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Dijkstra

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(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 30, 2003**

(54) **UTILITY LIGHTER**

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(73) Assignee: **Zippo Manufacturing Company, Bradford, PA (US)**

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(21) Appl. No.: **10/206,379**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **F23D 11/36**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **431/153; 431/255**

(58) **Field of Search** **431/153, 255, 431/344, 256; 126/407-409, 413, 414**

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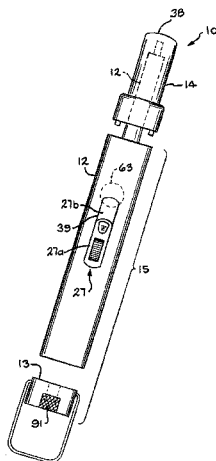
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is directed to a utility lighter having a housing, a nozzle, a lighter fluid reservoir, a conduit, an igniter assembly, a valve actuator, and a locking device. The housing has a top side, a bottom side, sides, a distal end, and a proximal end. The nozzle extends away from the distal end and has a nozzle tip. The lighter fluid reservoir is in the distal end. The conduit delivers the lighter fluid from the reservoir through the conduit to the nozzle tip. The igniter assembly generates a spark at a spark gap near the nozzle tip to ignite the lighter fluid, and has a piezoelectric component. The valve actuator is associated with the lighter fluid for selectively releasing the lighter fluid from the reservoir, and the igniter assembly. A compressor is connected to the valve actuator and when the valve actuator moves toward the nozzle tip, the valve actuator releases the lighter fuel and then sequentially activates the igniter assembly by having the compressor compress the piezoelectric component. The locking device diminishes the undesirable movement of the valve actuator.

