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(54) **HIGH-SPEED DRYING UNIT FOR LOCKER**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

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D06F 58/10	(2006.01)
A47B 61/04	(2006.01)
A47B 97/00	(2006.01)

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CPC ***F26B 21/001*** (2013.01); ***A47B 61/04*** (2013.01); ***D06F 58/10*** (2013.01); ***F26B 21/004*** (2013.01); ***F26B 21/006*** (2013.01); *A47B 97/00* (2013.01)

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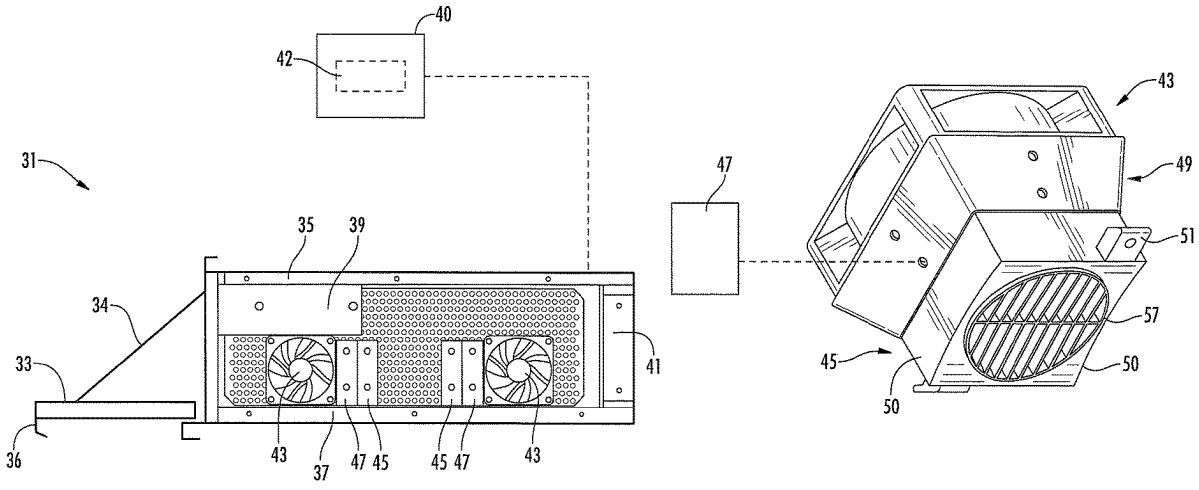
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A locker includes a pair of upstanding sidewalls and at least one compartment defined between the upstanding sidewalls. A drying compartment includes upper and lower horizontal panels, at least one of the upper and lower panels being hollow and extending at least partially between the sidewalls. A pair of compartment sidewalls are connected to the panels, at least one of the compartment sidewalls being in fluid communication with the at least one hollow upper and lower panels. A perforated rear panel is connected to the compartment sidewalls and the upper and lower panels and is in fluid communication with an interior of the drying compartment. A fan is disposed in one of the compartment sidewalls. The fan draws air from at least one hollow upper and lower panels, directs it into the interior of the drying compartment, and the air is exhausted from the compartment though the perforated rear panel.

