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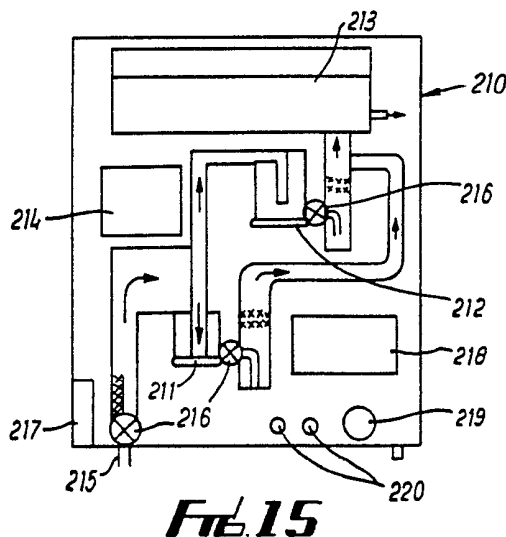
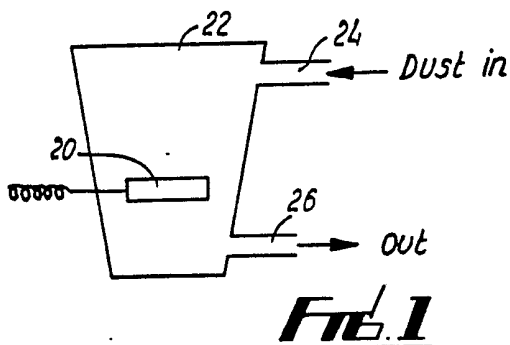
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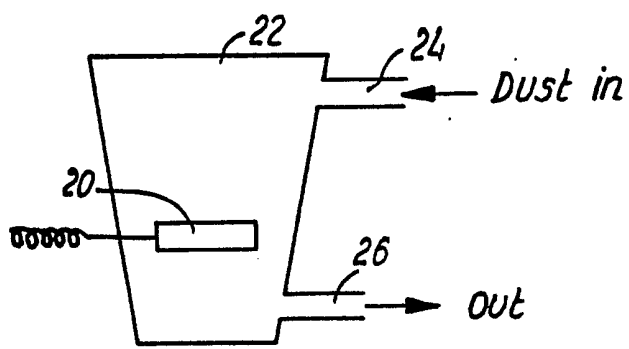
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SU 1397804 A**

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(54) "Dust monitoring with piezoelectric sensors

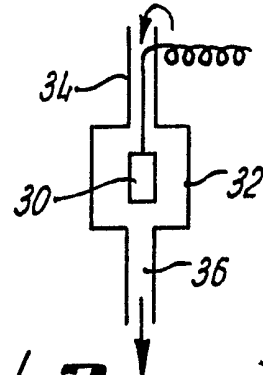
(57) A dust monitor comprises a piezoelectric sensor in the form of a quartz crystal 20 and an electrode system thereon. Exposure means in the form of a sampling cell 22 are provided to expose the piezoelectric sensor at least periodically to a stream of a gas which may contain dust or other organic or inorganic particulate material whose presence in or absence from the gas is to be monitored. The gas of said stream consists primarily of air. Electronic circuit means are provided (and disclosed in detail) coupled to the electrode system of said piezoelectric sensor to monitor variations in the resonant frequency of said piezoelectric sensor induced by the aggregation of dust or other particulate material on said piezoelectric sensor. The sensor is cleaned periodically. The monitor may be used for particles of selected-size only eg of respirable size. In one arrangement, crystals 211, 212 are sensitive to dust particles of different sizes and data logging and display devices 218-220 are provided. The monitor may be incorporated into a safety helmet e.g. for use in mining, manufacturing industry and agriculture.



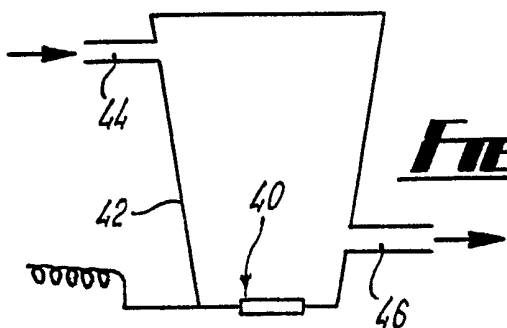


**FIG. 1**

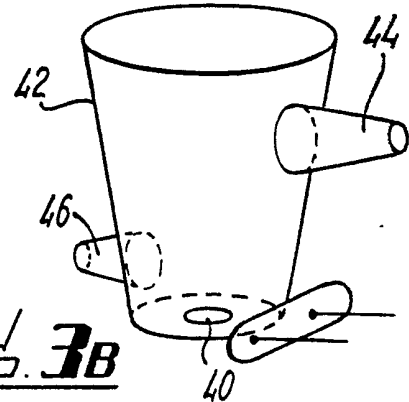
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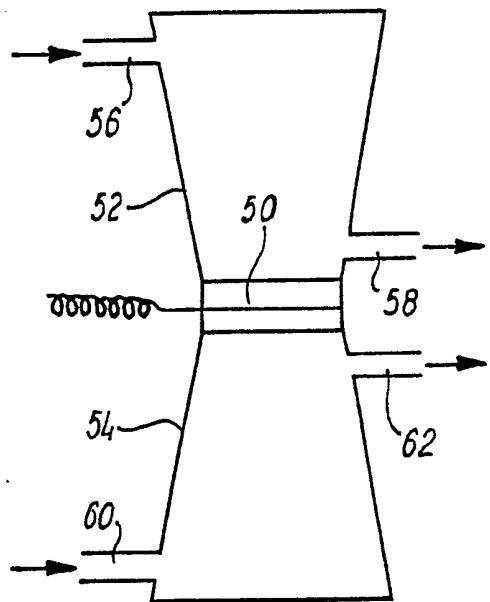
**FIG. 2**