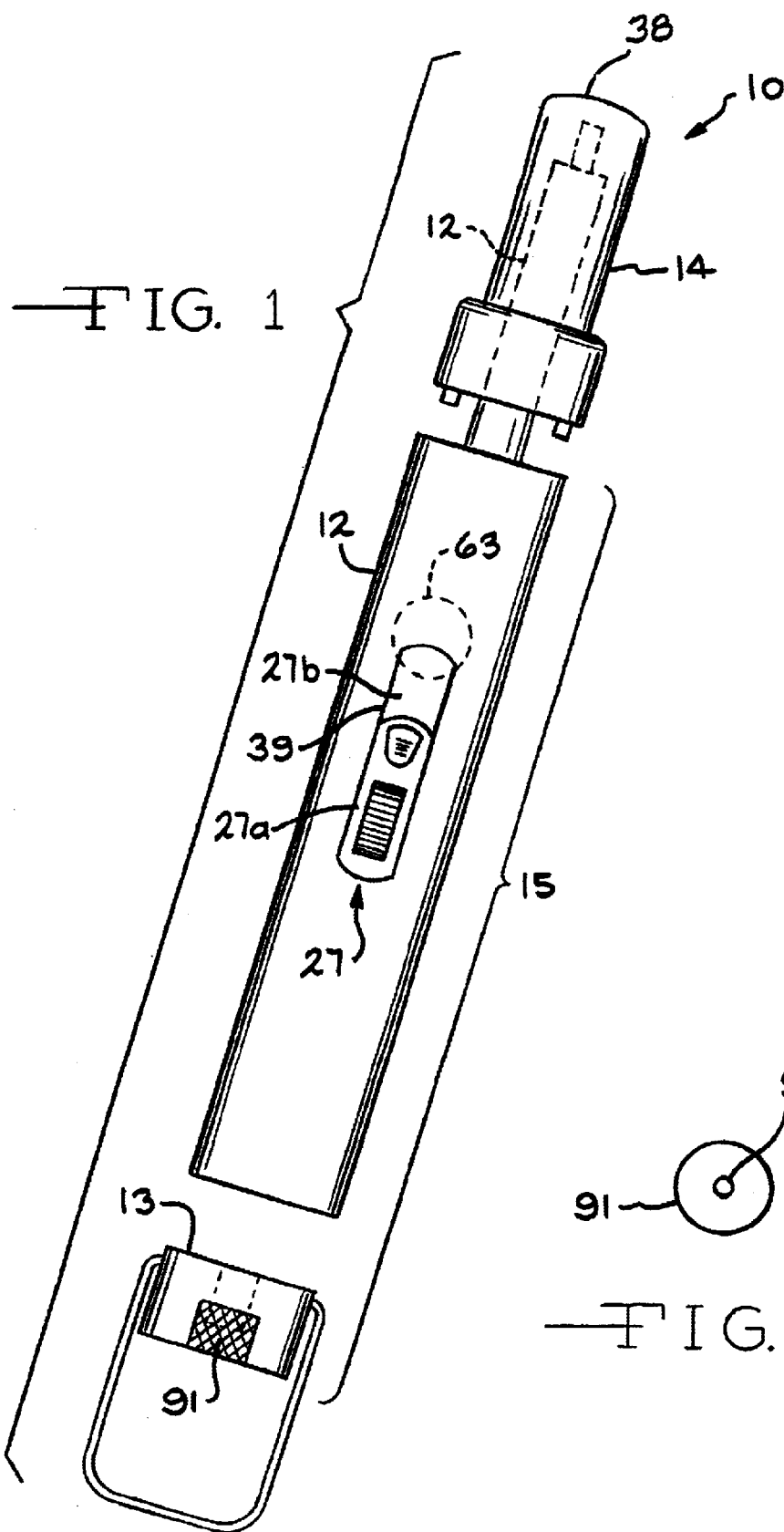
4 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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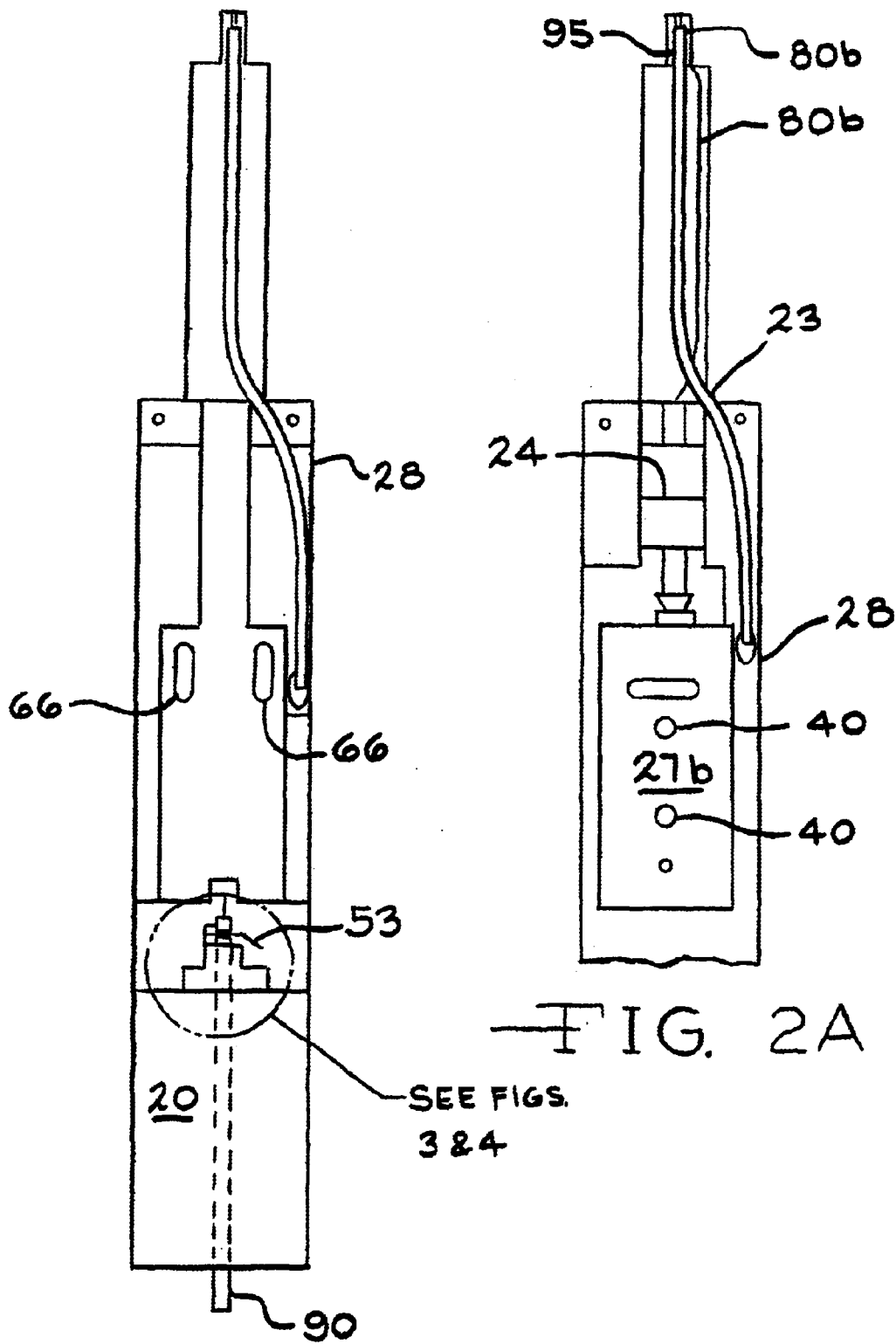


