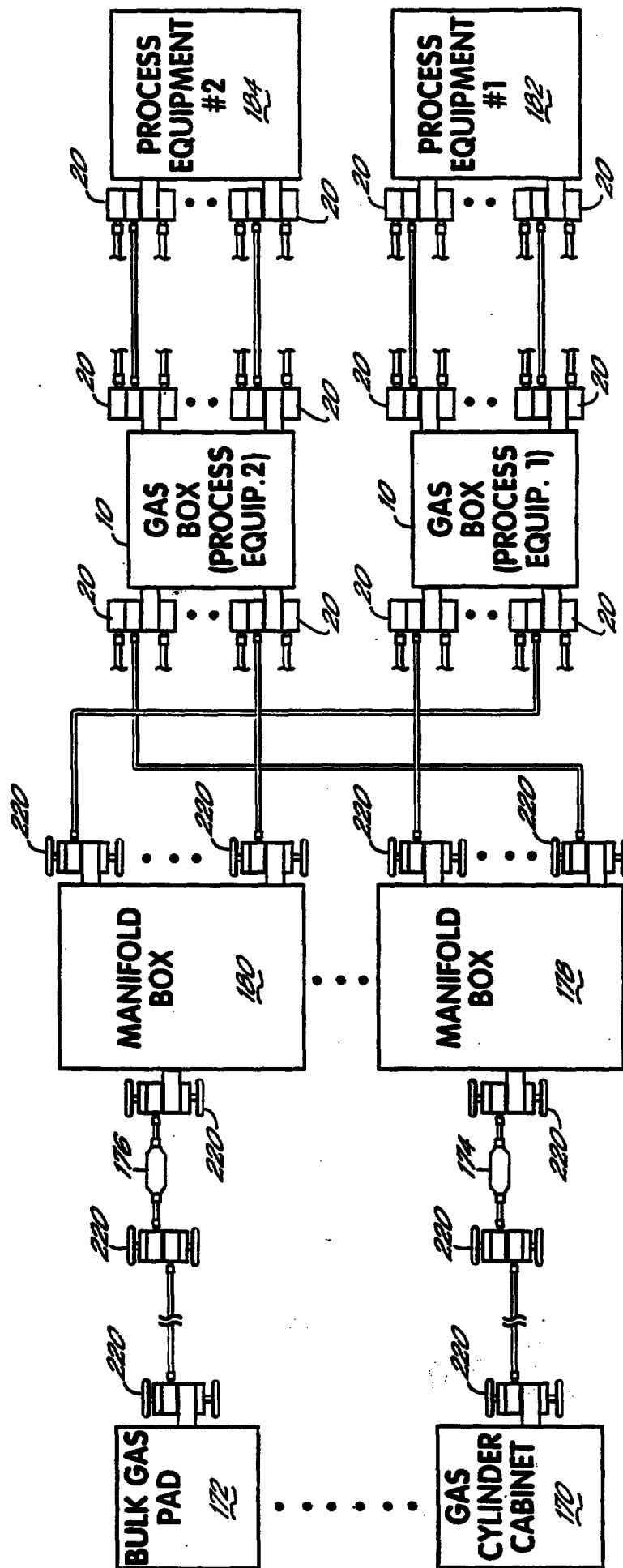


FIG. 9

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☒ Claim(s) : paged <u>44</u>	to paged <u>49</u>
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☐ Abstract : paged	to paged

REPLACEMENT SHEETS SG	
☒ Description : paged <u>1</u>	to paged <u>43</u>
☒ Claim(s) : paged <u>44</u>	to paged <u>49</u>
☒ Drawing(s) : paged	to paged <u>6</u>
☒ Abstract : paged <u>50</u>	to paged
DATE OF RECEIPT 22 MAY 1997	

VALVED COUPLING FOR ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

Cross Reference To Related Applications

5 This application is related to a copending application entitled ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS DISTRIBUTION COMPONENT WITH INTEGRAL VALVED COUPLING AND METHODS FOR ITS USE, filed simultaneously herewith and assigned to the same assignee, and

10 incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

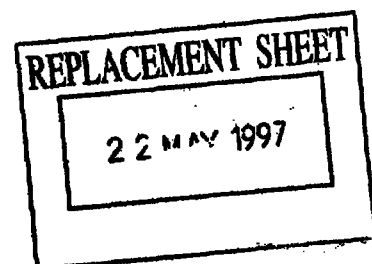
Field of the Invention

 The present invention relates to gas distribution systems for ultra-high purity gas, such as systems used to provide process gasses for

15 semiconductor manufacturing.

Background of the Invention

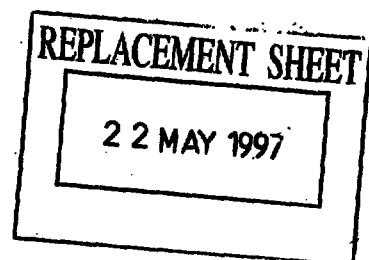
 High purity gas distribution systems, such as are used in semiconductor manufacturing or other thin film coating processes, typically include a



source of high purity gas coupled through a series of gas processing elements such as a mass flow controller, pressure sensor and/or regulator, heater, filters or purifiers, and shutoff valves.

5 In semiconductor processing, a series-connected set of such elements is referred to as a "gas stick". In a typical semiconductor processing apparatus, multiple gas sources are connected to the chamber through multiple gas sticks, which are typically
10 mounted to a frame, forming a complete assembly — known as a "gas box".

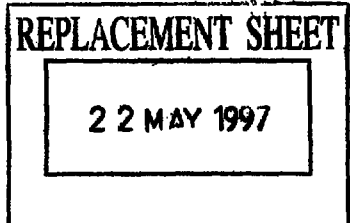
As the dimensions of semiconductor devices decrease and their density increases, semiconductor manufacturing processes have become increasingly
15 intolerant of particulate contamination. One important source of such contamination is the gasses used during the process, and particularly particulate carried by the wetted surfaces of the gas stick which delivers gas from the source to the
20 chamber. Moisture or dust which accumulates within a gas stick or processing component will be carried with the source gas and deposit onto the semiconductor devices being processed, creating defects. Moisture also may corrode the wetted



surfaces, leading to flaking of particles from these surfaces.

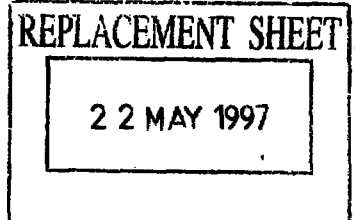
To reduce contamination of this sort, gas sticks and gas processing components for semiconductor processing are manufactured in low-dust, low-moisture environments, and purged for lengthy periods of time at elevated pressures after manufacture. Furthermore, gas processing components are typically packaged and sealed in pressurized nitrogen for shipment. As a result, the interior of the component or stick is exposed only to the clean room environment in which the semiconductor processing equipment is located, and only for the brief period of time between removal of the packaging and sealing of the stick or component into the processing equipment.

Despite these careful handling procedures, even brief exposure of a gas stick or component to clean room air results in the accumulation of potentially damaging levels of particulate and moisture within the stick or component, requiring extensive purging of the gas stick after assembly, and prior to further use for semiconductor manufacturing. Because the semiconductor manufacturing equipment cannot operate during



purging, the time needed for purging represents substantial lost revenue.

5 The gas processing components in a gas stick, and other components and connections in the gas distribution system, will wear and need replacement at various frequencies throughout the life of the processing apparatus. Typically, a component is replaced by closing the valves most nearly adjacent to the component, uncoupling and
10 replacing the component, and reopening the adjacent valves. To simplify this operation and minimize the extent of the gas stick exposed to room air during this procedure, each component is typically connected to its neighboring components or tubing
15 with removable couplers, and valves are placed between components at several locations along the stick. Nevertheless, the act of uncoupling a component or portion of the stick and removing it from the stick exposes that component and the
20 replacement component to room air, and also exposes substantial wetted surface between the component and the nearest valves (including the inside of any connecting tubing, and potentially other components), to room air. Thus, the gas stick must

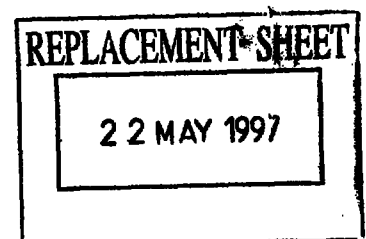


be extensively purged when the components are reassembled.

Summary of the Invention

5 The difficulties are alleviated in
accordance with principles of the present invention,
through the use of valved couplers particularly
suitable for an ultra-high purity gas distribution
system. These valved couplers may be integrally
10 incorporated into a gas processing component and/or
connected between such components, to permit
replacement of components or changes to connections
between components while exposing only a minute
wetted surface area of the gas distribution system
to room air. As a particular example, valved
15 couplers may be integrally incorporated into the
inlet and outlet of a gas stick, to permit
replacement of the entire gas stick.

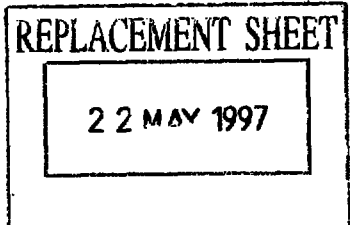
Specifically, a valved coupler in
accordance with principles of the present invention
20 has a valve stem/bullnose structure for sealing an
aperture of the coupler. The bullnose seals the
aperture immediately adjacent the exterior of the
coupler; the valve stem and bullnose move on an axis
extending through the aperture, and when the
25 bullnose is in position for sealing this aperture,



the end of the bullnose is substantially coplanar with the outside of the housing. As a result, when the bullnose is in this sealed position, only a minimal amount of the wetted surface of the coupler is exposed to the external environment.

In the first embodiment of the invention discussed below, the bullnose seals at an interior side of the aperture, and is withdrawn into the coupler to permit gas flow. In an alternative embodiment, the bullnose seals an exterior side of the aperture, and is moved outwardly from the coupler to permit gas flow.

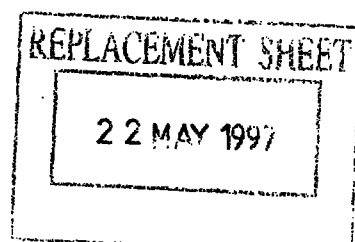
The valve stem may be pneumatically driven by a piston and cylinder arrangement connected to the coupler housing, or may be manually actuated. The pneumatically-actuated valve described below includes a return spring, which generates a force driving the bullnose into sealing engagement with the aperture, so that the valve is normally sealed in the absence of pneumatic pressure. As an alternative embodiment, the return spring drives the bullnose out of sealing engagement, so that the valve is normally open in the absence of pneumatic pressure. In a second alternative embodiment, a rack-and-pinion arrangement transfers vertically-



directed force from the pneumatic or manual actuator, to a horizontally-oriented valve stem.

In another aspect, the invention features a gas processing component (e.g., a filter), or
5 entire gas stick, which is sealed from the exterior environment at both its inlet and outlet sides, by valved couplers of the kind described above. Because the couplers seal the internal wetted surfaces of the component/gas stick from exposure to
10 the external environment, the entire device can be __ purged at the manufacturing site and left flooded with a controlled environment (e.g., pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly elevated above atmospheric) during shipment, such that the component/gas stick
15 can be installed and used after only brief purging.

The gas stick described below includes valved couplers integrally manufactured into the housing of the gas stick, and further includes a mass flow controller, dual filters on the inlet and
20 outlet sides of the mass flow controller, a pressure sensor, thermocouple, and heater. Additional elements such as a pressure regulator or purifier could also be integrally included in the gas stick as necessitated by the application.



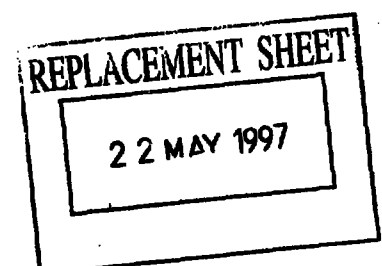
In a further aspect the invention features methods of using these devices. In particular, when two valved couplers are joined together, they may be used as shutoff valves by the gas processing apparatus. Because two conjoined couplers include two separate valves, and either valve can shut off gas flow through the couplers, wear caused by repetitive cycling of the valves can be distributed between the valves, resulting in increased lifetime of the conjoined couplers as compared to a separate shutoff valve.