20 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



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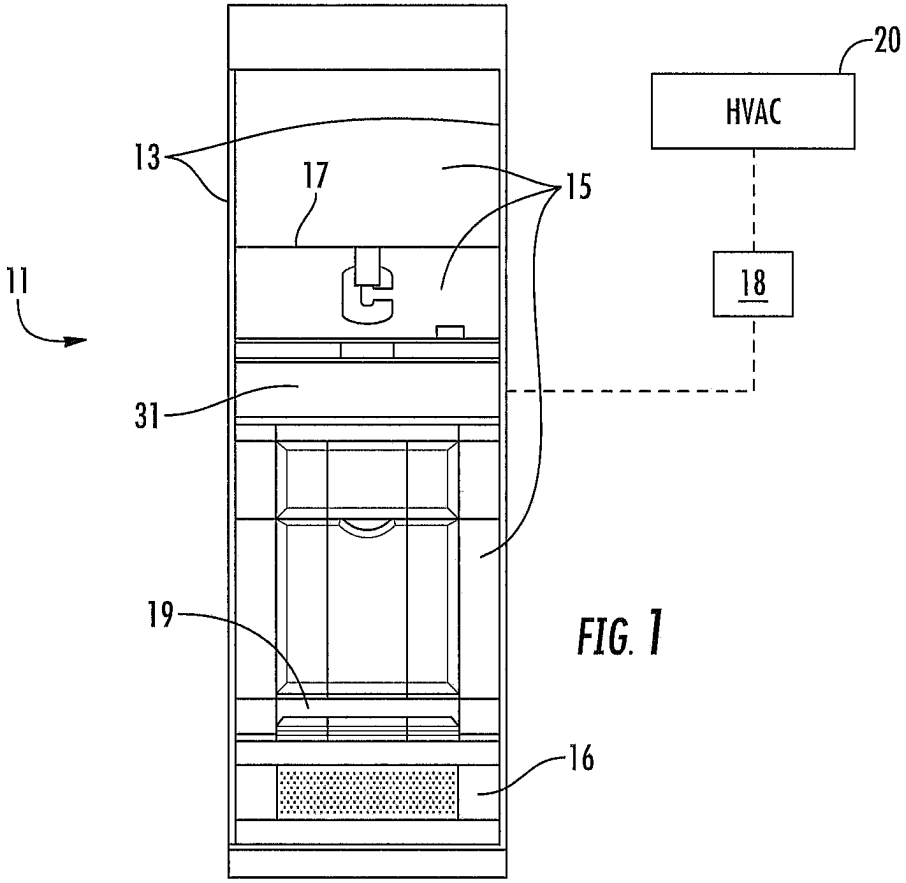


