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(54) **RADIO FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR USE IN CAST
CONCRETE COMPONENTS**

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340/572.9, 572.4, 572.7, 572.8, 539.1, 539.13;
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235/435, 436, 438, 449; 52/20, 21
See application file for complete search history.

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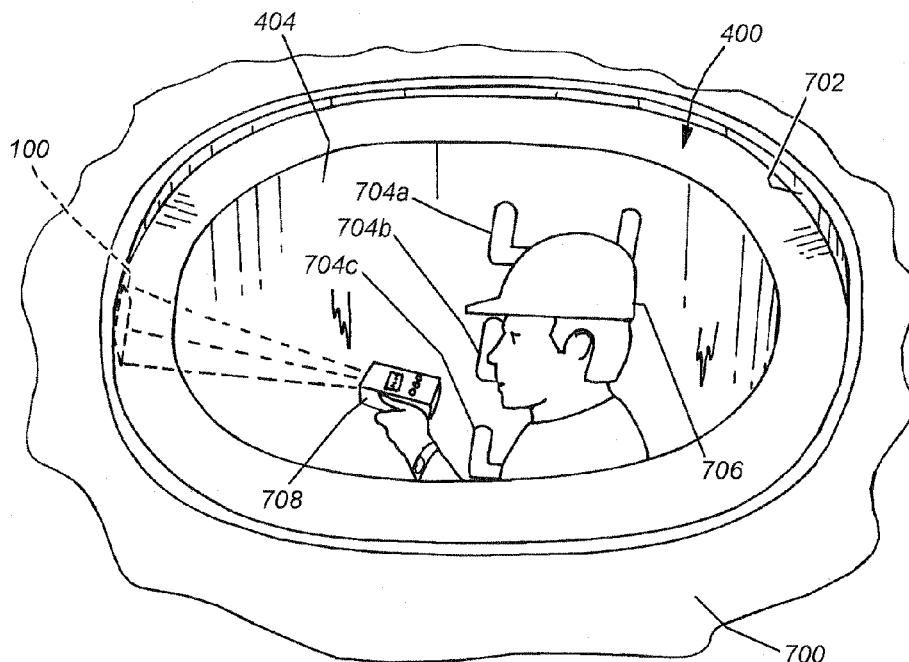
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly is config-
ured for use with cast concrete components. The RFID
assembly has a planar back plate having a plurality of break-
away, registration posts extending perpendicular to the nomi-
nal plane of the back plate, and a plurality of gripping surfaces
extending opposite the registration posts. The RFID assembly
further includes a RFID transponder encapsulated between
the back plate and a cover. The RFID transponder is pro-
grammed with information concerning the cast concrete com-
ponent to which the RFID tag is affixed.

16 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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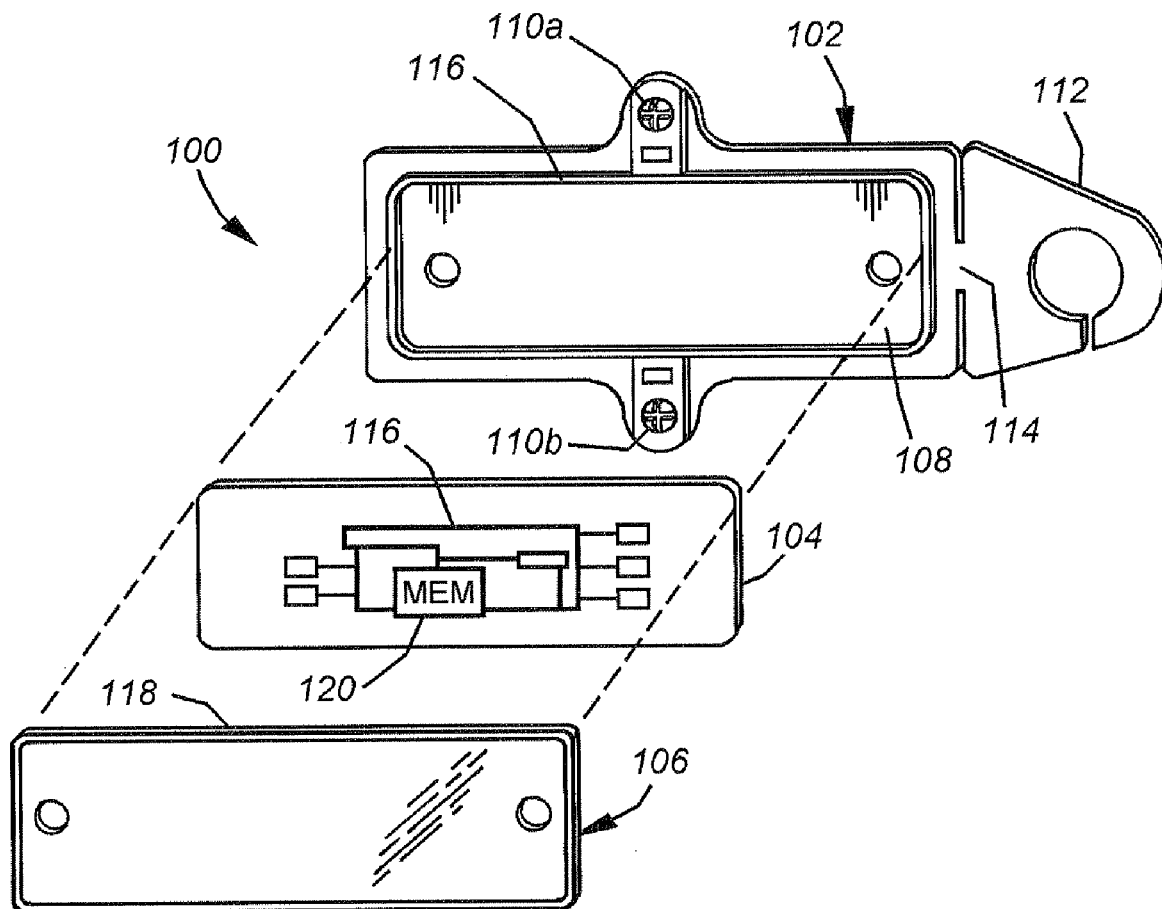