In a further aspect the invention features the above-described method of pre-purging a component and shipping the component in a purged, controlled environment between two sealed couplers.

The above and other objects and advantages of the present invention shall be made apparent from the accompanying drawings and the description thereof.

Brief Description of the Drawing

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed



description of the embodiments given below, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a schematic perspective view of a gas box formed of integrated gas stick/valved coupler assemblies in accordance with principles of the present invention;

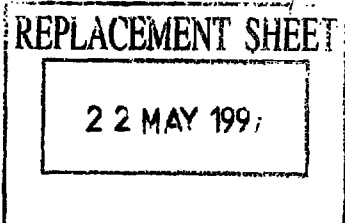
Fig. 2 is a partial cross-sectional view of a gas stick of Fig. 1 taken along lines 2-2, but showing pneumatic control lines welded to tube-stub connections on the valved coupler, to illustrate an alternative to the threaded couplers shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is partial cross-sectional detail view of two valved couplers in the gas stick of Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the joint between the two valved couplers of Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of a filter having integrated valved couplers in accordance with a second embodiment of the invention, and showing the uncoupling of such couplers;

Figs. 6 and 7 are partial cross-sectional views of an alternative embodiment of a valved



coupler in accordance with principles of the present invention;

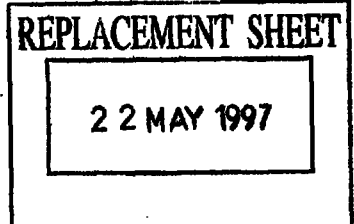
Fig. 8 is an uncoupled view of the alternative valved coupler of Figs. 6 and 7;

5 Fig. 9 is a schematic diagram of a complete gas distribution system using valved couplers in accordance with principles of the present invention.

Detailed Description of Specific Embodiments

10 Referring to Figs. 1 and 2, in accordance with principles of the present invention, a gas box 10 comprises a number, such as 6, of individual and separately controlled gas sticks 12. Each gas stick 12 receives a source gas for a semiconductor process
15 on an input line 14 and outputs gas to the semiconductor processing chamber on an output line 16. Gas flow through each gas stick 12 is controlled by a plurality of valved couplers 20. These valved couplers respond to pneumatic actuation
20 through pneumatic control lines 22, or in some cases may be manually actuated as shown at 220 and discussed in further detail below in Fig. 5.

Each gas stick 12 may optionally include additional elements, including a pressure sensor



(transducer) 24 which produces an electrical pressure signal on a line 25, a thermocouple (46, Fig. 2) for detecting temperature of the gas stick 12, as well as heater blankets (bands) (51, 53, Fig. 2) for applying heat to the gas stick. Other elements might include a gas purifier.

Gas sticks 12 are firmly mounted to a support plate 28 which provides mechanical support for each gas stick 12 in the gas box 10. In accordance with principles of the present invention, the dimensions of each gas stick 12 are reduced as compared to typical gas sticks, such that support plate 28 may be attached to or part of existing semiconductor processing equipment in the clean room where the gas sticks are in operation. This substantially reduces the floor space used in the clean room and thereby substantially reduce the cost of its construction and operation.

A second advantage of the smaller gas stick dimensions is the reduction in wetted surface in the gas stick, which implies less opportunity for accumulation of moisture and/or particulate in the gas stick and less area subject to possible corrosion or outgassing.

REPLACEMENT SHEET

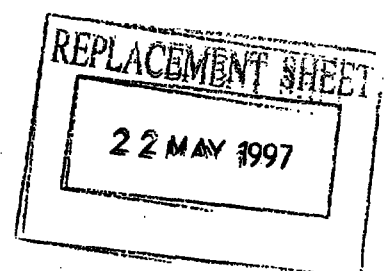
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Furthermore, the reduced size of the gas stick reduces the volume that must be purged, and thus reduces the purging time and the amount of purging gas consumed.

5 Finally, the integral construction of the gas stick provides fewer connections and seals and thus fewer potential leak paths for gasses from the gas stick to the surrounding environment, and also reduces the amount of steel used in the gas
10 distribution system.

Referring now to Fig. 2, each gas stick incorporates four valved couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d which connect the gas stick 12 to a gas supply and to gas distribution equipment in the processing
15 chamber. The four valved couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d shown in Fig. 2 have similar construction, but are positioned in different orientations, and in some cases integrally attached to housings of adjacent components.

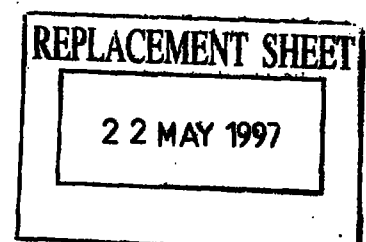
20 In particular, the valving structure in coupler 20a is a mirror image of the structures in couplers 20b, 20c and 20d, although the main housings in each case are slightly differently shaped to accommodate different applications.



In the embodiment shown in Fig. 2, the lower valved couplers 20b and 20c are integrally mounted to the housing of a gas stick (including a mass flow controller 38 and pressure transducer 24) situated therebetween. Accordingly, the gas stick may be removed from the gas distribution system by disconnecting lower couplers 20b and 20c from mating upper couplers 20a and 20d, lifting upper couplers 20a and 20d from connection with lower couplers 20b and 20c, and removing the entire gas stick with lower couplers 20b and 20c attached thereto.

In an alternative embodiment (not shown), upper couplers 20a and 20d are integrally mounted to the gas stick (rather than lower couplers 20b and 20c), and these integral upper couplers 20a and 20d are mounted to separate lower couplers 20b and 20c which connect to input and output lines 14 and 16. In this alternative embodiment, after disconnection, the gas stick and upper couplers 20a and 20d attached thereto may be directly lifted off lower couplers 20b and 20c without requiring movement of lower couplers 20b and 20c.

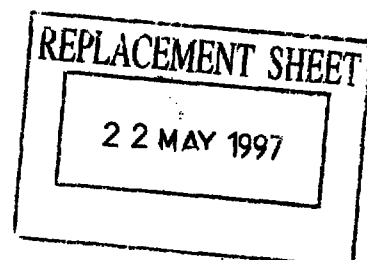
Returning now to the embodiment shown in Fig. 2, a process gas input line 14 connects to the main valve chamber 30a of a first valved coupler



20a. (The connection to input line 14 and output
line 16 may be a threaded joint as shown in Fig. 2,
or lines 14 and 16 may be welded to a tube stub of
the kind used on pneumatic control ports 91a/91b in
5 Fig. 2.) This chamber 30a is cylindrical in
profile, and is shown in cross-section in Fig. 2. A
lower face of chamber 30a includes an aperture 56a
passing through the housing. An axially-positioned
valve stem 32a, terminating at one end in a bull
10 nose 34a, moves along a center axis passing through
aperture 56a such that bull nose may engage and seal
aperture 56a.

Similarly, valved coupler 20b includes an
aperture 56b and a stem 32b which moves along a
15 center axis extending through aperture 56b and
terminates at an end in a bull nose 34b sized for
engagement and sealing of aperture 56b.

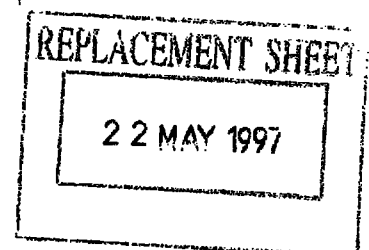
When valved couplers 20a and 20b are open,
stems 32a and 32b translate to the positions shown
20 in Fig. 2. In these positions, cylindrical main
chamber 30a of coupler 20a is in fluid communication
with cylindrical main chamber 30b of coupler 20b,
via apertures 56a and 56b. Accordingly, input line
14 is in fluid communication with inlet passage 35
25 formed in the housing of coupler 20b.



Passage 35 is in communication with a mass flow controller 38 (the details of which are not shown) through a top-hat shaped filter 40. Filter 40 is fitted into a matching top-hat shaped chamber in housing 55b of coupler 20b. Filter 40 includes, at its outer periphery, a sealing nib which is engaged between housing 55b of coupler 20b and the housing of mass flow controller 38, to form a seal therebetween.

The outlet of mass flow controller 38 is coupled, through a second filter 42, to an outlet passageway 45 and a main cylindrical valve chamber 30c of a third valved coupler 20c. Filter 42 is mounted within the housing 55c of valved coupler 20c, and housing 55c is sealed to the housing of mass flow controller 38 by a sealing nib 44 on filter 42.

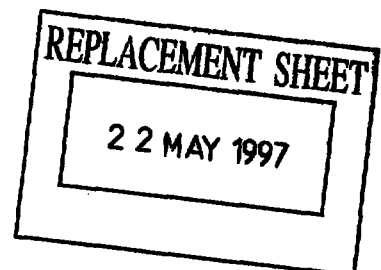
Valved coupler 20c, like valved couplers 20a and 20b, includes an aperture 56c and a valve stem 32c terminating at an interior end in a bull nose 34c. Similarly, valved coupler 20d includes an aperture 56d and a valve stem 32d terminating at its interior end in a bull nose 34d. When valve stems 32c and 32d are in their open positions, as shown in Fig. 2, main valve chamber 30c is in communication



with a main valve chamber 30d of valved coupler 20d through apertures 56c and 56d. Accordingly, in these positions of valve stems 32c and 32d, outlet passageway 45 is in fluid communication via valve chambers 30c and 30d to output line 16 of the gas stick 12.

The pressure sensor 24 (the details of which are not shown) is in fluid communication with outlet passageway 45 via passageway 45a. Electrical signals from pressure sensor 24 are carried on line 25. These signals can be used, for example, to control the pneumatic lines controlling the positions of valve stems 32 so as to close the valved couplers and thereby shut off gas flow if the gas pressure drops below a set point.

Thermocouple 46 is in thermal communication with the wall of housing 55b adjacent to filter 40, and thereby detects the temperature of gas flowing through filter 40 to produce an electrical temperature signal on lines 48. Heater jackets (bands) 51, 53 surrounding inlet passageway 35 and outlet passageway 45 obtain electrical power through lines 50 and 52, respectively, and may be controlled in response to temperatures sensed by thermocouple 46 to regulate the temperature of the

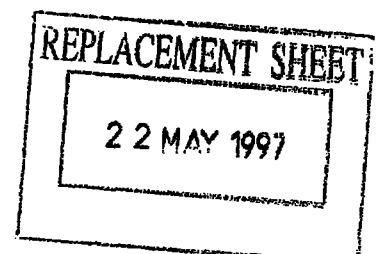


gas stick 12 to prevent gas condensation within the gas stick 12. (Heater cartridges could be used in place of heater bands, if desired.)

Gas stick 12 has an overall length as shown by numeral 54 of approximately nine inches. This dimension is substantially smaller than comparable dimensions of a typical gas stick assembly comprising discrete mass flow, pressure sensor and control valve housings and couplers therebetween.

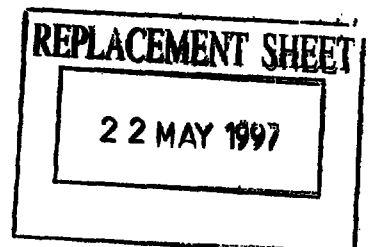
As noted above, the compact size of the gas stick 12, in accordance with principles of the present invention, permits a substantial reduction in the clean room floor space consumed by the gas box 10. Indeed, in some applications the gas box 10 may be mounted on the processing chamber, thus freeing all floor space formerly required for the gas box. Furthermore, the compact size of the gas stick also advantageously reduces the number of seals in the system, the volume needed to be purged, and the wetted surface area, resulting in fewer opportunities for corrosion or outgassing.

It will be further noted that the gas stick 12 of Fig. 2 is an integral unit containing all processing components needed for gas delivery,



including mass flow controller 38, and pressure
sensor 24. Furthermore, as will be explained in
greater detail in the following figures, the valved
couplers 20a, 20b, 20c and 20d function not only as
5 couplers for the gas stick, but also as
automatically-actuatable shutoff valves which can be
used to initiate and terminate gas flow as called
for by the semiconductor processing "recipe" used
with the processing chamber. The substantial
10 reduction in size and number of seals in the gas
stick 12, resulting from this integration of
functions into a single unit, is a particular
advantage of the present invention.