FIG. 2A

SEE FIGS.
3 & 4

FIG. 2B

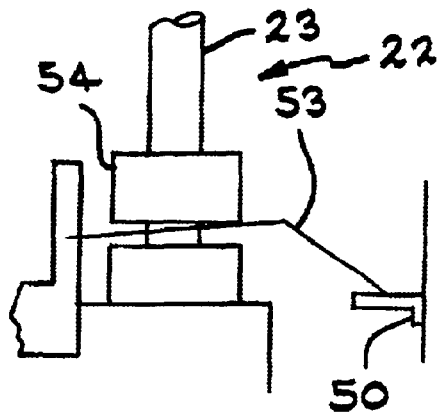


FIG. 3

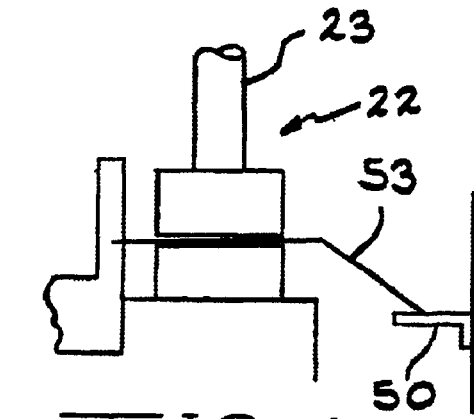


FIG. 4

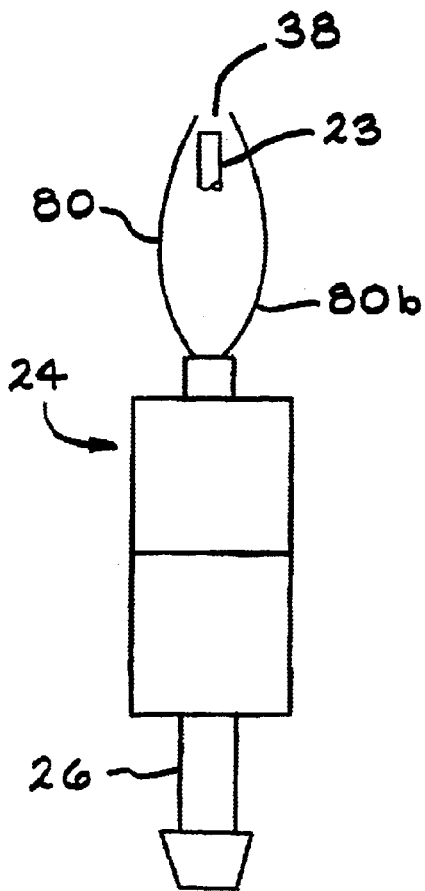


FIG. 5A

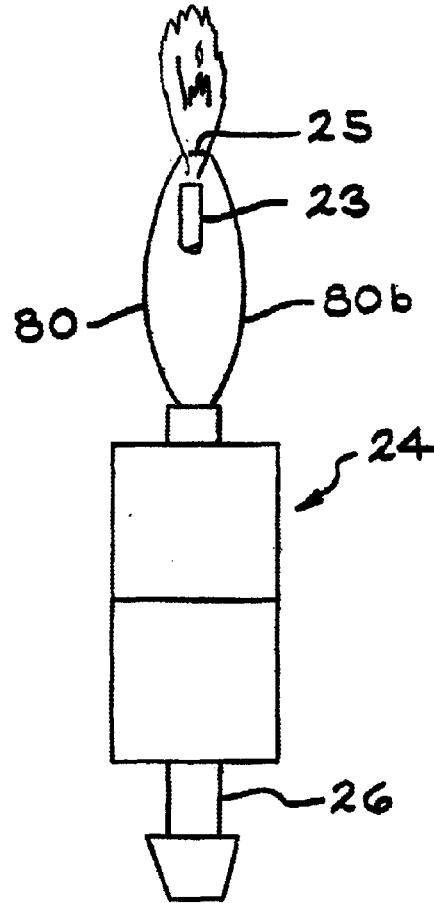


FIG. 5B

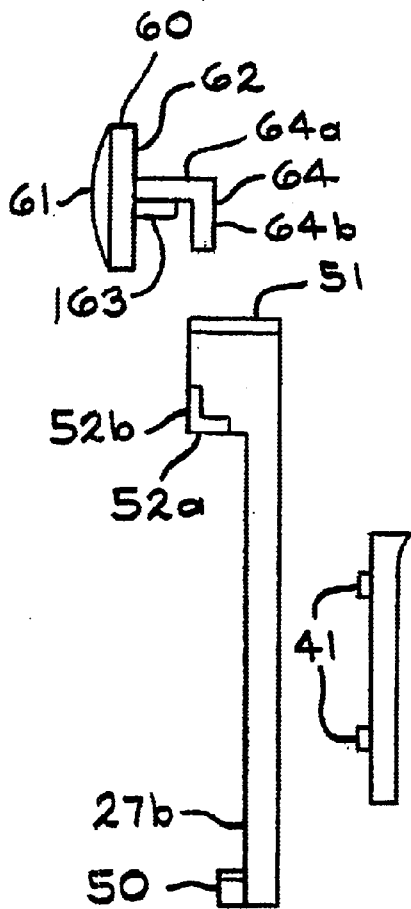


FIG. 6

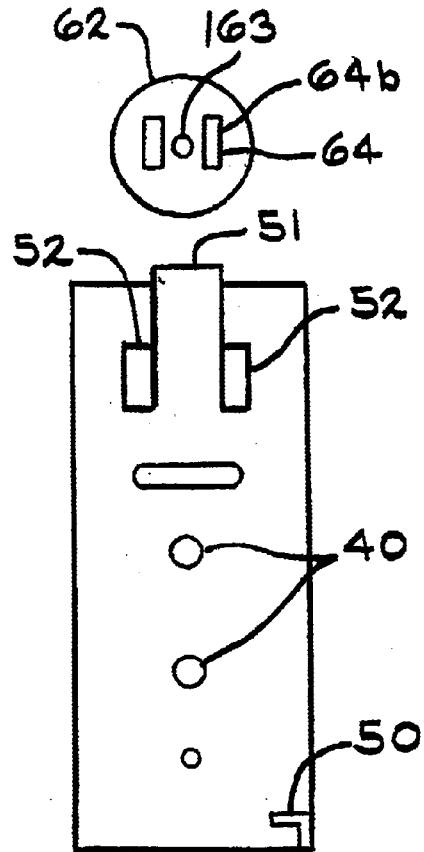


FIG. 7

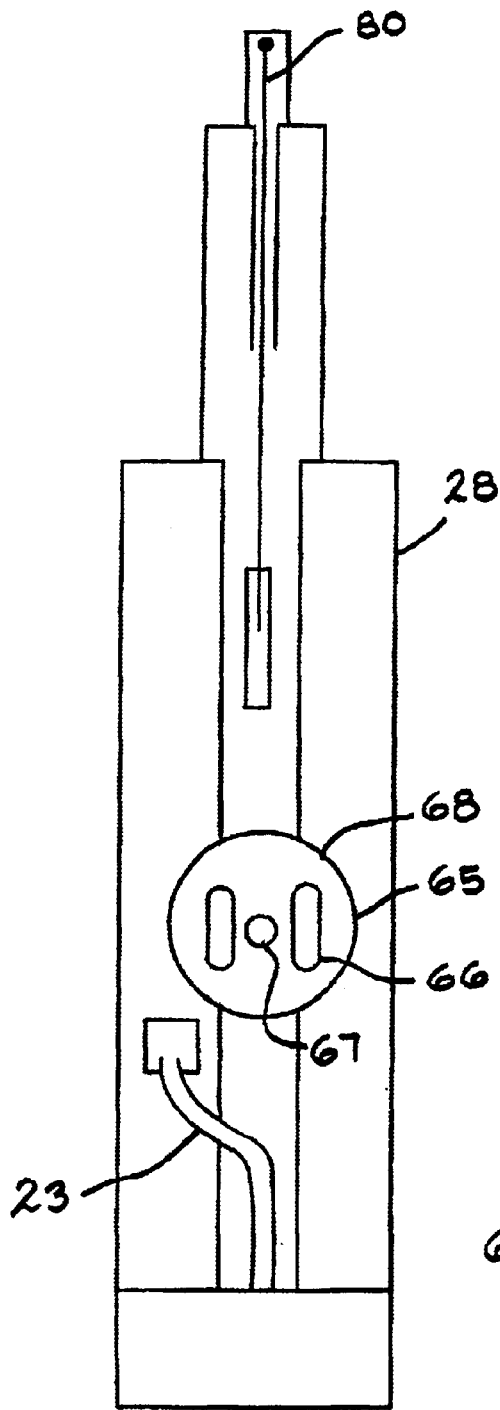


FIG. 8

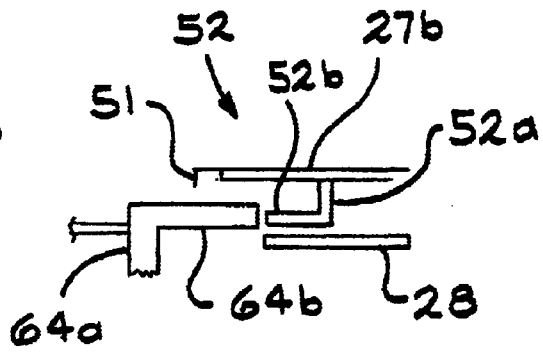


FIG. 9

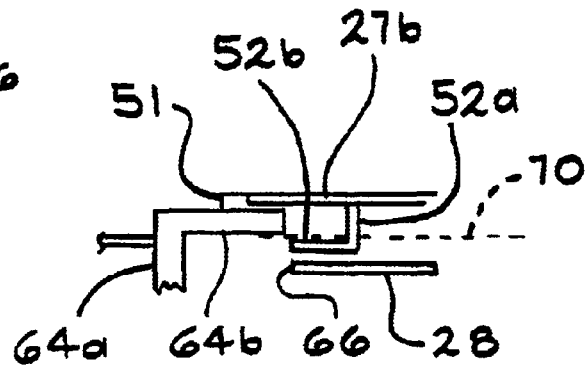


FIG. 10

UTILITY LIGHTER

CLAIM OF PRIORITY

This invention claims priority to U.S. provisional application No. 60/308,348, filed on Jul. 27, 2001.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a utility lighter.

BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

There are numerous utility lighters on the market. Utility lighters all have a rod-like top end portion and a main body. The rod-like top end portion has a jetting nozzle for jetting out a fuel to form a flame protruding therefrom. The main body has the following elements:

- 1) a fuel tank,
- 2) a valve mechanism for opening and closing a path, through which the fuel is supplied from the fuel tank to the jetting nozzle,
- 3) a spark generating device which lights the fuel and the spark is generated by a conventional piezo-electric unit or a conventional flint wheel assembly, and
- 4) an operation member which drives the valve mechanism and the spark generating device in order to carry out the lighting operation.

Such devices are well known to those skilled in the art.

Internationally, there is a drive for such lighters to become child resistant. It has come to the applicant's attention that Saito et al. in U.S. Pat. No. 5,697,775 and Fremund in U.S. Pat. No. 5,076,783, disclose similar child safety devices for lighters. In particular, both patents claim and disclose a safety device having the following generic elements:

- a) a locking member, which interferes with the operation member and thereby locks the lighting operation of the operation member, the locking member being capable of moving in a direction, that intersects with the direction along which the operation member moves, and
- b) an urging member which urges the locking member to a locking direction,
- c) the safety device being provided with an unlocking member, which is capable of being operated in order to move the locking member in a direction, that acts against the urging force of the urging member, the unlocking member being projected to the exterior of the main body on the side opposite to the operation member, wherein when the locking member is released from a position preventing the lighting operation by operating the unlocking member, the lighting operation is carried out by operating the operating section of the operation member, and the locking member automatically returns to the state of the locking as the operation member returns to its original position.