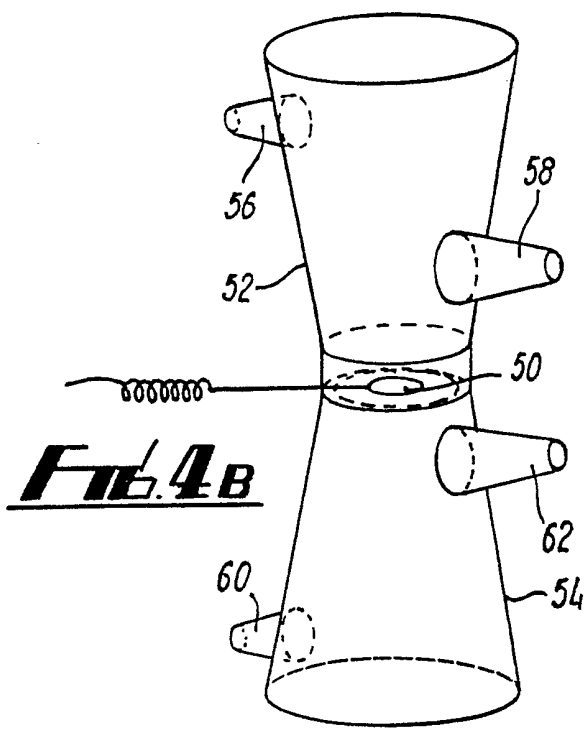
**FIG. 3A**



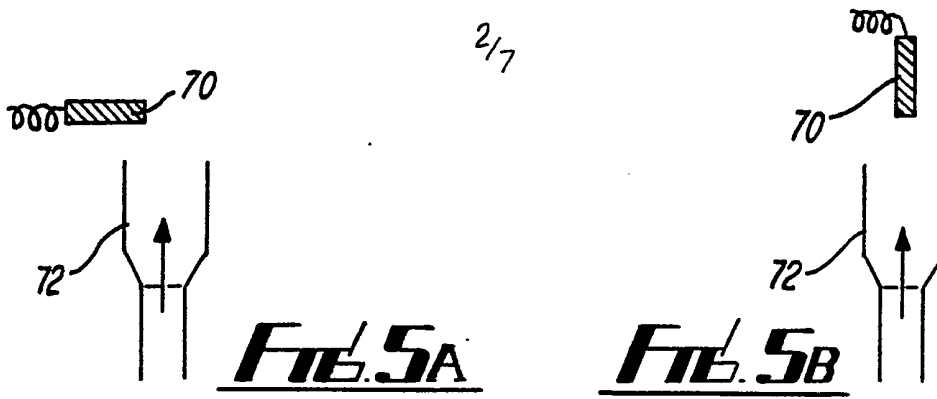
**FIG. 3B**



**FIG. 4A**

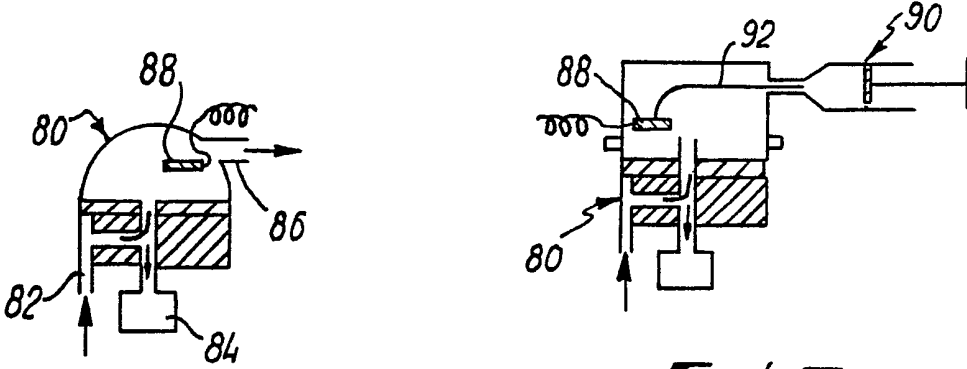


**FIG. 4B**



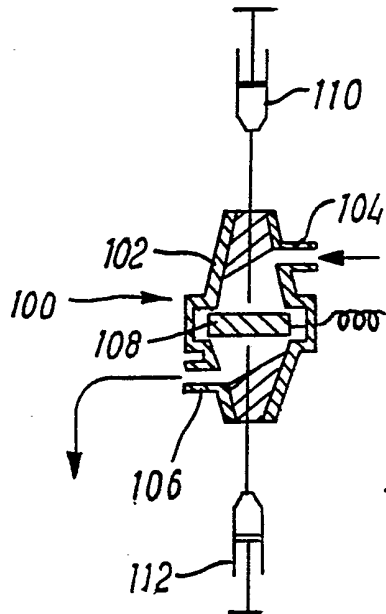
**FIG. 5A**

**FIG. 5B**

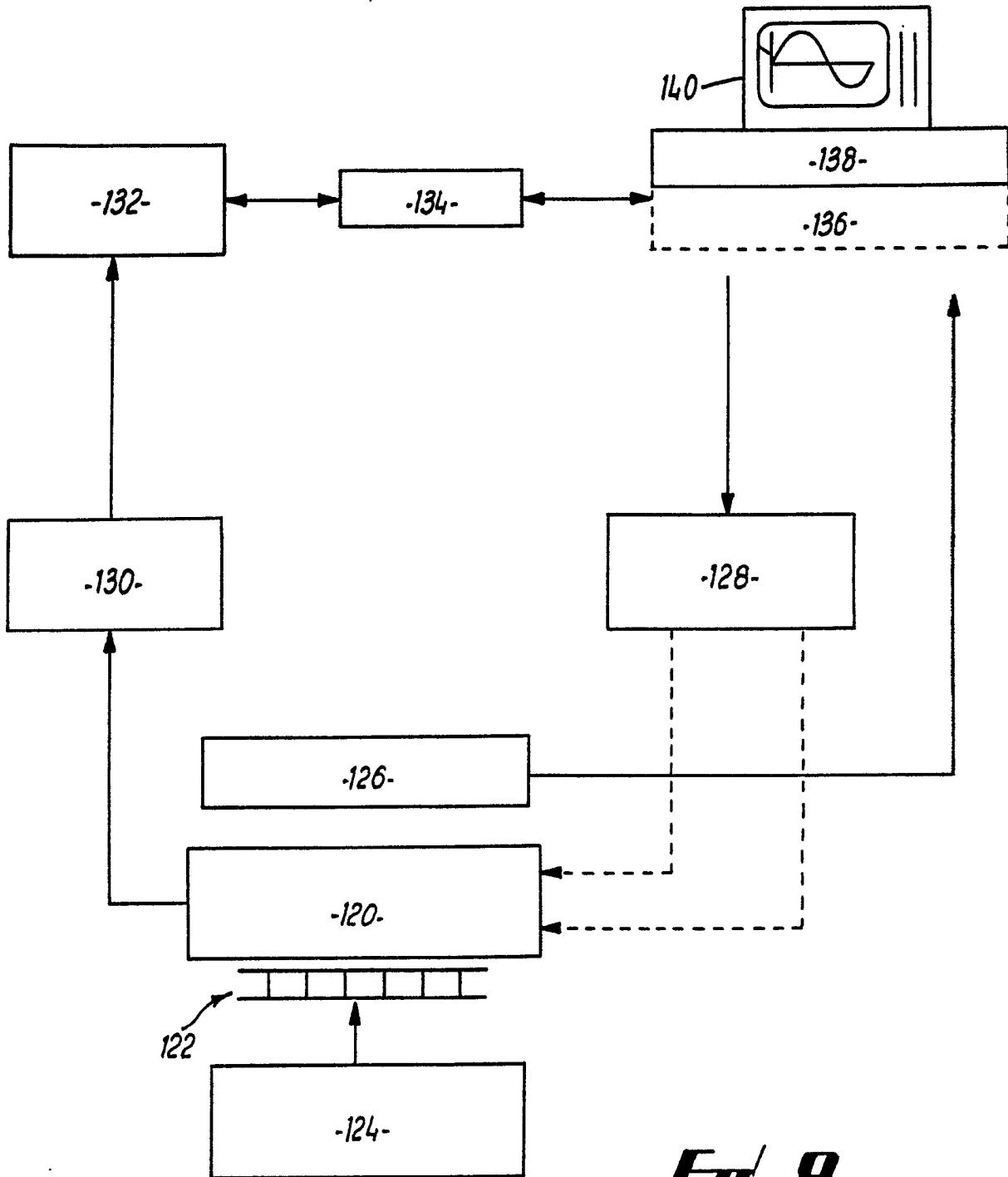