Now referring to Fig. 3, it can be seen
15 how valved coupler 20a or valved coupler 20b may be
used as a flow control valve during operation of the
gas stick 12. Specifically, comparing Fig. 3 to
Fig. 2, valve stem 32b of valved coupler 20b has
been moved to a closed position seen in Fig. 3. In
20 this position, bull nose 34b engages to aperture 56b
of coupler 20b to seal valve chamber 30b from valve
chamber 30a of coupler 20a. To facilitate such
sealing, each bull nose 34a and 34b includes on its
lower perimeter, a gasket 58a and 58b for sealing
25 against aperture 56a and 56b of housing 55a and 55b.

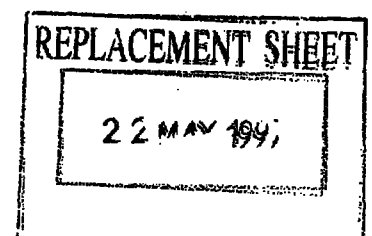


Additional details of a valved coupler 20 in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention are illustrated in Fig. 3. These details will be described in the context of valved coupler 20a and the corresponding elements in valved coupler 20b. However, the reader will appreciate that similar details appear in other valved couplers of the same type shown in Figs. 2 and 5.

In the following, corresponding components in each of couplers 20a and 20b will be described simultaneously, while identifying the reference characters for both components.

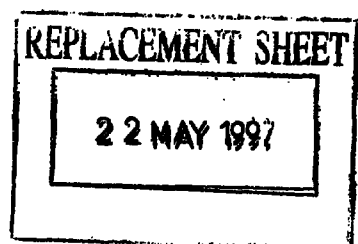
Now turning to the details shown in Fig. 3, each coupler includes a diaphragm 60a/60b, respectively, which is a disk-shaped sheet of flexible metal material. Diaphragm 60a/60b seals the main valve chamber 30a/30b. Valve stem 32a/32b passes through a central aperture of diaphragm 60a/60b. In an axial region surrounding this central aperture, diaphragm 60a/60b is welded to bull nose 34a/34b as shown at 62 on diaphragm 60a.

An interior end of valve stem 32a/32b passes through diaphragm 60a/60b and terminates in a threaded end as seen at 64 on stem 32a. Bull nose 34a/34b includes internal threads for accepting an



internal end of the respective valve stem 32a/32b.
Above this threaded end 64 of valve stem 32a/32b,
valve stem 32a/32b includes a radial projection
66a/66b having an outer diameter matched to an outer
5 diameter of bull nose 34a/34b. Thus, by tightening
the threaded end 64 of valve stem 32a/32b into bull
nose 34a/34b, diaphragm 60a/60b is clamped between
the valve stem projection 66a/66b and the bull nose
34a/34b. The result of this combined clamp and weld
10 forms a positive seal between diaphragm 60a/60b and
bull nose 34a/34b to minimize leakage in the space
therebetween.

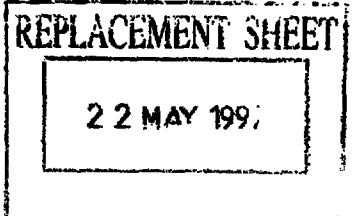
Main valve housing 55a/55b includes an
internal annular projection 70a/70b sized for
15 engagement to an outer periphery of diaphragm
60a/60b. A disk-shaped spacer 68a/68b, is inserted
above diaphragm 60a/60b and engages an opposite
peripheral rim of diaphragm 60a/60b. Diaphragm
60a/60b is thereby clamped between projection
20 70a/70b and spacer 68a/68b to positively lock
diaphragm 60a/60b in place and minimize leakage
between diaphragm 60a/60b and main housing 55a/55b.
An outer periphery of diaphragm 60a/60b may also be
welded or brazed to main housing 55a/55b to further
25 reduce leakage therebetween.



Spacer 68a/68b includes, at its radially inwardmost position, a circular aperture as seen at 78 in valved coupler 20b. This aperture 78 has a diameter slightly larger than that of projection 66a/66b on valve stem 32a/32b. Accordingly, as illustrated in valved coupler 20a, when valve stem 32a/32b withdraws into main valve chamber 30a/30b and extracts bull nose 34a from engagement with housing 55a, valve stem projection 66a fits within annular aperture 78 to permit full withdrawal of bull nose 34a away from housing 55a.

Spacer 68a/68b has a concave inner surface conforming to diaphragm 60a/60b when bull nose 34a/34b is in an open position, such as seen in valved coupler 20a of Fig. 3. Spacer 68a/68b thereby provides support for diaphragm 60a/60b against gas pressure and prevents unnecessary flexing thereof.

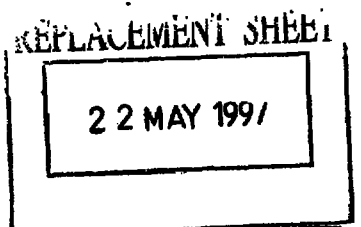
Main housing 55a/55b includes threads 72a/72b along its cylindrical inner periphery for receiving a cylindrical compression head 74a/74b having mating threads on its exterior periphery. Compression head 74a/74b engages spacer 68a/68b and provides compressive force against spacer 68a/68b to clamp the peripheral rim of diaphragm 60a/60b



between spacer 68a/68b and housing projection
70a/70b, as noted above.

Spacer 68a/68b further includes air
passages such as 75a/75b passing therethrough in an
5 axial direction. Air passage 75a/75b is in
communication with an annular channel 76a/76b formed
in compression head 74a/74b. A further channel
77a/77b formed in compression head 74a/74b leads
from channel 76a/76b to the clean-room atmosphere
10 surrounding valved coupler 20a/20b. Air passage
75a/75b and channels 76a/76b and 77a/77b permit air
flow from a region behind diaphragm 60b to or from
the clean-room atmosphere outside of valved coupler
20a/20b so that air pressure from a rear side of
15 diaphragm 60a does not inhibit movement of valve
stem 32a/32b.

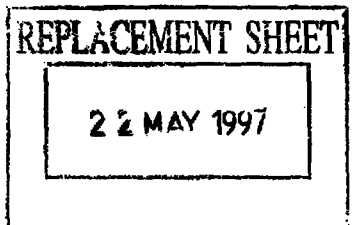
In pneumatically-actuated embodiments of a
valved coupler, such as are shown in Fig. 3, main
housing 55a/55b attaches to a drive housing 80a/80b.
20 Drive housing 80a/80b is attached to main housing
55a/55b by a drive wire 82a/82b inserted into an
annular channel formed between compression head
74a/74b and drive housing 80a/80b. This drive wire
82a/82b connection permits drive housing 80a/80b to
25 rotate relative to main housing 55a/55b about their



central axes as needed to permit connection of
pneumatic gas to drive housing 80a/80b.

Drive housing 80a/80b surrounds valve stem
32a/32b and includes a pneumatic piston-and-cylinder
5 for driving stem 32a/32b to an open or closed
position. Specifically, housing 80a/80b defines a
central cylinder 84a/84b. A piston 86a/86b mounted
to stem 32a/32b is slidably positioned within
cylinder 84a/84b. Piston 86a/86b is actuated
10 axially through housing 80a/80b by pneumatic
pressure from pressurized gas injected into cylinder
84a/84b via a pneumatic control line 22 (see Figs. 1
and 2) welded to tube-stub forming a pneumatic
control port 91a/91b. (Alternatively, as seen in
15 Fig. 1, pneumatic control lines may be threadedly
coupled to pneumatic control port 91a/91b, in which
case the port might be smaller in diameter.) Valve
stem 32a/32b carries grooves for retaining annular
locking rings 92a/92b on opposite sides of piston
20 86a/86b, such that valve stem 32a/32b is
mechanically coupled to movements of piston 86a/86b.

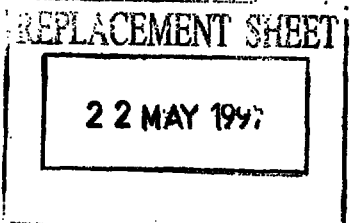
A passage 93a/93b carries pressurized gas
from control ports 91a/91b to a front side of piston
86a/86b, so that when pressure is applied, piston
25 86a/86b is driven from the position shown in drive



housing 80b to the position shown in drive housing 80a.

5 Housing 80a/80b includes interior threads at 94a/94b for receiving a cylindrical cap 96a/96b which is similarly threaded at its exterior cylindrical surface. A helical compression spring 98a/98b is captured between cap 96a/96b and piston 86a/86b. Spring 98a/98b provides an expansive force against piston 86a/86b and stem 32a/32b driving
10 these elements toward main housing 55a/55b to cause sealing engagement of bull nose 34a/34b with aperture 56a/56b of housing 55a/55b. Thus, when pneumatic pressure is removed, spring 98a/98b automatically causes closure of valved coupler
15 20a/20b.

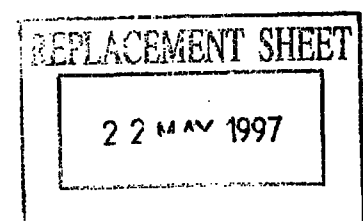
 In accordance with the above description, it will be appreciated that the valve structure shown in Fig. 3 is a "normally closed" valve, i.e., it will close and remain closed when pneumatic
20 pressure is removed. In an alternative embodiment for a specific application, a "normally open" valve could also be fabricated by forming channel 93a/93b to communicate between control ports 91a/91b and the space between a rear side of piston 86a/86b and cap
25 96a/96b. Also the orientation of piston 86a/86b and



position of spring 98a/98b would be reversed such
that spring 98a/98b is captured between a front side
of piston 86a/86b and housing 80a/80b. Finally, an
air passage from the housing to the external
5 environment would be provided to permit air captured
between a front side of piston 86a/86b and housing
80a/80b to vent to the exterior environment.

Main housing 55b of valved coupler 20b is
permanently mounted to the housing of mass flow
10 controller 38 to form a gas stick 12, as is seen in
its entirety in Fig. 2. Accordingly, housing 55b of
coupler 20b includes passage 35 which connects to
the inlet of the mass flow controller. Furthermore,
main housing 55b includes a heater jacket 51
15 attached to power lines 50. Referring back to Fig.
2, it will be seen that coupler 20c is also
integrally formed with an output side of gas stick
12, and contains structures which are similar, but
mirror-image, to those found in coupler 20b.

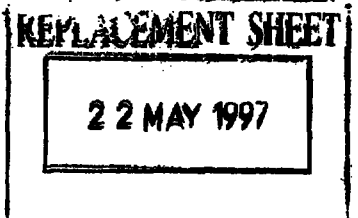
20 Referring now to Fig. 4, the details of
the passageway adjoining mating valved couplers can
be examined. This passageway is formed by the
apertures 56a and 56b into housings 55a and 55b of
couplers 20a and 20b. Housings 55a and 55b include,
25 at the outer peripheries of apertures 56a, 56b,



respective annular clamping jaws 99a and 99b. These jaws mate to form a circular clamping structure 102 surrounding apertures 56a and 56b. A packing gland 100 (deformable washer), is inserted into the
5 circular clamp 102 formed by jaws 99a and 99b. Packing gland 100 forms a fluid tight seal preventing seepage of fluid from apertures 56a and 56b and the passageway therebetween, into the joint 104 between housings 55a and 55b. Packing gland 100
10 is permanently deformed between jaws 99a and 99b — when housings 55a and 55b are conjoined, and must be replaced after each separation of housings 55a and 55b.

As is best seen in Fig. 4, when the bull
15 noses 34a and 34b are both in their closed positions shown in Fig. 4, both of apertures 56a and 56b are sealed. Furthermore, the bull noses 34a and 34b are substantially coplanar with the exterior surfaces of the valve housing along joint 104. As a result,
20 only a minuscule volume is contained in the region between bull noses 34a and 34b.

In use, the valved coupler structure shown in the Figs. 1-4 provides a substantially improved coupling and shutoff valve for ultra high purity gas
25 processing applications such as semiconductor



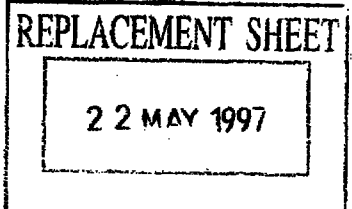
manufacturing. As can be best seen, for example, in Fig. 2, the valved couplers form matable pairs.