The particular locking members and the operating members of Saito et al. and Fremund, however, are not always stable and do not provide the desired child resistant characteristics.

For example, Saito et al. disclose a bar-like shaft, which is inserted transversely through the main body, and an engagement section, which is located at one end of said bar-like shaft. The engagement section is designed to be inserted into an engagement groove of the operation member to interfere with the movement of the operation member. It is possible that the engagement section can become perma-

nently positioned in the engagement groove to render the utility lighter useless or the engagement section can become dislodged so the utility lighter has no child resistance at all.

In contrast, Fremund discloses "when the lighter is not being used, [a] spring . . . has [a] locking slide . . . pushed to the right overlying [a] spring-loaded latch . . . and [a] lower end . . . of [a] locking rod . . . rests on the right hand end . . . of the locking slide . . . and it cannot be depressed and the lighter cannot be operated. When it is desired to use the lighter, the user pushes on [a] projection . . . on the locking slide . . . and pushes the locking slide to the left to free the latch . . . and actuating locking rod. . . . The latch . . . hits a notch . . . on the inside of the outer wall of the lighter assembly and is in such a position that the slide . . . cannot move to the right. Now the user can operate the activating lever . . . and to light the lighter. When the lever . . . is compressed, the spring latch . . . is pushed down and the locking slide . . . , whose end overlies slightly the spring-loaded latch . . . , is pushed to the right to rest against the locking rod. . . . When the lighter actuating lever . . . returns, it pulls the locking rod . . . upwardly above the locking slide's right hand end. . . . This allows the locking slide . . . to return, by the force of the spring . . . , to its rightmost position and to lock the locking rod . . . again in the inoperative position." As disclosed, Fremund's child resistant system has stability problems because the locking slide is a single rod that can easily break.

Thus, there remains a need for a utility lighter which resists unwanted actuation, minimizes wiring, ignites efficiently and reliably, and minimizes the impact of manufacturing variances. The present invention solves these problems.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an exploded view of the present invention with the housing 12.

FIG. 2a illustrates FIG. 1 without the housing 12 and the operation member 27a.

FIG. 2b illustrates FIG. 2b without the operation member 27b.

FIG. 3 illustrates a valve mechanism in the open position.

FIG. 4 illustrates the valve mechanism in the closed position.

FIG. 5a illustrates the spark generating device 24 in its relaxed state.

FIG. 5b illustrates the spark generating device 24 in its potential energy state with a spark 25 at the spark gap.

FIG. 6 is a side view of the safety unit and the operation member, without the interior housing.

FIG. 7 is the bottom side of the operation member.

FIG. 8 is the bottom side of FIG. 2b without the tank.

FIG. 9 is side operational view of the safety unit and the operation member in their relaxed states.

FIG. 10 illustrates a side operation view of the safety unit in its potential energy state and the operational member in its relaxed state.

FIG. 11 is a top view of an adjustment knob.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a utility lighter having a housing, a nozzle, a lighter fluid reservoir, a conduit, an igniter assembly, a valve actuator, and a locking device. The housing has a top side, a bottom side, sides, a distal end, and a proximal end. The nozzle extends away from the distal end

and has a nozzle tip. The lighter fluid reservoir is in the distal end. The conduit delivers the lighter fluid from the reservoir through the conduit to the nozzle tip. The igniter assembly generates a spark at a spark gap near the nozzle tip to ignite the lighter fluid, and has a conventional piezoelectric component. The valve actuator is associated with the lighter fluid for selectively releasing the lighter fluid from the reservoir, and the igniter assembly. A compressor is connected to the valve actuator and when the valve actuator moves toward the nozzle tip, the valve actuator releases the lighter fuel and then sequentially activates the igniter assembly by having the compressor compress the piezoelectric component. The locking device diminishes the undesirable movement of the valve actuator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a utility lighter **10**, as illustrated in FIG. 1. In FIG. 1, the utility lighter **10** illustrates an exterior housing **12** and an end cap **13** which define a main body **15**, and a nozzle **14**. The main body **15** contains many of the components that allow the utility lighter **10** to generate a flame at the terminal end **38** of the nozzle **14**. These main components are

