5,691,693, 5,802,479, 5,844,486 and 6,014,602; By Jinno et al. U.S. Pat. No. 5,948,031; and SAE technical papers 982292 and 971051 which are incorporated herein by reference. Additionally, as discussed in more detail below, the sensing of the change in the characteristics of the near field that surrounds an antenna is an effective and economical method of determining the presence of water in the vicinity of the antenna and thus a measure of occupant presence. The use of electric field and capacitance sensors and their equivalence to the occupant sensors described herein requires a special discussion.

[0037] 6. Electric Field, Capacitance and Wave Sensors

[0038] Electric field sensors and wave sensors are essentially the same from the point of view of sensing the presence of an occupant in a vehicle. In both cases, a time varying electric field is disturbed or modified by the presence of the occupant. At high frequencies in the visual, infrared and high frequency radio wave region, the sensor is based on its capability to sense change of wave characteristics of the electromagnetic field, such as amplitude, phase or frequency. As the frequency drops, other characteristics of the field are measured. At still lower frequencies, the occupant's dielectric properties modify parameters of the reactive electric field in the occupied space between/near the plates of a capacitor. In this latter case, the sensor senses the change in charge distribution on the capacitor plates by measuring, for example, the current wave magnitude or phase in the electric circuit that drives the capacitor. These measured parameters are directly connected with parameters of the displacement current in the occupied space. In all cases, the presence of the occupant reflects, absorbs or modifies the waves or variations in the electric field in the space occupied by the occupant. Thus for the purposes of this invention, capacitance, electric field or electromagnetic wave sensors are equivalent and although they are all technically "field" sensors they will be considered as "wave" sensors herein. What follows is a discussion comparing the similarities and differences between two types of field or wave sensors, electromagnetic wave sensors and capacitive sensors as exemplified by Kithil in U.S. Pat. No. 5,602,734.

[0039] An electromagnetic field disturbed or emitted by a passenger in the case of an electromagnetic wave sensor, for example, and the electric field sensor of Kithil, for example, are in many ways similar and equivalent for the purposes of this invention. The electromagnetic wave sensor is an actual electromagnetic wave sensor by definition because they sense parameters of a wave, which is a coupled pair of continuously changing electric and magnetic fields. The electric field here is not a static, potential one. It is essentially a dynamic, rotational electric field coupled with a changing magnetic one, that is, an electromagnetic wave. It cannot be produced by a steady distribution of electric charges. It is initially produced by moving electric charges in a transmitter, even if this transmitter is a passenger body for the case of a passive infrared sensor.

[0040] In the Kithil sensor, a static electric field is declared as an initial material agent coupling a passenger and a sensor (see Column 5, lines 5-7): "The proximity sensor **12** each function by creating an electrostatic field between oscillator input loop **54** and detector output loop **56**, which is affected by presence of a person near by, as a result of capacitive coupling, . . . "). It is a potential, non-rotational electric field. It is not necessarily coupled with any magnetic field. It is the electric field of a capacitor. It can be produced with a steady distribution of electric charges. Thus, it is not an electromagnetic wave by definition but if the sensor is driven by a varying current, then it produces a quasistatic electric field in the space between/near the plates of the capacitor.

[0041] Kithil declares that he uses a static electric field in his capacitance sensor. Thus, from the consideration above, one can conclude that Kithil's sensor cannot be treated as a wave sensor because there are no actual electromagnetic waves but only a static electric field of the capacitor in the sensor system. However, this is not believed to be the case. The Kithil system could not operate with a true static electric field because a steady system does not carry any information. Therefore, Kithil is forced to use an oscillator, causing an alternate current in the capacitor and a reactive quasistatic electric field in the space between the capacitor plates, and a detector to reveal an informative change of the sensor capacitance caused by the presence of an occupant (see **FIG. 7** and its description). In this case, the system becomes a "wave sensor" in the sense that it starts generating actual time-varying electric field that certainly originates electromagnetic waves according to the definition above. That is, Kithil's sensor can be treated as a wave sensor regardless of the shape of the electric field that it creates, a beam or a spread shape.

[0042] As follows from the Kithil patent, the capacitor sensor is likely a parametric system where the capacitance of the sensor is controlled by influence of the passenger body. This influence is transferred by means of the near electromagnetic field (i.e., the wave-like process) coupling the capacitor electrodes and the body. It is important to note that the same influence takes place with a real static electric field also, that is in absence of any wave phenomenon This would be a situation if there were no oscillator in Kithil's system. However, such a system is not workable and thus Kithil reverts to a dynamic system using time-varying electric fields.

[0043] Thus, although Kithil declares the coupling is due to a static electric field, such a situation is not realized in his system because an alternating electromagnetic field ("quasi-wave") exists in the system due to the oscillator. Thus, his sensor is actually a wave sensor, that is, it is sensitive to a change of a wave field in the vehicle compartment. This change is measured by measuring the change of its capacitance. The capacitance of the sensor system is determined by the configuration of its electrodes, one of which is a human body, that is, the passenger inside of and the part which controls the electrode configuration and hence a sensor parameter, the capacitance.

[0044] The physics definition of "wave" from Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary is: "11. Physics. A progressive disturbance propagated from point to point in a medium or space without progress or advance of the points themselves, . . . ". In a capacitor, the time that it takes for the disturbance (a change in voltage) to propagate through space, the dielectric and to the opposite plate is generally small and neglected but it is not zero. As the frequency driving the capacitor increases and the distance separating the plates increases, this transmission time as a percentage of the period of oscillation can become significant. Nevertheless, an observer between the plates will see the rise and