When both valves of a matable pair of couplers are in the off position, as seen in Fig. 4,

5 substantially no wetted surface of the inside of the valve will be exposed to external air when the coupler is separated (see Fig. 5, discussed below).

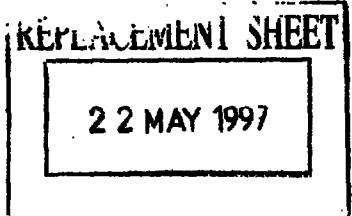
Thus, the couplers may be separated without leakage of atmosphere into the coupler valve chambers 30a
10 and 30b through apertures 56a and 56b, and thus — without accumulation of moisture or dust within the couplers or the attached gas processing elements.

Furthermore, it will be noted that, when the valved couplers are disconnected in the closed
15 position, the only internal wetted surface of the valve which is exposed to atmosphere is a small area at the extreme end of the bull nose. Accordingly, only this small area may accumulate dust or moisture when the valved couplers are disconnected and
20 reconnected. Thus, contamination of internal wetted surface of tubing or gas processing elements connected by the couplers will be substantially reduced and the purging required upon replacement of an element substantially reduced.



Accordingly, in accordance with principles of the present invention, valved couplers are positioned on opposing sides of a gas processing element to facilitate replacement of that element without substantial contamination. Thus, an entire gas stick 12, as seen in Fig. 2, may be surrounded by valved couplers 20 so that the entire gas stick 12 may be replaced without substantial contamination of the attached tubing. In an alternative application, shown in Fig. 5, an individual component of the gas distribution system or gas stick, such as a filter 120 or as an alternative example a gas purifier, is coupled to the remainder of the system or stick by a pair of valved couplers 20b and 20c so that this element may be removed and replaced without substantial contamination of either the filter or the remainder of the gas stick.

For each of these applications, it is contemplated that separate components (Fig. 5), or an entire gas stick (Fig. 2), will be supplied from a manufacturer with the valved couplers surrounding the component factory-sealed, with the component preserved therebetween in a controlled environment, such as in pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly above atmospheric. Furthermore, it is contemplated



that the component will be factory-purged of any impurities prior to factory-sealing of the associated valved couplers.

Specifically, it is contemplated that a
5 gas stick or component will be heated in a vacuum oven to bake out impurities, and then back filled with pure Nitrogen for several cycles to remove all air and moisture. Subsequently, the clean assembly will be charged with Nitrogen and placed in sealed
10 Nitrogen filled bags for shipment. As a result, — when the gas stick or component is added to the gas distribution system, it need only be briefly purged to eliminate any impurities acquired by the small wetted surfaces of the end of bullnose 34 during its
15 brief exposure to clean room air, and then immediately thereafter used in processing. Because the individual component or entire gas stick is supplied pre-purged, and internal wetted surfaces thereof are not exposed to contamination from air,
20 delays for purging are substantially reduced as compared to those needed when replacing a component in a typical gas sticks in the prior art.

In an embodiment where, for example, a gas purifier is isolated between valved couplers in this
25 manner, the present invention has particular

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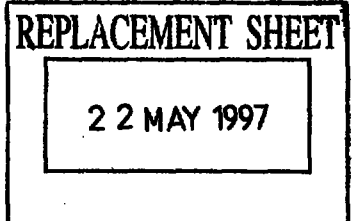
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advantage, in that purifier elements are often consumed by room air. The isolation procedure described above would prevent even brief exposure of the purifier element to room air and thus substantially reduce consumption of the element by room air during installation. (The use of couplers in accordance with the present invention in conjunction with a gas purifier will be noted below in connection with Fig. 9.)

An additional advantage of the valved coupler structure described herein is the inclusion of dual valves within each coupler joint. Specifically, the valve formed by a bull nose 34 and associated housing aperture 56 may be used as a shutoff valve during semiconductor processing, by automatic or manual (see below) actuation of the valve stem 32 and bull nose 34.

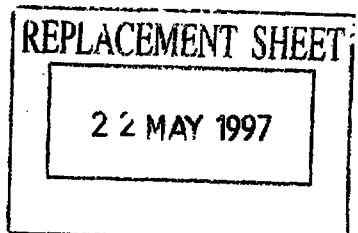
Typically, shutoff valves are positioned on either side of a mass flow controller and both shutoff valves are closed when gas flow is halted. In a typical gas stick, these shutoff valves are coupled to a mass flow controller through separate couplers and tubing.

By providing a combined coupler and shutoff valve, the present invention substantially



reduces the size and complexity of a gas stick. The integration of both functions into a single integral unit such as shown in Fig. 2, permits substantial reduction in the size of a gas stick, with the
5 resulting advantages identified above.

Another advantage arises from the provision for dual shutoff valves at each coupling. Specifically, as can be seen in Fig. 3, one coupler of a pair of valved couplers may be used as a
10 shutoff valve while the other coupler is held in an open position. For example, comparing Fig. 2 to Fig. 3, a shutoff function may be achieved by cycling valved coupler 20b between open and closed positions while holding 20a in an open position. By
15 cycling one coupler in this manner while holding the opposing coupler open, only one coupler accumulates wear while the other coupler remains unused. Accordingly, when coupler 20b nears the end of its useful life, the roles of the couplers may be
20 reversed, and coupler 20a cycled thereafter to provide shutoff valving. As a consequence, the useful life of the shutoff valves in a pair of valved couplers, can be as much as twice the useful life of a single shutoff valve. By thus extending
25 the useful life of the shutoff valves, the valved

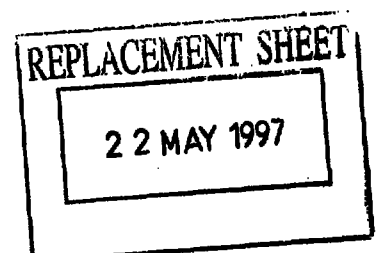


coupler structure of the invention may extend the time between refurbishments of the gas stick due to valve wear, and enhance productivity.

Now turning to a detailed discussion of
5 Fig. 5, an alternative embodiment of a valved
coupler 20c and 20d provides for manual actuation of
the valve stem 32c/32d. In this embodiment, certain
parts of the pneumatically actuated valve discussed
above are modified to provide manual actuation. As
10 was the case in Fig. 3, elements of couplers 20c and
20d (other than the main housings 55c and 55d) have
mirror-image construction, and for clarity like
elements from both couplers will be discussed below
simultaneously, with reference to corresponding
15 reference numerals.

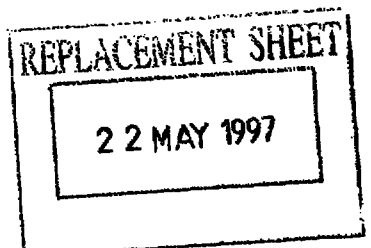
In this manually-actuated embodiment, the
main valve chamber 30c/30d and diaphragm 60c/60d are
identical to those used in a pneumatically-actuated
valved coupler such as those discussed above with
20 reference to Fig. 3. Furthermore, diaphragm 60c/60d
is welded/clamped to bullnose 34c/34d and stem
32c/32d and housing 55c/55d in a manner identical to
that discussed above with reference to Fig. 3.

The manually-actuated embodiment differs
25 from the pneumatically actuated embodiment of Fig.



3, in that a modified valve stem 32c/32d is used in conjunction with an alternative compression head 174c/174d and spacer 106c/106d, in place of the stem 32a/32b, compression head 74a/74b, and drive housing 80a/80b shown in Fig. 3. Specifically, the modified spacer 106c/106d has a central aperture sized slightly larger than the outer diameter of handle 112c/112d to fit around the innermost end of handle 112c/112d. As in the prior embodiment, compression head 174c/174d is threaded at its outer periphery — for engagement to an inner threaded periphery of housing 55c/55d, and drives spacer 106c/106d into engagement with diaphragm 60c/60d opposite housing projection 70c/70d. Accordingly, spacer 106c/106d compresses and seals diaphragm 106c/106d to main housing 55c/55d and minimizes leakage therebetween.

Compression head 174c/174d is formed with a central cylindrical recess 108c/108d for supporting the manual actuation handle 112c/112d and accompanying bearings, etc. An end of valve stem 32c/32d opposite bull nose 34c/34d extends into this recess 108c/108d. This end of valve stem 32c/32d includes external threads 110c/110d. Handle 112c/112d inserted in recess 108c/108d includes a

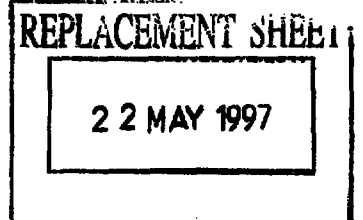


bore 113c/113d having threads matable with threads 110c/110d of valve stem 32c/32d.

Handle 112c/112d also includes an annular projection 117c/117d sized for insertion within
5 recess 108c/108d to axially constrain handle 112c/112d but permit rotation. Annular bearings 114c/114d are fitted on opposing sides of projection 117c/117d to permit rotation thereof while
constraining axial movement of handle 112c/112d. A
10 cap 116c/116d fitted into recess 108c/108d
constrains axial movement of bearings 114c/114d and handle 112c/112d.

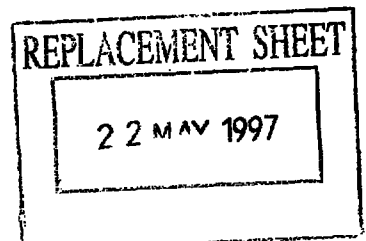
A channel 118c/118d formed in compression head 174c/174d provides a path for air flow to/from
15 a rearward side of diaphragm 60c/60d through spacer 106c/106d, and thus prevents air compression behind diaphragm 60c/60d that would otherwise inhibit opening or closing of the valve (as was the case with channels 75/76/77 of the pneumatically-actuated
20 valve of Fig. 3).

When the valve has been manually actuated to a fully open position, as shown in coupler 20d, diaphragm 60d abuts an underside of handle 112d and spacer 106d. This prevents further rotation of
25 handle 112d and over-travel of diaphragm 60d.



In use of the foregoing structure,
rotation of handle 112c/112d causes axial
translation of valve stem 32c/32d axially toward or
away from housing 55c/55d to or from an open end
5 closed position. Thus, the valve of the valved
coupler may be manually actuated using handle.

Manually actuatable valved couplers may be
used in applications where a pneumatically actuatable
shutoff valve is not needed. For example, in the
10 embodiment shown in Fig. 5, housing 55b of valved —
coupler 20b and housing 55c of valved coupler 20c
are integrally formed with a housing for supporting
a filter 120, which filters gas flow between main
valve chamber 30b and main valve chamber 30c.
15 Since, in a typical application, only one
pneumatically-actuated shutoff valve is used on each
side of the mass flow controller in a gas stick,
there is no need for two pneumatically actuated
shutoff valves on each side of filter 120.
20 Accordingly, couplers 20a and 20b are configured for
pneumatic control whereas couplers 20c and 20d are
configured for manual control. In such an
application, couplers 20c and 20d would be manually
placed in a closed position only when the filter or
25 an adjoining element is detached therefrom;

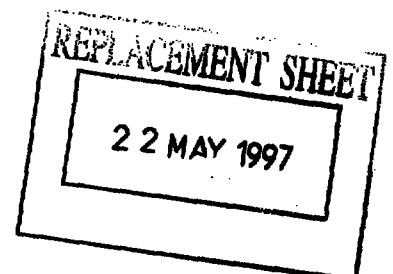


otherwise, the manually actuated couplers 20c and 20d would remain in an open position.

As before, a filter element 120 and adjoining integral valved couplers could be supplied from the manufacturer in a controlled environment (e.g., in pure Nitrogen at a pressure slightly elevated above atmospheric) and pre-purged of impurities, permitting rapid installation of the filter into the gas stick and use after only a brief purging.

It is contemplated that other gas processing elements may similarly be isolated between valved couplers, or incorporated integrally into the housings of adjoining valved couplers, to obtain the advantages noted above. For example, as noted above, a purifier, or in-line regulator, might be positioned between or valved couplers, or the valved couplers might be integrally incorporated into the housings of these elements. Various embodiments and applications of this sort are discussed below in connection with Fig. 9.

