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Klemic

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(54) **ATMOSPHERIC WATER ABSORPTION AND RETRIEVAL DEVICE**

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(76) Inventor: **John Klemic**, 18888 Lancashire Rd.,
Detroit, MI (US) 48223

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2002.

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96/147; 96/154

(58) Field of Search 95/117, 121–126;
96/108, 119, 130, 134–143, 147, 154

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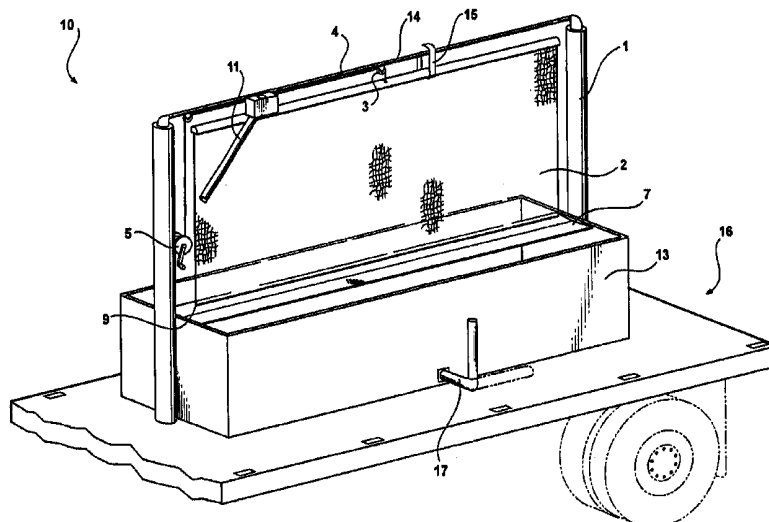
Primary Examiner—Robert H. Spitzer

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Gifford, Krass, Groh,
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A device for absorbing atmospheric moisture includes a support member with a net extending therefrom. The net includes a super absorbent polymer that has the property of being able to absorb a multiple of the polymer mass in atmospheric water and to thereafter release the water in response to an external stimulus. The device is in this way reusable. The device has particular application in the clearing of fog, manure odor clearance, and collection of potable water in remote locations. A process for extracting atmospheric moisture is also detailed that includes the step of extending a super absorbent polymer net into contact with an atmosphere. Thereafter, with that being in contact with the atmosphere for a sufficient amount of time moisture is absorbed from the atmosphere. The application of a stimulus to the super absorbent polymer containing atmospheric moisture causes the release of liquid water therefrom. The super absorbent polymer is then suitable for reuse to again absorb atmospheric water.