FIG. 1

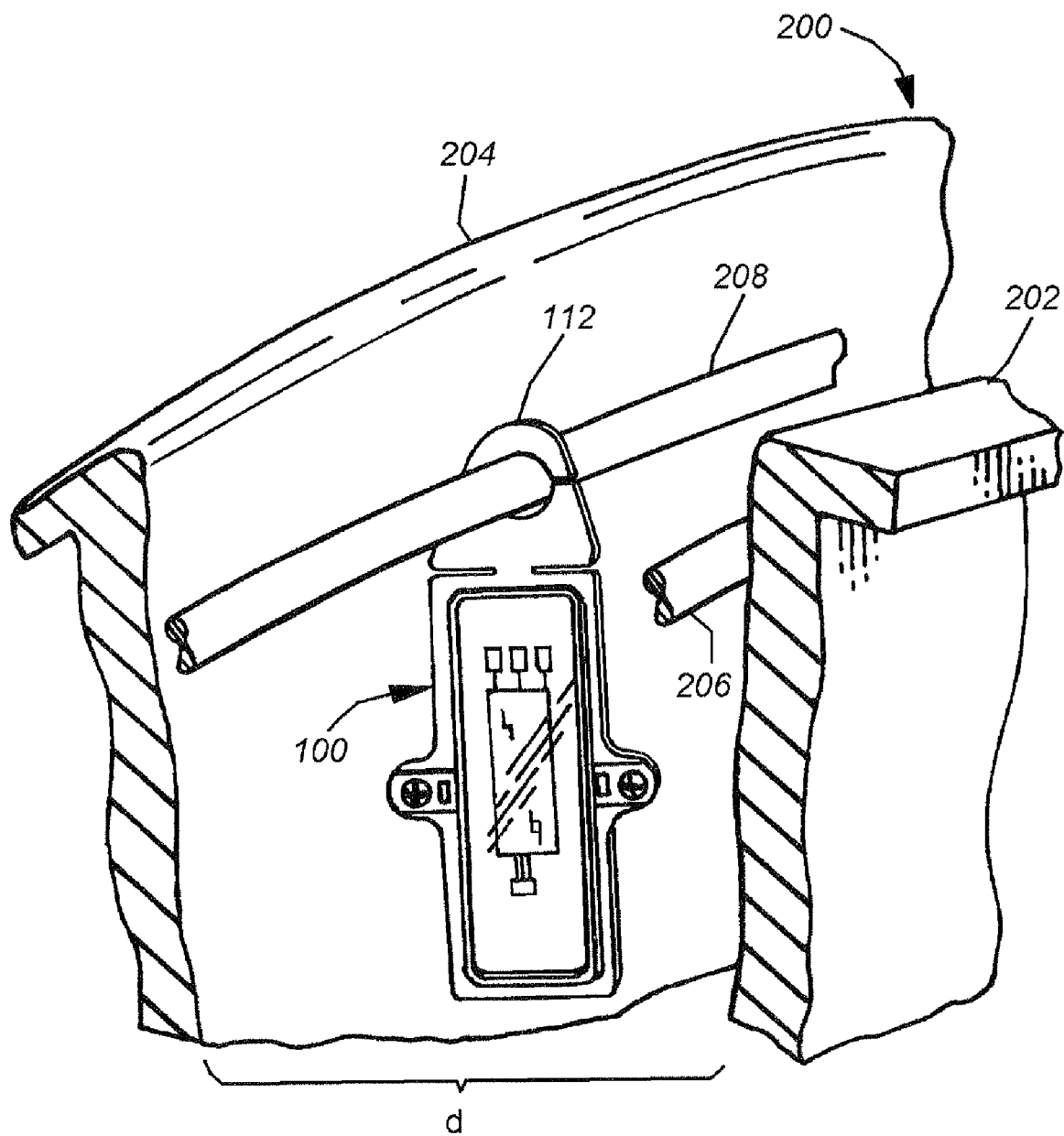


FIG. 2

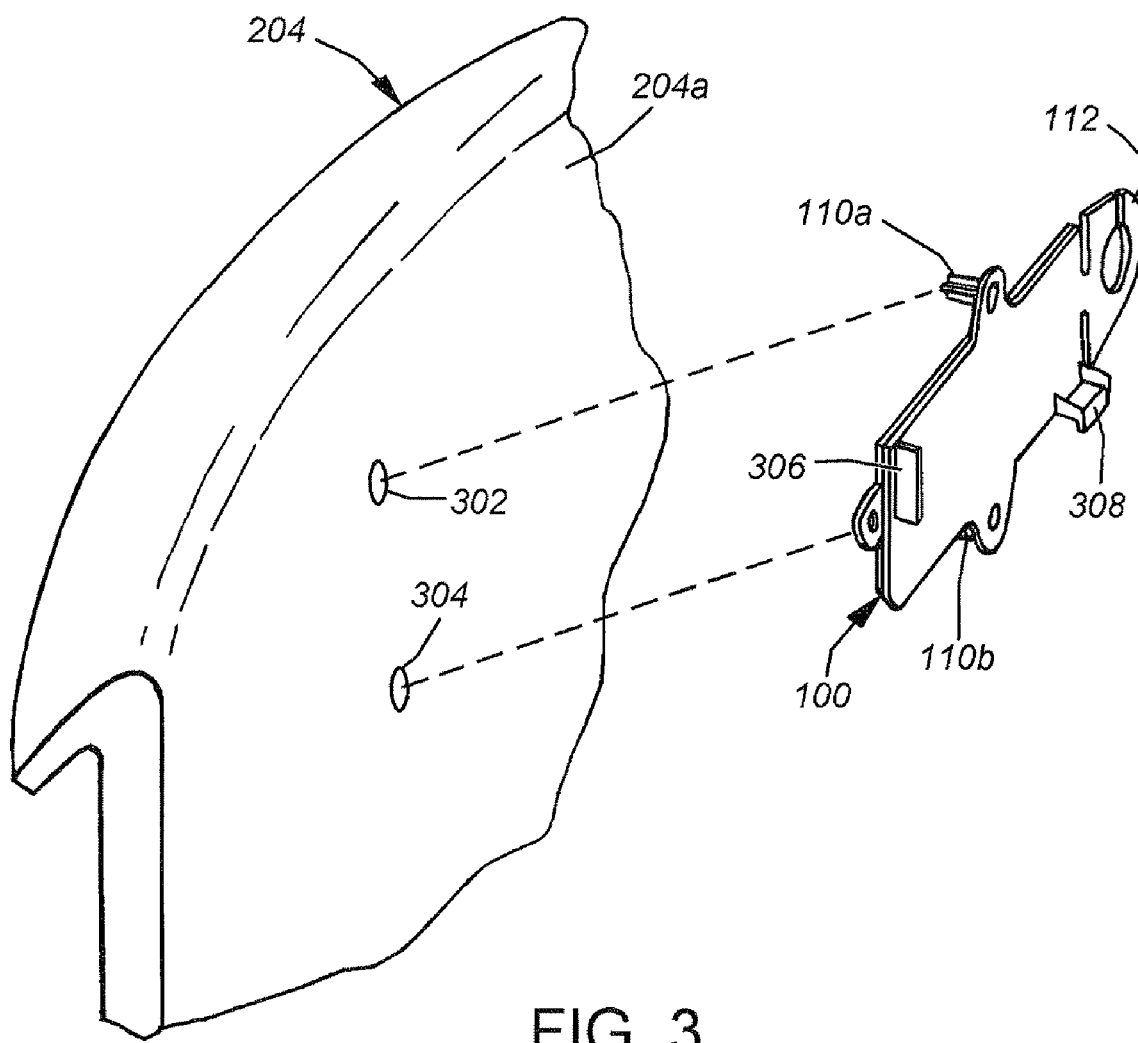


FIG. 3

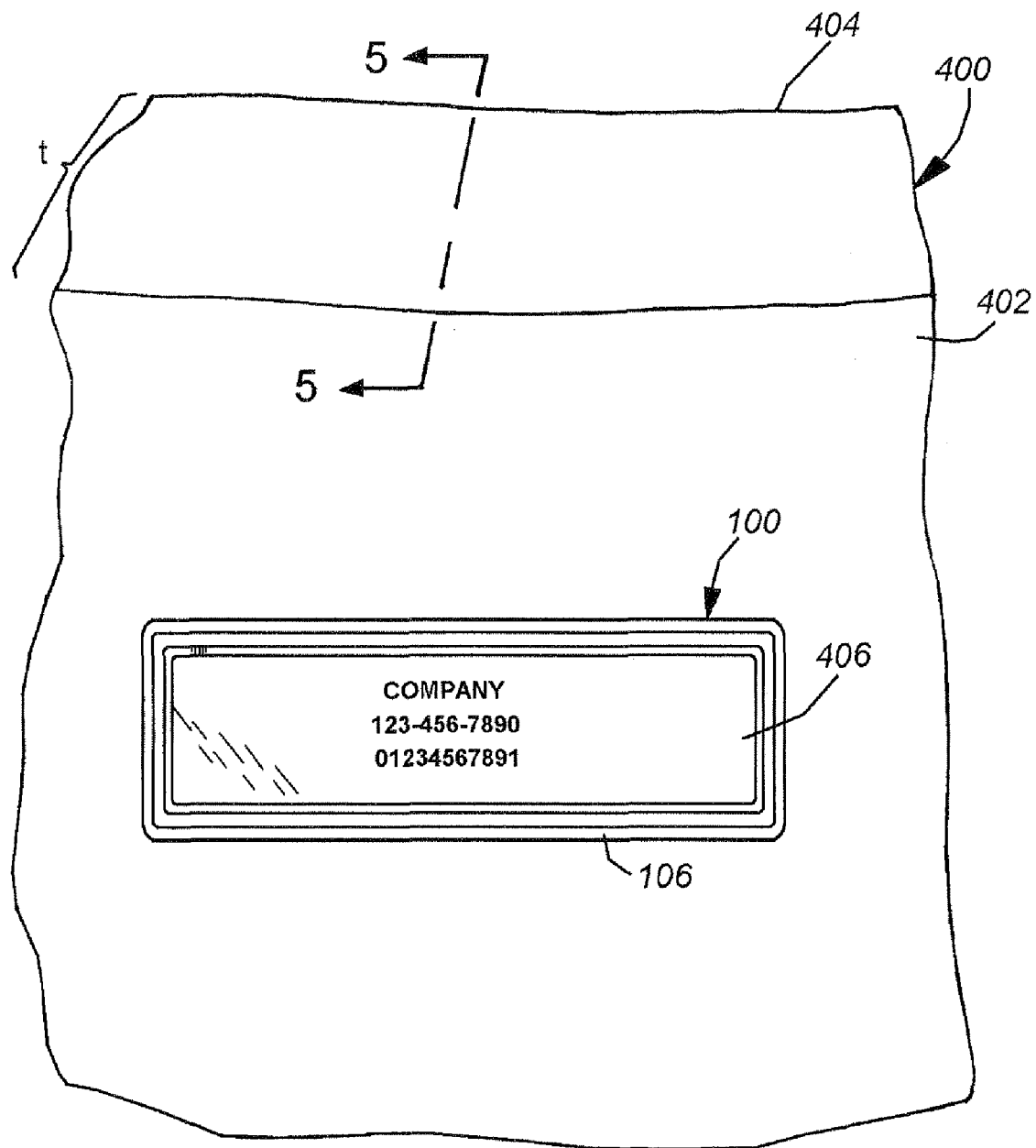


FIG. 4

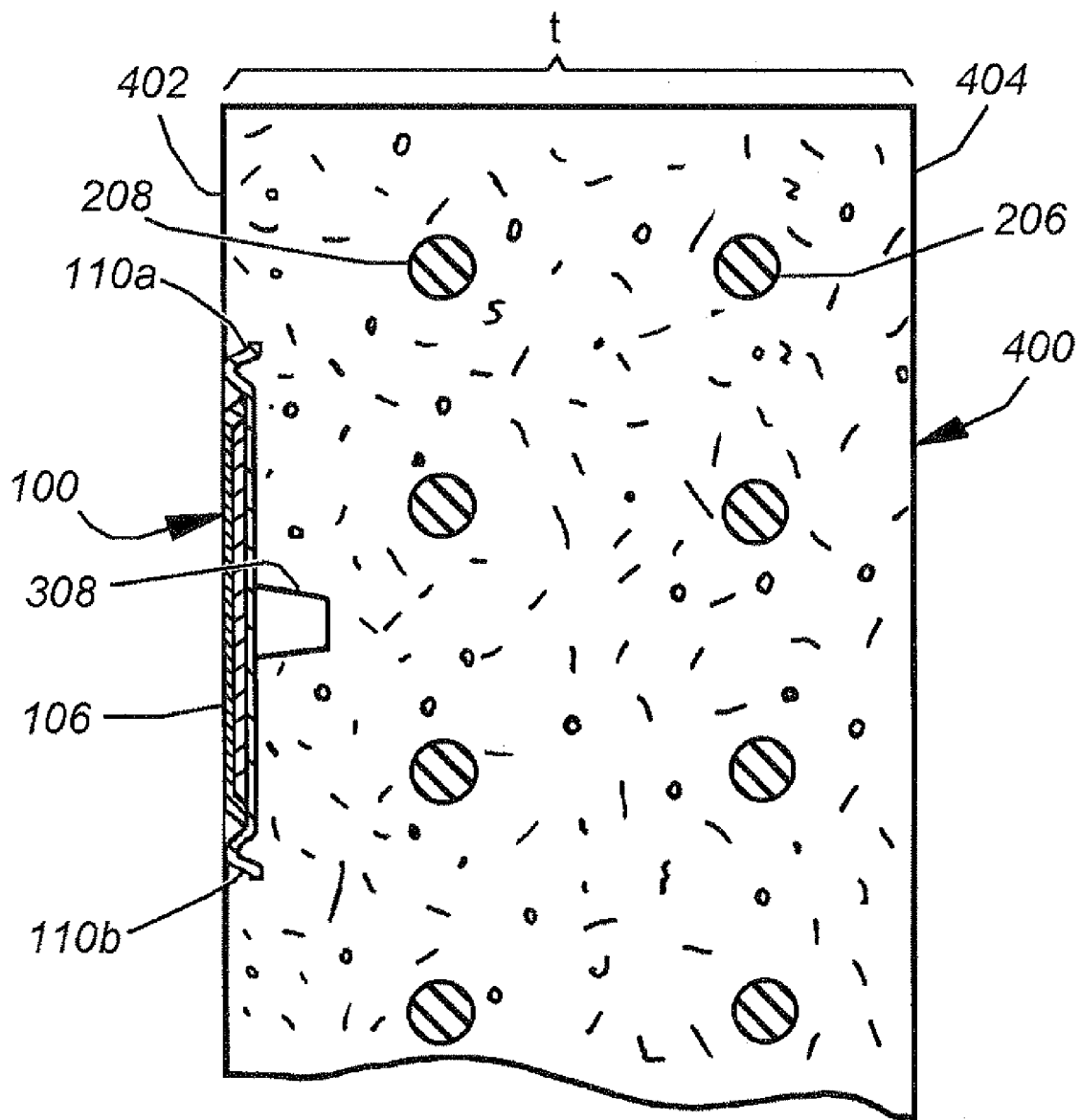


FIG. 5

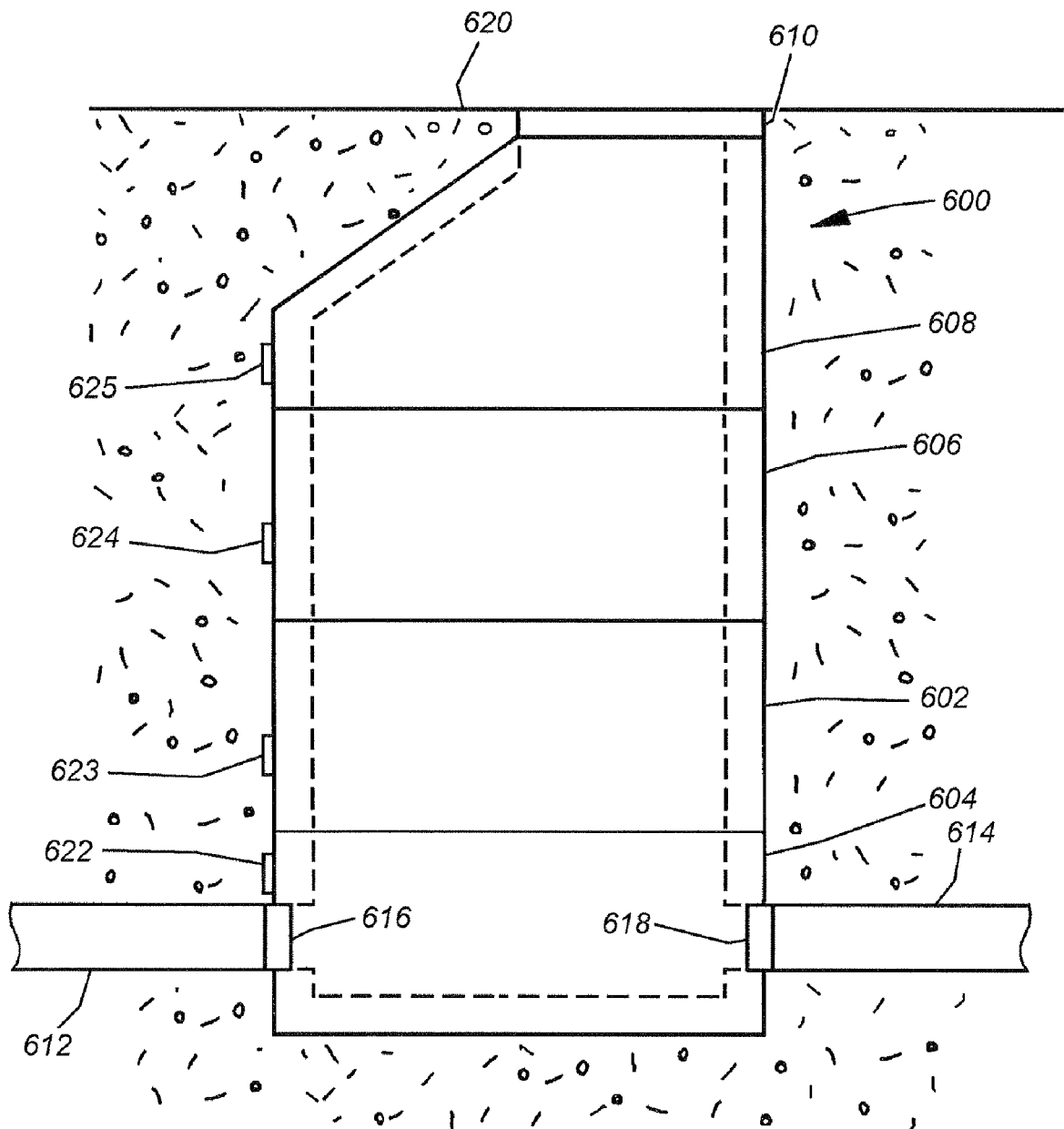