**FIG. 6**

**FIG. 7**

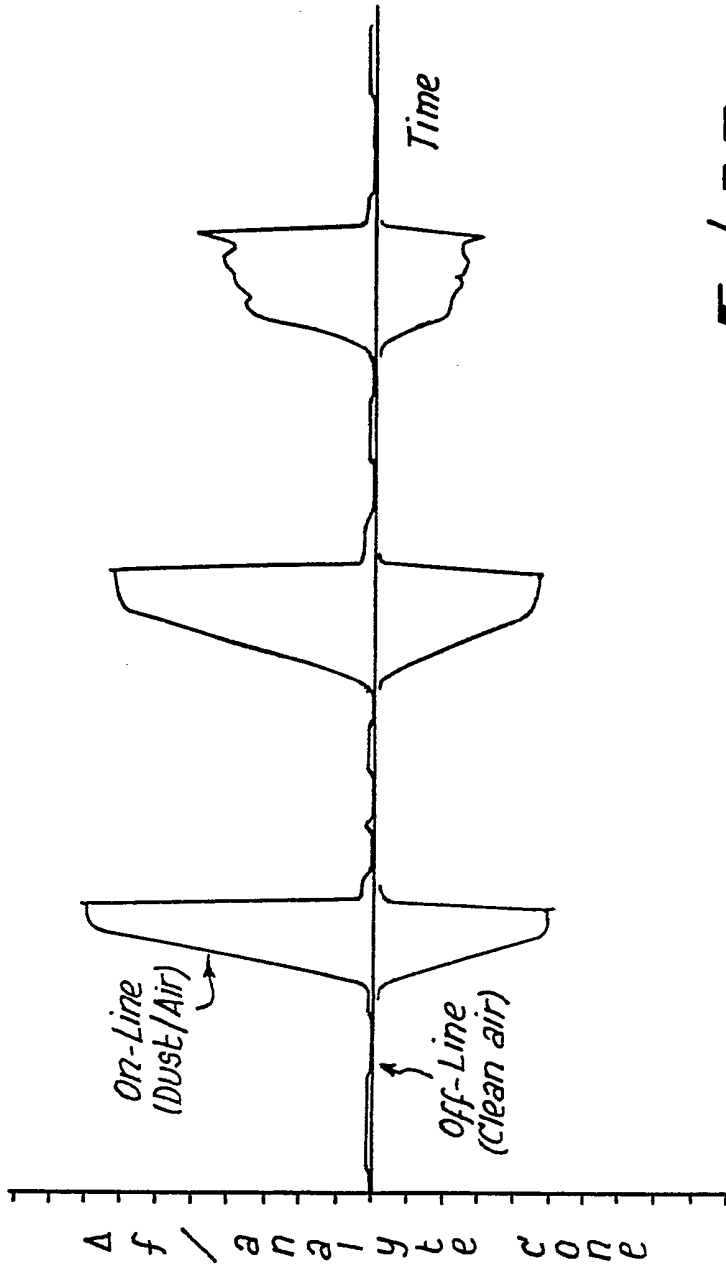


**FIG. 8**

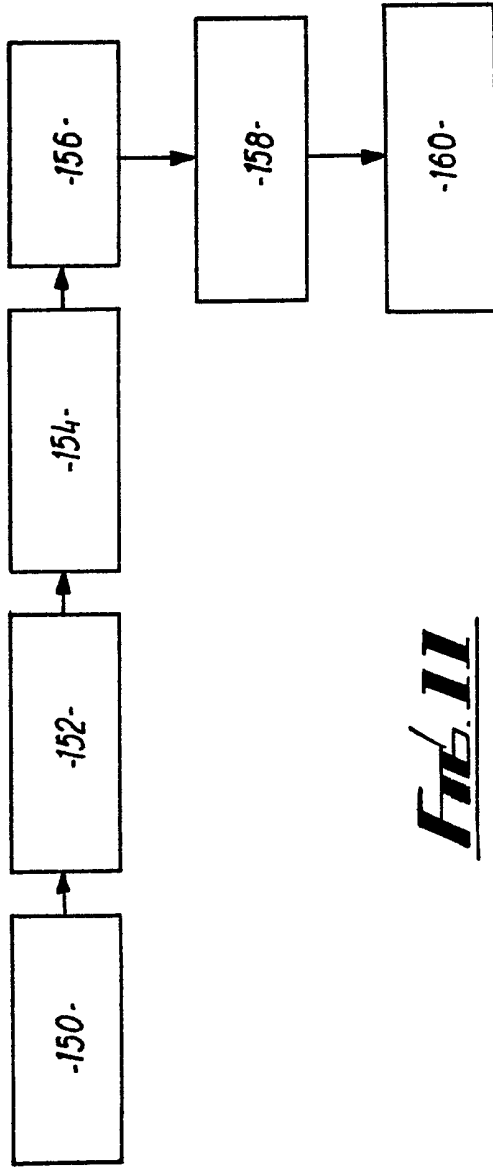


**FIG. 9**

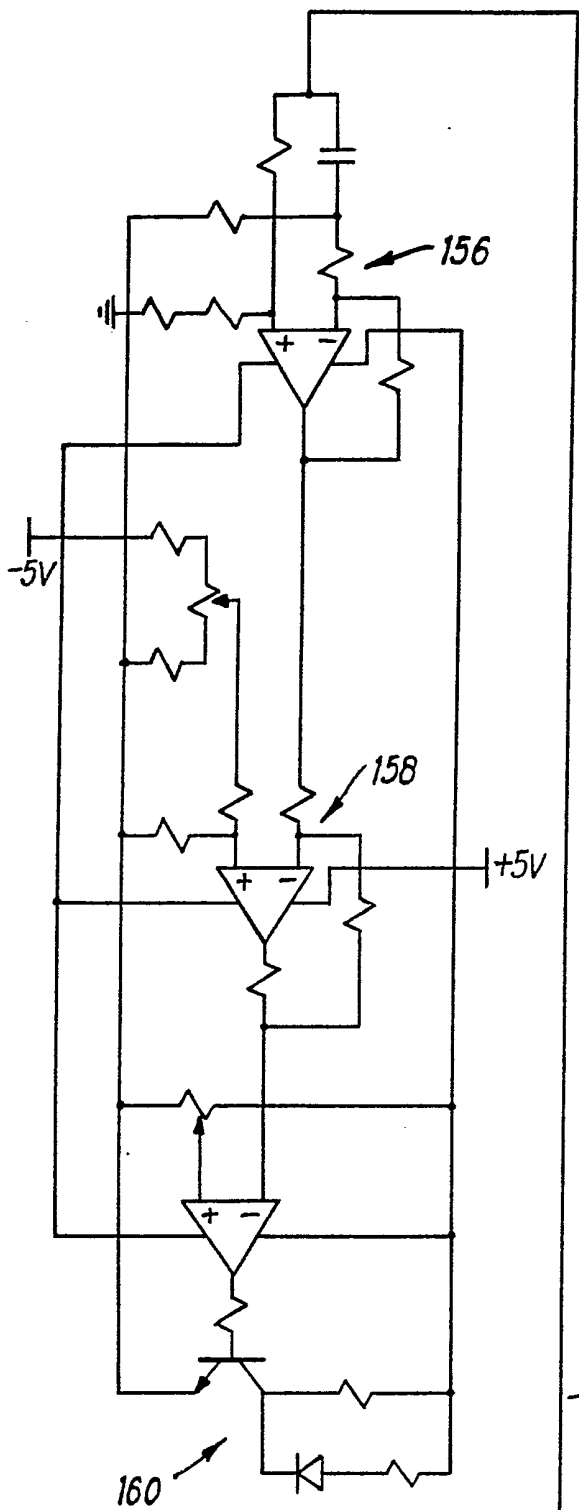
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**Fig. 10**