11 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



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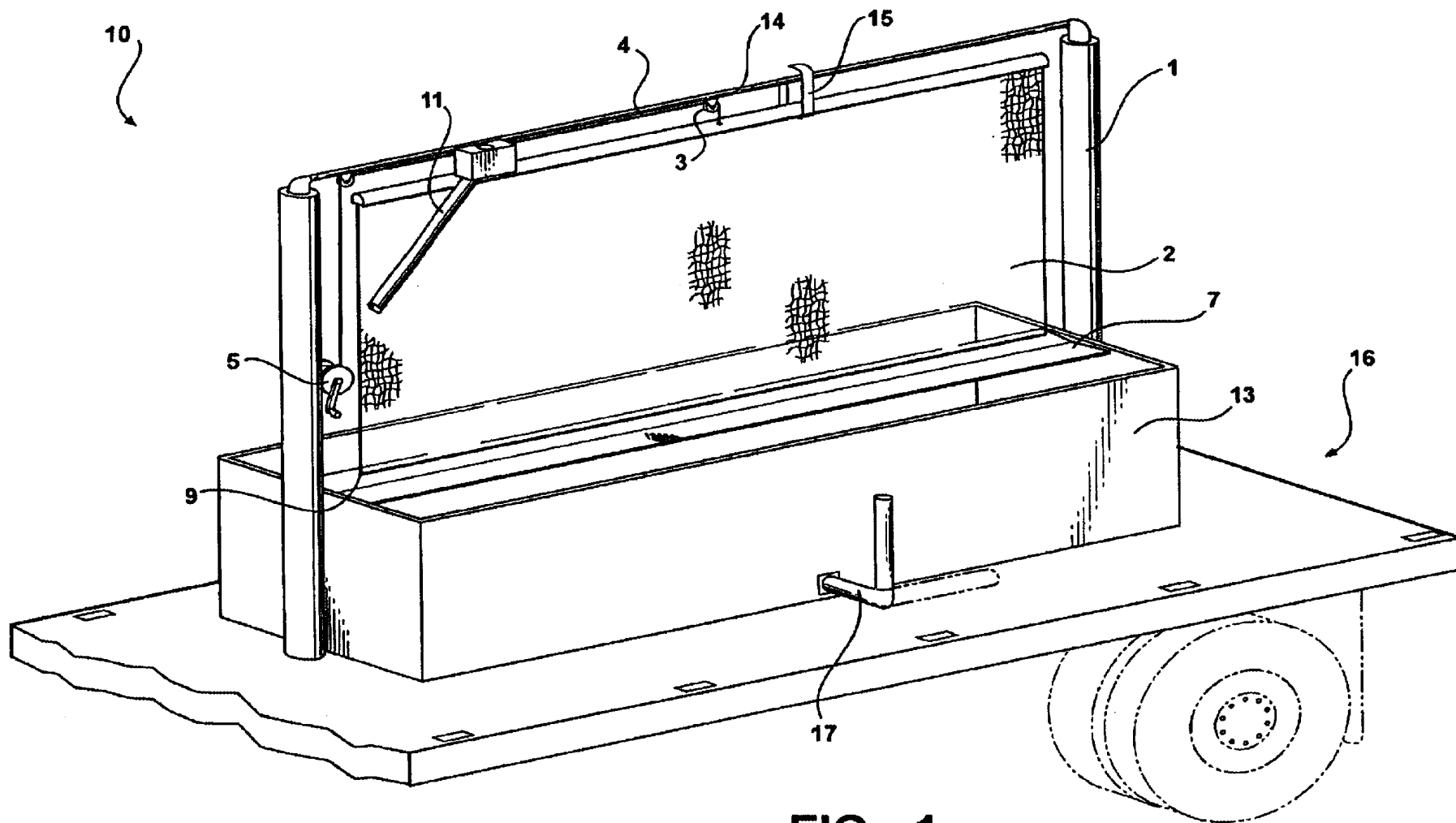


