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(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR STABILIZING A SLAB FOUNDATION**

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(60) Provisional application No. 62/010,873, filed on Jun. 11, 2014.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

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E02D 19/16	(2006.01)
E02D 19/18	(2006.01)
E02D 3/12	(2006.01)
E02D 27/02	(2006.01)
E02D 3/10	(2006.01)
E02D 19/22	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***E02D 31/10*** (2013.01); ***E02D 3/10*** (2013.01); ***E02D 3/12*** (2013.01); ***E02D 19/16*** (2013.01); ***E02D 19/18*** (2013.01); ***E02D 19/22*** (2013.01); ***E02D 27/02*** (2013.01)

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CPC E02D 19/16; E02D 19/06; E02D 19/12; E02D 19/18; E02D 19/22; E02D 31/06; E02D 31/08; E02D 31/10; E02D 17/12; E02D 3/10; E02D 3/12
See application file for complete search history.

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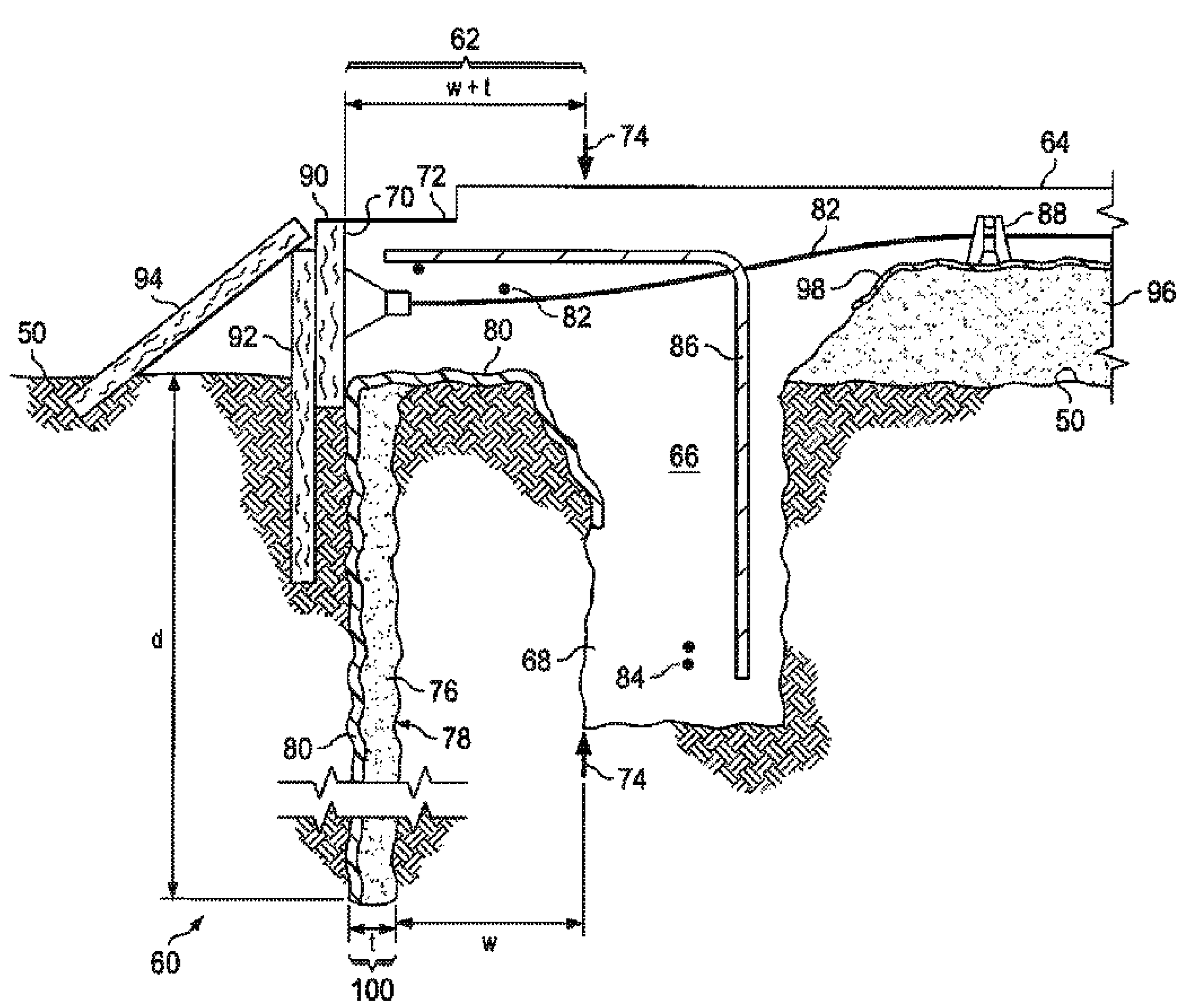
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method for stabilizing a slab foundation comprises a narrow, vertical moisture barrier assembly spaced outside and surrounding the perimeter grade beam of the slab foundation by a predetermined distance, and extends to preferably five feet below surface grade. The narrow trench for the barrier is preferably less than three inches wide. A membrane formed of a synthetic composition forms a moisture barrier against one wall of the narrow trench, and is held in place by back fill. The moisture barrier is intended for use in expansive soils that are subject to shrinking and swelling.

