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Hendrickson et al.

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- (54) **WALL-MOUNTABLE OPTICAL FIBER AND CABLE MANAGEMENT APPARATUS**
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- (22) Filed: **Mar. 27, 2007**

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 - (51) **Int. Cl.**
G02B 6/00 (2006.01)
 - (52) **U.S. Cl.** **385/135; 385/134**
 - (58) **Field of Classification Search** **385/134, 385/135**
- See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Optical fiber and cable management apparatus includes a base for mounting on a wall or other surface at a subscriber premises, and a drum region extending axially upward from the base. The drum region includes an outer cylindrical wall for supporting a length of a first fiber optic cable wound about the outer wall, an inner cylindrical wall disposed radially inward of the outer wall to define an annular fiber routing region between the two walls, and a cable entry port in the outer wall for receiving an end portion of the first fiber optic cable so that fibers of the cable may be routed through the fiber routing region. An interface compartment disposed atop the drum is constructed to interface a first set of fibers routed within the compartment, with a second set of fibers associated with a second fiber optic cable that is routed to the apparatus.

17 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets

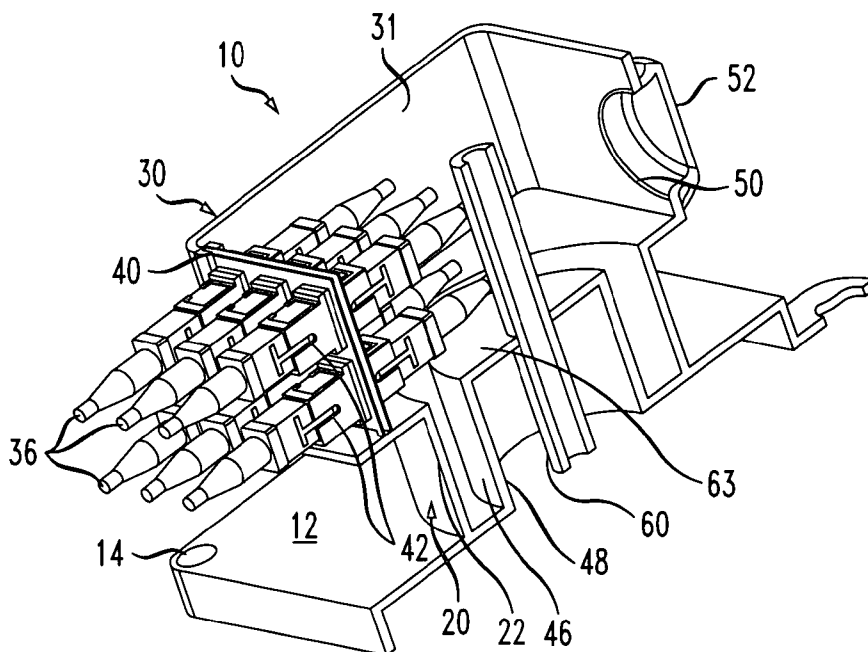


FIG. 1

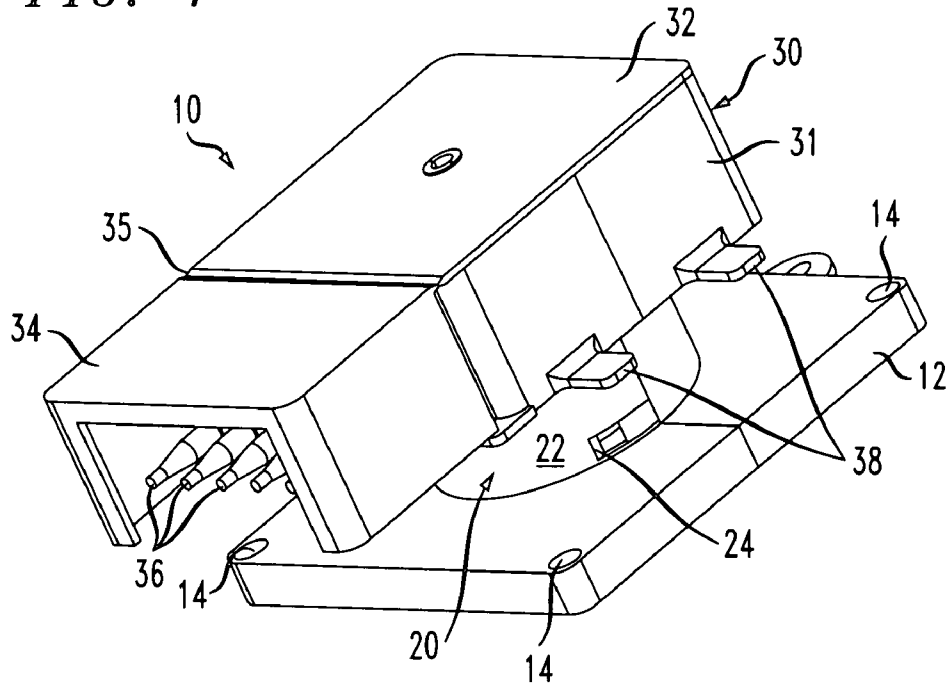


FIG. 2

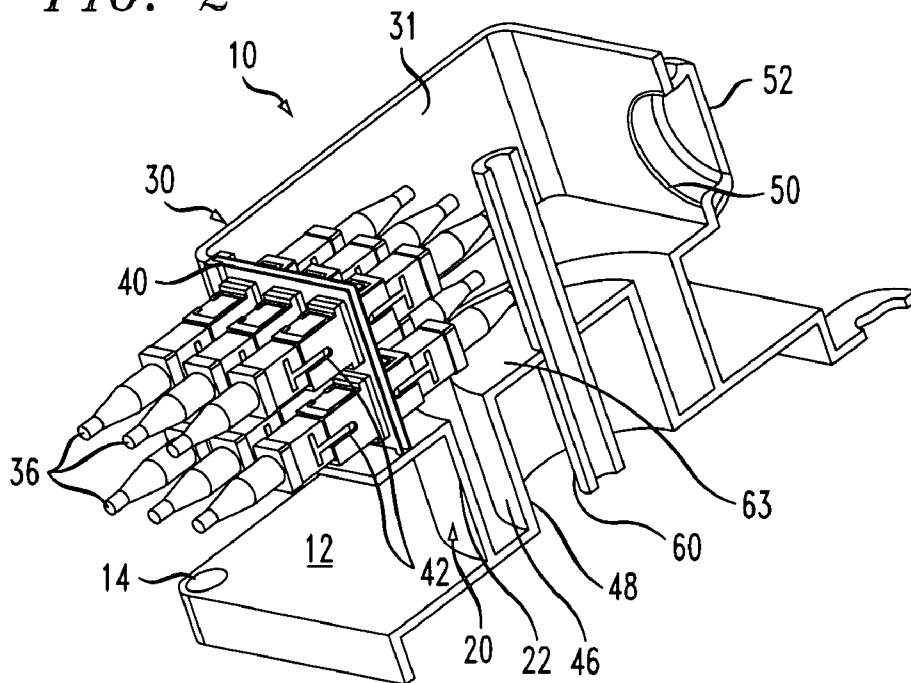


FIG. 5

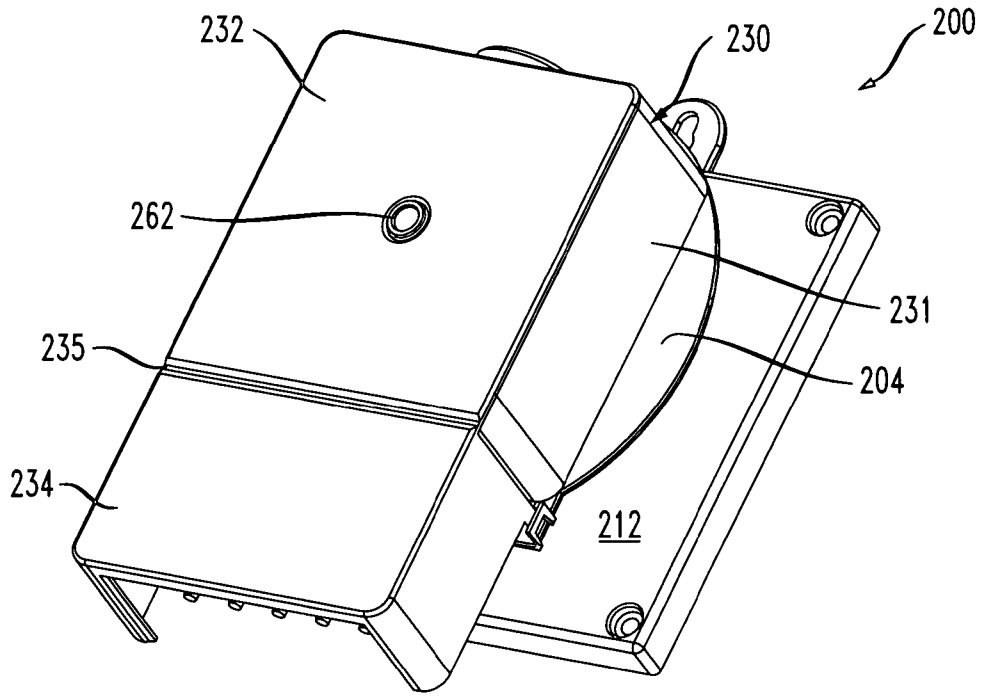


FIG. 6

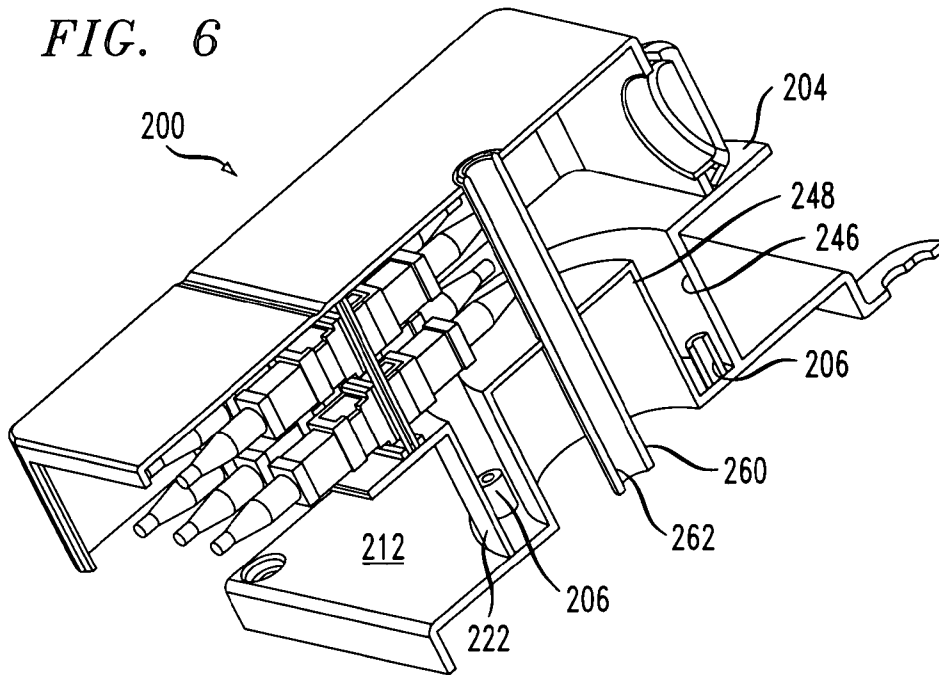


FIG. 7

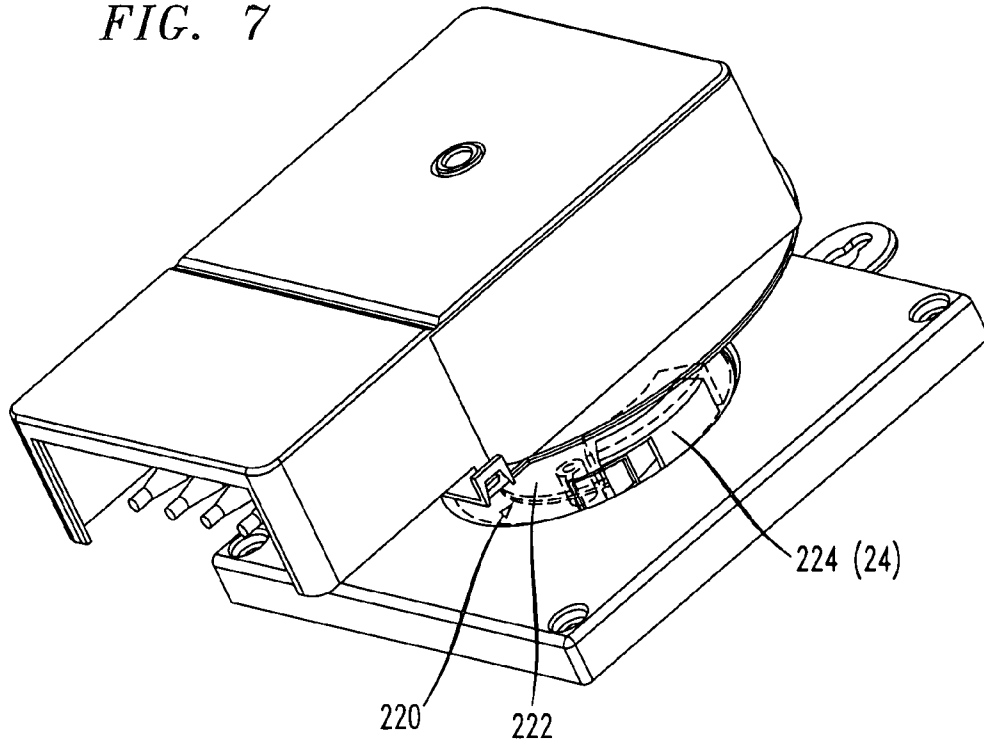


FIG. 8

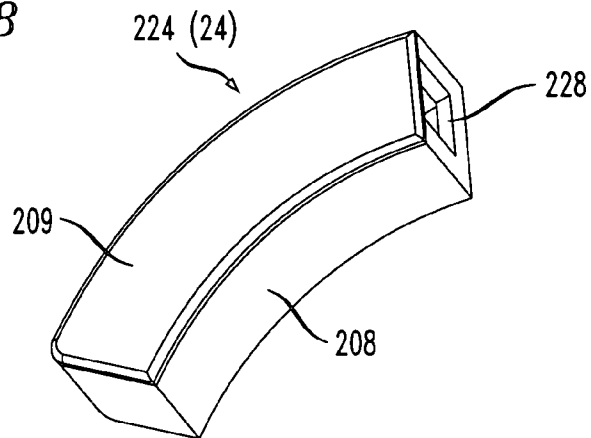


FIG. 9

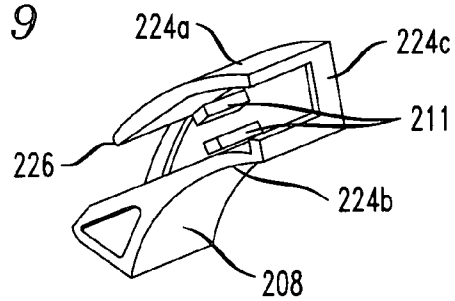


FIG. 9A

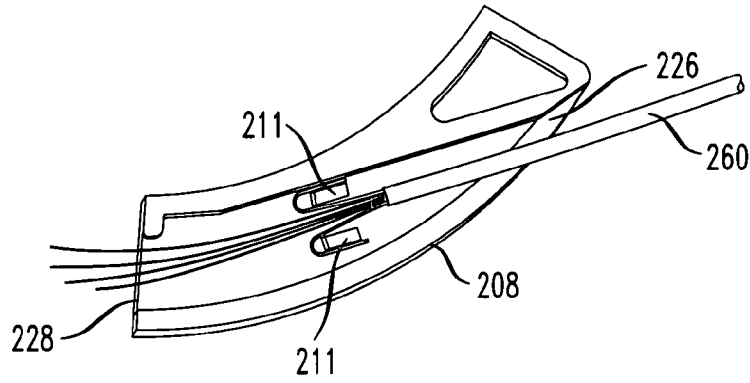
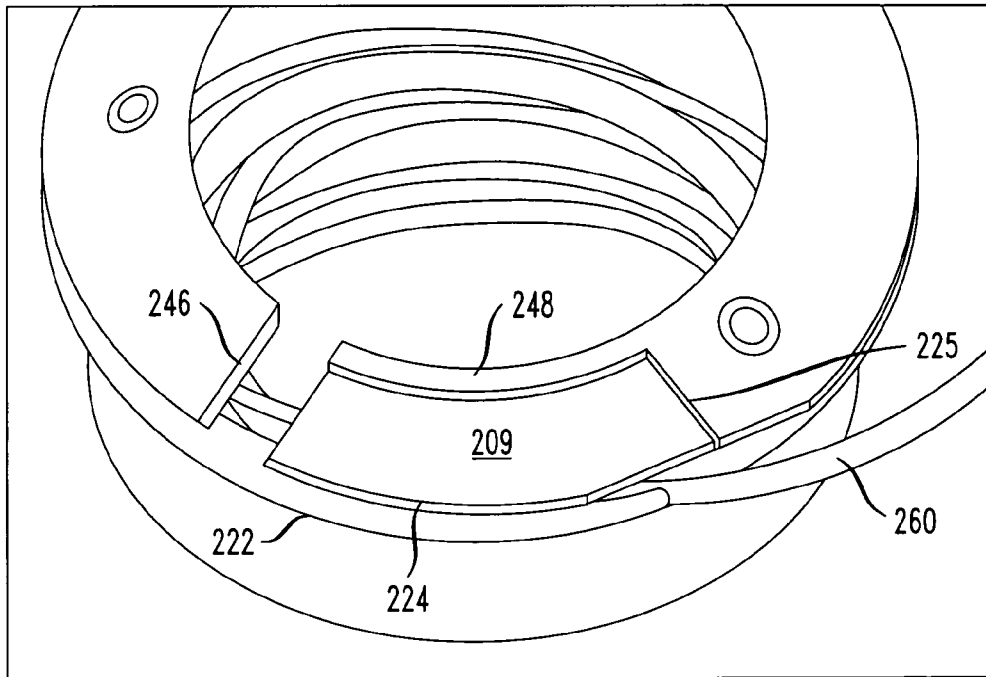