FIG - 1

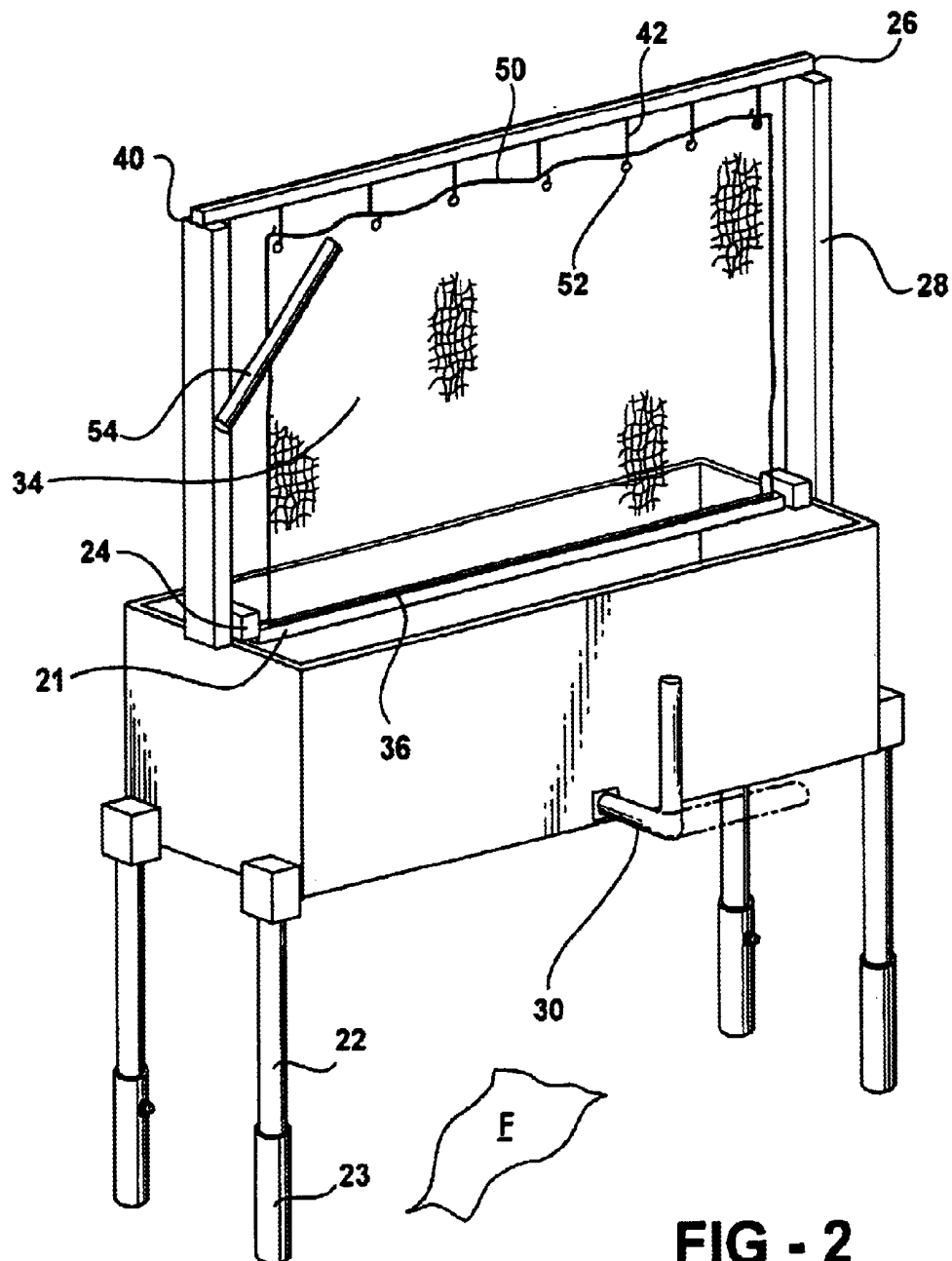


FIG - 2

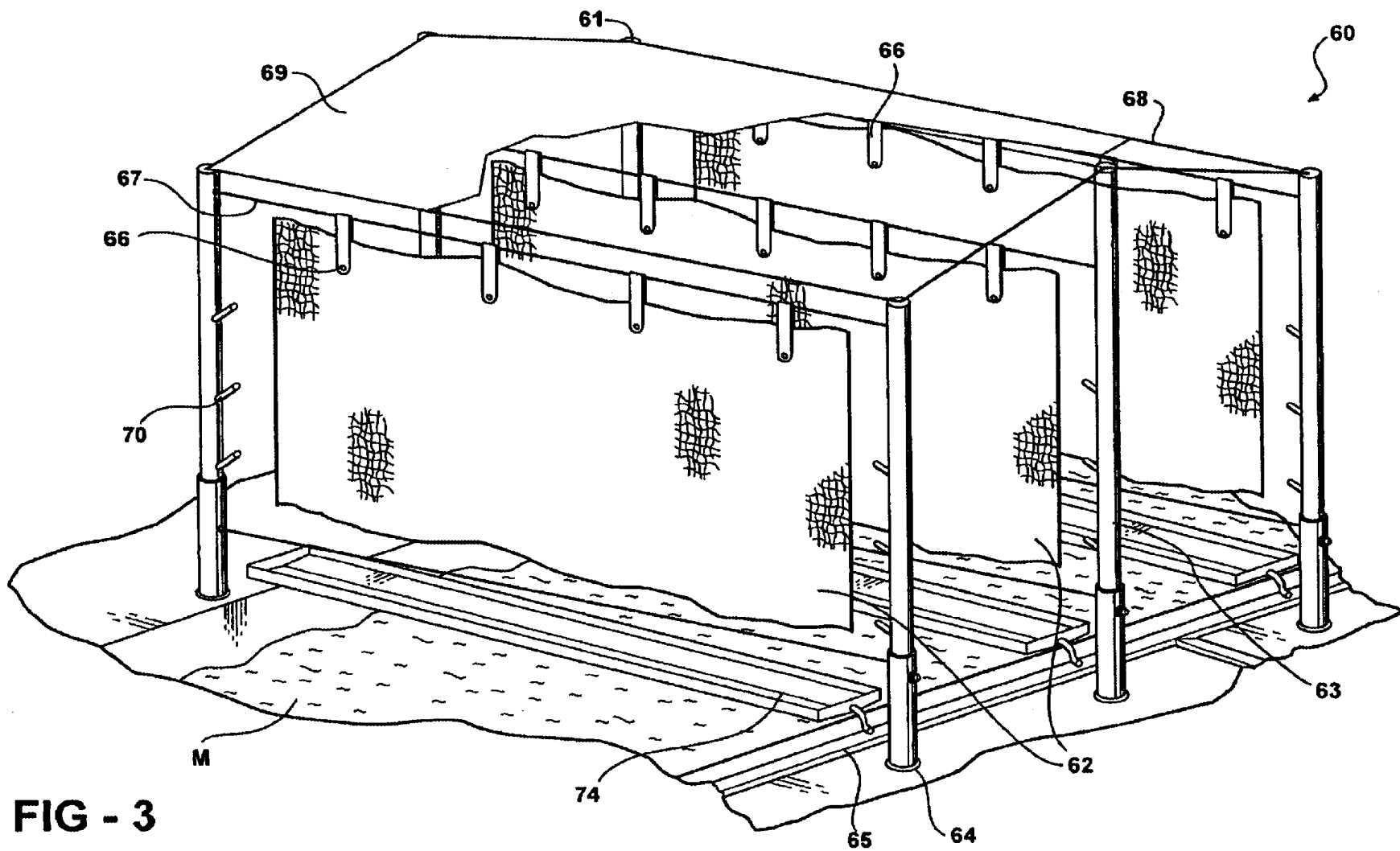


FIG - 3

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ATMOSPHERIC WATER ABSORPTION AND RETRIEVAL DEVICE

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/354,816 filed Feb. 6, 2002, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to devices for collecting atmospheric water with a super absorbent polymer and, more particularly, to devices with particular applications in dehumidification, fog dispersal, water retrieval, pollution control, and military applications.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Atmospheric moisture represents a peril and a resource. Fog represents a navigation hazard, and dehumidification of living space represents a considerable energy consumption component of air conditioning. Yet, in arid conditions, dew condensation represents one of the few reliable water resources. Additionally, in rural areas where arsenic and other undesirable minerals occur in well water, or in other areas where potable water is not readily available, humidity represents a clean and sustainable water supply.

While the prior art details numerous processes for removing atmospheric moisture, all of these processes suffer one or more limitations that preclude widespread feasibility. Cooling of air is a well known method to reduce the dew point and thereby condense atmospheric moisture, yet equipment and energy intensive. Alternatively, passive dew condensing traps are labor intensive to prepare and are inefficient in collecting condensate. Thus there exists a need for a device able to absorb large quantities of atmospheric moisture and to release the resulting water in a strong response to external stimuli.

Agriculture operations, particularly cattle, hog, and poultry feeding operations, produce large amounts of manure that, when processed by means of lagoons, present social and health concerns. Similar situations occur and exist in canning, manufacturing, and other industries. There is a need for a device that can be used in a manure management program to absorb and collect the atmospheric moisture and dissolved odorous substances, some of which can be recycled, that present social and health concerns. This device can be similarly used in other industrial and commercial situations.

This invention has military application for use in refugee care, water supply, and human waste pollution control, humidity control in tents, and aid to air conditioning in medical facilities and field hospitals.