- 1) a fuel tank **20** as shown in FIGS. *2a* and *b*,
- 2) a valve mechanism **22** for opening (as shown in FIG. **3**) and closing (see FIG. **4**) a conduit **23**, through which the fuel is supplied from the fuel tank **20** to the terminal end **38**,
- 3) a spark generating device **24** which lights the fuel from the conduit **23** at the terminal end **38** and as shown in FIG. *5a* a spark **25** is generated when a resilient extension member **26** is compressed, as shown in relation between FIGS. *5a* and *5b*, wherein the device **24** is a conventional piezo-electric unit assembly,
- 4) an operation member **27** which drives the valve mechanism **22** and the spark generating device **24** in order to carry out the lighting operation, and
- 5) an internal housing **28** that holds all the main components in the proper position.

The operation member **27** is divided into two components, a finger member **27a** and an internal member **27b**. The finger member **27a** is designed to allow a user's fingers (or thumb) to easily slide the operation member **27** toward the terminal end **38**. The finger member **27a** protrudes from an operation aperture **39** of the housing **12**.

The internal member **27b** has a plurality of apertures **40**. The apertures **40** receive corresponding prongs **41** which extend from the finger member **27a**. That way, the finger member **27a** is securely attached to the internal member **27b**. The internal member **27b** remains within the housing **12** but a portion of the internal member **27b** can be exposed through the operation aperture **39**.

On the opposite side of the internal member **27b** that has the finger member **27a** (as shown in FIG. **6**), are a valve latch **50**, a driving head **51**, and at least one interference member **52**, as shown in FIG. **7**. The valve latch **50** is designed to be positioned to drive a latch **53** of the valve mechanism **22** toward the terminal end **38** when the operation member **27** is moved forward. By moving the latch **53** forward, as shown in FIG. **3**, the fuel from the fuel tank **20** is released into the conduit **23**.

The latch **53** is attached to a compression conduit **54** that when the latch **53** not moved forward, as shown in FIG. **4**, the compression conduit **54** does not allow the fuel to be released from the tank **20** into the conduit **23**. And when the

latch **53** is moved forward as shown in FIG. **3** the compression conduit **54** allows the fuel to be released from the tank **20** into the conduit. The latch **53**, however, is not moved forward until the operation member **27** is moved forward.

The operation member **27** cannot move forward until the safety unit **60** is moved into the housing **12** a predetermined distance. The safety unit **60** is divided into an external cap **61** and a resilient interference protrusion unit **62**. The external cap **61** protrudes from the housing **12** through a safety aperture **63**, which is on the opposite side of the operation aperture **39** and when a user examines just the housing **12** through the operation aperture, the user will see a portion (the portion facing away from the terminal end **38**) of the safety aperture **63**.

The protrusion unit **62** is larger (a shoulder) than the safety aperture **63** (that way it will not be displaced from the lighter **10**), and has at least one resilient member **163** that forces the unit toward the safety aperture **63**, and at least one "L" shaped protrusion **64**, wherein the L faces away from the terminal end **38**. The L shaped protrusion **64** is divided into a vertical extension **64a** and a horizontal extension **64b**.

The unit **62** is positioned to contact the internal housing **28**, opposite the operation member **27**, within a safety receiver **65**, as shown in FIG. **8**. The safety receiver **65** has at least one protrusion aperture **66**, at least one protrusion **67** which receives the resilient member **163**, and a boundary wall **68** that contains the safety unit **60** within the lighter **10**. That way, the unit **62** in the relaxed mode is pushed toward the safety aperture **63**.

When the unit **62** is in the relaxed mode, the protrusion **64** member is positioned within a corresponding protrusion aperture **66**. In particular, the horizontal extension **64b** protrudes just beyond the protrusion aperture **66** as shown in FIG. **9**. In that position, horizontal extension **64b** interferes with the movement of the operation member **27**. In particular, the operation member **27** has a corresponding "L" shape unit **52** having a vertical member **52a** that protrudes toward the interior housing **28** and a horizontal member **52b**. The horizontal member **52b** and horizontal extension **64b** are designed to contact each other when the unit **62** is in the relaxed state, as shown in FIG. **9**. By contacting each other, the operation member **27** is unable to move forward and thereby the user is unable to operate the lighter **10**.