12 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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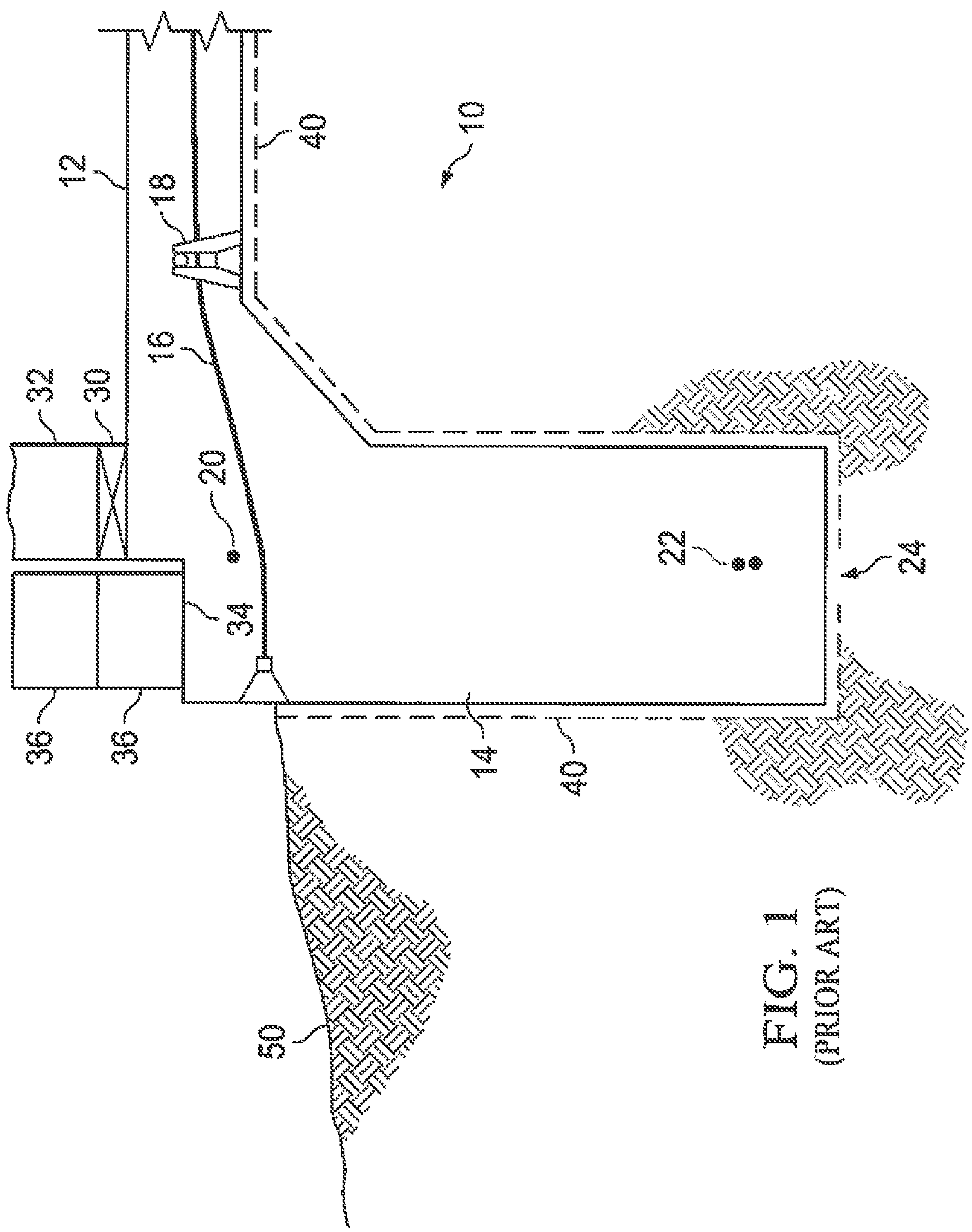

FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

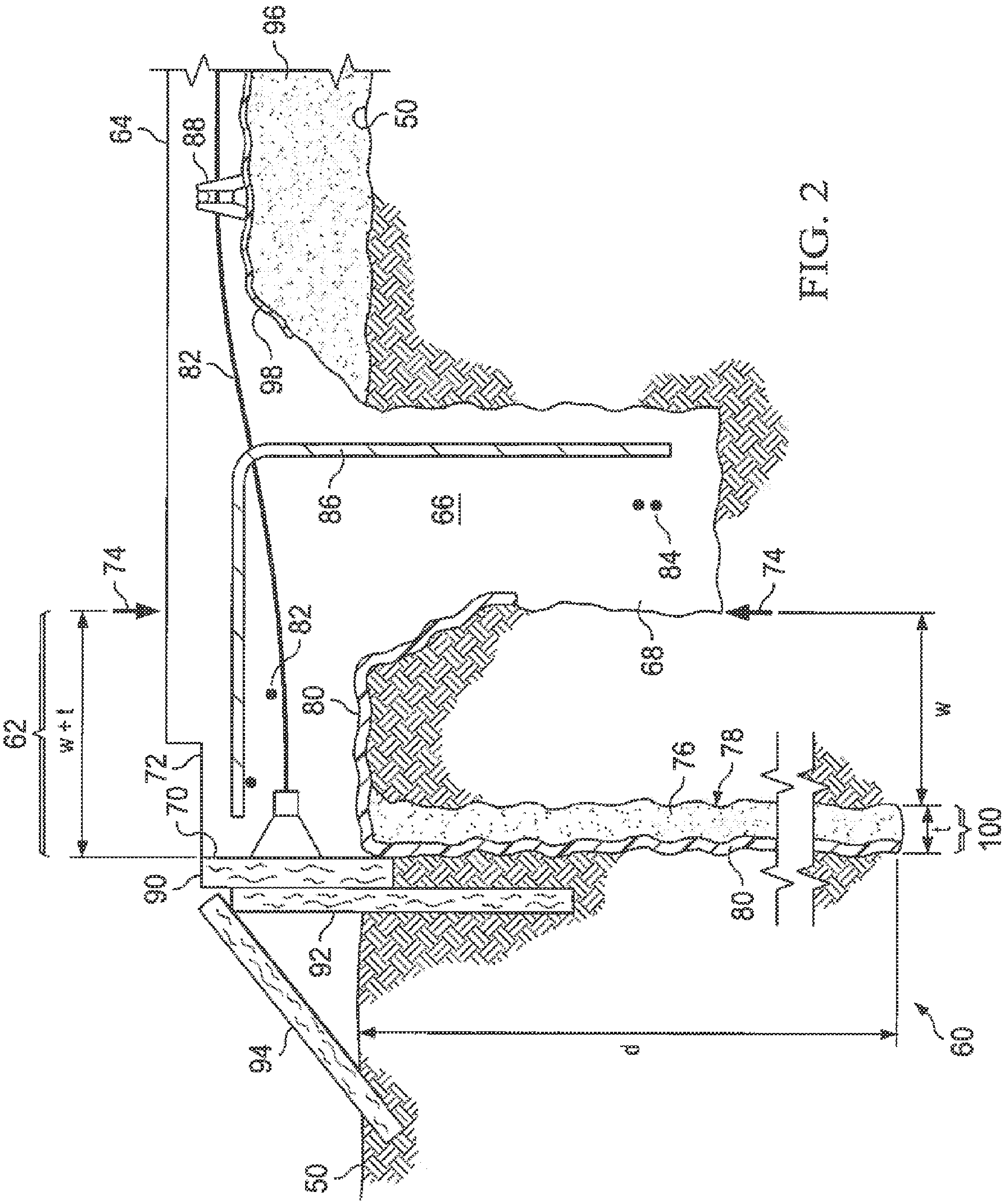
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FIG. 2