This invention has application for military personnel, in field conditions, for use in supplemental water supply for equipment care and maintenance, and human needs, and latrine operation and pollution control.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A device for absorbing atmospheric moisture includes a support member with a net extending therefrom. The net includes a super absorbent polymer that has the property of being able to absorb a multiple of the polymer mass in atmospheric water and to thereafter release the water in response to an external stimulus. The device is in this way reusable. The device has particular application in the clearing of fog, manure odor clearance, and collection of potable water in remote locations.

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A process for extracting atmospheric moisture is also detailed that includes the step of extending a super absorbent polymer net into contact with an atmosphere. Thereafter, with that being in contact with the atmosphere for a sufficient amount of time moisture is absorbed from the atmosphere. The application of a stimulus to the super absorbent polymer containing atmospheric moisture causes the release of liquid water therefrom. The super absorbent polymer is then suitable for reuse to again absorb atmospheric water.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

A better understanding of the present invention will be had upon reference to the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, wherein like reference characters refer to like parts throughout the several views, and in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates an atmospheric absorbing device according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 illustrates an atmospheric absorbing device embodiment suited for use as a room dehumidifier; and

FIG. 3 illustrates an atmospheric absorbing device embodiment suited for use as a pollution control tool in a manure management program.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention has utility in absorbing atmospheric moisture with a super absorbent polymer having the property of being able to absorb a multiple of the super absorbent polymer mass of atmospheric water and to release this water in response to external stimuli. A water swellable super absorbent polymer as described herein is a synthetic or natural polymer. Super absorbent polymers and optional matrices therefor are detailed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,051,317 which is incorporated herein by reference.

Grain sizes for super absorbent polymer particles range from 0.1 micron to 20,000 microns. Preferably, super absorbent particles are used in the range from 1 micron to 5,000 microns, and more preferably, from 50 to 1,000 microns.

This invention employs super absorbent polymer placed in nets or sheets hung to passively absorb atmospheric moisture. This collected water may then be retrieved from the polymer. The retrieved water may be discarded or used depending on the application. Various specific embodiments are described in detail: room dehumidifier, fog dispersal, water retrieval, and a manure management tool, and military applications; however, these specific embodiments in no way are meant to limit the scope of the invention.

Referring now to FIG. 1, a device **10** is detailed having at least one mounting post **1** braced to support a super absorbent polymer net **2**. Typically two vertical posts are used and a net **2** suspended therebetween on suspension cable **14** by snap hooks **15** and net pulley **3**, after being raised into position by means of pulley rope **4**.

The posts **1** are typically 4 to 20 feet in height and spaced according to the load strength of the net **2** when fully loaded with atmospheric water. The net **2** is preferably in the form of a cargo net structure with ropes of hollow tubes of water-permeable cloth filled in isolated sections with super absorbent polymer beads and or gel therein. The tubes are mounted vertically within a frame of conventional rope. Preferably, the isolated sections are between 3 and 24 inches in length, more preferably the tubes are spaced from 1 inch to 12 inches apart, typical area being defined by a conventional rope frame is anywhere from 1 to 200 square feet. It

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is appreciated that such a frame can be scaled to nearly any size based upon mechanical weight bearing properties of construction components and expected atmospheric moisture content and environmental conditions.

The base trough **13** is located below the net **2** to collect loaded water within the net **2** after it is released therefrom by application of an external stimulus by stimuli applicator **11**. The base trough **13** has a swivel drain pipe **17** to facilitate removal of the water.

Preferably, the frame is selectively extended from post **1** to collect atmospheric moisture through the use of the pulley wheel **3** attached to a cable **4** and the crank **5**. It is appreciated that a selectively deployable super absorbent polymer net will have a greater serviceable lifetime if stored when not in use. In order to afford greater rigidity, preferably a frame **7** is affixed to a base trough **13** to support the net **2** in an undeployed position. More preferably, the base trough **13** is mechanically coupled to the selective frame extension system including the pulley wheel **3**, cable **4** and the crank **5**. It is appreciated that a selective frame extension according to the present invention is in the form of any conventional system illustratively including an electric winch, a telescoping post, a cantilevered rail and extendible wheel for bridge use, retractable tethered helium balloons for park authority establishing remote wildlife drinking ponds. Still more preferably, a second bottom slat **9** is attached to the bottom frame during extension.