FIG. 9B



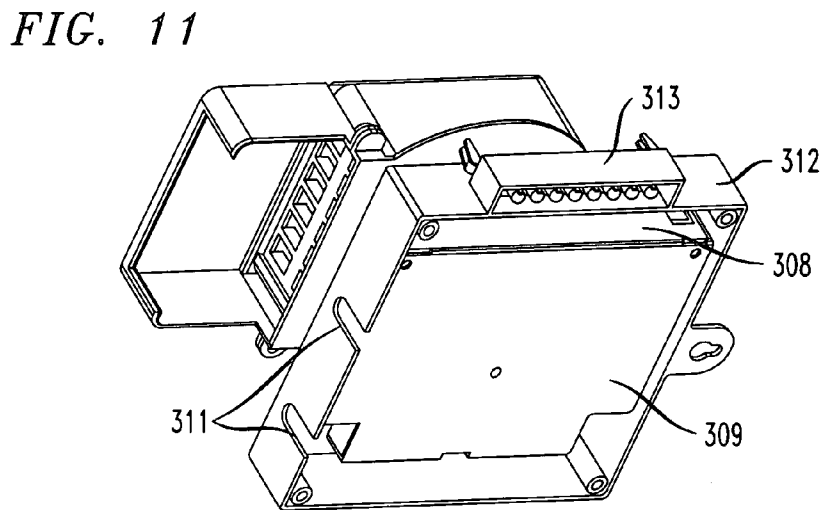
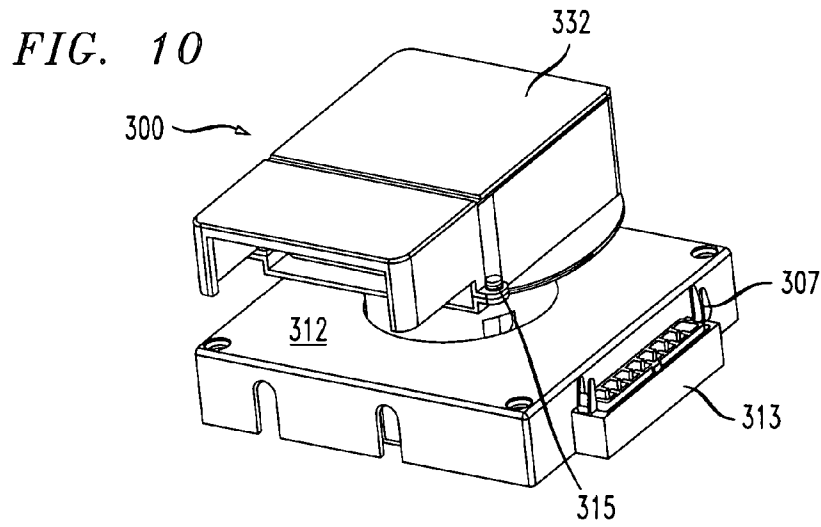


FIG. 12

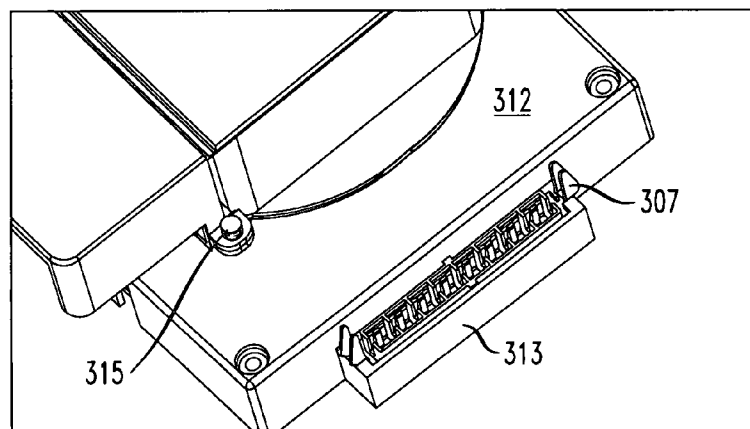
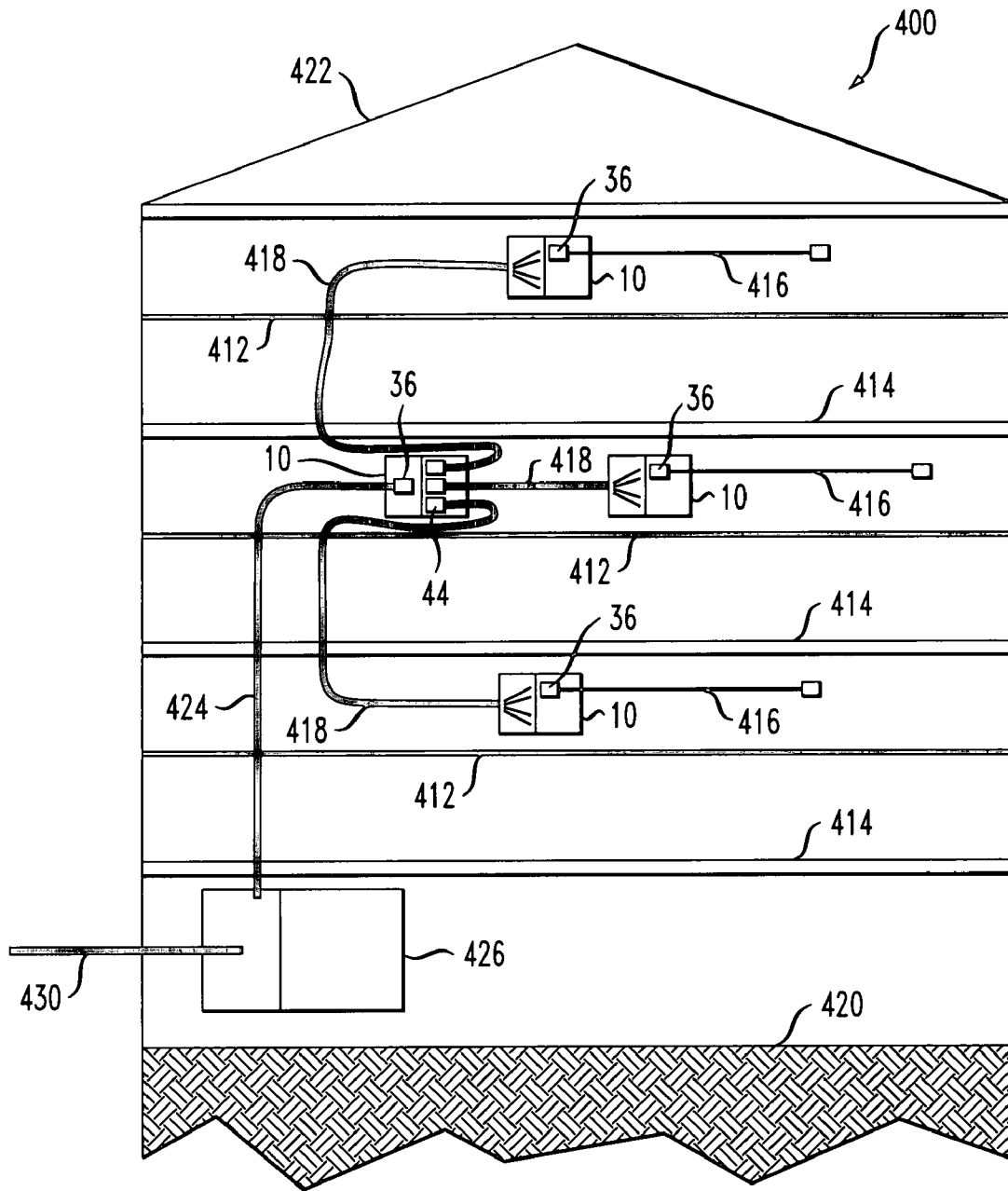