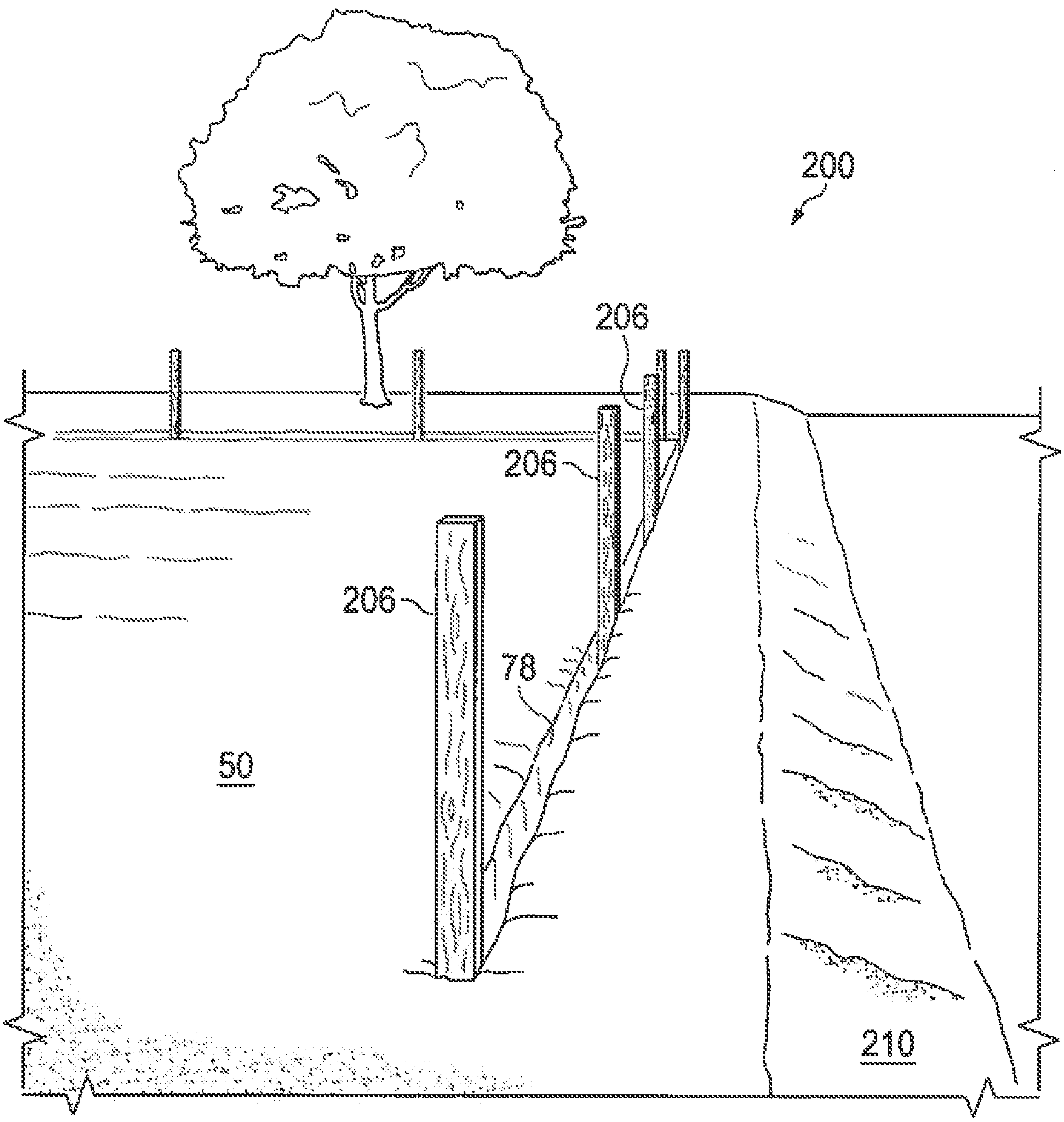

FIG. 3

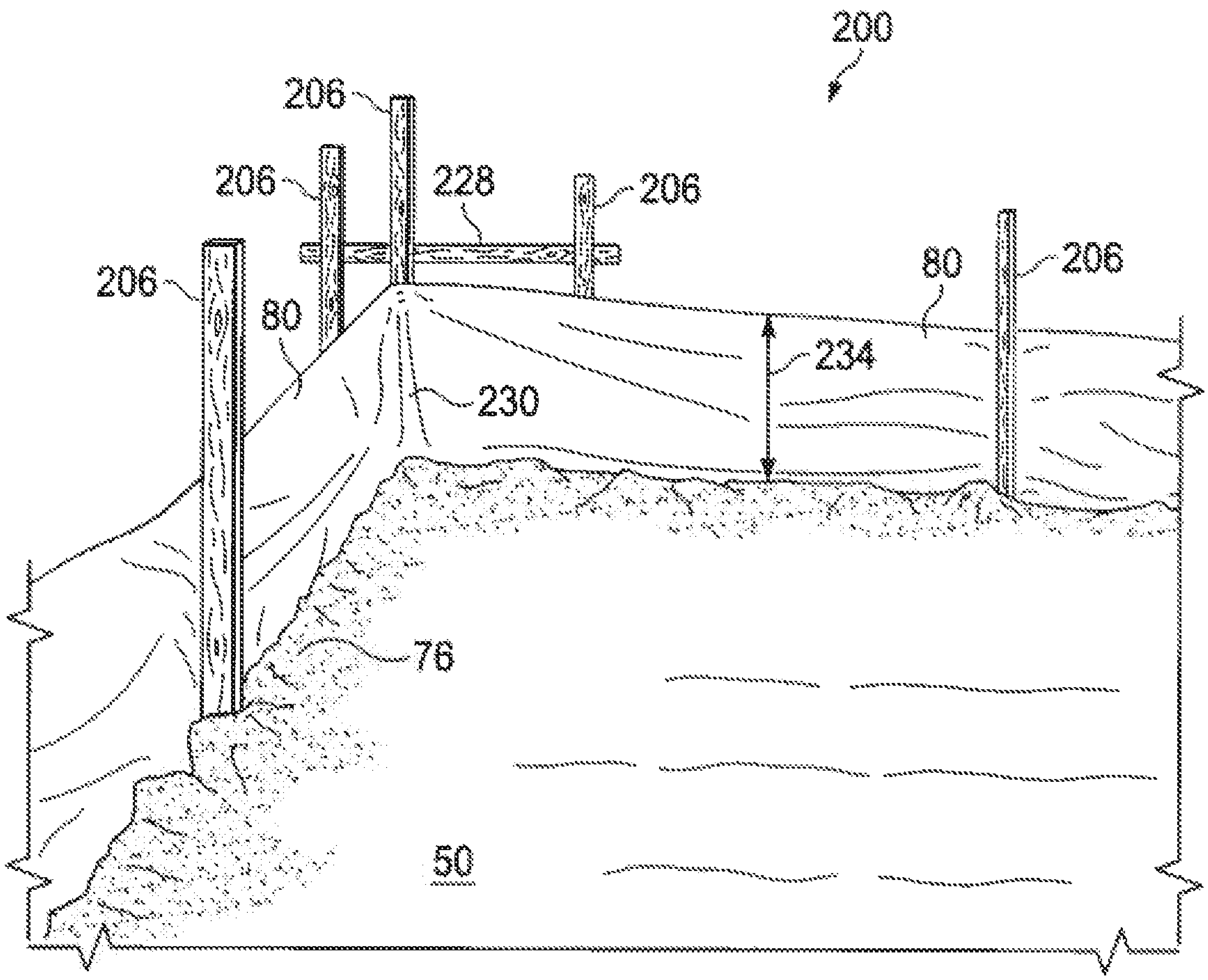

FIG. 4

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR STABILIZING A SLAB FOUNDATION

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present U. S. Patent Application is a Continuation-In-Part Application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/598,014, filed Jan. 15, 2015, entitled APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR STABILIZING A SLAB FOUNDATION, which claims priority to U. S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 62/010,873, filed Jun. 11, 2014 with the same title and filed by at least one of the inventors named in the present Application.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to soil stabilization and more particularly to stabilizing active soils at building sites that are subject to significant shrinking and swelling due to variations in moisture content.

2. Background of the Invention and Description of the Prior Art

Shrinking and swelling of soil upon which a building foundation is constructed is a well-known problem in the building industry particularly for residential structures. Soils such as clay, for example, that have a relatively high plasticity index, often termed “expansive soils,” typically lack sufficient stability to avoid foundation damage due to moderate or wide variations in the moisture content of the soil upon which the foundation is constructed. In a typical slab foundation with a perimeter grade beam, which surrounds the perimeter of the slab, the moisture content of the soil inside the perimeter grade beam can vary substantially from the moisture content of the soil outside the perimeter grade beam. This is because the outside soil is subject to widely varying amounts of moisture due to cycles of rainfall or lack thereof throughout the seasons of the year, while the soil within the perimeter grade beam is isolated from such moisture variations.

A substantial variety of businesses have been active and successful over the years in responding to the need for remediation of the conditions that cause foundation shifting, cracks, masonry cracks in the building veneer, cracks in the interior walls of the structure, doors that won’t close properly, plumbing systems that develop leaks, etc., all due to shifts on the soil upon which the building foundation is constructed. Many of these remedies involve construction of foundation supports to level the foundation, to provide support down to more solid subsurface components, to provide auxiliary supporting posts, beams, and the like to provide a stronger foundation less susceptible to flexing, cracking, and the like. Other kinds of remedies may involve providing injection of chemicals or fluids into the soil, or controlled moisture or irrigation systems to provide a more uniform moisture content year-round.