FIG. 6

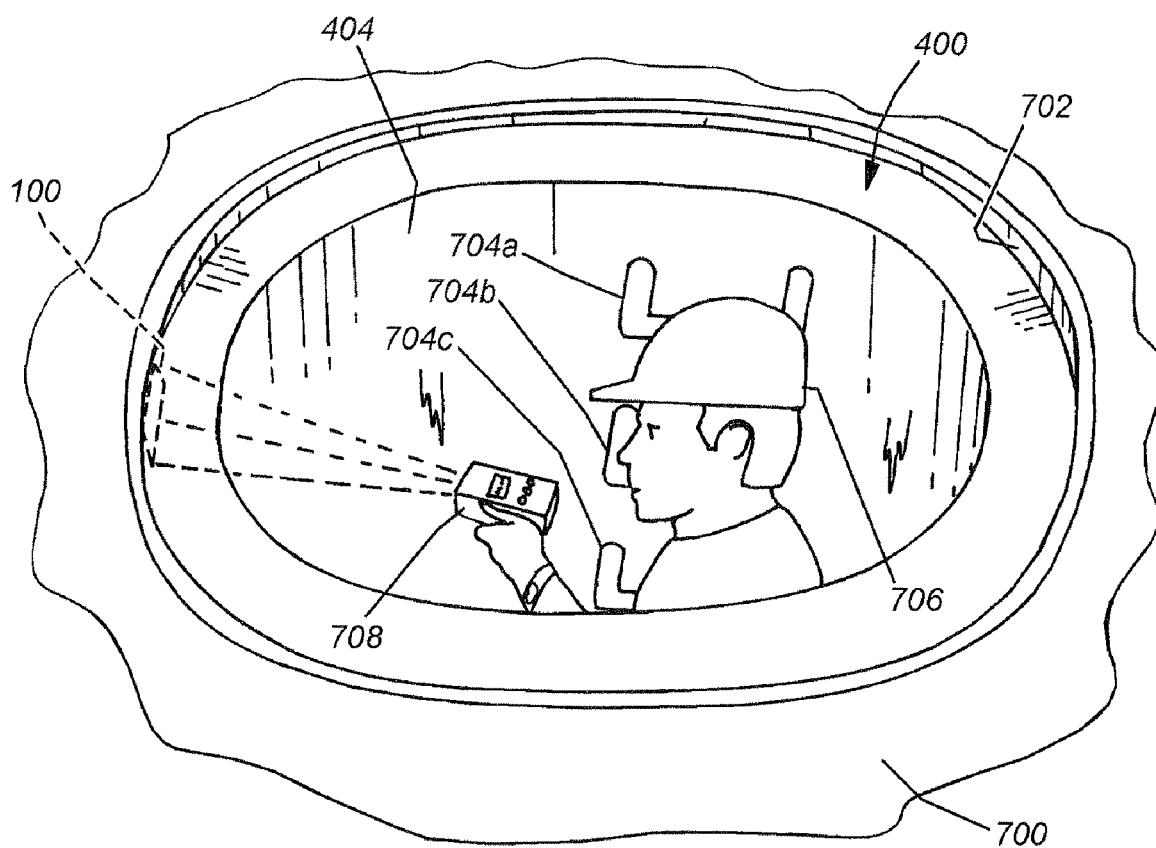


FIG. 7

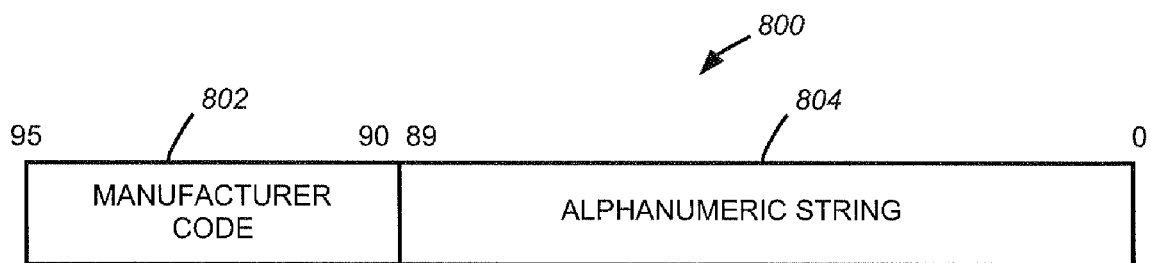


FIG. 8

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RADIO FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR USE IN CAST CONCRETE COMPONENTS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to systems and methods for applying identification information to components and, more specifically, to a radio frequency identification system and method for use with cast concrete components.