When the user depresses the unit **62** into the housing **12**, the protrusion **64** is moved further into the housing **12**. That means the horizontal extension **64b** is positioned above the upper surface **70** of the horizontal member **52b**, as shown in FIG. **10**. Once the unit **62** is in this potential energy position, the user can now freely move the operation member **27** forward toward the terminal end **38** because the horizontal extension **64b** and the horizontal member **52b** will not contact each other.

Once the operation member **27** is moved forward toward the terminal end **38**, the operation member **27** drives the valve mechanism **22** and the spark generating device **24** in order to carry out the lighting operation. How the operation member **27** drives the valve mechanism **22** is set forth above.

The operation member **27** drives the spark generating device **24** through the driving head **51**. The driving head **51** is moved forward and contacts the spark generating device **24**. Device **24** is a conventional piezoelectric lighter unit that amplifies the contact force of the driving head **24** through the resilient extension member **26** to generate the standard electrical impulse from the piezoelectric unit for generating the spark near the terminal end **38**.

The electrical impulse is transmitted through a wire **80** and the spark **25** is generated when the electrical signal has

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to jump (spark gap) to corresponding electrical contact **80b**. When the spark **25** is generated, the fuel from the tank **20** was released into the conduit **23** that directs the fuel to a metallic conduit **95** that simultaneously transmits the fuel and is the receiving contact **80b** of the spark **25**. That way, the fuel is lit, and the lighter **10** has generated its desired flame with a quality safety system.

Once the user wants to terminate the flame, the user merely releases the operation member **27**. The operation member **27** through the resilient extension member **26** will return the operation member to the relaxed state illustrated in FIG. 9. Also, the user can release the safety unit **60**, which will also return to the relaxed state, illustrated in FIG. 9, in response to the resilient member **163**.

In addition, the tank **20** has a conventional refilling port and flame adjuster control unit **90**. The unit **90** protrudes from the tank **20** as illustrated in FIGS. 2a and b, and through the end cap **13**. To allow the user to adjust the unit **90**, the end cap **13** has an adjustment knob **91**. The knob **91**, as shown in FIG. 11, has an aperture **92** that allows a user to refill the tank **20**, through conventional methods.

In addition, the housing **12** has a tank aperture, not shown, that allows a user to see how much fuel is in the tank **20**.

Although variations in the embodiment of the present invention may not each realize all the advantages of the invention, certain features may become more important than others in various applications of the device. The invention, accordingly, should be understood to be limited only by the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed:

1. A utility lighter comprising:

- a housing having a top side, a bottom side, sides, a distal end, and a proximal end;
- a nozzle extending away from the distal end and having a nozzle tip;
- a lighter fluid reservoir near the proximal end;
- a conduit for delivering the lighter fluid from the reservoir through the conduit to the nozzle tip;

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an igniter assembly for generating a spark at a spark gap near the nozzle tip to ignite the lighter fluid, the igniter assembly has a piezoelectric component;

a valve actuator positioned between the reservoir and the igniter assembly, the valve actuator releases the lighter fluid from the reservoir, and the valve actuator initiates the operation of the igniter assembly;

a locking device to diminish undesirable movement of the valve actuator, the locking device has

a button on the bottom side of the housing, the button having a shoulder, and the button having at least one blocker;

the blocker has a main section that vertically protrudes toward the top side of the housing, and a flange director section that extends horizontally from the main section toward the proximal end of the housing; when the button is in a first position of not being depressed, the flange director section inhibits the movement of the valve actuator toward the distal end;

when the button is in a second position of being depressed, the flange director section moves toward the top side of the housing allowing the valve actuator to move toward the nozzle tip; and,

a resilient member that ensures that flange director section remains in the first position when a user does not apply sufficient pressure to the button.

2. The utility lighter of claim 1 wherein the lighter fluid reservoir is refillable.

3. The utility lighter of claim 1 wherein the quantity of the fuel released from the lighter fluid reservoir is controllable.

4. The utility lighter of claim 3 wherein the quantity of the fuel released controls the size of the flame generated by the lighter.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 6,669,466 B2
DATED : December 30, 2003
INVENTOR(S) : Tjeerd Dijkstra

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Title page.

Item [75], the Inventor's name and residence should read -- **Tjeerd Dijkstra,**
Leiderdorp (NL) --.

Signed and Sealed this

Ninth Day of March, 2004

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon W. Dudas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

JON W. DUDAS
Acting Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office