FIG. 1

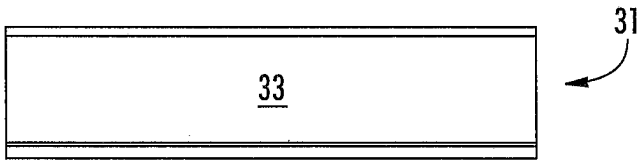


FIG. 2A

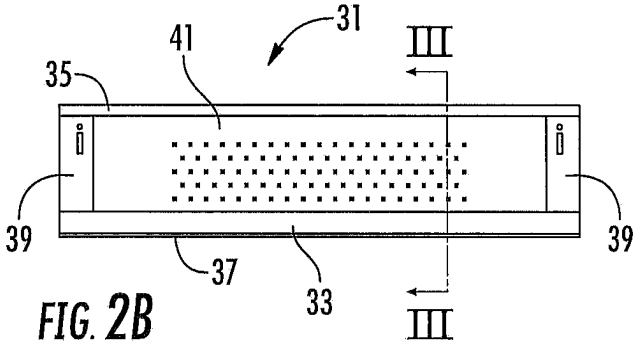


FIG. 2B

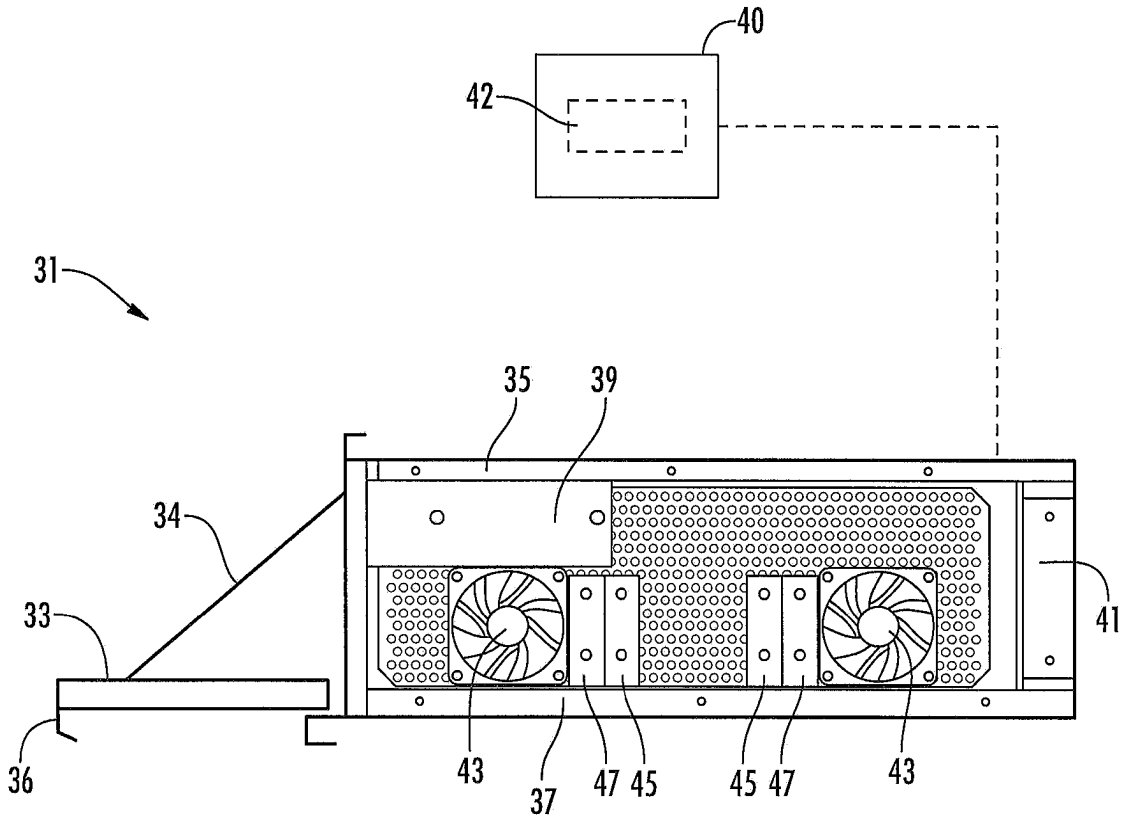


FIG. 3

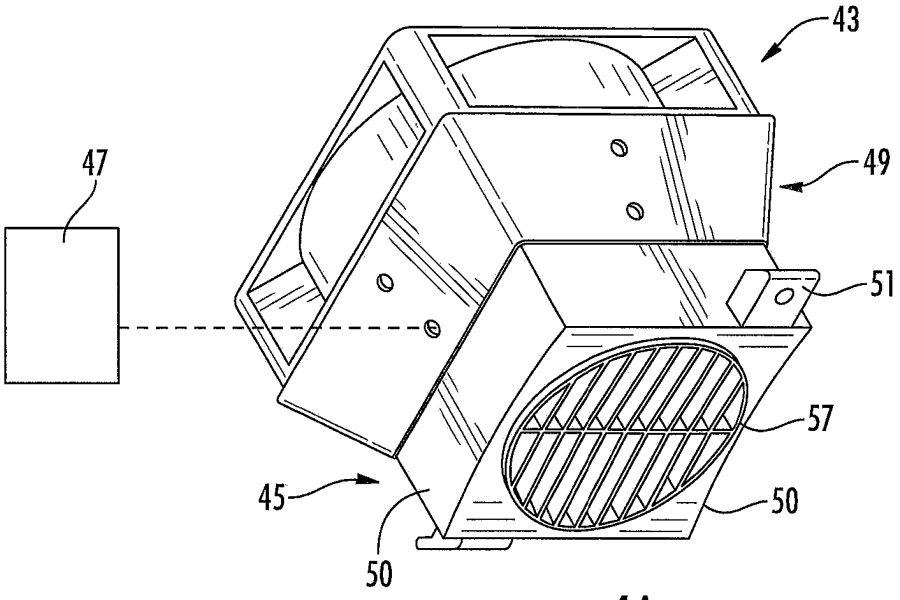


FIG. 4A

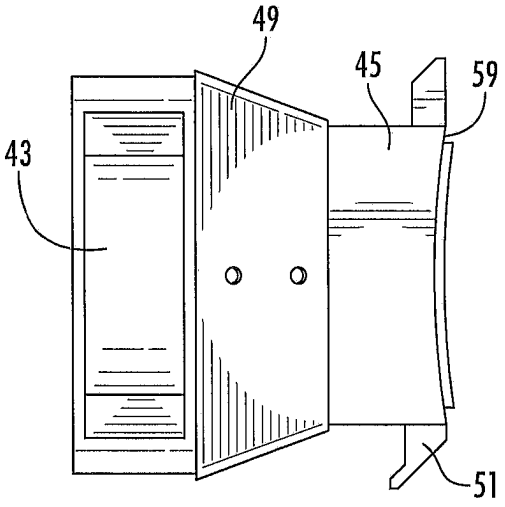


FIG. 4B

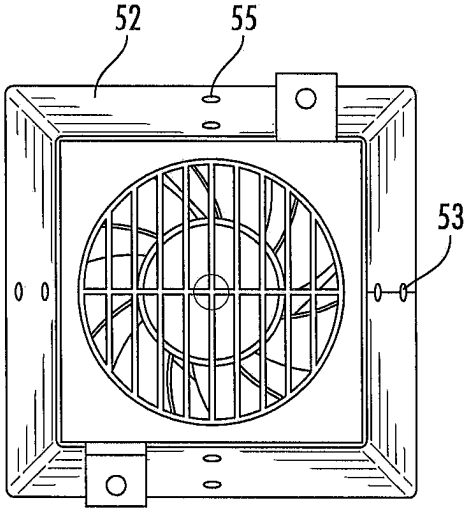


FIG. 4C

HIGH-SPEED DRYING UNIT FOR LOCKER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 16/429,895, filed Jun. 3, 2019, titled "High-Speed Drying Unit for Locker;" which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to improvements in lockers or storage cabinets used in athletic or sporting facilities, and more specifically to compartments of such lockers for storing wet equipment.

2. Description of Related Art

The aesthetics and utility of lockers or storage cabinets in "locker rooms" of athletic and sporting facilities of sports teams and country clubs, for example, have become a measure of the quality and prestige of such organizations and an increasingly important aspect of recruiting new team or club members. Modern lockers are a far cry from the simple wood or metal cabinets of the past.

Modern lockers incorporate storage for specific items of equipment, such as helmets and shoes, and features promoting comfort and luxury. There is a constant need for improvement in both functional and aesthetic aspects of such lockers, including the ability to store athletic or sporting equipment in ways that prolong their useful life.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the embodiments of the present application are set forth in the appended claims. However, the embodiments themselves, as well as a preferred mode of use, and further objectives and advantages thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. **1** is an elevation view of a locker having a high-speed drying unit according to the present application;

FIGS. **2**A and **2**B are enlarged elevation views of a drying unit of the locker of FIG. **1**, with the door closed and opened, respectively;

FIG. **3** is a side section view, taken along section line III-III of FIG. **2**B; and

FIGS. **4**A through **4**C are perspective, side, and top views of a heating element of a high-speed drying unit of the locker of FIG. **1**.