2. Background Information

Concrete elements or components, such as castings, are often used in the construction of civil engineering projects, such as water supply systems, wastewater systems, storm water systems and drainage systems. For example, a wastewater system typically includes a series of concrete manhole risers interconnected by concrete pipes. These elements are typically precast at a manufacturing facility, and then shipped to the location at which they are to be installed. The manhole risers and pipes are placed in ditches and connected in the desired manner. The ditches are then filled in, burying the manhole risers and pipes. Often, roads are then built over the manhole risers and pipes.

Once they are built, these civil engineering projects, such as the wastewater system, need to be periodically inspected and maintained. Having information regarding the individual concrete elements can often facilitate the construction, inspection, shipping, installation, maintenance, and upkeep of such projects. However, keeping accurate records has proven difficult. For example, keeping track of pre-pour and post-pour inspection data, concrete batch number, intended construction project, etc., in an efficient manner is not currently possible.

Accordingly, a need exists to improve the collection and maintenance of information concerning concrete elements used in civil engineering projects.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly, the present invention relates to a radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly that is configured for use with cast concrete elements. In a preferred embodiment, the RFID assembly includes a planar back plate having a plurality of break-away, registration posts extending perpendicular to the nominal plane of the back plate, and a plurality of gripping or engagement flanges extending perpendicular to the nominal plane of the back plate opposite the registration posts. The RFID assembly further includes a RFID tag or transponder that is mounted on a receiving area of the back plate, and a cover that is affixed to the back plate, e.g., by bonding or welding, thereby sealing the RFID tag within the assembly. In addition to the RFID tag, a label carries human-readable, e.g., typewritten, information, about the component.

The RFID tag is programmed with information concerning the specific cast concrete element to which the RFID tag is affixed. The information stored on the RFID tag may be a serial number that is associated in a computer database with the name of the manufacturing facility that cast the concrete element, the date it was manufactured, the supplies used in its construction such as the concrete batch number and the type of reinforcing bar ("rebar") used, pre-pour and post-pour inspections results, etc. In the preferred embodiment, the RFID tag is a passive tag. That is, it does not include a power supply.

In use, a mold is assembled to create a desired concrete component. Rebar is preferably positioned within the mold to

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provide the required strength to the finished concrete component. An RFID assembly whose RFID tag stores a unique serial number is selected for the concrete component being fabricated. The RFID assembly maybe hung off one of the rebar sections pending a pre-pour inspection of the mold. An inspector preferably checks to see that the mold has been correctly set-up, and that the rebar has indeed been properly positioned within the mold. Once the mold and rebar have passed the pre-pour inspection, the RFID assembly is removed from the rebar section, and press-fit into the side of the mold. Specifically, the mold, which may be formed from wood or steel, is configured with a plurality of holes positioned to receive the registration posts of the RFID assembly. Concrete is then poured into the mold and cured. The gripping or engagement flanges that extend from the back plate of the RFID assembly engage the concrete and facilitate the creation of a permanent bond between the RFID assembly and the concrete component. The concrete component is then removed from the mold, and at least a portion of the registration posts may be broken away so that that RFID assembly is flush with the outside surface of the concrete component. A post-pour inspection of the concrete component also may be performed. Information regarding the construction of the concrete component including inspection results may be added to a db and associated with the unique serial number of the RFID assembly cast into the concrete component.

The concrete component may then be shipped to and installed at its intended destination. For example, the concrete component, which may be a manhole riser, is buried in the ground. Nonetheless, at any time thereafter, a maintenance or other worker can "read" the RFID tag contained within the RFID assembly climbing into the manhole riser, energizing the RFID tag and reading its data using a RFID reader. That is, the RFID assembly of the present invention preferably can be read through the solid wall of the concrete component, which includes both concrete and rebar.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention description below refers to the accompanying drawings, of which:

FIG. 1 is an exploded view of a preferred RFID assembly according to the present invention;

FIGS. 2 and 3 are illustrations of a portion of a concrete mold and the preferred RFID assembly of FIG. 1 in various positions during use;

FIG. 4 is a partial side view of a precast concrete component with the RFID assembly of FIG. 1 installed;

FIG. 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of the precast concrete component and RFID assembly of FIG. 4 along lines 5-5;

FIG. 6 is a highly schematic side elevation view of a manhole structure assembly;

FIG. 7 is an illustration of a maintenance worker reading the RFID assembly of FIG. 1 in an installation; and

FIG. 8 is a highly schematic illustration of a data structure stored by the preferred RFID assembly.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AN ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENT

FIG. 1 is a highly schematic, exploded view of a radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly 100 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The RFID assembly 100 includes a back plate 102, an RFID tag or transponder 104, and a cover 106. The back plate 102 has a substantially planar shape and includes a receiving area 108

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sized and shaped to receive the RFID tag **104**. In the embodiment of FIG. 1, the back plate **102** further includes a plurality of registration posts, such as registration posts **110a** and **110b** that extend substantially perpendicularly from the nominal plane of the back plate **102**. The back plate **102** also may include a hook **112** located on one side of the back plate **102**, such as side **114**. As described in more detail below, the hook **112** is sized to fit over a section of reinforcing bar ("rebar") so that the RFID assembly **100** may be suspended from the rebar.

Those skilled in the art will understand that the RFID assembly **100** may be circular, oval, square, or some other shape.

A groove or recess **116** may be formed in the back plate **102** around the receiving area **108**. The groove or recess **116** is preferably sized and shaped to match either the cover **106** itself, or a flange **118** extending around the perimeter of the cover **106** perpendicular to the nominal plane of the cover **106**. The groove **116** and flange **118** cooperate to seat the cover **106** to the back plate **102**.

To assemble the RFID assembly **100**, the RFID tag **104** is preferably placed on the receiving area **108** of the back plate **102**. The RFID tag **104** may be formed on a film, such as paper, having an adhesive backing. As described herein, human-readable, e.g., type written, information may also be placed on the paper film. The adhesive backing may be used to adhere the RFID tag **104** to the receiving area **108** of the back plate **102**. The cover **106** is then placed over the RFID tag **104** so that the perimeter of the cover **106** (or the flange **118**) sits in the groove or recess **116** formed in the back plate **102**. The cover **106** and the back plate **102** are then joined together, e.g., by ultrasonic welding, bonding, heat sealing, etc. In the illustrative embodiment, the cover **106** and back plate **102** are joined so as to form a watertight seal around the RFID tag **104**.