FIG. 13



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WALL-MOUNTABLE OPTICAL FIBER AND CABLE MANAGEMENT APPARATUS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/880,169, filed in the names of the present inventors on Jan. 13, 2007, and entitled "Multidwelling Unit (MDU) Drop Box for Fiber Optic Cables".

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to drop boxes or enclosures for managing fiber optic cables in the deployment of fiber optic networks at subscriber premises.

2. Discussion of the Known Art

The deployment of fiber optic networks at multi-dwelling units (MDUs) and other subscriber premises, requires the use of so-called cable drop boxes which are designed for mounting on walls or other structures at the premises. Current industry practice calls for the boxes to have a cable entry port at the left side of the box for receiving a fiber optic cable originating from the network provider, and one or more ports at the right side of the box through which a number of fibers associated with individual subscribers at the premises are routed to connect with fibers in the provider cable. See, for example, Corning Cable Systems, Wall-Mountable Connector Housings, at <www.corningcablesystems.com>, and ADC Telecommunications, Indoor Fiber Distribution Terminals—Customer Premises Equipment (CPE), at <www.adc.com/productsandservices/>. See also, 2007 Multilink Catalog, vol. 24, at pages 87-94, disclosing a family of wall mountable fiber optic cable enclosures available from Multilink, Inc., of Elyria, Ohio, USA.

Installation of the known cable drop boxes by a single worker at a subscriber premises can be difficult and time consuming, however. Further, the known boxes are dimensioned to accommodate older types of fiber optic cables which can not tolerate bend diameters of less than three inches (76.2 mm) without impairing cable performance. Accordingly, the currently available drop boxes are relatively large, and are not well-suited for widespread deployment of fiber optic networks at multi-dwelling units or other kinds of premises without significant expenditures of time and labor.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention, optical fiber and cable management apparatus includes a base arranged for mounting on a wall or other surface at a subscriber premises, and a drum region extending a certain height axially from the base. The drum region has an outer cylindrical wall dimensioned to support a length of a first fiber optic cable when wound about the outer wall, an inner cylindrical wall formed radially inward of the outer wall wherein an annular fiber routing region is defined between the two walls, and a cable entry port in the outer wall for receiving an end portion of the first fiber optic cable so that fibers of the cable can be routed through the fiber routing region. An interface compartment is disposed atop the drum region and is arranged to interface a first set of fibers that are routed within the compartment, with a second set of fibers associated with a second fiber optic cable that is routed to the apparatus.

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In one embodiment, a tube having a passage whose axis coincides with that of the outer cylindrical wall, extends through the apparatus for enabling a single installer to use one hand for paying out a cable wound about the wall, while using the other hand to hold a screwdriver whose shaft is inserted in the tube passage so that the apparatus can turn freely about the shaft as the cable is being paid out. This feature can significantly reduce the time and effort required of the installer when deploying a fiber optic network at a given premises.

For a better understanding of the invention, reference is made to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

In the drawing:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a first embodiment of optical fiber and cable management apparatus in the form of a wall mountable cable drop box, according to the invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional elevation view of the drop box of FIG. 1, showing a cable drum region and other internal components of the box;

FIG. 3 is a view of the drop box of FIG. 1 as seen from the top with a cover lid removed;

FIG. 4 is a view of the drop box of FIG. 1 as seen from below;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a second embodiment of a wall mountable cable drop box, according to the invention;

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional elevation view of the drop box of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a side view of the drop box of FIG. 5, showing the location of a cable strain relief device according to the invention;

FIG. 8 is an enlarged perspective view of the cable strain relief device;

FIG. 9 is a view of the strain relief device in FIG. 8 with a top cover removed;

FIG. 9A is also a view of the strain relief device without the top cover, and shows a fiber optic cable entering one end of the device and individual fibers of the cable exiting from an opposite end of the device;

FIG. 9B shows the strain relief device in place in the drum region of the drop box;

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a third embodiment of a wall mountable cable drop box, according to the invention;

FIG. 11 is a view of the drop box of FIG. 10 as seen from below;

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of a connector parking area on a base of the drop box of FIG. 10; and

FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram showing a number of the inventive cable drop boxes deployed throughout a multidwelling unit (MDU) premises, according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

FIG. 1 shows a first embodiment of optical fiber and cable management apparatus in the form of a cable drop box 10, according to the invention. The box 10 may be constructed of sheet metal, and/or plastics materials such as, without limitation, ABS or polycarbonate. Moisture proof seals, gaskets and the like may also be provided on or within the box 10 in a known manner if the box will be mounted outdoors at a subscriber premises. The box 10 has a base 12 which, in the disclosed embodiment, is generally square and measures, e.g., about 6.25 inches (158.75 mm) long on each side with mounting holes 14 formed at each corner of the base.