Such remedies tend to be expensive and are often subject to individual skills or techniques used in a particular situation. Some are satisfactory over the long term life of the structure; others must be rebuilt or replaced with other remediation countermeasures. What is needed is a solution to the problem that is provided at the time the foundation is initially constructed or that is inherent in the design of the foundation. A solution that prevents damage to a foundation regardless of the moisture variations that occur in the soil it is built upon would minimize damage to structures built on the slab foundation and negate future needs to reconstruct the foundation or to later install countermeasures to correct this troublesome problem.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly there is provided a novel design solution to the problem of the variability of moisture content of high plasticity or expansive soils upon which slab foundations having perimeter grade beam construction are built that is an advance in the state of the art. The solution to be described is economical in both the labor needed to provide it and in the materials required for its construction. Moreover it has the ability to be approved by local codes.

In one embodiment the invention is an apparatus for stabilizing a slab foundation, comprising a vertical moisture barrier assembly spaced outside the perimeter grade beam of the slab foundation by a predetermined distance, surrounding the slab foundation, and extending to a predetermined depth below surface grade determined by the type of soil upon which the slab foundation is to be constructed.

In one aspect, the vertical moisture barrier assembly comprises a narrow trench excavated to the predetermined depth below surface grade as determined by the type of soil, and a moisture barrier sheet formed of a synthetic composition forming a planar surface disposed against one wall of the narrow trench from the depth dimension below surface grade to a predetermined extension above the surface grade.

In another aspect, the narrow trench comprises a nominal width not exceeding three inches and having a depth of approximately five feet for use in soils having a relatively high plasticity index that are subject to shrinking and swelling.

In another aspect, the vertical moisture barrier assembly further comprises a backfill component of soil filling the narrow trench to the surface grade for holding the moisture barrier sheet against substantially the entire surface of the one wall thereby maintaining its planar form within the narrow trench.

In other aspects, the predetermined distance comprises a distance approximately equivalent to the nominal thickness of the grade beam of the slab foundation, and the predetermined depth comprises a dimension of approximately five feet below the surface grade.

In another aspect, the synthetic composition of the moisture barrier sheet comprises a multi-layer plastic sheet extrusion manufactured from virgin polyolefin resins and having a nominal thickness of approximately 15 mils. In preferred embodiments, the multi-layer plastic sheet meets or exceeds ASTM E 1745 Class A, B & C standard Specification for Water Vapor Retarders Used in Contact with Soil or Granular Fill Under Concrete Slabs.