While the assembly and method of the present application is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof have been shown by way of example in the drawings and are herein described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the description herein of specific embodiments is not intended to limit the invention to the particular embodiment disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the present application as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Illustrative embodiments of the locker and high-speed drying unit of the present application are provided below. It will of course be appreciated that in the development of any actual embodiment, numerous implementation-specific decisions will be made to achieve the developer's specific goals, such as compliance with assembly-related and business-related constraints, which will vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it will be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time-consuming, but would nevertheless be a routine undertaking for those of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of this disclosure.

As used in conjunction with a drying unit, the term "high-speed" means a drying time associated with the function and capabilities of the drying unit, as described herein, that is less than or equal to seventy-five minutes for drying water-soaked equipment, including knee pads and cleats. As used in conjunction with a fan, the term means a fan rated at about 80 cubic feet per minute or more.

As used herein, the term "chemical dispensing unit" means an actuated device that has an inlet, an outlet, and a flow path, capable of delivering a chemical substance from a chemical chamber or a storage tank to the inlet, and from the inlet along the flow path to the outlet. The mode of delivery includes pressure differentials created by pneumatic force, mechanical force, centripetal force, gravity, capillary effect, and combinations thereof. The mode of delivery may also include creating an electric differential, as with charged particles and ionic interactions. The mode of delivery may further include a diffusion reaction, or a dispersion of a highly concentrated substance to an area of lesser concentration. The dispersion rate is adjustable based on operational parameters of the drying unit, such as fan output, temperature readings from a thermometer or other temperature gauge, voltage input/output (I/O) readings, and combinations thereof. The dispersion rate may be further adjustable based on additional operational parameters and control variables, such as user input and settings, locker location, locker dimensions, drying unit dimensions, inlet and/or outlet dimensions, flow path dimensions, the mode of delivery, and combinations thereof.