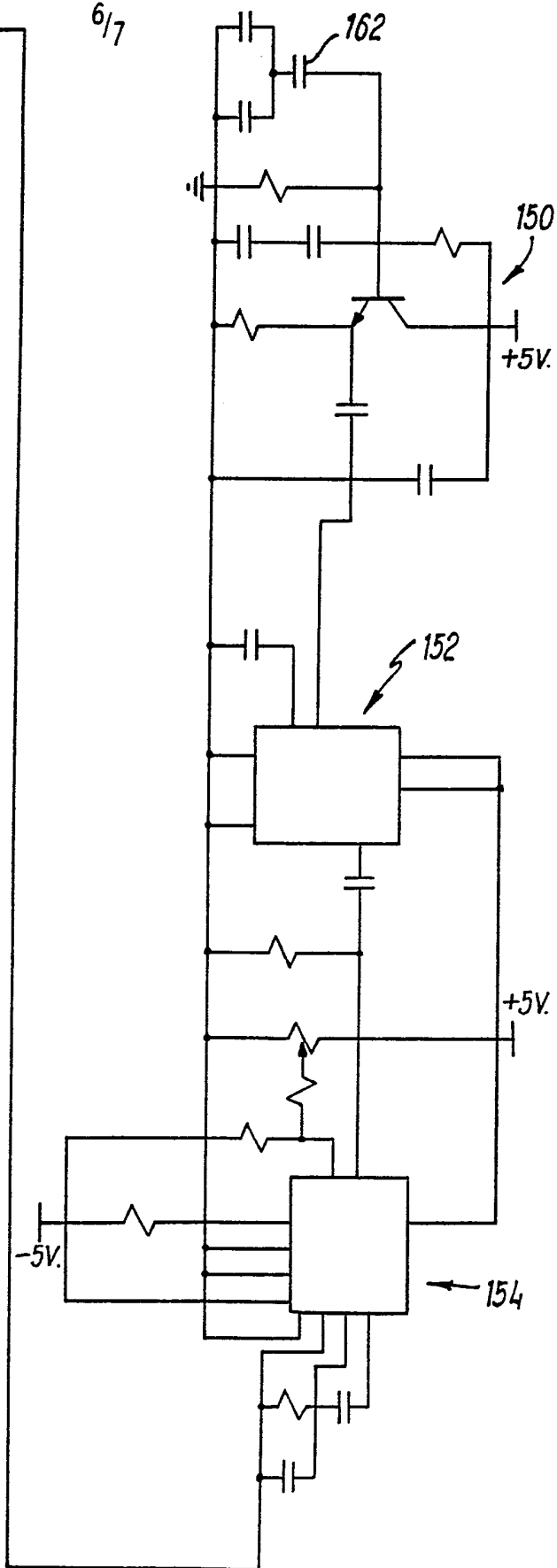


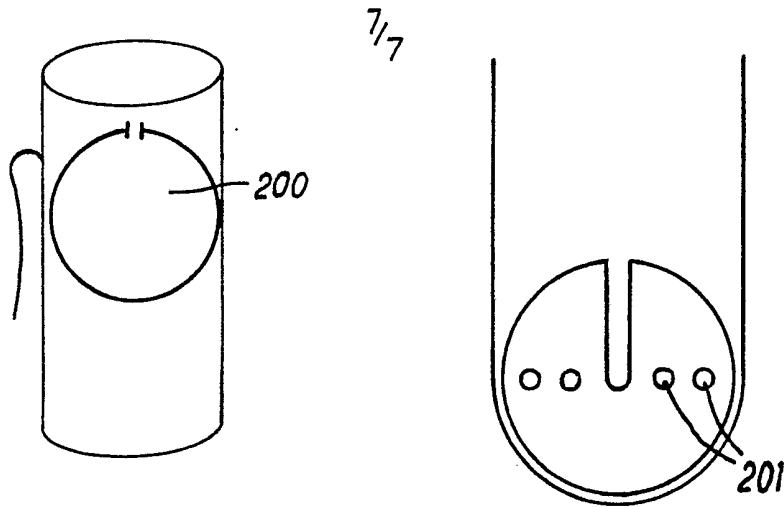
**Fig. 11**



***Fig. 12***

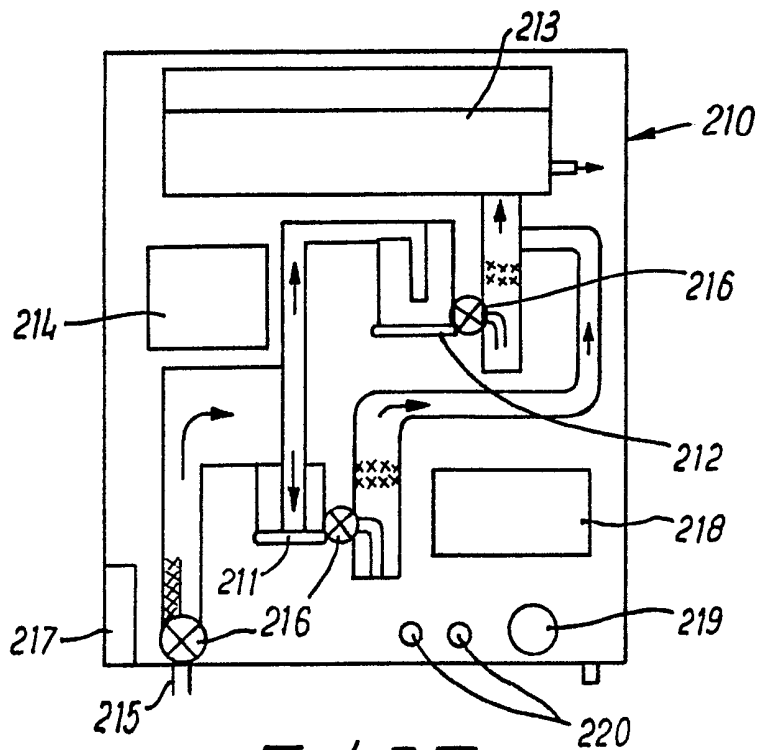
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**FIG. 13**

**FIG. 14**



**FIG. 15**



"Dust Monitors and Dust Monitoring"

This invention relates to dust monitors and to dust monitoring, and more particularly but not exclusively to  
5 real-time dynamic monitoring of gas-borne dust by use of a dust monitor based on a piezoelectric sensor.

There are numerous circumstances where health, safety, and/or product quality can be affected by gas-borne or air-  
10 borne dusts or micro-organisms. Accordingly there exists a requirement for a method and apparatus enabling rapid and accurate monitoring of dusts or micro-organisms, preferably with selectivity in respect of the range of size or type of air-borne particulate that is monitored, and it is an object  
15 of the invention to provide such a method and apparatus.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a dust monitor comprising a piezoelectric sensor including a piece of piezoelectric material and an  
20 electrode system thereon, and exposure means to expose the piezoelectric sensor at least periodically to a stream of a gas which may contain dust or other organic or inorganic particulate material whose presence in or absence from the gas is to be monitored. The gas of said stream may consist  
25 primarily or substantially entirely of air.

The piezoelectric material may comprise a crystalline material, for example quartz, or the piezoelectric material may comprise a non-crystalline material, for example polyvinylidene difluoride (PVDF). The electrode system may  
5 comprise two electrodes of suitable shape, size, and mutual spacing, preferably leaving at least one piezo-resonant area of the sensor to be exposed to the dust or the particulate material. The dust monitor preferably further comprises electronic circuit means coupled to the electrode system of  
10 said piezoelectric sensor to monitor variations in the resonant frequency of said piezoelectric sensor induced by the aggregation of dust or other particulate material on said piezoelectric sensor.

15 The exposure means preferably operates on a cyclic basis to expose the piezoelectric sensor periodically to said stream of gas, said exposure means comprising or being associated with a sensor cleaning system operable between periods of exposure of said sensor to said stream of gas substantially  
20 to remove dust or other particulate material aggregated on said piezoelectric sensor during a preceding period of exposure. The exposure means preferably operates to isolate said piezoelectric sensor from said stream of gas between said periods of exposure to facilitate operation of the  
25 sensor cleaning system.

The sensor cleaning system may comprise a vacuum system or an air jet system in the case of a piezoelectric sensor monitoring the dust or other particulate material by means  
30 of the gravity effect and/or the perturbation effect; the sensor cleaning system may comprise an electrostatic charge reversal system where the piezoelectric sensor is a charged crystal system; where the piezoelectric sensor is coated with a binder material for binding of the dust or other  
35 particulate material to be monitored during said periods of

exposure, the sensor cleaning system may comprise means for washing the sensor with a binder solvent, and for subsequently re-coating the piezoelectric sensor with clean binder.

5

The exposure means may comprise a cyclone or other dust size discriminator to cause substantially only particles on one size of a predetermined size limit to reach the piezoelectric sensor (i.e. to limit exposure of the piezoelectric sensor to particulates which are either above or below the size limit); the cyclone is preferably such that the piezoelectric sensor is exposed substantially only to particles of respirable size (less than a nominal 8 micrometre size) while dust particles which may have a nuisance value but are larger than the nominal respirable limit of 8 micrometres are caused substantially to be diverted away from the piezoelectric sensor to a second piezoelectric sensor.