In another aspect, the predetermined extension of the moisture barrier sheet or membrane comprises a dimension approximately twice the nominal thickness of the grade beam of the slab foundation.

In another aspect, the backfill component of soil comprises soil excavated from the narrow trench or its equivalent,

In an alternate embodiment, a method for stabilizing a slab foundation comprises the steps of preparing the surface grade for a slab foundation having a slab extension of the slab foundation beyond the perimeter of the location of a grade beam for the slab foundation; excavating a vertical barrier trench around and spaced a predetermined distance outside the location of the grade beam, wherein the vertical barrier trench is less than or equal to four inches wide and at least three feet deep below the surface grade; installing a moisture barrier membrane in the vertical barrier trench; excavating the grade beam trench; draping an extension of the moisture barrier over the surface grade and into the grade beam trench and secure it to the outer wall of the grade beam trench; installing rebar, slab strands and chairs, and plumbing lines; and pouring concrete for the grade beams and the slab foundation including the slab extension.

In other aspects, improvements to the method includes steps comprising: excavating the trench to a full depth of approximately 5 feet, wherein the width of the trench does not exceed six inches at surface grade and three inches at the full depth (there are variations of this additional step wherein the width of the trench at the surface grade may vary from three to six inches depending on soli conditions, etc.); installing vertical braces at least three inches wide in the trench at intervals of six to 10 feet therealong thereby providing temporary support for the side walls of the trench; installing the moisture barrier membrane against an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench wherein the membrane wraps around corners and extends from the full depth below surface grade to a predetermined extension above the surface grade; stapling the membrane to the vertical braces for providing temporary support; and mixing sand with the backfill soil as necessary to preserve porosity within a stable range.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** illustrates the cross section of a conventional prior art slab foundation viewed along a grade beam at one edge of the slab;

FIG. **2** illustrates the cross section of one embodiment of a stabilized slab foundation with a vertical moisture barrier assembly according to the present invention;

FIG. **3** illustrates a perspective view of a completed vertical barrier trench component of one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. **4** illustrates a perspective view of one corner of a slab foundation site with a vertical moisture barrier installed.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The invention to be described is a solution to the problem of soil moisture content variations due to, for example, seasonal and climatic variations that occur in many climate regions in the United States and elsewhere, or poor soil moisture maintenance practices in most locations. It is a solution that is provided at the time the building foundation is initially constructed so that the foundation needs no remedial repairs or counter measures years after it is built. The novel solution described herein prevents damage to a foundation regardless of the moisture variations that occur in the soil beyond the perimeter of the building. This solution thus negates future needs to repair or reconstruct the foundation, or to later install foundation support countermeasures to correct this troublesome problem. The invention is well-suited for slab-on-grade foundations constructed on expansive clay soils often found in, for example, California and Texas. The apparatus and method described herein is economical both in labor and materials, and is designed meet or exceed local building code requirements.

Briefly stated, the invention provides an apparatus and method for stabilizing the soil moisture content on both sides of the grade beam of a slab foundation to isolate or immunize the foundation from the effects of soil moisture variations. The apparatus comprises a vertical moisture barrier assembly spaced outside the perimeter grade beam of a slab foundation by a predetermined distance. The method comprises a process for constructing a slab foundation having the vertical moisture barrier assembly. The vertical moisture barrier assembly surrounds the slab foundation and extends to a depth below surface grade that is preferably five feet but may be determined by the type of soil upon which the slab foundation is to be constructed. The concept underlying the invention is that by providing an easily constructed, low cost, vertically-disposed auxiliary moisture barrier around and outside of the slab foundation's perimeter grade beam, and spaced a nominal distance outside the perimeter grade beam, the moisture content of the soil on both sides of the perimeter grade beam is maintained at a constant value, regardless of the moisture conditions outside the vertical moisture barrier due to variations in rainfall, foundation irrigation, landscape watering, etc. Under such conditions the slab foundation itself is much less likely to suffer stresses due to moisture variations that result in damage to the foundation and to the exterior and interior structure of the building that it supports.

FIG. **1** illustrates the cross section of a conventional prior art slab foundation viewed along a grade beam at one edge of the slab. The conventional slab foundation **10** includes a slab **12** formed of concrete integral with a grade beam **14**, the grade beam being disposed in a trench **24** that is excavated into the earth's surface to a typical depth of approximately two to three feet below surface grade **50**. The foundation includes reinforcing slab strands **16**,**20** supported on chairs **18** and draped beam strands **22** within the grade beam space to be occupied by the concrete when it is poured in place. The slab may include a membrane **40**—typically a 6 mil polyethylene sheet—to line the outside and inside surfaces of the grade beam **14** and the underside of the slab **12**. The edges of the slab foundation include a surface for securing the sill plate **30** and a seat or ledge **34** for positioning the exterior wall veneer such as brick or stone **36**. The problem with this prior art construction, when the soil is subject to substantial moisture content variations, is that the soil under the slab **12** and bounded around the perimeter of the slab **12** by the grade beams **14** tends to remain at a constant moisture content while the soil outside the perimeter of the grade beam **14** may vary significantly due to rainfall variations that can be substantial in some regions. If the foundation is constructed on expansive soils such as clay, the volume occupied by the soil outside the grade beam **14** as it expands and contracts with variations in moisture content can vary sufficiently to exert significant bending forces on the slab. This set of conditions often leads to fractures in the slab and exterior and interior walls, misaligned doors and sometimes even cracks in plumbing that passes through the grade beams, etc.

FIG. **2** illustrates the cross section of one embodiment of a novel, stabilized slab foundation **60** that includes a vertical moisture barrier assembly (**76**, **78**, **80**, which is collectively designated vertical barrier assembly **100**) according to the present invention. In the description that follows, it is assumed that the site has been prepared and the foundation outlined with chalk, etc. so that the narrow trenches can be properly located. The slab foundation **64** is constructed on a surface grade **50** and depicted in a cross section view that includes a reinforced slab extension **62** that extends beyond the perimeter **74** of the grade beam **66**, which is formed in the grade beam trench **68**. Typical grade beams range between 8 to 12 inches wide but can vary beyond these figures. Situated in parallel with the grade beam **66** is a second, narrower, barrier trench **78**. The barrier trench must be narrow to lessen the effect this second trench may have on the soil's ability to support the building. Further, the narrow trench **78** is placed well outside the location of the grade beam **66** by a predetermined distance w. The barrier trench **78** may be located by the predetermined distance w=9-½ inches outside the grade beam **66** in this example. In general the predetermined distance w is at least equal to or greater than the width of the grade beam. The barrier trench **78** is preferably narrow, having a width of t=2-½ inches (in this illustrative example), and no more than 3 inches wide. The barrier trench **78** must be narrow to avoid a loss of support for the slab foundation on the surface grade. Further, the outside walls of the grade beam trench **68** and the barrier trench **78** are separated by approximately **12** inches in this example, as indicated by the spacing **62** defined by the distance w +t, where w=spacing between the trenches, and t=the width of the barrier trench **78**. This spacing also represents the distance **62** that the slab **64** extends beyond the perimeter **74** of the grade beam **66**.