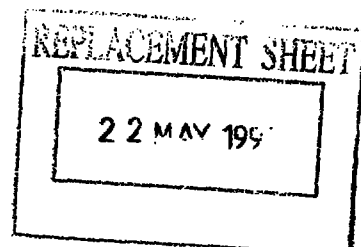
Another application in which manually-actuated valved couplers might be used, is where a valved coupler is used to control flow of a high-pressure gas. In such a case, it may be impractical



to use a pneumatically actuated valved coupler. For example, referring to Fig. 2, if a high pressure gas is input to coupler 20a via inlet line 14, when coupler valve stem 32a is in the open position, a
5 large force would need to be applied (by spring 98b) to valve stem 32b to overcome the gas pressure and hold coupler 20b closed, i.e., in the position shown in Fig. 3. However, a large force of this kind, is likely to unacceptably deform gasket 58b over a few
10 open-close cycles, and thereby dramatically reduce — the number of cycles that could be obtained from the valve.

Accordingly, where a high pressure gas is in use, the input-side coupler 20b may be a
15 manually-actuated coupler such as those shown in Fig. 5, which is opened after coupler 20b has been connected to coupler 20a, and left open throughout later processing. Coupler 20a (which is not subject to the pressures described in the previous
20 paragraph) could then be cycled to provide a shut-off capability. As noted above, an example of a gas stick using a manually-actuated coupler is shown in Fig. 1, coupler 220.

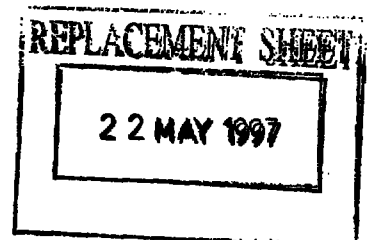
In high-pressure applications, it is
25 particularly important to incorporate a heater into



the coupler such as heater 51 shown in Fig. 2. A pressure drop is likely to be experienced in the coupler, which will cause a temperature drop through the effect known as Joule-Thompson cooling. The temperature drop can be significant for particular gasses used in semiconductor processing. Accordingly, it is important to heat the coupler housing to prevent the condensation of gas or formation of icicles in the coupler.

Now referring to Fig. 6, an alternative embodiment of the present invention includes a horizontally disposed valve stem 130 which engages a main valve housing 132 at a gasket 134. Valve stem 130 moves horizontally through housing 132. A disc-shaped diaphragm 136 is welded and clamped between valve stem 130 and an actuator 138, in a manner discussed above. Diaphragm 136 is further clamped at its outer peripheral edge between main housing 132 and actuator housing 133, providing a fluid-tight seal.

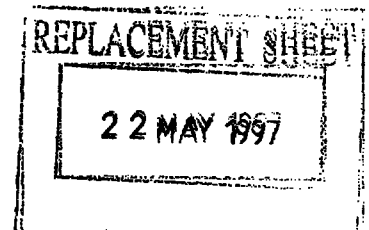
Actuator 138 includes a rack 140 of teeth engageable with a pinion 142. Pinion 142 is actuated by an actuator with a second rack of teeth 144, which is in turn coupled to, for example, a pneumatically actuated piston and cylinder assembly



146. Assembly 146 may include a spring return to return stem 130 to the closed position shown in Fig. 6, so that the valve returns to a seal when pneumatic pressure is removed. Alternatively, assembly 146 may return stem 130 to the open position in the absence of pneumatic pressure. As a second alternative, assembly 146 may include a manually-controlled actuator.

As seen by comparison of Fig. 6 and Fig. 7, when the valve is moved to an open position, rack 144 is ejected outward from assembly 146 in response to pneumatic actuation, causing rotation of pinion 142 clockwise about its axis and thereby causing horizontal movement of valve stem 130 away from gasket 134.

The main housing 132 may be coupled to a gas processing component such as a mass flow controller 38 or other component. Mass flow controller 38 includes an outer housing 148 having a substantially planar surface 160 for mating with main valve housing 132. A bull nose 150 is supported within outer housing 148 for actuation by valve stem 130. Bull nose 150 is spring biased into contact with outer housing 148 by a spider (annular spring) 152. Bull nose 150 carries a gasket 154 for

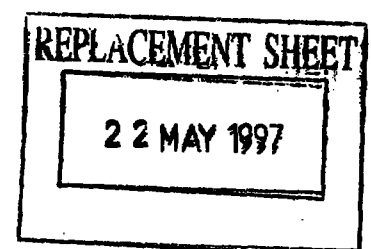


sealing to outer housing 148 when in engagement therewith.

Outer housing 148 is held in engagement with main housing 132 by a nut 156 having an
5 internal threaded surface 158 matable with external threads on main valve housing 132. Planar surface 160 of outer housing 148 mates to a similar planar surface 160 of main valve housing 132. A packing gland (deformable metal gasket) 162 inserted between
10 outer housing 148 and main housing 132 provides a — seal preventing fluid flow from inside of the valve housing.

As before, mass flow controller 38 may be integrally constructed with a filter 162, as well as
15 other components such as a mass flow controller or a pressure sensor, and/or other components.

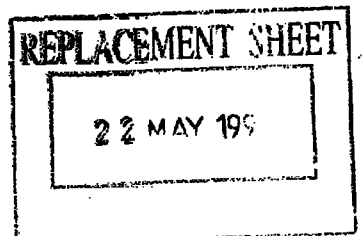
In use, comparing Fig. 6 to Fig. 7, it will be seen that horizontal actuation of valve stem 130 causes stem 130 to abut bullnose 150, and
20 overcome the spring force of spider 152 to push bullnose 150 out of engagement with outer housing 148. Thus, in the position shown in Fig. 7, gas flow is permitted through the valve structure whereas in the position shown in Fig. 6, gas flow is
25 inhibited.



As can be seen in Fig. 8, the valved coupling of Figs. 6-7 may be disconnected along surfaces 160 and separated. In such a situation, valve stem 130 and bull nose 150 seal the interior wetted surfaces of the housings and adjacent structures so that, as before, moisture and dust are prevented from contacting those interior wetted surfaces.

Here, as in the first embodiment described with reference to Figs. 1-5, the advantages of the present invention are obtained because valve stem 130 and bull nose 150, which move along a center axis extending through the aperture in the valve housings 132 and 148, come to rest at a position where the outer surface of the stem 130 and bull nose 150 is approximately coplanar with the adjoining surfaces 160 of the two sides of the coupler, so that a minimal wetted surface of the valve is exposed when the coupler is disconnected.

While the present invention has been illustrated by a description of various embodiments and while these embodiments have been described in considerable detail, it is not the intention of the applicants to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional



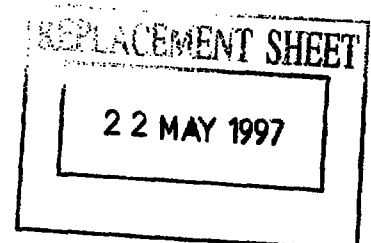
advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art.

As one example, the gas stick illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2 may be integrally combined with a pressure regulator, for example in place of pressure sensor 24 or in addition thereto. Further, the valved couplers may have a second inlet aperture, for example for purging gas.

As a second example, the disclosed valved couplers could be advantageously used in connection with other components in a gas distribution system to permit high-purity coupling/uncoupling of gas lines from these components.

Referring to Fig. 9, valved couplers 220 might be used at the connection of tubing to a gas source, e.g. a gas cylinder in a cylinder cabinet 170 or a tank on a gas pad 172. In these cases, a valved coupler in accordance with principles of the present invention might be formed integrally with or connected by tubing to a standard gas coupling.

Additional valved couplers 220 might be provided on either side of a purifier 174 and 176 to facilitate replacement of the purifier. Further valved couplings 220 might be provided on either side of a manifold box 178 and 180 which distributes

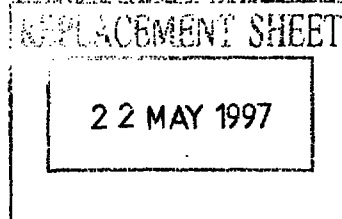


gas from one of the sources 170 and 172 to multiple gas boxes 10. Also, couplers 20 might be used at the connections leading from a gas box to process equipment 182 and 184.

5 In a typical application, couplers 220 connected to the gas sources 170 and 172, purifier 174 and 176 and manifold boxes 178 and 180 would be manually-actuated couplers, as these connections are not typically opened and closed regularly during
10 processing. However, couplers 20 attached to the gas boxes 10 and connected to the process equipment 182 and 184 would be pneumatically actuated since these connections are regularly opened and closed during processing.

15 Thus, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details, representative apparatus and method, and illustrative example shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such
20 details without departing from the spirit or scope of applicant's general inventive concept.

What is claimed is:



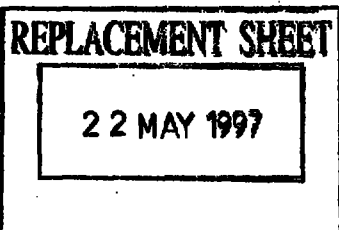
Claims

1. A valved coupler for ultra high purity gas distribution, comprising

a valve housing having an external surface, an internal surface defining a gas-carrying chamber, and first and second aperture-defining surfaces extending from said inner surface to said outer surface and defining first and second apertures permitting gas flow between said gas-carrying chamber and an external environment to which the external surface of the housing is exposed,

a valve stem having proximal and distal ends slidably mounted within said housing for linear movement between a first position and a second position, along an axis extending through said first aperture, said valve stem having a sealing surface at said distal end,

a substantially planar flexible diaphragm having an outer periphery and an inner periphery, said inner periphery sealingly engaged to said valve stem, said outer periphery sealingly engaged to said internal surface of said housing, dividing said internal surface of said housing into two sections, said aperture-defining surfaces communicating



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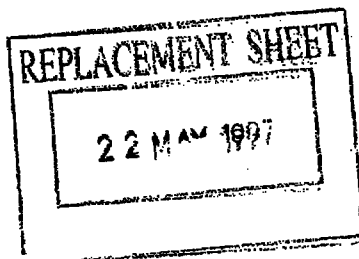
between said outer surface and a common section of said internal surface of said housing,

wherein at said first position, said sealing surface of said valve stem engages said first aperture-surrounding surface of said housing, and a distal end of said valve stem is substantially coplanar with said outer surface of said housing in a region bordering said first aperture-defining surface, whereby when said first aperture is sealed by said bullnose only a minimal fraction of said inner surface of said housing is exposed to the external environment.

2. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein said sealing surface engages said aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said inner surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface of said valve stem withdraws into said housing and away from said outer surface of said housing.

3. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein



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said sealing surface engages said aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said outer surface of said housing, and

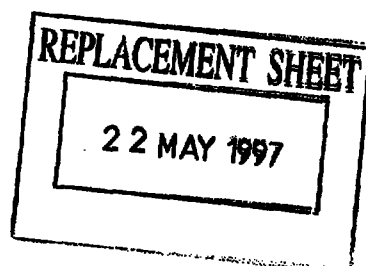
moving said valve stem from said first position to said second position comprises moving said sealing surface outwardly from said housing such that said distal end of said valve stem extends beyond said outer surface of said housing.

4. The valved coupler of claim 1, further comprising a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and further defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said actuating cylinder,

wherein said valve stem further comprises a piston at said proximal end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder, and

further comprising a spring applying a force between said drive housing and said valve stem to move said valve stem toward said first position,

whereby said valve stem may be actuated from said first position to said second position by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture.



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5. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein
said sealing surface engages said
aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said inner
surface of said housing,

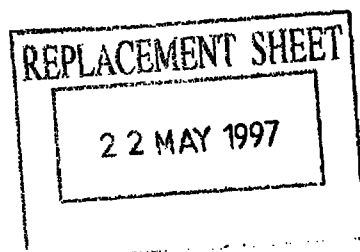
at said second position, said sealing
surface of said valve stem withdraws into said
housing and away from said outer surface of said
housing, and

said spring urges said valve stem toward
said first aperture and said surface into engagement
with said aperture-surrounding surface.

6. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein
said sealing surface engages said
aperture-surrounding surface adjacent said outer
surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing
surface extends outwardly from said housing such
that said distal end of said valve stem extends
outside said outer surface of said housing, and

said spring urges said valve stem inwardly
into said housing and said surface into engagement
with said aperture-surrounding surface.

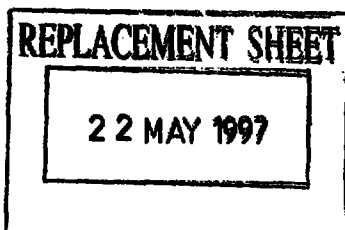




7. The valved coupler of claim 1, further comprising
a pinion journaled for driven rotation in said housing, wherein
said valve stem includes a toothed surface at its proximal end engaging said pinion,
whereby rotation of said pinion causes motion of said stem between said first and second positions.

8. The valved coupler of claim 7, further comprising
a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said cylinder, and further comprising

an actuator carrying a piston at an end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder for movement along a second axis, and including a toothed surface engaging said pinion,
whereby said second stem is actuated along said second axis by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture,



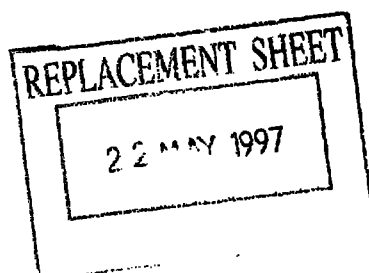


to cause rotation of said pinion and motion of said valve stem between said first and second positions.

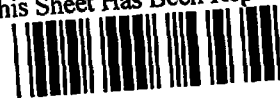
9. The valved coupler of claim 8 further comprising

a spring applying a force between said housing and said actuator to move said actuator toward a starting position.

10. The valved coupler of claim 8 wherein said second axis and said axis extending through said first aperture are orthogonal to each other.



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VALVED COUPLING FOR ULTRA HIGH PURITY GAS
DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

Abstract of the Disclosure

Valved couplers 20 and gas processing components particularly suitable for ultra-high purity gas distribution for use in semiconductor manufacturing. In the couplers, a valve stem/bullnose 34 seals the aperture of the coupler 56 immediately adjacent the exterior of the coupler, so that only a minimal amount of the wetted surface of the coupler is exposed to the external environment. A gas processing component (e.g., a filter 120), or an entire integrated gas stick assembly 12, may be sealed from the exterior environment at both its inlet and outlet sides, by these valved couplers. As a result, the entire device can be purged after manufacture and left in a controlled environment during shipment and installation, reducing the need for purging after installation.

FIG. 1



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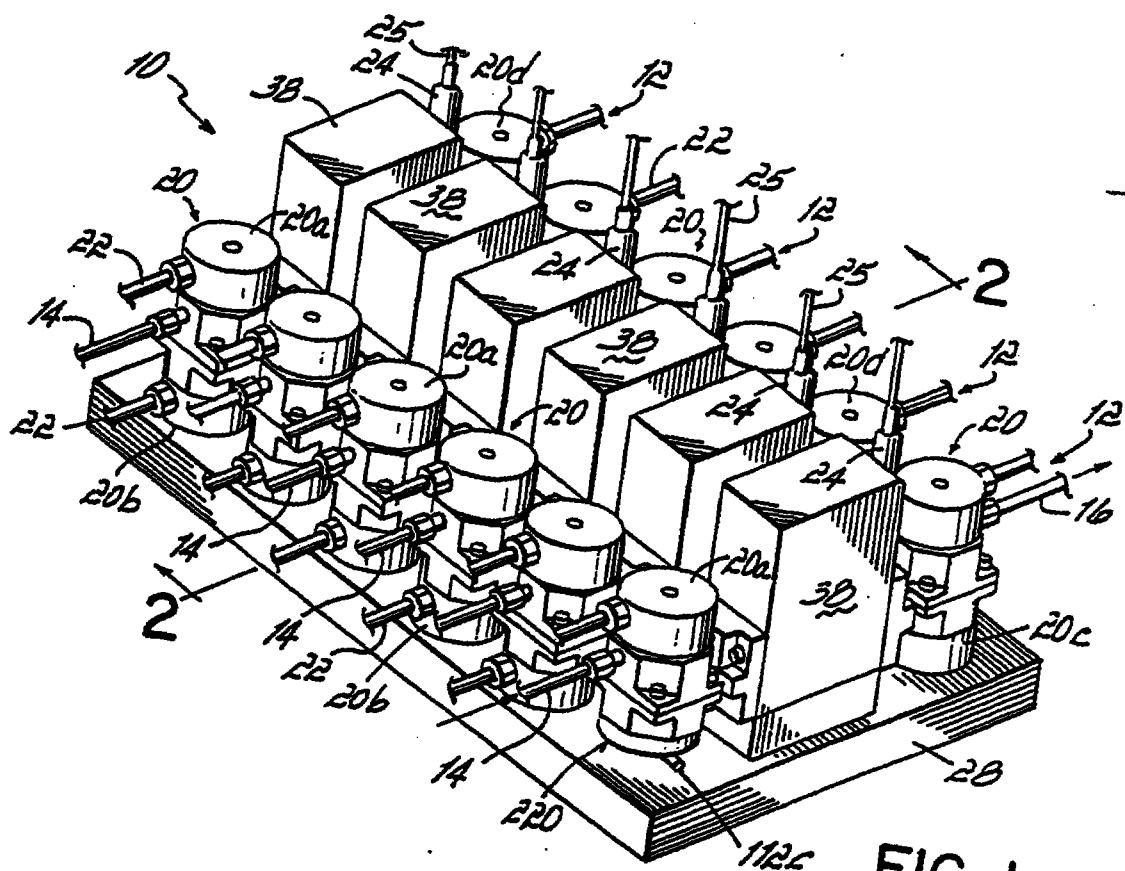


FIG. 1

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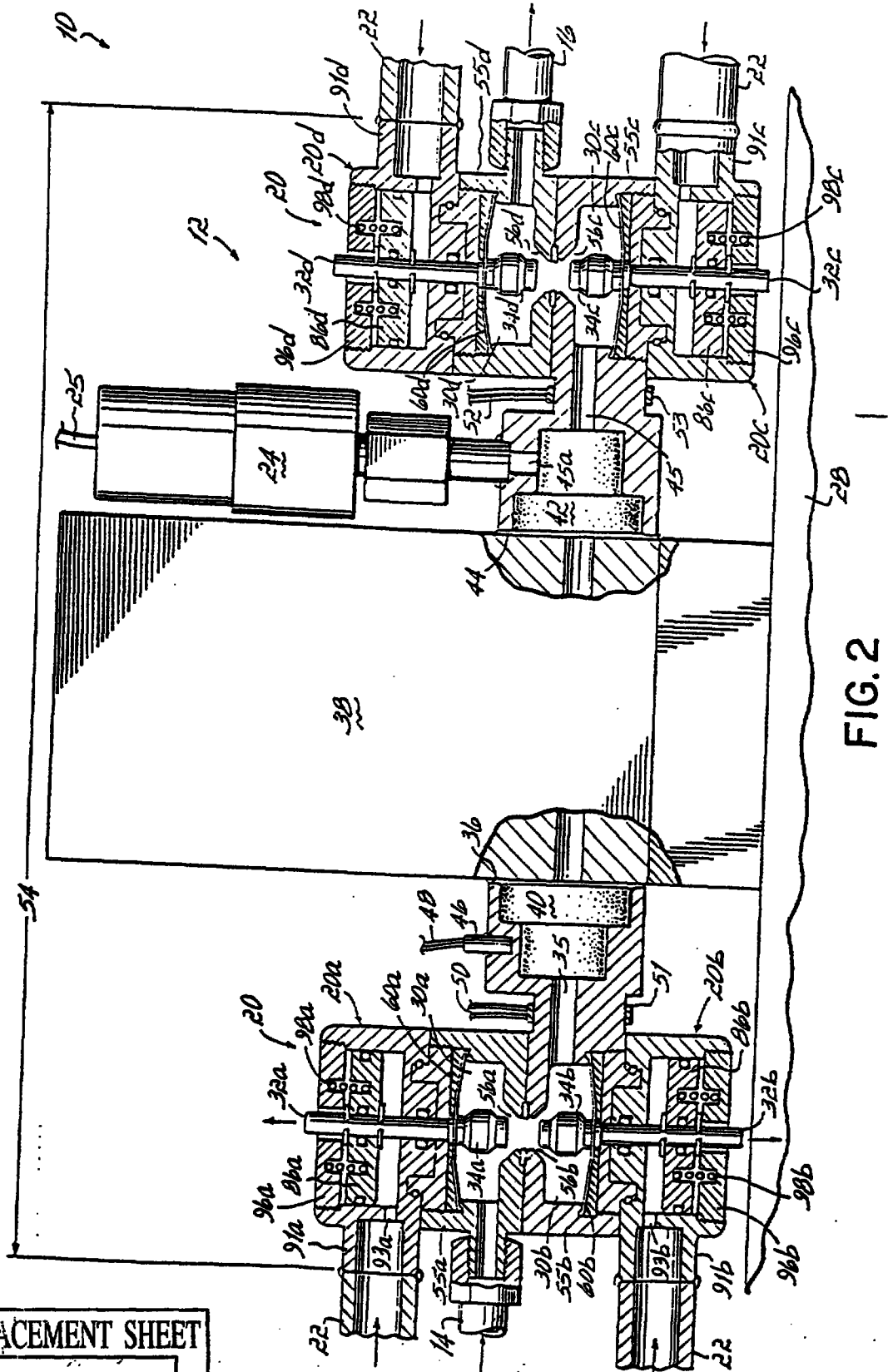


FIG. 2

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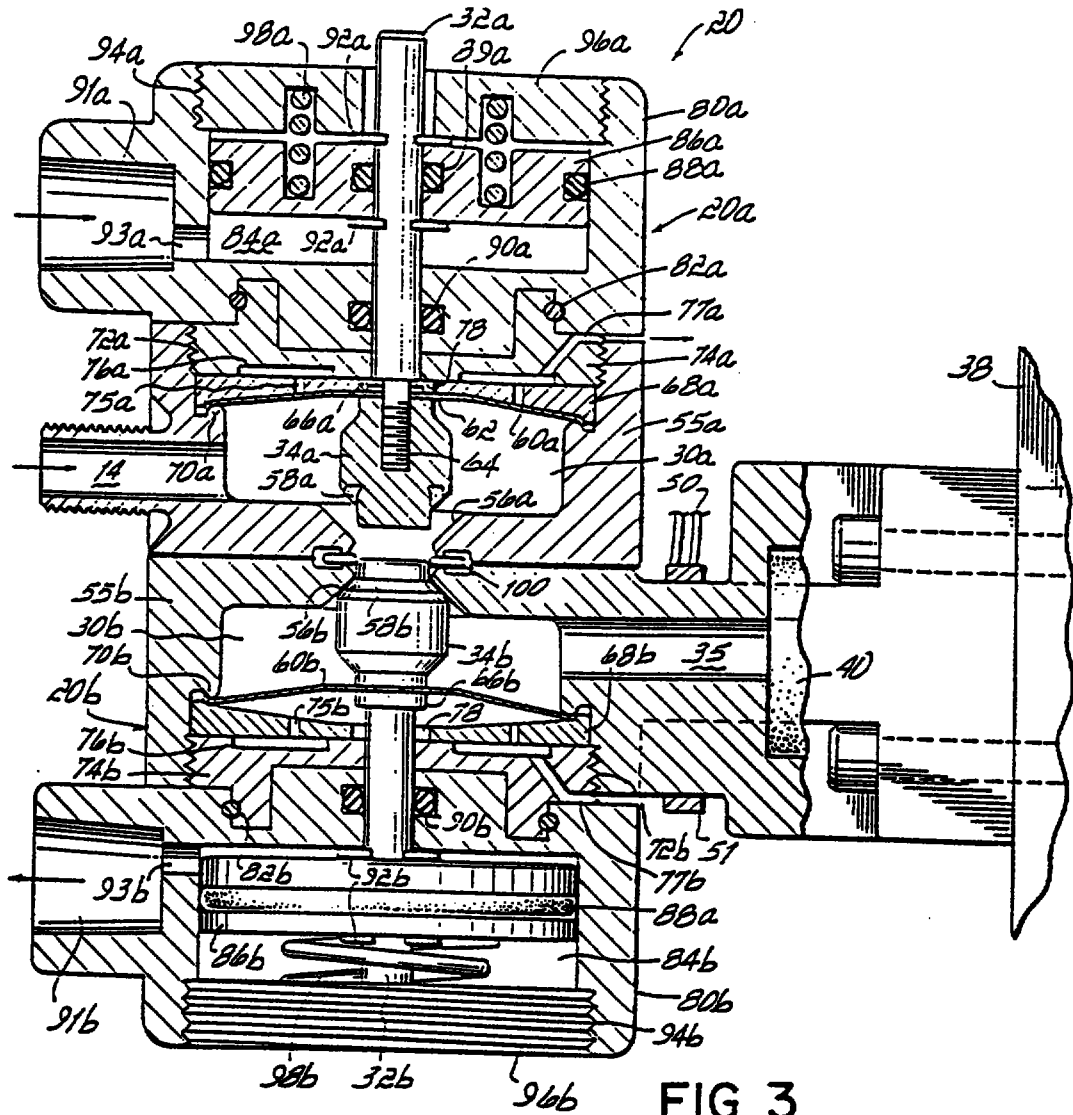