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The box 10 also has a drum region 20 that extends axially upward from a central portion of the base 12. The drum region 20 includes an outer cylindrical wall 22 the outside periphery of which is partially visible in FIG. 1. The outside diameter of the wall 22 is sufficient to allow a length of a fiber optic cable (not shown) to be wound on the drum wall 22 for storage or retention, with at least the minimum bend diameter specified for the cable. For example, when using cables of Allwave® Flex™ fiber available from OFS Fitel, the outside diameter of the drum wall 22 can be about 3.0 inches (76.2 mm) or less. An inside end portion of the cable enters a cable entry port in the drum wall while being supported over a substantially straight path by a strain relief device 24 fitted within the entry port. The device 24 is described further below in connection with FIGS. 7 to 9B, and it guides the end portion of the cable through the cylindrical wall 22 along a line tangential to the circumference of the wall at the location of the device 24.

The cable drop box 10 also has an interface compartment 30 that is disposed atop the drum region 20, and which has a peripheral side wall 31. In the embodiment of FIG. 1, the compartment 30 has a removable cover lid 32 constructed and arranged to permit an installer to access the interior of the compartment 30 from outside, and a connector guard or cover 34 that is hinged to the lid at 35. As explained below, the interface compartment 30 is dimensioned and formed to allow a first set of optical fibers that enter the compartment 30 and originate either from a cable wound over the drum region 20, or from a cable that enters a port in the compartment wall 31 (see FIGS. 2 and 3), to connect with a second set of optical fibers from another cable which fibers terminate in connectors 36 seen beneath the cover 34 in FIG. 1. A number of flat fingers or tabs 38 are formed to project outward from lower side edges of the compartment wall 31, and are parallel to the base 12. The tabs 38 and the base 12 together serve to confine a length of cable wound about the drum wall 22, in the region between the base and the interface compartment 30.

FIG. 2 is a cross sectional view in elevation of the drop box 10 in FIG. 1, and FIG. 3 is a view of the box 10 as seen from the top with the cover lid 32 removed. The interface compartment 30 features a connector panel 40 that is supported to occupy a cut out region 41 in the compartment sidewall 31. A number of optical connector adapters 42 are mounted to extend through corresponding openings in the panel 40, and the adapters 42 operate to couple the fiber optic connectors 36 at the external side of the panel 40, with corresponding connectors 44 at the internal side of the panel. Preferably, the panel 40 is mounted in the sidewall 31 so that it can be easily removed and exchanged with another panel of the same dimensions but in which adapters of a different type are mounted. For example, the panel 40 may be slid in or out of vertical channels 43 formed at both ends of the sidewall cut out region 41. A desired panel 40 may then be selected from among a number of different panels having adapters 42 which accommodate, for example, type LC, SC, FC, ST, MPO, or type MPX connectors, depending on the type of cable connectors used at a given deployment.

As mentioned, optical fibers routed into the interface compartment 30 may originate from the inside end portion of a cable wound over the drum region 20 and which passes through the drum wall 22 via the strain relief device 24. In such an application, the fibers are routed through an annular fiber routing region 46 that extends between the outer cylindrical wall 22, and an inner cylindrical wall 48 of the drum region which wall 48 is formed radially inward of the outer wall 22. The strain relief device 24 and the dimensions of the annular fiber routing region 46, are such that individual optical fibers will not be subject to a bend diameter less than that

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specified for the fibers before entering the interface compartment 30 and terminating in the connectors 44. For example, when using cables of Allwave® Flex™ fiber available from OFS Fitel, the inner wall 48 may have an outside diameter as small as 0.7874 inches (20 mm), and the mean diameter of the fiber routing region 46 may only be about 2.0 inches (50.8 mm).

The sidewall 31 of the interface compartment 30 also has a cable entry or pass through port 50 (FIGS. 2 & 3) in a rear section of the wall 31 for receiving an outside fiber optic cable or cable assembly (not shown) whose fibers are to be coupled with those fibers terminated by the connectors 36. Alternatively, the cable entry port 50 may be provided in the form of a large opening through a portion of an alternate connector panel 40 (not shown). In such applications, the fibers of the cable entering the rear port 50 may be routed directly to corresponding ones of the connectors 44 with little, if any, bending whatsoever. Moreover, the use of multifiber connectors such as type MPO in the connector panel 40 enables the box 10 to act as an aggregation box. That is, multiple cables originating from other like boxes at different levels of a multi-dwelling unit (MDU) may enter the rear port 50 of the interface compartment 30, to connect via the MPO connectors with a single cable routed to the box from an alternate location, e.g., the basement of the MDU. See FIG. 13 and related text below. If not used, the rear cable entry port 50 is preferably kept closed by a plug 52.

FIG. 4 is a bottom view of the fiber optic cable drop box of FIG. 1. A cylindrical tube 60 is formed with a central axial passage 62. The tube 60 extends axially between a top end of the tube 60 that fits through a clearance opening in the cover lid 32 to lie flush with the lid's top surface as shown in FIG. 1, and a bottom end of the tube where the tube passage 62 opens beneath the base 12 as seen in FIG. 4. The axis of the tube passage 62 coincides with the axis of the outer cylindrical wall 22 of the drum region 20. In the disclosed embodiment, the tube 60 extends above and below the center of a wall 63 that closes an upper axial end of the inner cylindrical wall 48, as seen in FIG. 2.