A liquid trough **13** is located below the net **2** when in an extended position. The trough **13** extends the length of the frame **7** to collect water within the net **2** after it is released therefrom by application of an external stimulus. Preferably, the liquid trough has a swivel drain pipe **17** in order to facilitate removal of released water from the net **2** that has collected in the trough **13**.

The moisture absorbent device as detailed herein has application in a fog dispelling embodiment. For a highway fog pocket situation, an inventive device as detailed herein is mounted on a flatbed truck base **16**, suspended from guardrail posts or devoted use posts in locations where fog is known to regularly occur. It is appreciated that the inventive device is readily coupled to wireless communication technology to remotely activate the inventive device. Remote activation requires the addition of an antenna receiver and conventional automated operation components relating to extension and recycle (not shown). Power to operate a remotely activated device is supplied from line voltage, solar, wind, or other available power sources. In operation an inventive device is assembled at a selected location. The super absorbent polymer net upon exposure to moisture in a fogged area becomes engorged with the atmospheric moisture thereby increasing significantly in weight. The increased weight associated with the engorged net triggers a stimulus applicator thereby inducing release of water from the net. Preferably, the stimulus applicator is then reset and the cycle of water loading and discharge repeat automatically. It is appreciated that the device materials other than the super absorbent polymer are constructed of a variety of materials illustratively including wood, metal, and plastic consistent with water quality, cost, and local material availability conditions.

In another application, the inventive device is used at airports and other large area situations. Through the strategic placement of inventive devices as described above, the atmosphere in the vicinity of the inventive device becomes too dry to support fog formation. As a result, a comparatively dry pocket of air is formed. A dry pocket extends into

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a fogged area and absorbs additional atmospheric moisture thereby diluting the fog. As the engorgement and release of liquid water continues from the inventive device, dilution of the fog in adjacent areas continues thereby decreasing fog thickness and enhancing ground visibility. The rate of fog thinning with the inventive device depends on several factors illustratively including the size of the device, the placement and number of inventive devices deployed, terrain, topography, temperature, wind speed and direction, and humidity.

In another embodiment, the inventive device is operative as a room dehumidifier. Referring now to FIG. **2** a trough-shaped base **21** is supported above a floor **F** on legs **22** with optional height adjusters **23**. Inside the base **21** is a support block **24** for the ends of a curtain winding rod **26**. The support block **24** also secures two curtain support rods **28**. Preferably, the base **21** has a slight angle, and a swivel drain tube **30** is attached thereto. The base **21** is typically constructed of materials illustratively including wood, metal, and plastic. The curtain **34** has a bottom edge **36** that is attached to the curtain winding rod **26**. The bottom end of the curtain rod **34** fits into block **24** inside the base **21**. The curtain support rods **28** encompass the curtain **34**. The curtain rod **26** is secured to support rods **28** by angle post lock brackets **40**. Preferably the curtain rod **26** has a hook **42** adapted to engage the curtain **34**. The curtain **34** in a typical configuration includes one inch diameter hollow tubes of water permeable cloth fitted in isolated sections with super absorbent polymer beads or gel. Tubes are spaced vertically. More preferably, the tubes are affixed to a continuous sheet of water permeable cloth.

Additional reinforcement members (not shown) are provided based upon the polymer water absorbing capability and structural properties of device components elements. Preferably, the top edge **50** of the curtain **34** includes at least one loop **52** adapted to engage the hook **42** of the rod **26**.

A stimulus applicator **54** is affixed to the rod **26** and activated by the curtain attaining a preselected water weight. The stimulus applicator **54** is appreciated to operate and reset either automatically or manually.

In still another application, a super absorbent polymer net as described herein is suspended in a louvered structure, attached or built as part of a structure to provide a mist spring of potable water. In this application, a housing is provided to protect the super absorbent polymer net associated apparatus from wildlife contamination. In such an application, a released water collection base has an inner lining of plastic or stainless steel to facilitate cleaning and maintenance of sanitary conditions. It is appreciated that device materials other than the super absorbent polymer are constructed of materials illustratively including wood, metal, and plastic consistent with water quality, cost, and local material available conditions. An automatic stimulus applicator provided with the inventive device is preferably utilized to deliver released water at user specified intervals under a variety of humidity conditions. It is appreciated that the instant device is readily operated absent external line power and is well suited for rural and remote environment uses.