The back plate **102** and the cover **106** are preferably formed from polypropylene, and made by injection molding or other techniques.

In an alternative embodiment, the cover **106** is joined to the back plate **102** by a hinge. That is, a side edge of the cover **106** may be attached to a side edge of the back plate **102**, such as the side edge opposite the hook **112**. Once the RFID tag **104** has been placed on the back plate **102**, the cover **106** may be swung around the hinge and sealed to the back plate **102**. Those skilled in the art will understand that the hinge may be formed by molding a thin portion of material along the edge between the cover **106** and the back plate **102**.

The RFID tag is preferably a passive type RFID tag. That is, it does not include its own power source. The RFID tag includes an antenna **116** coupled to a non-volatile memory **120**, such as a read only memory (ROM), an erasable programmable ROM (EPROM), an electrically erasable programmable PROM (EEPROM), etc. A suitable RFID tag for use with present invention includes the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) Rafsec G2 DogBone model of RFID tag from UPM Raflatac, Inc., which can hold 96 or 128 bits of data.

FIG. 2 is a highly schematic illustration of the RFID assembly **100** placed in a temporary position within a mold **200** for use in casting a concrete component. More specifically, the mold **200**, which is shown in a partial, cut-away view, has an inner jacket **202** and an outer jacket **204**. The outer jacket **204** is spaced some distance, *d*, from the inner jacket **202** thereby defining a space to receive poured wet concrete. The two jackets may be substantially cylindrical in shape so that the resulting concrete component has a tubular or hollow cylindrical shape with an open interior. One or more reinforcement elements, such as reinforcing bar (rebar) segments **206** and **208**, are placed within this space between the two jackets **202**,

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204. The reinforcement element, as is well-known in the art, is typically made of steel, and provides added strength to the concrete component being manufactured. Other types of reinforcement elements, besides rebar, include meshes, fences, fiberglass fibers, hoops, etc. The reinforcement element is placed within receiving space according to the design of the concrete component. Once the mold **200** has been set-up, and the rebar has been properly positioned inside the mold **200**, the RFID assembly **100** may be hung from the reinforcement element, e.g., rebar segment **208**, as shown in FIG. 2. That is, the hook **112** of the RFID assembly **100** is placed over the rebar segment **208**.

After the reinforcement element(s) has been positioned within the mold **200** and before the concrete is added, an inspector preferably conducts a pre-pour inspection by, among other things, examining the mold **200** and the reinforcing element(s) to confirm that the mold has been correctly set-up, and that the reinforcing element(s) has been correctly positioned within the mold **200**. If so, the inspector preferably removes the RFID assembly **100** from the reinforcing element, e.g., from rebar segment **208**, and affixes it to the outer jacket **204** of the mold **200**.

As described herein, the RFID assembly **100** stores a unique serial number that may be read by an RFID reader, entered into a computer database and associated with the particular concrete component being manufactured. Information concerning the construction or manufacture of the concrete component, such as the results of the pre-pour inspection, may be added to the database and associated with the unique serial number of the selected RFID assembly.

FIG. 3 is a highly schematic illustration of the RFID assembly **100** and the outer jacket **204** of the mold **200** (FIG. 2). The outer jacket **204** of the mold **200** has an inner face **204a** that defines the outer surface of the concrete component being cast. Formed within the outer jacket **204** on the inner face **204a** are two receiving holes **302** and **304**. The two receiving holes **302** and **304** are sized and spaced to receive respective ones of the registration posts **110a**, **110b** of the RFID assembly **100**, as illustrated by the dashed lines. Specifically, registration post **110a** may be received in receiving hole **302**, while registration post **110b** may be received in receiving hole **304**. In a preferred embodiment, one of the registration posts, e.g., post **110a**, and its respective receiving hole, e.g., hole **302**, is larger or of a different cross-sectional shape, such as square or oval as opposed to circular, so that the RFID assembly **100** can only be installed in one orientation. In this way, the RFID assembly **100** cannot mistakenly be installed upside down. As shown in FIG. 3, the RFID assembly **100** further includes one or more gripping or engagement flanges or surfaces, such as surfaces **306** and **308** that extend from the back plate **102** of the RFID assembly **100** in a direction substantially opposite to the registration posts **110a**, **110b**. The gripping or engagement surfaces **306**, **308** help secure the RFID assembly **100** to the concrete to be added to the mold **200**.

In the illustrated embodiment, the registration posts **110a**, **110b** of the RFID assembly **100** are press fit into the receiving holes **302**, **304**. The registration posts **110a**, **110b** may be tapered to facilitate their receipt within the receiving holes **302**, **306**. The RFID assembly **100** is preferably attached to the inner face **204a** of the outer jacket **204** such that the cover **106** of the RFID assembly **100** is flush against the inner face **204a**. Those skilled in the art will understand that barbs or other surface features may be added to the registration posts **110a**, **110b** to help hold the RFID assembly **100** against the outer jacket **204** as wet concrete is poured into the mold **200**. Furthermore, the material(s) used to make the RFID assembly **100** is sufficiently elastic so that the cover **106** conforms to the

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shape of the inner face **204a** of the outer jacket **204**. Accordingly, when concrete is poured into the mold **200**, no concrete is able to pass or settle between the cover **106** of the RFID assembly **100** and the inner face **204a** of the outer jacket **204**. Once the RFID assembly **100** has been press fit into the receiving holes **302**, **304**, concrete may be poured into the mold **200**, and allowed to set to create the desired concrete component.

Those skilled in the art will understand that other arrangements of registrations posts and receiving holes may be used. For example, the RFID assembly **100** may include only one, or more than two, registration posts. In an alternative embodiment, rather than or in addition to having receiving holes, a mold **200** may be configured with a recess formed in the inner face **204a** of the outer jacket **204**. This recess, moreover, may be sized and shaped to receive the RFID assembly **100**. That is, the depth of the recess may be something less than the thickness of the RFID assembly **100**. In yet another embodiment, a receptacle may be attached to mold, e.g., at the inner face **204a**, and the RFID assembly **100** may be seated in this receptacle before the wet concrete is added to the mold.

In yet another embodiment, the RFID assembly **100** may have one or more holes that extend through the back plate **102** in place of the registration posts. In this embodiment, the outer jacket **204** of the mold **200** similarly has one or more holes, e.g., holes **302** and **304**, that line up with the holes in the RFID assembly **100**. Before wet concrete is added to the mold **200**, the RFID assembly **100** is held against the inner surface **204a** of the outer jacket **204** by a worker so that the holes in the RFID assembly **100** line up with the holes **302**, **304** in the outer jacket **204**. A pin is then inserted through each pair of aligned holes, thereby keeping the RFID assembly **100** in place as wet concrete is added to the mold **200**. Once the concrete has sufficiently hardened, the pins can be pulled out, and the concrete component can be removed from the mold **200**. With this embodiment, the concrete component can be removed from the mold **200** even though it may not be fully cured.

Those skilled in the art will also understand that other designs or shapes of gripping or engagement surfaces may also be used, such as screw shapes, etc.

Once the wet concrete poured into the mold **200** has hardened, the mold **200** is removed or pulled apart to reveal the concrete component that was cast. At least some portion, such as the tips or outer portions, of the registration posts **110a**, **110b** may break away as the mold **200** is removed.