The diameter of the central passage 62 in the tube 60 is preferably sufficient to allow a long narrow tool such as a screwdriver shaft, bolt or other payoff mandrel, to be inserted through the passage from above or below the box 10 so that the tool will act as a spindle about which the box 10 can turn freely. This construction allows a single worker easily to pay out a cable wound on the drum region 20, as may be necessary for a network deployment at a MDU. For example, while holding the handle of an inserted screwdriver in one hand, the worker can use his or her other hand to pull and unwind a desired length of the cable from the drum region 20 while the box 10 is free to turn about the screwdriver shaft.

FIGS. 5 to 7 show a second embodiment of a fiber-optic cable drop box 200 according to the invention. Components of the box 200 that are identical or similar to those of the box 10 of FIGS. 1 to 4, have corresponding reference numerals increased by 200.

The box 200 has a single piece cover lid 232 with an integrated hinge 235 for a connector guard or cover 234. Further, a side wall 231 of an interface compartment 230 has a continuous circular disk flange 204 that extends radially outward beneath the compartment 230, parallel to a base 212 of the box. The flange 204 and the base 212 together serve to confine a length of fiber optic cable wound on the outer cylindrical wall 222, within the region between the flange 204 and the base 212. As with the box 10 of FIGS. 1 to 4, an inside end portion of the cable is guided by a strain relief device 224 to enter an annular fiber routing region 246 inside the box 200,

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over a substantially straight path tangential to the circumference of the wall 222 at the location of the device 224.

Also, as seen in FIG. 6, the base 212 of the drop box 200 may be formed as a separate piece that is fastened to the bottom of the drum region 220 by, e.g., screws or other fasteners that are formed to engage collars 206 fixed at the bottom of the annular fiber routing region 246.

FIG. 8 is an enlarged, perspective view of the strain relief device 224 which corresponds to the strain relief device 24 provided in the drop box 10 in FIG. 1. As seen in FIG. 9, the strain relief device 224 is comprised of an arcuately shaped device body 208 with a generally U-shaped cross section having an outer side wall 224a, an inner side wall 224b, a base wall 224c, and a cover 209 that fits atop and extends between the side walls 224a, 224b of the device.

Further, as shown in FIG. 9A, the outer side wall 224a has an opening 226 at one end of the device 224 for receiving the inner end portion of, e.g., a flat ribbon fiber optic cable 260 wound on the outer cylindrical wall 222 of the drum region 220. An opening 228 at the opposite end of the device 224 allows individual fibers of the cable to exit from the device and to enter the fiber routing region 246 of the box 200, preferably after each fiber is protected with, for example, a commercially available 900 μm sleeve.

The cable 260 and its individual fibers are guided over a substantially straight path between the device openings 226, 228, with the aid of a pair of parallel fingers or guides 211 that project upward from the base wall 224c of the device 224 as seen in FIGS. 9 and 9A. After outer jacketing is stripped away from the end portion of the cable 260, lengths of an aramid or Kevlar® yarn that surrounds the cable fibers and serves as a reinforcing or strength material for the cable, are wrapped about and secured to the guides 211 with an epoxy or other suitable adhesive. Commercially available protective sleeves (e.g., 900 μm) are placed over each of the individual cable fibers, and the sleeved fibers are guided out of the device opening 228. The device cover 209 is fixed to the body 208 via a suitable adhesive, and the assembled cable strain relief device 224 is fixed securely within a cable entry port 225 defined between the outer cylindrical wall 222 and the inner cylindrical wall 248 of the drum region 220, as shown in FIG. 9B.

Accordingly, the inside end portion of the cable 260 and its individual fibers pass tangentially with respect to the outer cylindrical wall 222 through the cable entry port 225 in the wall, and into the annular fiber routing region 246 of the box 200. Because the yarn surrounding the fibers is anchored to the guides 211 of the strain relief device 224, any force applied externally to the cable 260 when the cable is being wound on or off the outer cylindrical wall 222 of the drum region, will be transferred to the wall 222 in which the device 224 is fixed rather than to the fibers themselves.

FIGS. 10 to 12 show a third embodiment of a fiber optic cable drop box 300 according to the invention. Components of the box 300 that are identical or similar to those of the box 10 of FIGS. 1 to 4, have corresponding reference numerals increased by 300. The box 300 features an integral splice compartment 308 in its base 312, a connector parking area 313, and a number of security latch holes 315.

Splice Compartment 308

Typical MDU drop box installations have single fiber breakouts that egress from the box, wherein each breakout is associated with a corresponding living unit of the premises where the box is installed. Single fiber cables from each living unit are often routed to a drop box without a terminating

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connector. The bare ends of these cables can be terminated at the drop box in various ways. For example, single ended fiber pigtailed can be spliced within the drop box so that splice sleeves are housed in a common space. This requires a chamber or compartment to house the splice in order to prevent damage and to manage fiber slack. Alternatives may include mechanical splicing of the pigtailed, which would require a similar chamber or housing. The individual single fiber cables may also be terminated directly with a field installable connector, thus obviating the need for a splice chamber.

The drop box 300 has an integrated splice chamber or compartment 308 attached or formed underneath the base 312, including a splice tray 309 mounted inside the base. The splice tray 309 may be fixed within the box 300, or affixed directly to a wall. In either case, the box 300 may be installed over the splice compartment 308. Pigtailed or terminated ends can then enter or exit a lower section of the compartment through corresponding clearance notches 311 that are cut in a side wall of the base 312.

Connector Parking Area 313

The connector parking area or block 313 allows terminated fiber ends to be stored while not in use. The block 313 is constructed and dimensioned to receive and secure a selected one of a number of different commercially available connector parking strips 307 (e.g., type SC) in the block 313. This feature enables the future use of alternate connector types without having to replace the box 300, but at the same time allows installers to forego parking.

Latch Holes 315

Several latch or security holes 315 may be formed through corresponding feet on the hinged cover lid 332. The latch holes 315 allow the end user to utilize a number of safety lockout methods. For example, one hole 315 can be used with a standard plunger type latching mechanism simply to keep the lid closed. Other holes 315 can be used to receive wire ties, lockout tags, or other security locks.