FIG. **3** illustrates an atmospheric moisture absorbing device embodiment well suited for use as an odor reducing and urea recovery manure management tool.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, a device shown generally at **60** is detailed having at least one mounting post **61** braced to support a super absorbent polymer net **62**. Typically two vertical posts **61** on each side on the manure lagoon **M** and two nets, net **62** supported therebetween across the manure lagoon **M**.

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A cover support post **63** is located on each side of the manure lagoon **M** to support and anchor the cover **69**.

Three metal post holes **64** are located on each side of the manure lagoon **M** to locate and engage the mounting posts **61** and the cover support posts **63**.

A liquid trough **74** is located below each net **62** and is angled slightly to drain into liquid manifold **65**.

Liquid manifold **65** is located at the lower end of liquid troughs **74** and collects and directs the liquid beyond the edge of the manure lagoon **M** for disposal.

Support cable **67** supports net **62** through support straps **66** and liquid trough **74** and liquid manifold **65**.

Cover cable **68** supports and anchors plastic cover **69**.

Stimuli applicator **70** is mounted on mounting posts **61** for each net **62**.

On each side of the manure lagoon **M** located 2 feet from the side, **3** metal post holes are inserted typically 4 feet into the ground at points typically 8 feet, 14 feet, and 22 feet from the end of the lagoon **M**. Two mounting posts **61** and one cover support post **63** are installed in the metal post holes 8 feet, 14 feet, and 22 feet, respectively, on each side of the manure lagoon **M**.

Support cable **67** extends horizontally across the manure lagoon **M** from about one foot below the top of each mounting post **61**. Super absorbent polymer net **62** and liquid trough **74** and liquid manifold **65** are suspended from support cable **67**. Mounting post **61** typically is about 14 feet in length, cover support post **63** typically is about 12 feet in length, and metal post hole **64** typically is about 4 feet in length. Plastic cover **69** is supported and anchored by cover cable **68**.

This device has application in manure management programs of large dairy, beef, pork, and poultry operations.

The stimulus applied herein to release water from an engorged super absorbent polymer illustratively includes pH change or protonation/deprotonation as detailed in Department of Energy, Office of Science—Feature Article May 7, 2001 Polymer Improvements, which is incorporated herein by reference.

While the forms of the invention herein described constitute presently preferred embodiments, many others are possible. It is not intended herein to mention all the possible equivalent forms or ramifications of the invention. It is

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understood that the terms used herein are merely descriptive rather than limiting and various changes may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. Such changes will be apparent to one skilled in the art.

We claim:

1. A process for extracting atmospheric moisture comprising the steps of:

extending a net comprising a super absorbent polymer in contact with an atmosphere;
allowing sufficient time for said net to absorb moisture from the atmosphere; and
applying a stimulus to said super absorbent polymer to cause release of wafer therefrom.

2. The process of claim 1 wherein said stimulus is a pH changing solution.

3. The process of claim 1 wherein atmospheric moisture is absorbed proximal to a situs selected from the group consisting of an airport, a road, a dwelling interior and a manure pit.

4. An atmospheric moisture absorbing device comprising:
a support member;

a net comprising super absorbent polymer, said net extending from said support; and

a stimulus applicator dispersing a water releasing stimulant into contact with said super absorbent polymer.

5. The device of claim 4 further comprising a net extending system coupled to said net and said support.

6. The device of claim 5 wherein said net extending system comprises a pulley wheel, a cable and a crank.

7. The device of claim 4 wherein said support comprises at least one vertical post.

8. The device of claim 7 wherein said at least one vertical post comprises a pair of vertical posts having said net suspended therebetween.

9. The device of claim 8 further comprising a cover over said net.

10. The device of claim 4 further comprising a liquid trough beneath said net and adapted to collect water released from said net.

11. The device of claim 10 wherein said liquid trough further comprises a drain.

* * * * *