As used herein, the term "heating element" means a mechanical, chemical, or electrical device capable of creating a temperature differential. The term encompasses a heater that uses resistor heating coils or elements, a furnace that uses petroleum or natural gas, or a thermoelectric unit that relies on the Peltier Effect. Other similar thermodynamic devices will be recognized and are encompassed by the term. As used in conjunction with the drying unit, the term means a small-scale device that is smaller in scale than an HVAC furnace, such as an electrical resistor heater, a Peltier Unit, or a thermodynamic device that is dimensioned to be housed within a removable drying unit. The removable drying unit itself being dimensioned to fit within a compartment of a locker.

Referring now to FIG. **1** in the drawings, a locker **11** according to the present application is illustrated. As can be seen, locker **11** comprises a pair of upstanding sidewalls **13** that generally define the extent of locker **11**. Sidewalls **13** may be connected at the rear by a rear wall, at the top by a top wall, and at the bottom by a bottom wall. It will be appreciated that the rear wall, the top wall, and the bottom wall may be formed of multiple components parts, each of which may perform additional functions other than merely forming an enclosure, such as ventilation plenums, interconnecting surfaces, ventilation conduits, electrical conduits, etc. Each locker may be installed adjacent to another, similar or identical locker, with its rear against a wall, and its front facing the interior of the locker room.

Between sidewalls **13** of locker **11**, a plurality of compartments **15** are defined by dividers **17** that may include vertical panels parallel to sidewalls **13**, or shelves or other horizontally extending surfaces, panels, or platforms that serve to connect sidewalls **13** and lend rigidity and strength to locker **11**, in addition to forming compartments **15**. Each compartment **15** may be sized and otherwise configured for storage of clothing, sporting equipment, or other items, and may include doors, ventilation grills, sliding components, tilting components, equipment racks, and equipment holders, any of which may be lockable. Locker **11** may also include a generally horizontal seat **19**, which sits atop a "footlocker" or lowermost footlocker compartment **16**, which may be forward of the remainder of locker **11**, and which may form a door to the footlocker compartment **16**.

In at least one embodiment, locker **11** is in fluid communication with a forced-air ventilation system **18**. The forced-air ventilation system may be connected to an HVAC **20** of the locker room, or of the building in which the locker **11** is disposed, where the HVAC includes a furnace.

Referring now also to FIGS. **2**A, **2**B, and **3** in the drawings, included among the various compartments **15** of locker **11** may be a high-speed drying unit **31**. According to a preferred embodiment of the present application, drying unit **31** may be a full- or partial-width, rectangular, or otherwise configured, compartment adapted particularly for the storage and high-speed drying of wet equipment and/or clothing. Drying unit **31** may be integrally installed into locker **11**, or may be installed as a stand-alone unit that can be quickly and easily removed and replaced for servicing, maintenance, or interchangeability. Drying unit **31** is preferably provided with a door **33** that may be accessed from the front of locker **11**, and that is hinged at a lower extent, so that, in the open position (FIGS. **2**B and **3**), the full width and height of drying unit **31** is opened and accessible. A handle **36** may be provided at the upper extent, or other convenient location, of door **33** and preferably is of bent stainless steel or aluminum, but may be of any configuration. A door support mechanism **34**, such as one or more cables, a knife hinge, a damper, and/or a support strut, may be provided and coupled to door **33** to prevent over-travel and support. Door support mechanism **34** may include counterweight features to assist with opening and closing door **33**, and may include pneumatic cylinders or other components to provide a soft-close element to drying unit **31**.

Upper **35** and lower **37** shelves or horizontal dividers are preferably formed of corrosion-resistant metallic or polymer material (preferably stainless steel) and are hollow and open at least the forward or front ends and serve as air intakes. Shelves **35** and **37** extend at least partially between sidewalls **13** and are in fluid communication with right and left compartment sidewalls **39**, which may be formed of at least partially perforated metallic or polymer material, again preferably stainless steel, and may be hollow structures. Compartment sidewalls **39** are just interior of locker sidewalls **13** and extend between and connect shelves **35** and **37**. In a similar fashion, a rear wall **41** may be at least partially perforated and formed or metallic or polymeric material to resist corrosion.