FIG. 3

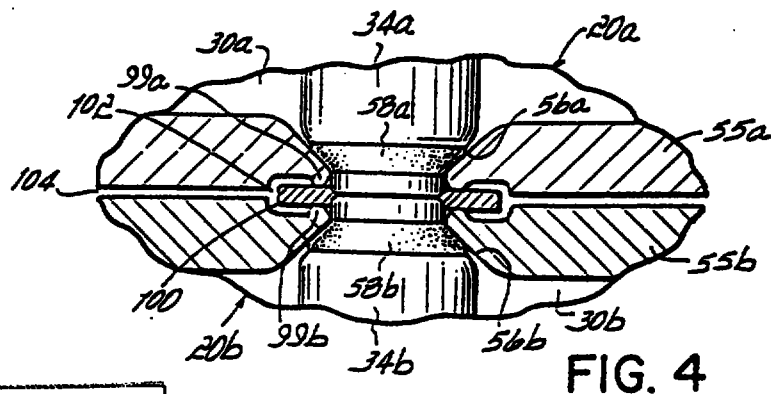
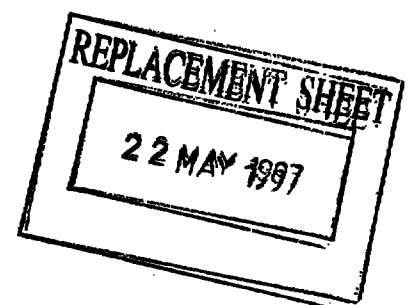
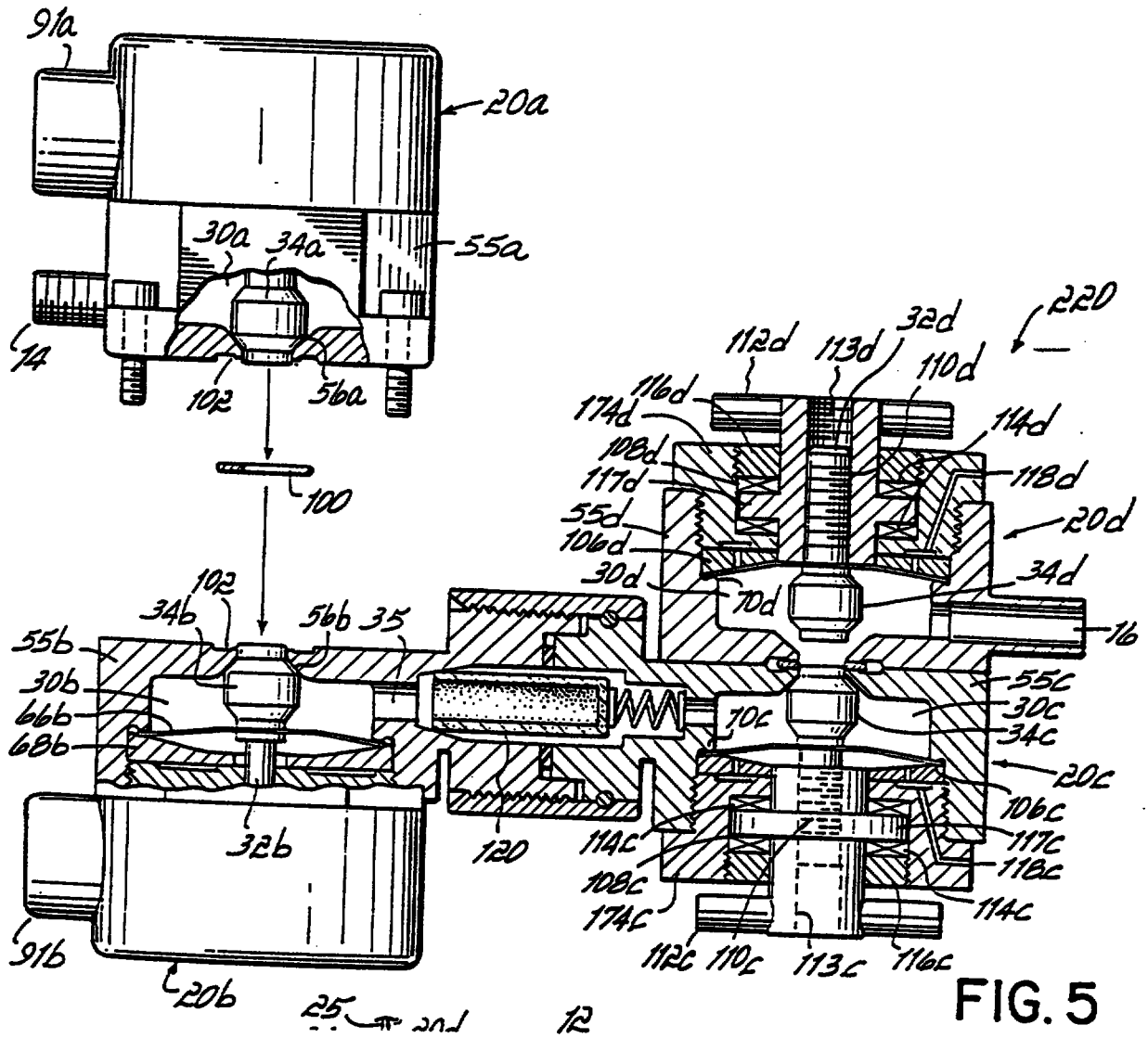
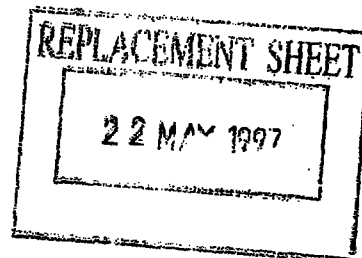
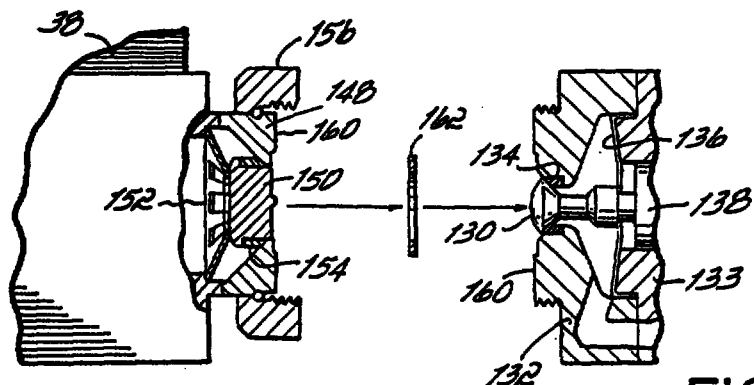
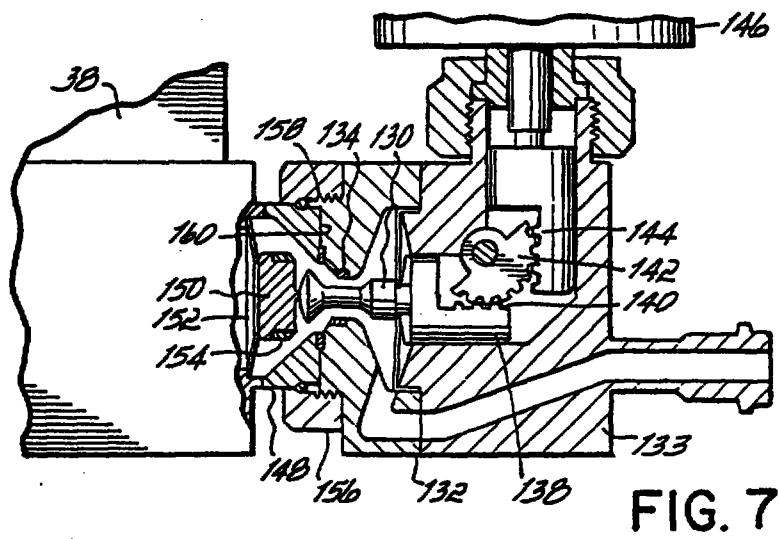
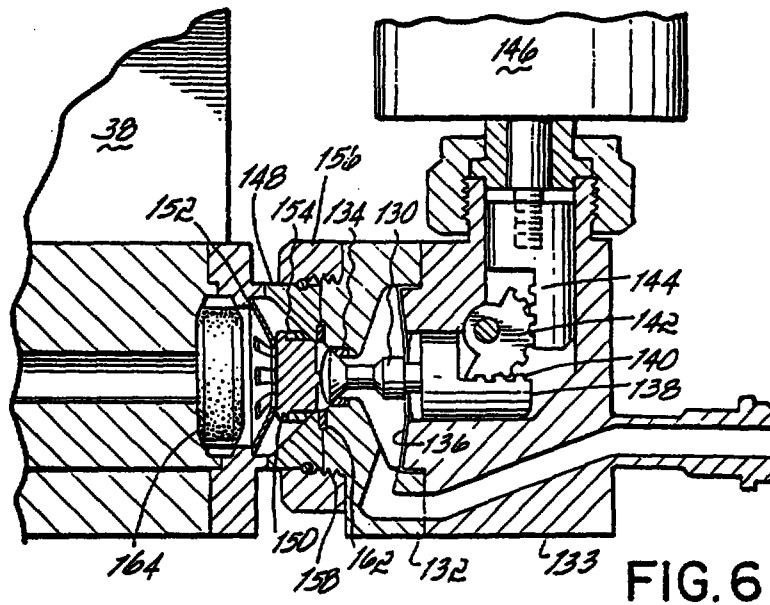