20 The dust monitor preferably incorporates temperature stabilisation means thermally coupled to the piezoelectric sensor and operable to tend to stabilise the temperature of the sensor during operation of the dust monitor. The temperature stabilisation means may comprise means to supply a stream of temperature-controlled air to a portion of the piezoelectric sensor other than the portion or portions of the piezoelectric sensor exposed to the stream of gas whose particulate content is to be monitored. Alternatively, the temperature stabilisation means may comprise a Peltier pile thermally coupled to the piezoelectric sensor and supplied in use with current of a magnitude and polarity such as to stabilise the temperature of the piezoelectric sensor to within a predetermined range of temperatures, preferably as measured by a thermocouple also thermally coupled to the piezoelectric sensor.

Said electronic circuit means coupled to the electrode system of the piezoelectric sensor may comprise an oscillator having an oscillatory frequency wherein the variations in oscillatory frequency are substantially or  
5 entirely determined by the variations in the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor as brought about by the aggregation of dust or other particulate material thereon, and frequency variation sensing means to sense the variations in oscillatory frequency. The frequency  
10 variation sensing means may comprise a frequency-to-voltage converter (optionally fed through a fixed-ratio frequency divider) and a threshold crossing detector operable to give an output signal if the frequency variation exceeds a predetermined limit, for example, to give an alarm signal if  
15 the sensed frequency variation indicated a concentration of gas-borne or air-borne dust or other particulate material in excess of a predetermined limit.

For the monitoring of air-borne organic particulates of a  
20 biological nature, the piezoelectric sensor may be coated with an agar rich in nutrients to encourage growth of a particular analyte micro-organism, or alternatively, the piezoelectric sensor may be coated with a material which reacts directly with a side product chemically related to a  
25 specific organism.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of dust monitoring for monitoring the presence in or absence from a gas of dust or other organic  
30 or inorganic particulate material, said method comprising the steps of periodically applying a stream of said gas to the piezoelectric sensor of a dust monitor in accordance with the first aspect of the present invention, and monitoring variations in the resonant frequency of said  
35 piezoelectric sensor induced by the aggregation of dust or

other particulate material on said piezoelectric sensor.

Preferably said method includes the further steps of periodically discontinuing application of the stream of gas to said piezoelectric sensor, and of removing any dust or other particulate material aggregated on said piezoelectric sensor prior to the next period of application of the stream of gas to said piezoelectric sensor.

10 Preferably said method also includes the step of subjecting the dust or other particulate material in said gas to discrimination based on particle size such as to cause said stream of gas to contain substantially only particles either above or below a predetermined nominal size; more  
15 preferably the method comprises limiting exposure of said piezoelectric sensor to particulate material of a respirable size. Preferably, the monitoring of variations in the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor is such as to cause an alarm or other signal indicative of the gas being  
20 monitored containing more than a predetermined maximum amount of respirable particles.

Said method may also include the steps of applying heat to or withdrawing heat from the piezoelectric sensor in a  
25 manner such as to tend to stabilise the temperature of the piezoelectric sensor during dust monitoring.

Embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings  
30 wherein:-

Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram of a first embodiment of the invention;  
Fig. 2 is a schematic diagram of a second embodiment  
35 of the invention;

Figs. 3A and 3B are respectively schematic and perspective diagrams of a third embodiment of the invention;

5 Figs. 4A and 4B are respectively schematic and perspective diagrams of a fourth embodiment of the invention;

Figs. 5A and 5B show two variations in an application of the invention;

10 Fig. 6 is a schematic section of a fifth embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 7 is a schematic section of a sixth embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 8 is a schematic section of a seventh embodiment of the invention;

15 Fig. 9 is a schematic diagram of a computerised dust monitoring system;

Fig. 10 is a dual graph of measurements obtained in testing of the invention;

20 Fig. 11 is a block schematic diagram of an electronic circuit for use in the invention;

Fig. 12 is a detailed diagram of the circuit of Fig. 11.

Fig. 13 is a perspective diagram of a device of the invention incorporating a levelling device;

25 Fig. 14 is a schematic detail diagram of the device of Fig. 13 and

Fig. 15 is a schematic diagram of a dust monitor device in accordance with the present invention.

30 Before referring to the drawings in detail, some theoretical principles underlying the invention will first be discussed. A piezoelectric material such as quartz or polyvinylidene difluoride (PVDF) has the property of converting mechanical strain to electricity, and vice versa. An electrode system,  
35 such as a suitably dimensioned pair of electrodes, on a

suitably dimensioned piece of piezoelectric material enable measurement of strain-induced voltages and/or application of an electrostatic field to induce mechanical strain. Such a piezoelectric device can form the frequency-determining resonant element in an electronic oscillator circuit. If part of the surface of such a piezoelectric device is exposed to accretion of dust or other particulate material, the mass increment decreases the resonant frequency in accordance with the Sauerbrey equation, as follows:-

10

$$DF = - D_m \cdot F / R \cdot t \cdot A$$

where DF is the frequency change in Hertz,

$D_m$  is the mass change in microgrammes,

F is the resonant frequency of the clean

15 (dust-free) piezoelectric device in MegaHertz,

R is the density of the piezoelectric material in grammes per cubic centimetre,

t is the thickness of the piezoelectric device in centimetres, and

20 A is the area of the piezoelectric device exposed to dust, in square centimetres.

Thus a suitable piezoelectric device can be employed as a piezoelectric sensor for sensing the accretion on the sensor of dust or other particulate material, the mass of the particulate material being readily measurable by determining the changes in the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor, or by any other suitable technique.

30 Measurement can be made of the rate of deposition (mass increment per unit time) of dust on the piezoelectric sensor, or measurement can be made of the total accumulation of dust on the piezoelectric sensor over a fixed sampling period (for example, a predetermined number of seconds or 35 minutes), or any suitable combination of both such types of

measurement can be employed. The piezoelectric sensor is preferably cleaned between successive ones of these measuring periods or sampling periods.

5

In the following description of specific embodiments of the invention, the preferred piezoelectric sensor is a piezoelectric quartz crystal with a pair of electrodes thereon and with at least one area on one or both sides of  
10 the crystal exposed to allow dust or other particulate material to accumulate thereon in a manner which affects the resonant frequency of the crystal. Accordingly, references to a crystal are to be taken as referring to a crystalline piezoelectric dust sensor, but it should be borne in mind  
15 that suitable non-crystalline piezoelectric sensors may be substituted in appropriate circumstances. The preferred piezoelectric crystal sensor is an AT-cut quartz crystal with a diameter of about 1.3 centimetres and a thickness of  
20 silver, and a resonant frequency of 9MHz. Alternatively a GT-cut quartz crystal may be used as it has been found that such crystals have virtually no temperature coefficient in the range 0 degree C. to 40 degrees C.

25 For the sake of simplicity Figs. 1 to 8 (detailed below) show dust sampling systems without the external electronic circuitry enabling resonant frequency measurements to be performed on the piezoelectric sensor crystal within the sampling system to complete the dust monitoring system and  
30 function. Moreover, Figs. 1 to 6 omit the sensor cleaning systems that would normally be necessary in practice.

Referring now to Fig. 1, a piezoelectric sensor crystal 20 hangs freely in a horizontal position within a sampling cell  
35 22. Air (or another gas) which may contain suspended particulate material is fed into the sampling cell 22



through an upper inlet duct 24, circulates through the cell 22, and is finally exhausted from the sampling cell 22 through a lower outlet duct 26. A representative aliquot of the air-borne particulate material aggregates on the sensor crystal 20. Either the rate of aggregation is measured as the decline with time of the apparent resonant frequency of the crystal 20, or the total aggregation is measured at the end of a fixed sampling period as the decrement of the apparent resonant frequency of the crystal 20.

10

After each sampling period, the sensor crystal 20 is blown, vacuumed, shaken, or washed substantially clean of collected particulates in preparation for a subsequent sampling session. Air flow through the sampling cell 22 is preferably cut off during cleaning of the crystal 20.