As shown in FIG. **3**, at least one, and preferably two, high-speed ventilation fans **43** may be provided in each (right and left) sidewall **39**. Fans **43** preferably may be Delta AFB812EHE (available from Delta Electronics (Americas) Ltd., 46101 Fremont Blvd., Fremont, Calif. 94538) 80 mm fans rated at about 80 cubic feet per minute capacity and are configured to direct forced air to the interior of drying unit **31**. Other fan sizes and capacities may be desired depending upon the volume, size, and shape of drying unit **31**, depending upon the amount of time desired to dry the clothes and/or equipment placed in drying unit **31**, and/or depending upon other factors, such as the particular equipment to be dried, ambient conditions, etc. It will be appreciated that this unique high-speed drying system has a significantly higher capacity than conventional ventilation systems in lockers.

The unique functionality and capacity of drying unit **31** is best understood by an actual example performed with a working prototype of drying unit **31**. In the example, a pair of adult cleats were filled with water and the water was allowed to soak in for two minutes. After two minutes, the remaining water was poured out of the cleats. In addition, a pair of knee braces were dunked under water for several seconds and then removed from the water. Then, the water-soaked cleats and the water-soaked knee braces were placed in drying unit **31**. Drying unit **31** was turned on and the cleats and the knee braces were dry in about seventy-five minutes. This example was performed without the use of the optional heating elements described below.

A control system **40** connected to the high-speed drying unit **31** includes programmable logic or executable instructions **42** for setting temperature parameters, control limits, variable speed fan motor inputs and/or voltages, or combinations thereof. The control system **40** includes, but is not limited to, a processor, non-volatile memory, field programmable devices including programmable ROM (PROM), electrically erasable ROM (EEPROM), field programmable logic arrays (FPLA), a programmable array logic device (PAL®), a complex programmable logic device (CPLD), a field-programmable gate array (FPGA), and combinations thereof.

Locker **11** may include a forced-air ventilation system, and the forced-air ventilation system may be connected to an HVAC system for the locker room, so that the "dirty" air being circulated throughout locker **11** may be vented and/or filtered outside of the locker room. Drying unit **31** may be separate from such forced-air ventilation system contain in locker **11**, or may be integrated with such forced-air ventilation system of locker **11**. Indeed, it may be desirable to exhaust the air from drying unit **31** to an external location to assist in eliminating any odor contained within drying unit **31** and/or the items being dried. Thus, drying unit **31** may include conduits and adapters for attachment to the forced-air ventilation system and/or the HVAC system.

Drying unit **31** may include one or more heating elements **45** to assist in the high-speed drying of the clothing and/or equipment placed in drying unit **31**. The heating elements **45** selectively heat the air that is circulated by fans **43**, thereby accelerating the time required to dry the equipment and/or clothing. In addition, drying unit **31** may include one or more chemical dispensing units **47** for selectively dispensing chemicals, such as detergents, deodorants, anti-bacterial chemicals, anti-static substances, etc. during the operation of drying unit **31**. The heating elements **45** and the chemical dispensing units **47** are preferably disposed within void spaces in upper and lower shelves **35** and **37**, side walls **39**, and/or rear wall **41** of drying unit **31**. It will be appreciated that the fans **43**, the heating elements **45**, and/or the chemical dispensing units **47** may be controlled by a specialized microprocessor-controlled computerized control system and/or computer network that may be selectively programmed to control the operational parameters and maintenance of drying unit **31**. In this manner, multiple drying units **31** over multiple lockers **11** may be networked together to perform the efficient operation of drying units **31**. It will be appreciated that the heating elements **45** may be in commu-

nication with a centralized source of heat, such as a main gas or electric heater, boiler, or other heat source, where the heat is distributed to the individual lockers **11**. Similarly, the chemical dispensing units **47** may be in communication with a centralized source of chemicals, such as tank or reservoir, where the chemicals are distributed to the individual lockers.