FIG. 4 is a partial, highly schematic illustration of a concrete component **400** cast with the RFID assembly **100** in place. The concrete component **400**, which may be a cylindrical manhole riser, has an outer surface **402** that corresponds to the inner face **204a** (FIG. 3) of the outer jacket **204** of the mold **200**, and an inner surface **404** that corresponds to an outer face (not shown) of the inner jacket **202** of the mold **200**. The concrete component **400** further has a thickness, t , that corresponds to the spacing between the inner and outer jackets of the mold. Because the RFID assembly **100** was positioned flush against the inner face **204a** of the outer jacket **204**, it is visible on the outside surface of the concrete component **400**. Nonetheless, the RFID assembly **100** is permanently adhered to the concrete component **400**, at least in part due to the gripping surfaces **306**, **308** (FIG. 3), which help hold the RFID assembly **100** in place in the concrete component **400**.

As mentioned herein, the RFID assembly **100** further includes a label **402** placed behind the cover **106** that is transparent, so that the label **402** can be seen through the cover **106**. Human-readable information, such as the name

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and telephone number of the company that cast the concrete component **400** is preferably printed on the label **406**. The label **402** may be positioned between the cover **106** and the RFID tag **104** when the RFID assembly **100** is assembled so that the information may be read through the cover **106** of the RFID assembly **100**. Alternatively, the RFID tag **104** itself may have a label printed on it.

Thus, the preferred RFID assembly **100** carries or bears information that is stored in two forms. First, the RFID assembly **100** includes electronic information, such as an identification number, stored on the RFID tag or transponder **104**. This electronic information may be read by an RFID reader. Second, the RFID assembly **100** includes written or typed information, such as the name and telephone number of the manufacturer of the concrete component. This information, which may be located behind a transparent cover **106**, is human readable, e.g., it may be perceived by simply reading it from the RFID assembly **100**.

It should be understood that additional information may be printed on the label **406**, such as the serial number **7** stored on the RFID tag or some other identification number assigned to or associated with the concrete component **400**, the name and/or telephone number of the entity that manufactured the RFID assembly **100**, a bar code bearing information about the concrete component, etc.

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the concrete component **400** of FIG. 4 along lines 5-5. As shown, the RFID assembly **100** is flush against the outer surface **402** of the concrete component **400**. Furthermore, at least some portion of the registration posts **110a**, **110b** have been broken off. The gripping or engagement surface **308**, moreover, extends into the concrete component **400**, thereby helping affix the RFID assembly **100** to the concrete component **400**.

As shown, the RFID assembly **100** of the present invention is preferably placed on the outside surface of the concrete component **400**, which in the illustrative embodiment is a manhole riser. As described above, the manhole riser is typically lowered into a ditch, connected to one or more pipes, and buried along with the pipes. Thus, the outside surface of the manhole riser cover comes into contact with the dirt, rocks and other material used to bury the manhole riser. To protect the RFID tag **100** while the manhole riser is being buried in the ground, the cover **106** of the RFID assembly **100** is preferably formed from an impact-resistant plastic or other similar material. Furthermore, by having the RFID assembly **100** located on the outside surface of the manhole riser, it can be easily seen and examined by workers both at the manufacturing facility, and at the staging area before it is lowered into the ground at its intended location.

Nonetheless, it should be understood that the RFID assembly **100** of the present invention may be positioned at other locations relative to the mold **200**. For example, the RFID assembly **100** may be placed inside the mold **200** and surrounded by concrete, so that the RFID assembly **100** is not visible from outside the concrete component. The RFID assembly **100** alternatively may be positioned flush to the outside surface of the inner jacket **202** of the mold **200** so that the RFID assembly **100** is visible on the inner surface **404** of the concrete component **400**, as opposed to its outer surface **402**.

FIG. 6 is a highly schematic, side elevation of a manhole structure assembly **600**, which may be used in a wastewater or storm water system. The manhole structure assembly **600** is made up of a series of precast concrete components, each having a generally cylindrical shape, that are stacked on top of each other. Specifically, the manhole structure assembly **600** includes a manhole base **602**, a first riser **604** stacked on top

of the manhole base **602**, a second riser **606** stacked on top of the first riser **604**, and an eccentric cone **608** stacked on top of the second riser **606**. Mounted on top of the eccentric cone **608** is a manhole cover **610**. Grade rings (not shown) and a manhole frame (not shown) may be positioned between the cone **608** and the manhole cover **610**. A series of pipes, such as pipes **612** and **614** are coupled to the manhole base **602** by rubber boots, such as boots **616** and **618**. As indicated above, the manhole structure assembly **600** is buried in the ground so that the manhole **610** is flush with a road surface **620**. The interior of the manhole structure assembly **600** is hollow so that a worker may descend into the manhole structure assembly **600** to conduct inspections and/or repairs.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, an RFID assembly is cast into each of the concrete components of the manhole structure assembly **600**. Specifically, RFID assemblies **622-625**, which correspond to RFID assembly **100** described above, are cast into components **602-608**, respectively. Each RFID assembly **622-625** has its own unique serial number stored on its RFID tag.

FIG. 7 is a highly schematic, partial illustration of the concrete component **400** installed at its intended location. Specifically, as indicated above, the concrete component **400** may be the cone portion of a manhole structure assembly that is buried in the ground **700**, e.g., below a street. The concrete component **400** may have an upper surface **704** sized and shaped to receive a manhole cover (not shown). Within the concrete component **400** may be a series of steps **704a-c** so that a worker **706** may climb down into the concrete component **400**. The worker **706** may carry an RFID reader **708**, and use it to scan the RFID assembly **100** that was cast into the concrete component **400** as described herein. Even though the RFID assembly **100** is located on the outside surface of the concrete component **400**, the RFID reader **708** is able to get a reading of the RFID tag **104** housed within the RFID assembly **100** through the concrete and reinforcement element of the concrete component **400**. In particular, the reader **708** preferably emits a low-power radio signal that powers up the RFID tag **104**. The RFID tag **104** then transmits the information stored in its memory through its antenna. This information is captured and stored by the reader **708**.

To help the worker locate the RFID tag **104** from inside the concrete component **400**, a mark may be placed on the inside surface of the concrete component **400** indicating where, on the outside surface of the concrete component **400**, the RFID tag **104** is located. For example, the RFID tag **104** may be placed at a location on the outer jacket **204** of the mold that is aligned with a weld line along the inner jacket **202** of the mold **200**. When the concrete component **400** is cast, this weld line produces a visible line down the inside surface of the concrete component **400**. The worker may locate this visible line and activate the reader **708** at this location. Alternatively, the worker may "walk" the reader **708** around the circumference of the of the concrete component **400** until the reader **708** detects the RFID tag **104**.

For RFID assemblies that have been installed on concrete components or castings that are too narrow for a worker to enter, such as a concrete pipe, a reader at the end of a long wand, or a device for carrying the reader into such narrow places may be used.