Disposed in the barrier trench **78** is a lining comprised of a moisture barrier membrane **80** that is held in place against the outer wall of the barrier trench **78** by back-filled soil **76**. The height of the membrane **80** is actually the width of the material (to be described) when it is sized for use during construction of the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100**. The total width of the membrane **80** is determined to extend above grade level by approximately 20 inches to 24 inches so that it can be wrapped over the surface grade **50** toward the grade beam trench **68**. Thus, for a barrier trench **78** that is five feet deep, the total width of the membrane **80** would be approximately seven feet. The free edge of the membrane **80** is then secured against the upper portion of the grade beam trench **68** as will be described. The barrier trench **78** is preferably excavated to a depth of d=five (5) feet. However, while in some applications the minimum depth of d=2-½ feet is permissible, in general the preferred depth for providing the intended vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** is closer to five feet below the surface grade **50**.

FIG. **2** includes other important details. The location of the form board **90**, which may be installed after the membrane **80** is placed in the trench **78**, is shown so that its inside surface **70** is disposed directly above the outside surface of the barrier trench **78** against which the membrane **80** is placed. The form board **90** may be supported by the stake **92**, which may be further supported by an angled brace **94** as shown. Before the concrete for the slab **64** is poured, an optional sand cushion **96**, preferably covered by a horizontal moisture barrier **98**, may be installed as shown. The slab **64** preferably also includes the slab strands **82**, **84**, chairs **88**, and re-bar **86**, which are set in place prior to pouring the concrete for the grade beam **66** and the slab **64**. The slab foundation **64**, when poured, may include a brick ledge **72** as shown—a surface for positioning an exterior wall veneer such as brick or stone (similar to the veneer wall **36** as depicted in FIG. **1**). After the concrete is poured and cured, the form boards **90** and its supports **92**, **94** may be removed.

Several characteristics of the stabilized slab foundation **60** are essential to providing the ability of the invention to neutralize any instability that may result from variations in soil moisture content in the vicinity of the stabilized slab foundation **60**. One is the addition of the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** that is spaced outside the conventional perimeter of the slab **64** that is usually aligned with the outer side of the grade beam **66**. Without the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** in place, the soil moisture proximate the outside of the grade beam **66** is allowed to vary with climate changes, rainfall, landscape watering, etc. The resulting moisture content difference in the soil (a) inside the grade beam **66** and the slab **64** and (b) outside the grade beam **66** can exert substantial bending forces on the slab structure, resulting in cracks in the building structure as described herein above. The presence of the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** prevents moisture from outside its perimeter from reaching the grade beam **66**, thus maintaining equal soil moisture content on both sides of the grade beam **66**. This structure substantially immunizes the slab **66** from the destructive forces exerted by expansive soils when exposed to variations in moisture, providing a stable slab foundation **60** that is not subject to the damage typically wrought by soil moisture variations.

The structure of the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** comprises a very narrow vertical barrier trench **78** into which is positioned a membrane **80** that is held in place by backfilled soil **76** after the membrane **80** is placed against the outer wall of the barrier trench **78**. After such placement, the excess width of the membrane **80** can be draped outwardly and over the form board **90**, and secured with tape, nails, or screws, until the back filling step is completed. Then the grade beam (primary) trench **68** may be excavated, followed by re-positioning the excess membrane **80** inward toward the primary trench **68** and secured to its outer wall. Securing the membrane **80** material against the outer wall of the primary trench **68** may be accomplished using **16** penny nails, for example; i.e., just enough fastening to hold the membrane **80** in place while the concrete is being poured in to the grade beam trench **68**.

The preferred material for the vertical moisture barrier membrane **80** is a multi-layer plastic extrusion manufactured of polyolefin resins, forming a rugged, 15 mil thick membrane that preferably meets or exceeds ASTM E 1745 Class A, B, & C Standard Specification for Water Vapor Retarders Used in Contact with Soil or Granular Fill Under Concrete Slabs. One preferred material is manufactured under the trade name Stego® Wrap Vapor Barrier by Stego Industries, LLC. of San Clemente, Calif. 92672.

Another characteristic of the stabilized slab foundation **60** that will be noticed by observant persons is the beefed up or reinforced slab extension **62** that extends the slab **64** outward past the grade beam **66**. This portion **62** of the slab **64** may be constructed to be twice the thickness of the slab **64** that is within the grade beam perimeter **74**. The purpose of this reinforced section **62** of the slab **64** is to provide sufficient load bearing support for the building exterior surface that may typically be brick or stone veneer on the brick ledge **70**.

The excavation of the barrier trench **78** generally requires certain specialized equipment to provide a narrow trench—not to exceed three inches in width—that is preferably five feet deep below the surface grade **50**. Moreover, the barrier trench **78** must be excavated before the grade beam (primary) trench **68** is excavated, to avoid disturbing the soil while excavating the grade beam trench **68**. There are four known types of equipment mechanisms (not shown) for excavating trenches of this type. These mechanisms include devices modeled after or configured in the manner of a chain saw, a rotary or disc saw, a knife or slicing type device, or a back hoe. Each of these mechanism types must be driven by some apparatus that provides power, support, and control for the cutting blade assembly and a mechanism for excavating soil from the barrier trench **78**. For example, a rotary or disc saw may be used to excavate such a narrow trench as described. However, because of the requirement for a very narrow secondary trench, the chain saw type mechanism may be the most practical, particularly for depths that exceed 2-½ or three feet. As is well known, a chain saw blade comprises a stationary blade having a continuous chain that travels along and around the edge of the stationary blade in a continuous fashion. A plurality of excavating teeth may be disposed at intervals along the chain in a spaced relationship appropriate to the function of the blade. A rotary or disc saw may be a round blade having a plurality of fixed teeth disposed at intervals in a spaced relationship around the perimeter of the disc. The stationary blade embodiment may be an elongated shape of a typical chain saw used for felling trees, or other shapes, including circular, oval, eliptical, etc. that may be adapted to excavating the narrow trench as described herein. If a blade structure is used, it may include one blade or several blades, and may be pulled or pushed through the earth. In addition, the blade structure, in particular the excavating implements or teeth of the chain saw—or the rotary or disc saw—needs to be configured for cutting through highly abrasive soil materials that frequently include hard materials such as rocks or metal objects, concrete debris, and the like.