In Fig. 2, a piezoelectric sensor crystal 30 hangs freely in a vertical position within a sampling chamber 32 having an upper inlet duct 34 and a lower outlet duct 36. The dust sampling system of Fig. 2 functions in a generally similar manner to that described above with respect to Fig. 1.

The dust sampling system of Fig. 3A is in some respects similar to that of Fig. 1, but differs in that the piezoelectric sensor crystal 40 of the Fig. 3 system is an integrated rim-bound crystal forming part of the inner surface of the sampling chamber 42, as is more clearly shown in the perspective schematic of Fig. 3B. Also shown in Fig. 3B are the cross-sectional tapers and radial offsets of the upper inlet duct 44 and the lower outlet duct 46 to give requisite gas and particulate flow conditions within the sampling chamber 42.

The double-chamber bifunctional dust sampling system shown in Fig. 4A (diagramatic) and Fig. 4B (perspective schematic)

is an extension of that shown in Figs 3A and 3B, in that the piezoelectric sensor crystal 50 divides the system into an upper chamber 52 and a lower chamber 54 which are mutually pneumatically isolated. The upper chamber 52 has an upper 5 inlet duct 56 and a lower outlet duct 58 (corresponding to the inlet and outlet ducts 44 and 46 of the Fig 3 system), while the lower chamber 54 has a lower inlet duct 60 and an upper outlet duct 62.

10 The upper chamber 52 in the Fig. 4 system performs the same function as the dust sampling chamber 42 in the Fig. 3 system. The lower chamber 54 of the Fig. 4 system can be used to carry heated air for temperature control of the sensor crystal 50. Alternatively, in the case where the 15 face of the crystal 50 exposed to the interior of the upper chamber 52 is coated with a binder to promote adherence of particulate material on the sensitive area of the piezoelectric sensor, the face of the crystal 50 exposed to the interior of the lower chamber 54 may also be coated with 20 binder, and preferably also exposed to a current of clean air generally matching the current of air through the upper chamber 52. This procedure will differentially back off base-line drift in binder-type dust monitoring systems.

25 Fig. 5A shows a fume monitoring system in which a piezoelectric sensor crystal 70 is horizontally mounted above a fluidized bed 72, while Fig 5B shows a similar monitoring system in which the sensor 70 is vertically mounted above the fluidized bed 72.

30

Fig. 6 shows a dust-separating cyclone head 80 having an inlet duct 82 fed with a stream of dusty air. The cyclone head 80 acts in a known manner to separate heavier particles out of the incoming air-stream, and to drop them into a 35 lower receptacle 84. Air which now contains substantially

only the lighter particles of dust passes up through the top of the cyclone head 80 to be exhausted through an outlet duct 86. Light dust in this exhaust stream is monitored by a piezoelectric sensor 88 mounted within the cyclone head 80 5 just upstream of the outlet duct 86. A suitable arrangement of the cyclone head 80 will enable the sensor 88 to be exposed substantially only to dust particles which are small enough to be respirable, and which therefore present a particular health hazard.

10

Fig. 7 represents a modification of the Fig. 6 system in which the cyclone head 80 is provided with a viewing window. Also, the sensor 88 is provided with an air jet cleansing system 90 which is schematically depicted as a manually- 15 operable syringe feeding through a conduit 92 to a nozzle tip positioned to blow dust off the sensor 88 when this function is required. (Note: in practice an automatic microprocessor controlled air jet, vacuum or solvent cleansing system is used, Fig. 9, employing solenoid 20 valves).

Fig. 8 shows a more advanced model of respirable dust monitor 100 which is intended to be used in conjunction with a cyclone head (not shown) having an inner aluminium 25 dust capture chamber and Millipore filter (a proprietary membrane filter). The monitor 100 has a double-ended chamber 102 with an upper inlet duct 104 and a lower outlet duct 106. A piezoelectric dust sensor crystal 108 is horizontally mounted in the centre of the chamber 102 so as 30 to be exposed to the stream of (potentially) dust-carrying gas passing through the chamber 102 from the inlet 104 to the outlet 106.

The monitor 100 is provided with a sensor cleaning system 35 schematically depicted as an upper syringe 110 and a lower

syringe 112. Operation of the syringes 110 and 112 will air-blast the upper and lower surfaces of the sensor crystal 108 respectively, to remove dust or other particles accumulated thereon. (Note: again the automatic system above replaces this system in practice).

The outlet duct 106 may be coupled to a downstream filter (not shown) for cross-checking and calibration of the dust monitor 100.

Fig. 9 is a block schematic diagram of a computerised dust monitoring system based on a piezoelectric sensor cell 120 which may be in the form of a dust sampling cell as shown in any of Figs 1 to 8, or in any other suitable form. The piezoelectric sensor within the cell 120 has its temperature stabilised by a Peltier unit 122 under the control of a Peltier temperature controller 124 and a temperature-sensing thermocouple 126.

20

Dusty air (or potentially dusty air) is periodically fed to the sensor cell 120, alternately with clean air for sensor-cleaning purposes, under the control of air-stream change-over solenoids 128.

25

The piezoelectric sensor within the sensor cell 120 is connected to an external electronic oscillator circuit 130 whose oscillatory frequency is determined by the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor, as modified by the accretion of dust or other particulate material on the sensor. The output frequency of the oscillator circuit 130 is measured by a frequency counter 132, and the frequency measurement is transferred via an IEEE bus (data communications link) 134 to the port 136 of a microcomputer 138 (in this instance, a BBC Micro). The port 136 also links the microcomputer 138 to the solenoids 128 for their

programmed control, and to the thermocouple 126 for the reception of temperature correction signals.

5 The microcomputer 138 calculates the density of air-borne dust in any suitable manner on the basis of changes in the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor within the sensor cell 120, and displays the calculation results in a suitable form, for example on a linked VDU 140.

10

Fig. 10 shows typical graphical results obtainable by dust monitoring in accordance with the invention. The vertical scale of the lower graph shows the progressive decrements in the resonant frequency of the piezoelectric sensor during  
15 three successive periods of exposure to dust-laden air, the horizontal scale being time. (In this instance, use is made of cellulose dust generated in a fluidised bed). The vertical scale of the upper graph shows the corresponding concentration of air-borne dust (in milligrammes per cubic  
20 metre) to the same horizontal time scale. The central horizontal line is the zero or datum level corresponding to clean (dust-free) air. The graphs of Fig. 10 could be displayed on the V.D.U. 140 of the Fig. 9 computerised dust monitoring system, and the microprocessor 138 could be  
25 programmed to display either or both of the Fig. 10 graphical plots. Either the rate of change (slope of the graphical plot) can be monitored to measure the rate of dust accumulation on the sensor, or the integrated total per unit time (area between the graphical plot and the zero line per  
30 sampling period) can be monitored to give an equivalent result, or both these values may be monitored simultaneously.

Fig. 11 is a block circuit diagram of an electronic circuit  
35 for measuring the resonant frequency of a piezoelectric dust sensor (e.g. as previously described, or any other suitable

type), and for responding to a change (decrease) in resonant frequency above a certain magnitude to give an alarm signal indicative of an excessive concentration of dust. The Fig. 5 11 circuit comprises an oscillator circuit 150 whose frequency-determining element is the piezoelectric dust sensor, a frequency pre-scaler 152 to divide the output frequency from the oscillator 150 to a more convenient value, a frequency-to-voltage converter 154 to convert the scaled 10 frequency to a proportionate analogue voltage, a smoothing circuit 156 to minimize undesirable ripple and transients, a differential amplifier 158 set to produce an output when the smoothed frequency-dependent voltage changes by more than a predetermined limit, and an audio and/or visual alarm 15 circuit 160 driven or triggered by the output from the differential amplifier 158.