In operation, wet clothing and/or equipment may be inserted into drying unit **31**. Fans **43** may be energized or turned on by a manual switch or automatically via the control system. The control system may include an optical or other type of sensor that detects the presence of items in drying unit **31** and energizes fans **43** only while items are present and require drying. Fans **43** may alternatively run "full-time" or on a timer on a specific, predetermined schedule, for example, at night, or for two hours after events or practices are scheduled to end.

Fans **43**, when energized, draw air from the exterior of locker **11** through hollow shelves or panels **35** and **37**, into sidewalls **39**, and into the interior of compartment **31**. Shelves or panels **35** and **37** and compartment sidewalls **39** act as intakes and ducts for the air moved by fans **43**. The circulating, forced air assists in drying the items in compartment **31**. Air may be exhausted or diffused through perforated rear panel **41**, either to the atmosphere external to locker **11**, or to the plenum of a forced-air ventilation system as described in commonly invented U.S. application Ser. No. 15/897,875, filed Feb. 15, 2018, and Ser. No. 15/823,073, filed Dec. 5, 2017, which are incorporated herein by reference for all purposes. The heating elements and/or the chemical dispensers may be selectively utilized during the drying process.

Fans **43**, heating element **45**, and chemical dispensing unit **47** are connected in a linear fashion. In this configuration, the air drawn from the exterior of locker **11** passes through the chemical dispensing unit **47**, then is heated by the heating element **45**, and finally emitted into a chamber of the drying unit **31**.

As shown in FIGS. **4**A through **4**C, an alternative embodiment includes a duct **49** connecting blower fan **43** to the heating element **45**. Heating element **45** is at least one of a resistive heater, a Peltier Unit, or a furnace of an HVAC unit, and includes a pair of sidewalls **50** and one or more mounts **51**. The one or more mounts **51** are flat, angled, or a combination thereof, depending on an attachment location relative to locker **11**. Duct **49** is preferably a two-piece duct made from flat pattern or sheet metal, including a duct wall **52** and a connector **53** to connect a seam of the duct wall **52**.

Duct **49** includes one or more apertures **55**. The one or more apertures **55** may be used for ventilation, attachment, or for dispersing chemicals when a chemical dispensing unit **47** is located within the duct **49**. The blower fan **43** is either a positive pressure or a negative pressure fan, however, in this embodiment the locker **11** uses a positive pressure fan. In other embodiments, duct **49** includes additional components, such as a plenum chamber, a wall stack, a collar, an angle stack boot, an elbow, and combinations thereof. The connector **53** includes, but is not limited to, a rivet, a weld, a self-tapping screw, a barrel clamp, gorelock, sealant, and combinations thereof.

The heating element **45** includes an air diffuser **57**, including a grille, a grate, or a series of apertures formed in a face plate. In positive pressure configurations, the air diffuser **57** is attached to an end **59** of the heating element **45** that is disposed in a wall or a shelf of the drying unit **31**, or a wall or a shelf of the locker **11**.

It is apparent that a system with significant advantages has been described and illustrated. The particular embodiments disclosed above are illustrative only, as the embodiments may be modified and practiced in different but equivalent manners apparent to those skilled in the art having the benefit of the teachings herein. It is therefore evident that the particular embodiments disclosed above may be altered or modified, and all such variations are considered within the scope and spirit of the application. Accordingly, the protection sought herein is as set forth in the description and claims. Although the present embodiments are shown above, they are not limited to just these embodiments, but are amenable to various changes and modifications without departing from the spirit thereof.

We claim:

1. A locker, comprising:
- a pair of spaced-apart, upstanding sidewalls;
- at least one compartment defined between the upstanding sidewalls and associated with upper and lower horizontal panels;
- a heating element heating an airflow flowing between the pair of spaced-apart sidewalls; and
- a high-speed drying unit disposed within the at least one compartment, the high-speed drying unit comprising:
  - a pair of drying unit sidewalls extending between the upper and lower horizontal panels;
  - an air diffuser, having a grille facing into the high speed drying unit and coupled to an end of the high-speed drying unit; and
  - at least one high-speed fan connected between the pair of drying unit sidewalls;
- wherein the pair of drying unit sidewalls and the at least one high-speed fan define a removable portion of the high-speed drying unit, the removable portion being removable at least relative to the pair of upstanding sidewalls of the locker;
- wherein at least one of the upper and lower horizontal panels, the pair of drying unit sidewalls, the pair of spaced-apart upstanding sidewalls, and the at least one compartment are at least partially perforated so as to be in fluid communication with the high-speed drying unit; and
- wherein the at least one high-speed fan is configured to direct the airflow into or out of the partial perforations of the locker or the high-speed drying unit.