Regardless of the type of mechanism used to excavate the narrow barrier trench **78**, some skill is required to maneuver the cutting mechanism at the comers of the foundation plan. In general, the barrier trenches **78** along sides of the foundation will cross at the corners so that the depth of the barrier trench **78** is the full prescribed depth. The excess length of the barrier trenches **78** at each corner may then be back-filled after the vertical barrier **80** is installed. The sheets of material of the vertical barrier **80** may be folded together at the corners and sealed with cement formulated for that purpose. Such cement is available form the manufacturer identified above.

The method for constructing a slab foundation **60** that includes the vertical moisture barrier assembly **100** as described herein includes the following steps, with reference to the structures illustrated in FIG. **2**.

(1) Excavate a vertical barrier trench **78** surrounding the location of a grade beam trench **68** for a slab foundation **60** and spaced a predetermined distance "w" outside the perimeter **74** of the grade beam trench **68**, wherein the vertical barrier trench **78** is less than or equal to three inches wide and at least 2-½ feet deep below the surface grade **50**;

(2) Install a moisture barrier membrane **80** against an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench **78** wherein the moisture barrier membrane **80** has a width from the bottom of the vertical barrier trench **78** to an extension approximately 20 inches above the surface grade **50**;

(3) Install an exterior form board **90** for the slab foundation **50**, such that its inside surface is disposed above and outside an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench **78**;

(4) Drape the excess of the vertical moisture barrier extending above the trench **78** and outward over the form board **90**;

(5) Backfill the vertical barrier trench **78** to the surface grade **50** to secure the moisture barrier membrane **80** against the outer wall of the vertical barrier trench **78**;

(6) Excavate the grade beam trench **68**; drape the excess width of the membrane **80** over the surface grade **50** and into the grade beam trench **68** and secure it to the outer wall of the grade beam trench **69**;

(7) Install rebar **86**, slab strands **82**, **84** and chairs **88**, and plumbing lines not shown because they do not form part of the invention; and

(8) Pour concrete for the grade beams **66** and the slab foundation **60**.

In a final step, after the concrete has cured, the form boards **90** and supports **92**, **94** may be removed.

Persons skilled in the art understand that constructing a slab foundation on expansive soils is subject to good engineering design and expertise. The engineer designing a foundation using a moisture barrier must have knowledge and experience with both (1) the design of post-tension slab-on-ground on expansive soils; and (2) the appropriate design requirements referenced in recognized standards documents such as the ICC (International Code Council, a model building codes standards organization). Proper construction of a sound slab foundation also relies on the construction experience and expertise of the persons supervising the construction and installation of the slab foundation according to the present invention.

As with any novel construction method or process, there may be associated risks arise during construction or that are atypical from the usual experience. For example, foundation designs on expansive soils may be based on design equations derived empirically from past studies, and may rely on certain assumptions regarding soil behavior under varying conditions. The addition of the novel vertical moisture barrier described herein adds further factors to be considered in the design, and can increase the risks associated with slab foundation designs if good engineering practices are not followed in the design and construction of the inventive slab foundation configuration described above.

In an alternate embodiment of the invention a method of stabilizing a slab foundation using a vertical moisture barrier assembly is described with reference to FIGS. **3** and **4**. Structures bearing the same reference numbers as appear in FIGS. **1** and **2** refer to the same structural feature. The method to be described includes several steps that in practice have been found to facilitate performance of the method of stabilizing a slab foundation. Broadly stated, the steps of the method comprise:

(1) preparing the surface grade for a slab foundation having a slab extension of the slab foundation beyond the perimeter of the location of a grade beam for the slab foundation;

(2) excavating a vertical barrier trench around and spaced a predetermined distance outside the location of the grade beam, wherein the vertical barrier trench is less than or equal to four inches wide and at least three feet deep below the surface grade;

(3) installing a moisture barrier membrane in the vertical barrier trench;

(4) excavating the grade beam trench;

(5) draping an extension of the moisture barrier over the surface grade and into the grade beam trench and secure it to the outer wall of the grade beam trench;

(6) installing rebar, slab strands and chairs, and plumbing lines; and

(7) pouring concrete for the grade beams and the slab foundation including the slab extension.

Additional steps that improve the method during its installation, based on experience in constructing slab foundations using the method include:

(8) excavating the trench to a full depth of approximately 5 feet, wherein the width of the trench does not exceed six inches at surface grade and three inches at the full depth. There are variations of this additional step wherein the width of the trench at the surface grade may vary from three to six inches depending on soli conditions, etc.

(9) installing vertical braces at least three inches wide in the trench at intervals of six to 10 feet therealong thereby providing temporary support for the side walls of the trench.

(10) installing the moisture barrier membrane against an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench wherein the membrane wraps around corners and extends from the full depth below surface grade to a predetermined extension above the surface grade.

(11) stapling the membrane to the vertical braces for providing temporary support.

(12) mixing sand with the backfill soil as necessary to preserve porosity within a stable range.

The alternate method that includes these improvements is described with the aid of FIGS. **3** and **4**. It will be noted that some of the same features depicted in FIGS. **3** and **4** are the same as in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

FIG. **3** illustrates a perspective view of a completed vertical barrier trench component of one embodiment on the site of a slab foundation **200** under construction according to the method of the present invention. A portion of a prepared surface grade **50** that will be covered by the slab **64** is shown, with a narrow trench **78** excavated along one side of the prepared surface grade **50**. The trench **78** shown is representative of a vertical barrier trench that completely surrounds the perimeter of the slab **64**. Outside the trench **78** (to the right in FIG. **3**) is excavated soil **210**. The narrow trench **78** is the same structure as the vertical barrier trench **78** shown in cross section in FIG. **2**. Inserted into the trench **78** are several upright stakes or braces **206** spaced typically at six to 10 foot intervals to support the side walls of the trench from collapse before the membrane **80** is installed in the trench **78**. The braces **206** may preferably be eight foot lengths of wood supplied as 2"×3" lumber. The 3" width is preferably placed across the width of the trench **78** as shown. The braces **206** need not be pressed into the soil other than just enough to maintain their upright orientation.