Fig. 12 shows the Fig. 11 circuit in detail, and portions of the Fig. 12 circuit that correspond to the functional blocks 20 of the Fig. 11 circuit are identified by the same reference numerals. Additionally, in the Fig. 12 circuit the reference numeral 162 denotes the frequency-determining piezoelectric dust sensor.

25 The circuit of Fig. 12 can be miniaturised and battery-powered, and utilised in conjunction with a suitable air sampling system to form a personal dust monitor that can be carried (e.g. attached to clothing) by a person who may be exposed to undesirably high levels of air-borne respirable 30 dust. In such a case, the Fig. 12 circuit would be present to give an alarm at the appropriate TLV level, i.e. the desirable or mandatory threshold limiting value corresponding to the maximum concentration of dust to which a worker can be safely or legally exposed in a given period, 35 for example, an 8-hour working day.

If a levelling device is incorporated in the apparatus by using a gas or liquid supported floating sphere ball device 200, Fig. 13, the device can be made to be affected as little as possible by movements of the wearer. A simpler device could incorporate a pendulum supported by a ball joint which would allow the device to remain level over a small degree of angular variation of the apparatus as a whole. Such devices could, in addition to being attachable to a users clothing, be attached to a safety helmet or safety classes.

In the gas supported version suitable air outlets 201 can be provided to produce a cushion of air around the ball device 200 as illustrated in Fig. 14. As an added refinement a microchip tilt detector can be included for monitoring any actual movement away from the horizontal and to provide a default signal on detecting tilt beyond a present limit.

20

The sensitivity of dust detection is proportional to the reciprocal of the area of the piezoelectric sensor that is exposed to dust. Typical theoretical values of resonant frequency decrement are 240 Hertz per microgramme of dust for an exposed sensor area of 1 centimetre diameter, and 667 Hertz per microgramme of dust for an exposed sensor area of 6 millimetres diameter. (These figures apply to sensors that are coated with a binder to cause adherence of dust during monitoring). These dust detection sensitivities may be translated to respective detection limits of 1 milligramme of dust per cubic metre of air and 400 microgrammes of dust per cubic metre of air using an air sampling flow rate of 10 litres per minute and one-minute sampling periods. The calculated detection limits are based on a (3 x sigma) noise level of plus or minus 2.5 Hertz. Lower detection limits are possible with a smaller area of

piezoelectric sensor exposed to the dust and/or with higher air sampling flow rates.

5 Further figures relating sensor area to sensitivity and detection limits are as follows:-

Diameter of exposed area = 3.0 millimetres (corresponding to an exposed area of 0.0707 square centimetres) gives a  
10 sensitivity of 2669 Hertz per microgramme of dust or 400 picogrammes of dust per Hertz, as calculated from the previously cited Sauerbrey equation. The corresponding detection limit is 1.1 nanogrammes, calculated from (3 x  
15 sigma)/sensitivity (where sensitivity is expressed as Hertz per microgramme), taking sigma as 1 Hertz (being the piezoelectric sensor crystal loading detection limit).

With calculations made on the same basis as quoted above, an exposed area with a diameter of 10.6 millimetres  
20 (corresponding to an exposed area of 0.7854 square centimetres) gives sensitivity of 240 Hertz per microgramme of dust or 4 nanogrammes of dust per Hertz, and a detection limit of 13 nanogrammes.

25 Again on the same basis, an exposed area with a diameter of 13.86 millimetres (corresponding to an exposed area of 1.5087 square centimetres) gives a sensitivity of 125 Hertz per microgramme of dust or 8 nanogrammes of dust per Hertz, and a detection limit of 24 nanogrammes.

30 The above detection limits based on area of piezoelectric sensor exposed to dust can be converted to detection limits under the dynamic conditions of exposure to flowing air by dividing the area-dependent detection limit by the product of the air flow rate and the signal update time (or sampling  
35 period), and multiplying by a suitable conversion constant whose magnitude depends on the relevant units of



measurement.

Thus the 3.0 millimetre diameter case referred to above, with  
5 a signal update time of 1 second and a flow rate of 10  
litres per minute, gives a dynamic detection limit of 7  
microgrammes of dust per cubic metre of air. Similarly, the  
13.86 millimetre diameter case referred to above, with a  
signal update time of 1 second and a flow rate of 50  
10 millilitres per minute, gives a dynamic detection limit of  
29 milligrammes of dust per cubic metre of air.

While the monitors and monitoring procedures described above  
have particularly referred to dusts and other such  
15 particulate materials, the apparatus and method of the  
invention can also be applied to the detection and  
monitoring of gas-borne and air-borne biological substances  
and micro-organisms. For use as a biosensor, the  
piezoelectric crystal or other form of piezoelectric sensor  
20 would be coated with an agar rich in nutrients to encourage  
growth of the selected micro-organism. Alternatively, use  
may be made of a coating which reacts directly with some  
side product chemically related to a specific organism.  
Unlike the seconds or minutes that would be typical for dust  
25 monitoring, biosensors may require a response time of  
several hours. Biosensor response time could be reduced by  
providing optimum biological growth conditions at the  
detection surface of the piezoelectric sensor and in the  
sampling chamber; such optimum growth conditions may include  
30 correct humidity, temperature, pH of the agar, and improved  
growth nutrients for specific organisms. Alternatively, a  
second piezoelectric sensor may be mounted downstream of the  
piezoelectric biosensor, with the second sensor being coated  
to detect specific respiratory gases emitted by the micro-  
35 organism being cultivated on the first (upstream) sensor.

The apparatus and method of the invention may be utilised in any situation where health and safety, and/or product quality require to be protected against airborne dusts, particulate materials, and/or micro-organisms. The apparatus and method of the invention may also be utilised for detecting and measuring airborne dusts, particulate materials, and/or micro-organisms in circumstances where health is not an issue; for example, in scientific and technical studies, and in the control of totally enclosed processes.

Without prejudice to the generality of the above-mentioned potential applications of the present invention, it is envisaged that the invention may be utilised in the following industrial contents:-

- (1) industrial food preparation and processing;
- (2) mining and quarrying;
- (3) building;
- (4) industrial manufacture of chemicals, paints, solvents, and the like;
- (5) iron and steel foundries;
- (6) farms, agriculture, and horticulture;
- (7) semiconductor fabrication;
- (8) "clean rooms" for scientific and medical purposes;
- (9) textile industries;

(10) cement works, brick works, and the like.

The above describes various basic embodiments of dust  
5 monitors and their applications and there now follows a  
brief summary of a possible development of the Casella  
Cyclone Dust Personal Monitor.

The apparatus as described can be utilised to provide  
10 modification to the Casella Cyclone Dust Personal Monitor by  
replacement of the standard millipore filter paper by a  
rimbound or free hanging piezoelectric crystal integrated  
with an oscillator drive circuit. This can be set up to  
provide an electronic readout of dust in dynamic real-time  
15 rather than time-averages retrospective result. The  
arrangement can also include a set voltage audio-visual  
trigger linked system with occupational exposure standards  
(OES) and maximum exposure levels (MEL) of dust which allows  
a dust profile history for each working day to be stored  
20 onboard a microchip and later dumped to a micro or mainframe  
computer for a health records management system. The  
arrangement can be adapted to a stationary multipoint dust  
monitor for overall building/factory management from a  
central computer control point and can be linked to an event  
25 marker either manually or via radio pick-up for routine  
sites around the building.

Several different receivers can be produced and these are:-

- 30 (a) single crystal system with limited detection  
limits related to temperature and humidity range  
of operating conditions.
- (b) double crystal humidity compensated system.
- 35 (c) triple crystal humidity and temperature

compensated system for  $\mu\text{g}$  detection limits,  
either respirable or alternatively general dust.

- 5 (d) double crystal respirable and general dust system  
with limited detection limits.
- (e) quadruple crystal with humidity, temperature,  
compensation for respirable and general dust,  
10 with  $\mu\text{g}$  detection limits.
- (f) double crystal system with alternate measurement  
switching between general dust and humidity  
measurement on crystal A and respirable dust and  
15 temperature on crystal B.