As described herein, the information stored on the RFID tag **104** is a serial number that uniquely identifies the concrete component **400**. FIG. 8 is a highly schematic illustration of a data structure **800** representing the information stored on the non-volatile memory unit of the RFID tag **104**. The data structure **800** is organized to store a serial number. In the preferred embodiment, the serial number has a manufacturer

code portion **802** and an alphabetic, numeric or alphanumeric portion **804**, which together form the unique serial number for the respective concrete component. For example, bits **90-95** of a 96-bit data structure may store the manufacturer code, and bits **0-89** may store the alphanumeric portion. In a preferred embodiment, each concrete component manufacturing making using an RFID assembly **100** of the present invention is assigned its own manufacturer's code. This manufacturer's code, moreover, is used in all RFID assemblies sent to and used by this particular manufacturer.

In the preferred embodiment, the serial number stored on, e.g., written to, the RFID tag **104** cannot be modified or changed.

As described herein, the serial number of an RFID assembly **100** may be associated with the concrete component during the construction of the concrete component. For example, after a particular RFID assembly **100** has been selected and attached to a mold **200**, a worker preferably scans the RFID assembly **100**, thereby reading its serial number. The reader transmits, e.g., through a wireless connection, the serial number to a data server, which stores the serial number in a database. Additional information is then entered into the database, e.g., through the RFID reader or some other input device, such as a keyboard or mouse, and associated with serial number. This additional information may include the date the concrete component is cast, the batch of concrete used to make the concrete component, the project for which the concrete component is to be used, the particular manhole structure assembly, or other structure, to which the concrete component belongs, the results of the pre- and post-pour inspection, etc.

Those skilled in the art will understand that the data structure **800** may be modified to carry additional information. For example, it may be configured to carry a name or identifier of manufacturer of the concrete component, a name or identifier of the entity that supplied the concrete used to make the component, an identifier of the concrete batch used to make the concrete component, a name or identifier of the entity that supplied the reinforcement element, if any, used in the precast concrete component, a name of the project or structure for which the concrete component is to be used, etc.

Those skilled in the art will understand that the RFID assembly of the present invention can be used with other concrete components besides the elements of a manhole structure assembly. For example, the RFID assembly may be used with concrete septic tanks, concrete box culverts, concrete steps, concrete light and/or utility poles, and concrete components used in the construction of parking garages, such as double tees, slabs and columns, among other concrete components. The RFID assembly of the present invention could also be used in "cast in place" construction, where the concrete component is formed at the construction site. In each case, the RFID assembly is preferably attached to an outer surface of the concrete component.

As described herein, the RFID assembly of the illustrative embodiment does not receive measurement data from any sensors, nor does it perform any data processing functions. Accordingly, the RFID assembly need not include a micro-processor or a power source. It also does not include any communication wires extending from it. As a result, the RFID assembly is economical to manufacture. Furthermore, the RFID assembly only stores a unique identifier for the concrete component to which it is attached. Thus, the memory of the RFID assembly is preferably no more than 512-bits, and more preferably on the order of 96-bits.

The foregoing description has been directed to specific embodiments of this invention. It will be apparent, however,

that other variations and modifications may be made to the described embodiments, with the attainment of some or all of their advantages. For example, although the preferred embodiment has been described as using a passive RFID transponder, an active RFID transponder may also be used. Therefore, it is an object of the appended claims to cover all such variations and modifications as come within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A cast concrete component configured for in ground installation, the cast concrete component comprising:
 - a hollow portion having an outer surface and an inner surface defining a wall thickness between the inner and outer surfaces and an open interior inside of the inner surface;
 - a radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly mounted flush along the outer surface of the hollow portion, the RFID assembly including (i) a RFID tag having a memory configured with data uniquely identifying the cast concrete component, and an antenna coupled to the memory, and (ii) a housing that encapsulates the RFID tag, the housing having one or more gripping surfaces extending into the cast concrete component that keep the RFID assembly secured to the concrete component during the in ground installation; and
 - one or more reinforcing elements disposed between the inner and outer surfaces, wherein
 - the RFID tag of the RFID assembly is configured to be readable from the open interior of the hollow portion through the wall thickness.
2. The cast concrete component of claim 1 wherein the memory is a read only memory.
3. The cast concrete component of claim 1 wherein the identifying data includes a serial number a portion of which identifies a manufacturer of the cast concrete component.
4. The cast concrete component of claim 1 wherein the housing of the RFID assembly further includes a back plate and a cover, and the RFID tag is encapsulated between the back plate and the cover.
5. The cast concrete component of claim 1 wherein the RFID assembly further includes
 - human-readable information disposed within the housing, and visible through at least a portion of the housing.
6. The cast concrete component of claim 5 wherein the human-readable information includes at least one of:
 - a name of an entity that manufactured the cast concrete component, and
 - a telephone number of the entity that manufactured the cast concrete component.
7. The cast concrete component of claim 1 further comprising:
 - a label attached to the RFID housing, the label bearing:
 - human-readable information identifying at least a manufacturer of the cast concrete component, and
 - a bar code associated with information concerning the cast concrete component.
8. A method for casting a concrete component having built-in identifying information, the method comprising:
 - setting up a mold for casting the concrete component, the mold defining an inner surface, an outer surface, a wall thickness between the inner and outer surfaces, and a hollow interior inside of the inner surface;
 - placing one or more reinforcement elements in the mold;

- suspending a radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly from the one or more reinforcing elements pending an inspection of the mold;
- releasably attaching the RFID assembly to the mold at a predetermined location on the outer surface following the inspection, the RFID assembly having (i) a RFID tag with a memory configured with data uniquely identifying the concrete component and an antenna coupled to the memory, (ii) human-readable information, and (iii) a housing that encapsulates the RFID tag and has one or more gripping surfaces for extending into the concrete component;
- adding wet concrete to the mold between the inner and outer surfaces so that the concrete envelopes at least part of the RFID assembly, said concrete, when dry, forming the concrete component; and
- removing the concrete component from the mold, leaving the RFID assembly secured to the concrete component, wherein
 - the RFID tag of the RFID assembly is configured to be readable from the hollow interior of the cast concrete component.
9. The method of claim 8 wherein the RFID assembly further includes one or more registration posts extending from the RFID assembly, and the mold includes a corresponding receiving hole for each of the one or more registration posts of the RFID assembly, the attaching further comprising:
 - inserting each of the one or more registration posts of the RFID assembly into the corresponding receiving hole of the mold.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein the RFID assembly defines a nominal plane and the one or more registration posts extend from the nominal plane of the RFID assembly.
11. The method of claim 10 wherein the removing further comprises:
 - breaking away a portion of each of the one or registration posts.
12. A radio frequency identification (RFID) assembly for attachment along a surface of a cast concrete component, the RFID assembly comprising:
 - a back plate having a front, and a back;
 - a cover attached to the front of the back plate;
 - an RFID tag disposed between the cover and the back plate, the RFID tag including a memory configured with data uniquely identifying the cast concrete component, and an antenna coupled to the memory;
 - a label bearing human-readable information concerning the cast concrete component;
 - at least one gripping surface extending from the back of the back plate, and configured to be received into the cast concrete component; and
 - a hook wherein the hook is sized for grasping a reinforcement element.
13. The RFID assembly of claim 12 comprising at least one registration post.
14. The RFID assembly of claim 12 composing at least one registration hole.
15. The RFID assembly of claim 12 wherein
 - the label is disposed between the back plate and the cover, at least a portion of the cover is transparent, and
 - the human-readable information is visible through the transparent portion of the cover.
16. The RFID assembly of claim 12 wherein the cover and the back plate form a watertight seal around the RFID tag.

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