The vertical barrier trench **78** should be excavated to a depth of at least three feet. In typical soil conditions a depth of five feet is preferred. The width of the trench **78** should be at least three inches at the full depth or bottom of the trench **78** five feet below the surface grade **50** and should preferably be no wider than four inches to 4-½ inches wide at the level of the surface grade **50**. There may be some variation in these dimensions within the range of 1-½ inches at the full depth to six inches at the surface grade **50**, particularly depending on the local soil conditions such as soil composition and soil moisture content.

FIG. **4** illustrates a perspective view of one corner **230** of a slab foundation site **200** with a vertical moisture barrier or membrane **80** installed in the trench **78** and backfill soil **240** installed in the trench **78**. The membrane **80** is shown supported on the vertical stakes **206**, typically by stapling the membrane **80** to the outside surface of the stakes **206** to provide temporary support for the membrane **80** while installation is in progress. Also shown is the membrane **80** placed in the trench **78** around the corner **230**. Although not shown in the Figure, it is important that the membrane **80** be wrapped around the corner to the full depth of the trench **78**, just as indicated by the portion of the membrane **80** that is above the surface grade **50**. The membrane **80** at the corner **230** may be supported by the corner braces **226** that are braced by cross pieces **228**. The membrane **80** is shown extending above the surface grade **50** by a distance **234** of at least 20 inches to 24 inches as shown. This "excess" portion of the membrane **80** will be draped inward over the surface grade **50** and secured into the grade beam trench **68** as previously described.

The installation of the membrane **80** in the vertical barrier trench **78** may be completed, following excavation of the grade beam trench **68**, by removing the braces **206**. In most cases they may simply be pulled upward from the vertical barrier trench after removing the staples that were used to temporarily support the membrane **80** while it was being installed in the trench **78** and the backfill soil **76** installed in the trench **78**. The backfill soil **240** may typically be soil removed when the trench **78** was excavated. In some conditions, the backfill soil may be supplemented by sand to provide backfill soil **240** with an appropriate mix of characteristics to facilitate backfill and support of the membrane **80**.

While the invention has been shown in only one of its forms, it is not thus limited but is susceptible to various changes and modifications without departing from the spirit thereof. Moreover, the vertical moisture barrier concept may find application in other construction projects built on the surface grade on expansive soils, such as roadways, railway crossings, and the like.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for stabilizing a slab foundation, comprising the steps of:

preparing the surface grade for a slab foundation having a slab extension of the slab foundation beyond the perimeter of the location of a grade beam for the slab foundation;

excavating a vertical barrier trench around and spaced a predetermined distance outside the location of the grade beam, wherein the vertical barrier trench is less than or equal to four inches wide and at least three feet deep below the surface grade;

installing a moisture barrier membrane in the vertical barrier trench;

excavating the grade beam trench;

draping an extension of the moisture barrier over the surface grade and into the grade beam trench and secure it to the outer wall of the grade beam trench;

installing rebar, slab strands and chairs, and plumbing lines; and

pouring concrete for the grade beams and the slab foundation including the slab extension.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of installing the moisture barrier membrane comprises the step of:

installing a synthetic membrane formed of a multi-layer plastic sheet extrusion manufactured from virgin polyolefin resins.

3. The method of claim **2**, wherein the nominal thickness of the multi-layer plastic sheets is approximately 15 mils.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of excavating a vertical barrier trench comprises the steps of:

excavating the trench to a full depth of approximately 5 feet, wherein the width of the trench does not exceed six inches at surface grade and three inches at the full depth; and

installing three-inch wide vertical braces in the trench at intervals of six to 10 feet therealong thereby providing temporary support for the side walls of the trench.

5. The method of claim **4**, wherein the step of installing a moisture barrier membrane comprises the steps of:

installing the moisture barrier membrane against an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench wherein the membrane wraps around corners and extends from the full depth below surface grade to a predetermined extension above the surface grade;

stapling the membrane to the vertical braces for providing temporary support; and

backfilling the vertical barrier trench to the surface grade to secure the moisture barrier membrane against the outer wall of the vertical barrier trench.

6. The method of claim **5**, wherein the step of backfilling comprises the steps of:

securing the membrane against substantially the entire surface of the outer wall thereby maintaining its planar form within the barrier trench; and

backfilling the barrier trench with backfill soil excavated from the barrier trench.

7. The method of claim **5**, wherein the step of backfilling comprises the step of:

mixing sand with the backfill soil as necessary to preserve porosity within a stable range.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of excavating a vertical barrier trench comprises the steps of:

excavating the trench to a full depth of approximately 5 feet, wherein the width of the trench does not exceed four inches at surface grade and three inches at the full depth; and

installing three-inch wide vertical braces in the trench at intervals of six to 10 feet therealong thereby providing temporary support for the side walls of the trench.

9. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of excavating a vertical barrier trench comprises the step of:

providing a vertical barrier trench having a nominal width not exceeding three inches and having a full depth of approximately five feet for use in soils having a relatively high plasticity index that are subject to shrinking and swelling.

10. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of excavating a vertical barrier trench a predetermined distance outside the grade beam comprises the step of:

spacing the vertical barrier trench a distance beyond the location of the grade beam of at least the nominal thickness of the grade beam of the slab foundation.

11. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of excavating a vertical barrier trench comprises the step of:

excavating the vertical barrier trench using a device selected from the group consisting of a mechanism configured in the manner of a chain saw, a circular saw, a knife, and a back hoe.

12. The method of claim **1**, wherein the step of installing the moisture barrier membrane comprises the steps of:

installing an exterior form board for the slab foundation, such that its inside surface is disposed above an outer wall of the vertical barrier trench;

extending the membrane from the bottom of the vertical barrier trench to an extension at least 20 inches above the surface grade; and

draping the excess vertical moisture barrier membrane outward over the form board.

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