An example of (f) above is illustrated in Fig. 15. The  
device is enclosed in a casing 210 and incorporates two  
crystals 211 and 212. The casing also encloses a battery  
20 system and pump unit 213 and an oscillator circuit 214. An  
inlet vent 215 is provided and a number of solenoids 216  
control the air flow. Crystal 211 is used to measure  
general dust and humidity alternately and crystal 212 is  
used to measure respirable dust and temperature alternately.  
25 The device also incorporates a tilt mechanism 217, data  
logger and display device 218 together with audio 219 and  
visual 220 indicators.

A further modification to the Casella system provides that  
30 the the dust cell is controlled to sample on, or crystal  
vacuum clean via microsolenoid valves; this allows the dust  
cell containing the piezoelectric crystal to be vacuum  
cleaned.

35 The system can provide rapid sensor response times over  
periods of a few seconds if required.

Dust can be retained at the crystal surface by the following means: stationary phase films, polymeric charged films (coatings), magnetic coatings, gravity.

5

Further the perturbation (disruption) noise signal generated by the presence of dust particles in the vicinity of an oscillating crystal intergrated with a tuned circuit, can be used as an alternative method of data measurement and  
10 interpretattion of dust levels being monitored.

Other standard signal treatment includes frequency subtraction ( $\Delta F$ ) frequency divide (ratioing). The piezo dust monitor uses rate of signal change as its principle mode of  
15 relating dust concentration in the atmosphere. It can also give a total dust exposure over sampled time period.

While certain modifications and variations have been described above, the invention is not restricted thereto,  
20 and other modifications and variations can be adopted without departing from the scope of the invention.

25

30

35

1    CLAIMS

2  
3    1. A dust monitor comprising a piezoelectric sensor  
4 including a piece of piezoelectric material and an  
5 electrode system thereon, and exposure means to expose  
6 the piezoelectric sensor at least periodically to a  
7 stream of a gas which may contain dust or other organic  
8 or inorganic particulate material whose presence in or  
9 absence from the gas is to be monitored.

10  
11   2. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the  
12 piezoelectric material comprises a quartz crystal rim  
13 bound within a sampling chamber of the dust monitor.

14  
15   3. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the  
16 piezoelectric material comprises polyvinylidene  
17 difluoride material.

18  
19   4. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
20 preceding Claims, wherein the electrode system  
21 comprises two electrodes of suitable shape, size and  
22 mutual spacing such that at least one piezo-resonant  
23 area of the sensor is exposed to the dust or  
24 particulate material.

25  
26   5. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
27 preceding Claims and further comprising electronic  
28 circuit means coupled to the electrode system of said  
29 piezoelectric sensor to monitor variations in the  
30 resonant frequency of said piezoelectric sensor induced  
31 by the aggregation of dust or other particulate  
32 material on said piezoelectric sensor.

33  
34   6. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
35 preceding Claims, wherein the exposure means preferably

1 operates on a cyclic basis to expose the piezoelectric  
2 sensor periodically to said stream of gas, said  
3 exposure means comprising or being associated with a  
4 sensor cleaning system operable between periods of  
5 exposure of said sensor to said stream of gas  
6 substantially to remove dust or other particulate  
7 material aggregated on said piezoelectric sensor during  
8 a preceding period of exposure.

9

10 7. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 6, wherein the  
11 sensor cleaning system comprises a vacuum system or an  
12 air jet system in the case of a piezoelectric sensor  
13 monitoring the dust or other particulate material by  
14 means of the gravity effect and/or the perturbation  
15 effect.

16

17 8. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 6, wherein the  
18 sensor cleaning system comprises an electrostatic  
19 charge reversal system where the piezoelectric sensor  
20 is a charged crystal system.

21

22 9. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 6, wherein the  
23 sensor cleaning system comprises means for washing the  
24 sensor with a binder solvent where the piezoelectric  
25 sensor is coated with a binder material for binding of  
26 the dust or other particulate material to be monitored  
27 during said periods of exposure and for subsequently  
28 re-coating the piezoelectric sensor with clean binder.

29

30 10. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
31 preceding Claims, wherein the exposure means comprises  
32 a dust size discriminator to cause substantially only  
33 particles on one side of a predetermined size limit to  
34 reach the piezoelectric sensor.

35

- 1 11. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the  
2 dust size discriminator allows particles of respirable  
3 size to reach the piezoelectric sensor and diverts  
4 larger particles to a second piezoelectric sensor.  
5
- 6 12. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
7 preceding Claims incorporating temperature  
8 stabilisation means thermally coupled to the  
9 piezoelectric sensor and operable to tend to stabilise  
10 the temperature of the sensor during operation of the  
11 dust monitor.  
12
- 13 13. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 12, wherein the  
14 temperature stabilisation means comprises means to  
15 supply a stream of temperature-controlled air to a  
16 portion of the piezoelectric sensor other than the  
17 portion or portions of the piezoelectric sensor exposed  
18 to the stream of gas whose particulate content is to be  
19 monitored.  
20
- 21 14. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 12, wherein the  
22 temperature stabilisation means comprises a Peltier  
23 pile thermally coupled to the piezoelectric sensor and  
24 supplied in use with current of a magnitude and  
25 polarity such as to stabilise the temperature of the  
26 piezoelectric sensor within a predetermined range of  
27 temperatures.  
28
- 29 15. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
30 preceding Claims, wherein said electronic circuit means  
31 coupled to the electrode system of the piezoelectric  
32 sensor comprises an oscillator having an oscillatory  
33 frequency wherein the variations in oscillatory  
34 frequency are substantially or entirely determined by  
35 the variations in the resonant frequency of the



1 piezoelectric sensor as brought about by the  
2 aggregation of dust or other particulate material  
3 thereon, and frequency variation sensing means to sense  
4 the variations in oscillatory frequency.

5  
6 16. A dust monitor as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the  
7 frequency variation sensing means comprises a  
8 frequency-to-voltage converter and a threshold crossing  
9 detector operable to give an output signal if the  
10 frequency variation exceeds a predetermined limit to  
11 give an alarm signal if the sensed frequency variation  
12 indicated a concentration of gas-borne or air-borne  
13 dust or other particulate material in excess of a  
14 predetermined limit.

15  
16 17. A dust monitor as claimed in any one of the  
17 preceding Claims, wherein the piezoelectric sensor is  
18 coated with an agar rich in nutrients to encourage  
19 growth of a particular analyte micro-organism, or  
20 coated with a material which reacts directly with a  
21 side product chemically related to a specific organism  
22 for the monitoring of air-borne organic particulates of  
23 a biological nature.

24  
25 18. A method of dust monitoring for monitoring the  
26 presence in or absence from a gas of dust or other  
27 organic or inorganic particulate material, said method  
28 comprising the steps of periodically applying a stream  
29 of said gas to the piezoelectric sensor of a dust  
30 monitor in accordance with any of the preceding Claims  
31 and monitoring variations in the resonant frequency of  
32 said piezoelectric sensor induced by the aggregation of  
33 dust or other particulate material on said  
34 piezoelectric sensor.

35

1 19. The method of Claim 18 including the further steps  
2 of periodically discontinuing application of the stream  
3 of gas to said piezoelectric sensor, and of removing  
4 any dust or other particulate material aggregated on  
5 said piezoelectric sensor prior to the next period of  
6 application of the stream of gas to said piezoelectric  
7 sensor.

8

9 20. The method of Claim 18 or 19 including the step of  
10 subjecting the dust or other particulate material in  
11 said gas to discrimination based on particle size such  
12 as to cause said stream of gas to contain substantially  
13 only particles either above or below a predetermined  
14 nominal size.

15

16 21. A dust monitor substantially as hereinbefore  
17 described, with reference to and as shown in the  
18 accompanying drawings.

19

20 22. A method of dust monitoring substantially as  
21 hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown  
22 in the accompanying drawings.

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