FIG. 13 illustrates an example of a fiber optic network deployment at a multi-dwelling unit 400. A number of the inventive drop boxes, for example, the box 10 of FIGS. 1 to 4, are mounted at corresponding locations in the MDU 400, for example, above a drop ceiling on each floor 414 of the MDU. Optical fibers 416 corresponding to network subscribers on a given floor 414 are terminated in the connectors 36 which, in turn, are connected to the adapters 42 on the external side of the box panel 40.

Each of the subscriber fibers 416 is connected with a corresponding fiber in a cable 418 associated with the drop box 10 in the ceiling of the subscriber's floor. The cable 418 may be wound initially about the drum region 20 of the box 10, to be partially or fully unwound later for routing to another drop box 10 that serves as an "aggregation" box which is located, e.g. between a basement 420 and a roof 422 of the MDU 400. The fibers of the cable 418 are terminated in the connectors 44 which, in turn, are connected to the adapters 42 on the internal side of the box connector panel 40.

At the aggregation box 10, each one of the cables 418 containing subscriber fibers from each floor of the MDU 400, enters the aggregation box through its rear pass through port 50 or a faceplate port. As mentioned earlier, the fibers of each cable 418 may be routed inside the box with little if any bending to connect via a multi-fiber connector 44 with a corresponding adapter 42 on the internal side of the box panel 40. A main fiber optic cable 424 serving all subscribers in the

MDU **400**, is routed between a cable entry box **426** in the basement **420**, and the aggregation box **10** in which the main cable fibers connect to the adapters **42** on the external side of the box panel **40** via multifiber connectors **36**. A network provider cable **430** is routed to the entry box **426** from outside the MDU **400**, and fibers of the cable **430** are connected to corresponding subscriber fibers of the cable **424** inside the entry box **426**.

The various embodiments disclosed herein incorporate the following important features in optical fiber and cable management apparatus.

1. Reduced physical dimensions for use with newer types of fiber optic cable such as Allwave® Flex™ available from OFS Fitel and which have superior bending performance.

2. An axial drum region that provides for external cable storage and keeps internal fiber routing within safe bending limits.

3. A central through tube that facilitates pay-off of cable wound externally on the drum region, with the use of a common tool such as a screwdriver.

While the foregoing represents preferred embodiments of the invention, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various modifications and changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, and that the invention includes all such modifications and changes as come within the scope of the following claims.

We claim:

1. Optical fiber and cable management apparatus, comprising:

a base constructed and arranged for mounting on a wall or other surface at a subscriber premises;

a drum region extending a certain height axially from the base and including;

(a) an outer cylindrical wall dimensioned and formed to support a length of a first fiber optic cable when wound about said wall,

(b) an inner cylindrical wall formed radially inward of the outer wall, wherein an annular fiber routing region is defined between the inner and the outer walls, and

(c) a first cable entry port formed in the outer cylindrical wall for receiving an inside end portion of the first fiber optic cable so that optical fibers of the cable can be routed through the fiber routing region; and

an interface compartment disposed atop the drum, wherein said compartment is constructed and arranged for interfacing a first set of fibers that are routed within the compartment, with a second set of fibers associated with a second fiber optic cable that is routed to the apparatus.

2. Optical fiber and cable management apparatus according to claim **1**, including a strain relief device fixed at the first cable entry port, wherein the device is constructed and arranged to guide the inside end portion of the first fiber optic cable through the outer cylindrical wall and into the fiber routing region over a path that is tangential to the circumference of the outer cylindrical wall at the location of the device.

3. Apparatus according to claim **2**, wherein the strain relief device is constructed and arranged to transfer a pull force applied externally to the first fiber optic cable, to the outer cylindrical wall of the drum region when the cable is wound on or off the drum region.

4. Apparatus according to claim **3**, wherein the strain relief device includes one or more guides for securing a strength material beneath an outer jacket of the cable.

5. Apparatus according to claim **1**, including a tube having an axial passage that is sufficiently wide to receive an elongated tool so that the apparatus can turn freely about the tool when the first fiber optic cable is paid out from the drum region of the apparatus.

6. Apparatus according to claim **5**, wherein the tube is supported to extend between a bottom end whereat the tube passage opens beneath said base, and a top end whereat the passage opens on a top surface of the interface compartment.

7. Apparatus according to claim **6**, wherein the tube is supported so that the axis of said passage coincides with the axis of the outer cylindrical wall of the drum region.

8. Apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the interface compartment includes a connector panel, and a number of connector adapters mounted in the panel for coupling fiber optic connectors at an externally facing side of the panel, with corresponding fiber optic connectors at an internally facing side of the panel.

9. Apparatus according to claim **8**, wherein the interface compartment is constructed and arranged to support the connector panel so that a first connector panel can be removed and exchanged with a second connector panel having connector adapters of a type different from the type of adapters mounted in the first connector panel.

10. Apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the interface compartment has a side wall, and a number of fingers or tabs that project outward from the side wall so that the fingers or tabs and the base confine a length of the first fiber optic cable wound on the outer drum wall, in the region between the base and the interface compartment.

11. Apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the interface compartment has a side wall, and a disk flange that extends radially outward and parallel to said base so that the flange and the base confine a length of the first fiber optic cable wound on the outer drum wall, in the region between the base and the interface compartment.

12. Apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein the interface compartment has a side wall, and the side wall has a second cable entry port for receiving a fiber optic cable or cable assembly having a third set of fibers to be coupled via the connector panel with the second set of fibers of the second fiber optic cable routed to the apparatus.

13. Apparatus according to claim **8**, wherein one or more of the adapters mounted in the connector panel of the interface compartment are constructed and arranged to couple multi-fiber type connectors with one another.

14. Apparatus according to claim **1**, including a length of the first fiber optic cable wound about the outer cylindrical wall of the drum region, and a fiber optic connector for terminating an outside end of the cable.

15. Apparatus according to claim **14**, wherein the fiber optic connector at the outside end of the cable is a multi-fiber type of connector.

16. Apparatus according to claim **1**, including a splice chamber arranged within the base, and a splice tray mounted inside the chamber.

17. Apparatus according to claim **1**, including a connector parking block fixed to the base, for securing one of a number of different connector parking strips.

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