2. The locker according to claim **1**, wherein the upper and lower horizontal panels are hollow, are in fluid communication with the high-speed fan, and serve as air intakes.

3. The locker according to claim **1**, wherein a duct is disposed between a blower fan and the heating element.

4. The locker according to claim **1**, wherein the high-speed drying unit further comprises:
- a rear panel;
- wherein the rear panel is at least partially perforated and the air is exhausted through the perforated rear panel to an exterior of the high-speed drying unit.

5. The locker according to claim **1**, wherein the high-speed drying unit is a separate stand-alone unit that may be removed from and reinstalled into the locker.

6. The locker according to claim **1**, further comprising:
- an air duct;
- wherein the heating element is in fluid communication with the air duct.

7. The locker according to claim **6**, further comprising:
- a forced-air ventilation system;
- wherein the forced-air ventilation system is in fluid communication with a HVAC system in a locker room.

8. The locker according to claim 7, further comprising:
a second heating element for heating the air within the high-speed drying unit;
wherein the second heating element is connected to the high-speed fan of the high-speed drying unit.
9. The locker according to claim 1, further comprising:
a chemical dispensing unit operably associated with the high-speed drying unit for selectively dispensing chemicals into the high-speed drying unit.
10. The locker according to claim 1, further comprising:
a control system for selectively controlling operational parameters of the high-speed drying unit.
11. A high-speed drying unit for a locker, comprising:
a pair of drying unit sidewalls disposed within at least one compartment of a locker and extending between upper and lower horizontal panels of the at least one compartment;
an air diffuser, having a grille facing into the high speed drying unit and coupled to an end of the high-speed drying unit;
a heating element disposed adjacent at least one of the upper and lower horizontal panels and connected to the pair of drying unit sidewalls; and
at least one high-speed fan connected to the heating element;
wherein the upper and lower horizontal panels, the pair of drying unit sidewalls, the rear panel, and a door define an interior portion of the high-speed drying unit;
wherein the pair of drying unit sidewalls and the at least one high-speed fan define a removable portion of the high-speed drying unit, the removable portion being removable at least relative to the pair of upstanding sidewalls of the locker;
wherein at least one of the upper and lower horizontal panels, the pair of drying unit sidewalls, and the at least one compartment are at least partially perforated so as to be in fluid communication with the high-speed drying unit; and
wherein the at least one high-speed fan is configured to direct air into or out of the partial perforations of the locker or the high-speed drying unit.
12. The drying unit according to claim 11, wherein the upper and lower horizontal panels are hollow, are in fluid communication with the high-speed fan, and serve as air intakes.
13. The drying unit according to claim 11, wherein two fans are disposed in each of the pair of drying unit sidewalls.
14. The drying unit according to claim 11, further comprising:
a rear panel;
wherein the rear panel is at least partially perforated and the air is exhausted through the perforated rear panel to an exterior of the high-speed drying unit.
15. The drying unit according to claim 11, further comprising:
a conduit system for coupling the high-speed drying unit to a forced-air ventilation system.
16. The drying unit according to claim 15, wherein the forced-air ventilation system is in fluid communication with a HVAC system in a locker room.
17. The drying unit according to claim 11, further comprising:
an air duct;
wherein the heating element is in fluid communication with the air duct.
18. The locker according to claim 11, further comprising:
a chemical dispensing unit for selectively dispensing chemicals into the high-speed drying unit.
19. The drying unit according to claim 11, further comprising:
a control system for selectively controlling operational parameters of the high-speed drying unit.
20. The locker according to claim 11, further comprising:
an air diffuser;
wherein a duct is disposed between a blower fan and the heating element of the high-speed drying unit;
wherein the heating element has one or more mounts for connecting the heating element to the locker;
wherein the air diffuser is connected directly adjacent the heating element;
wherein the air diffuser, the duct, and the heating element comprise another removable unit that is removable relative to the sidewalls of the locker.

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