FIG. 4

REPLACEMENT SHEET

22 MAY 1997





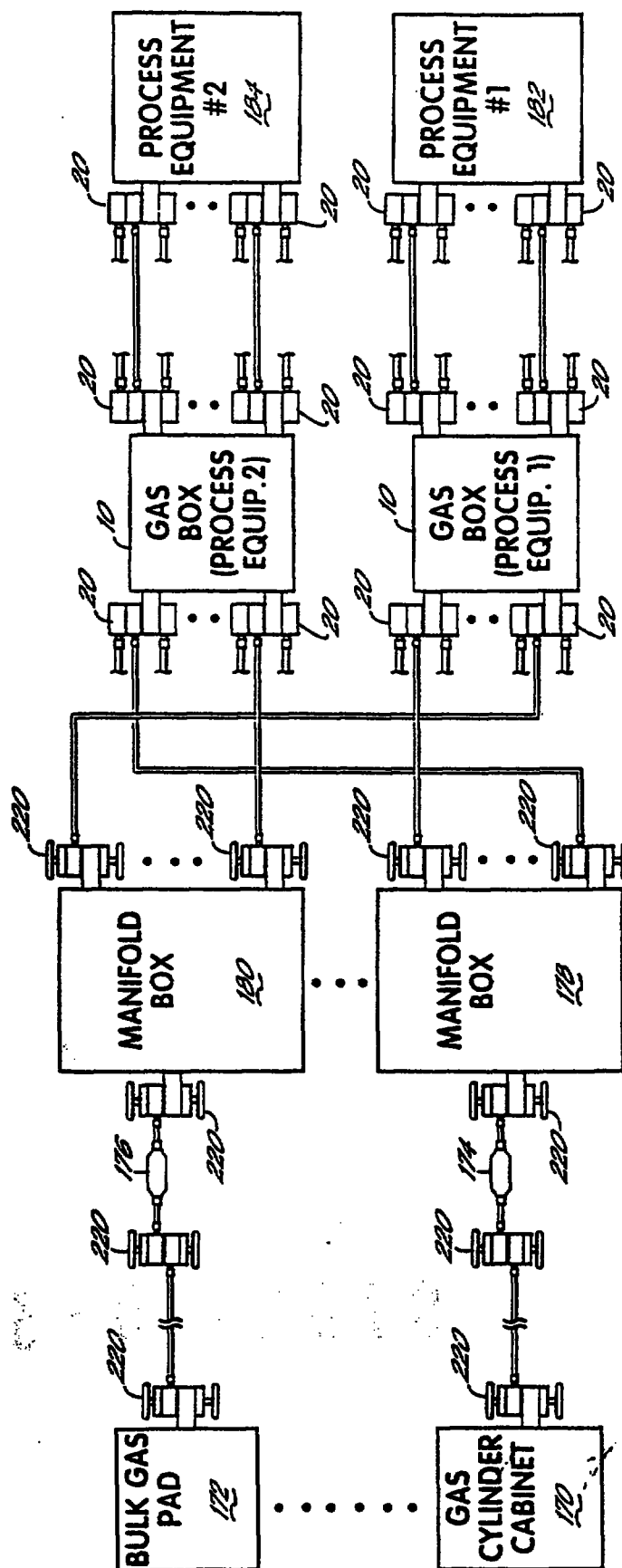


FIG. 9

REPLACEMENT SHEET

22 MAY 1997



44

Claims

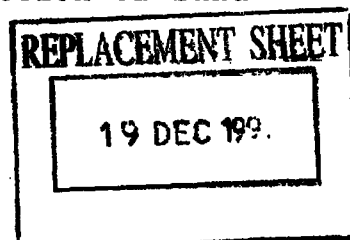
REPLACEMENT SHEETS		SG
☐ Description :	paged to paged	
☒ Claim(s) :	paged 44 to paged 54	
☐ Drawing(s) :	paged to paged	
☐ Abstract :	paged to paged	
DATE OF RECEIPT		19 DEC 1997

1. A valved coupler for ultra high purity gas distribution, comprising

a valve housing having an external surface, an internal surface defining a gas-carrying chamber, and first and second aperture-defining surfaces extending from said internal surface to said external surface and defining first and second apertures permitting gas flow between said gas-carrying chamber and an external environment to which the external surface of the housing is exposed,

a valve stem having proximal and distal ends slidably mounted within said housing for linear movement between a first position and a second position, along an axis extending through said first aperture, said valve stem having a sealing surface at said distal end,

a substantially planar flexible diaphragm having an outer periphery and an inner periphery, said inner periphery sealingly engaged to said valve stem, said outer periphery sealingly engaged to said internal surface of said housing, dividing said internal surface of said housing into two sections, said aperture-defining surfaces extending between said external surface and a common section of said internal surface of said housing,





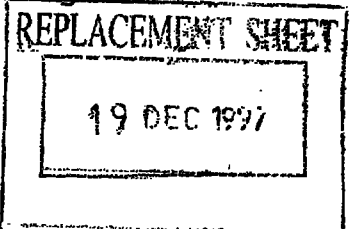
wherein at said first position, said sealing surface of said valve stem engages said first aperture-defining surface of said housing, and said distal end of said valve stem is substantially coplanar with said external surface of said housing in a region bordering said first aperture-defining surface, whereby when said first aperture is sealed by said valve stem only said first aperture-defining surface of said housing and said distal end of said valve stem are exposed to the external environment.

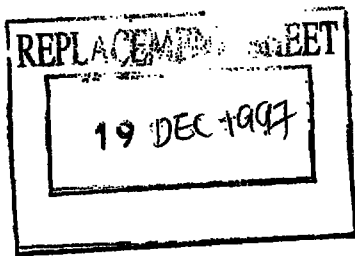
2. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said internal surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface of said valve stem withdraws into said housing and away from said external surface of said housing.

3. The valved coupler of claim 1 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said external surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface extends outwardly from said housing such





that said distal end of said valve stem extends outside said external surface of said housing.

4. The valved coupler of claim 1,
further comprising a drive housing
defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and further
defining a third aperture in communication with said
actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into
said actuating cylinder,

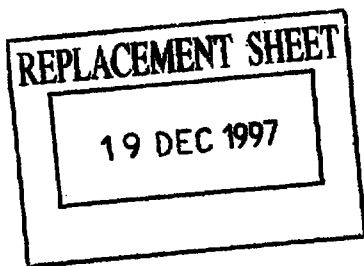
wherein said valve stem further comprises
a piston at said proximal end thereof slidably
mounted within said actuating cylinder, and

further comprising a spring applying a
force between said drive housing and said valve stem
to move said valve stem toward said first position,

whereby said valve stem may be actuated
from said first position to said second position by
injection of compressed gas into said actuating
cylinder through said third aperture.

5. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein
said sealing surface engages said
aperture-defining surface adjacent said internal
surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing
surface of said valve stem withdraws into said



housing and away from said external surface of said housing, and

said spring urges said valve stem toward said first aperture and said sealing surface into engagement with said aperture-surrounding surface.

6. The valved coupler of claim 4 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said external surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing surface extends outwardly from said housing such that said distal end of said valve stem extends outside said external surface of said housing, and

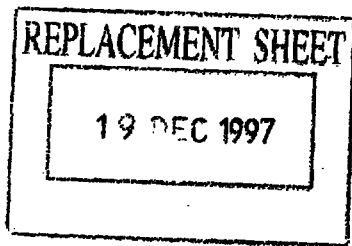
said spring urges said valve stem inwardly into said housing and said surface into engagement with said first aperture-defining surface.

7. The valved coupler of claim 1, further comprising

a pinion journaled for driven rotation in said housing, wherein

said valve stem includes a toothed surface at its proximal end engaging said pinion,

whereby rotation of said pinion causes motion of said stem between said first and second positions.



8. The valved coupler of claim 7, further comprising

a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said cylinder, and further comprising

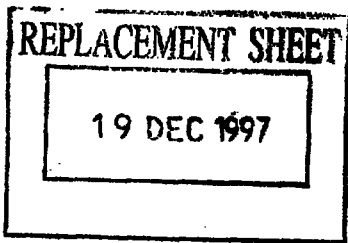
an actuator carrying a piston at an end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder for movement along a second axis, and including a toothed surface engaging said pinion,

whereby said actuator is actuated along said second axis by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture, to cause rotation of said pinion and motion of said valve stem between said first and second positions.

9. The valved coupler of claim 8 further comprising

a spring applying a force between said housing and said actuator to move said actuator toward a starting position.

10. The valved coupler of claim 8 wherein said second axis and said axis extending through said first aperture are orthogonal to each other.

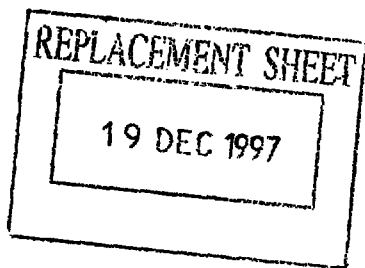


11. A valved coupler for ultra high purity gas distribution, comprising

a valve housing having an external surface, an internal surface defining a gas-carrying chamber, and first and second aperture-defining surfaces extending from said internal surface to said external surface and defining first and second apertures permitting gas flow between said gas-carrying chamber and an environment external to said housing,

a substantially planar flexible diaphragm having an outer periphery sealingly engaged to said internal surface of said housing, dividing said internal surface of said housing into two sections, said first and second apertures connecting to a common section of said internal surface of said housing,

a sealing surface moveable with said diaphragm between a first position and a second position, wherein at said first position, said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface of said housing to seal said first aperture at a location substantially coplanar with said external surface of said housing in a region bordering said first aperture-defining surface, and at said second position said sealing surface does



not seal said first aperture, whereby when said first aperture is sealed by said sealing surface only said first aperture-defining surface of said housing and an inner area of said sealing surface are exposed to an external environment.

12. The valved coupler of claim 11 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said internal surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface withdraws into said housing and away from said external surface of said housing.

13. The valved coupler of claim 11 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said external surface of said housing, and

at said second position, said sealing surface extends outwardly from said housing such that said sealing surface extends outside said external surface of said housing.

14. The valved coupler of claim 11,



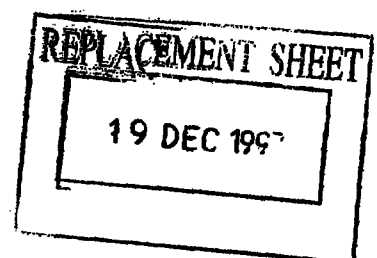
further comprising a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and further defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said actuating cylinder,

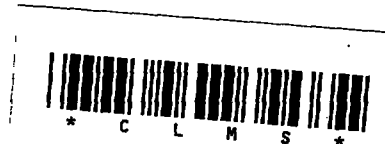
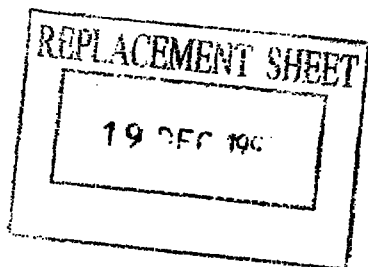
wherein said sealing surface is positioned on a distal end of a valve stem, an inner periphery of said diaphragm sealingly engaging said valve stem further comprising a piston at a proximal end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder, and

further comprising a spring applying a force between said drive housing and said valve stem to move said sealing surface of said valve stem toward said first position,

whereby said sealing surface of said valve stem may be actuated from said first position to said second position by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture.

15. The valved coupler of claim 14 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said internal surface of said housing,





at said second position, said sealing surface of said valve stem withdraws into said housing and away from said external surface of said housing, and

said spring urges said sealing surface of said valve stem toward said first aperture and said sealing surface into engagement with said aperture-surrounding surface.

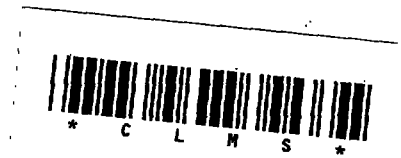
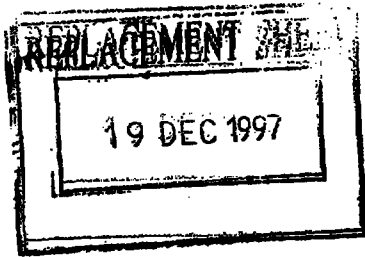
16. The valved coupler of claim 14 wherein said sealing surface engages said first aperture-defining surface adjacent said external surface of said housing,

at said second position, said sealing surface extends outwardly from said housing such that said distal end of said valve stem extends outside said external surface of said housing, and

said spring urges said sealing surface of said valve stem inwardly into said housing and said surface into engagement with said first aperture-defining surface.

17. The valved coupler of claim 11, further comprising

a pinion journaled for driven rotation in said housing, wherein



said sealing surface is positioned on distal end of a valve stem, an inner periphery of said diaphragm sealingly engaging said valve stem, said valve stem further comprising a toothed surface at a proximal end thereof engaging said pinion,

whereby rotation of said pinion causes motion of said sealing surfaces of said valve stem between said first and second positions.

18. The valved coupler of claim 17, further comprising

a drive housing defining a pneumatic actuating cylinder, and defining a third aperture in communication with said actuating cylinder for admitting compressed gas into said cylinder, and further comprising

an actuator carrying a piston at an end thereof slidably mounted within said actuating cylinder for movement along an axis, and including a toothed surface engaging said pinion,

whereby said actuator is actuated along said axis by injection of compressed gas into said actuating cylinder through said third aperture, to cause rotation of said pinion and motion of said sealing surface of said valve stem between said first and second positions.



54

19. The valved coupler of claim 18 further comprising

a spring applying a force between said housing and said actuator to move said actuator toward a starting position.

