

generating a signal representative of the position of the occupant or part thereof based on the waves received by the receiver means. The determining means can include transmitter means for transmitting waves into the space above the seat portion of the seat which are receivable by the receiver means. The receiver means may be mounted in various positions in the vehicle, including in a door of the vehicle, in which case, the distance between the occupant and the door would be determined, i.e., to determine whether the occupant is leaning against the door, and possibly adjacent the airbag module if it is situated in the door, or elsewhere in the vehicle. The control means are designed to suppress deployment of the airbag, control the time at which deployment of the airbag starts, control the rate of gas flow into the airbag, control the rate of gas flow out of the airbag and/or control the rate of deployment of the airbag.

[0314] Another arrangement for controlling deployment of an airbag comprises determining means for determining whether an occupant is present in the seat, and control means coupled to the determining means for controlling deployment of the airbag based on whether an occupant is present in the seat, e.g., to suppress deployment if the seat is unoccupied. The determining means may comprise receiver means, e.g., a wave-receiving transducer such as an ultrasonic transducer, SAW, CCD, CMOS, capacitor plate, capacitance sensor or antenna, for receiving waves from a space above a seat portion of the seat and processor means coupled to the receiver means for generating a signal representative of the presence or absence of an occupant in the seat based on the waves received by the receiver means. The determining means may optionally include transmitter means for transmitting waves into the space above the seat portion of the seat which are receivable by the receiver means. Further, the determining means may be designed to determine the position of the occupant or a part thereof when an occupant is in the seat in which case, the control means are arranged to control deployment of side airbag based on the determined position of the occupant or part thereof.

[0315] One method for controlling deployment of an airbag from an airbag module comprising the steps of determining the position of the occupant or a part thereof, and controlling deployment of the airbag based on the determined position of the occupant or part thereof. The position of the occupant or part thereof is determined as in the arrangement described above.

[0316] Another method for controlling deployment of an airbag comprises the steps of determining whether an occupant is present in the seat, and controlling deployment of the airbag based on the presence or absence of an occupant in the seat. The presence of the occupant, and optionally position of the occupant or a part thereof, are determined as in the arrangement described above.

[0317] Furthermore, disclosed above are methods for controlling a system in the vehicle based on an occupying item in which at least a portion of the passenger compartment in which the occupying item is situated is irradiated, radiation from the occupying item are received, e.g., by a plurality of sensors or transducers each arranged at a discrete location, the received radiation is processed by a processor in order to create one or more electronic signals characteristic of the occupying item based on the received radiation, each signal containing a pattern representative and/or characteristic of

the occupying item and each signal is then categorized by utilizing pattern recognition techniques for recognizing and thus identifying the class of the occupying item. In the pattern recognition process, each signal is processed into a categorization thereof based on data corresponding to patterns of received radiation stored within the pattern recognition means and associated with possible classes of occupying items of the vehicle. Once the signal(s) is/are categorized, the operation of the system in the vehicle may be affected based on the categorization of the signal(s), and thus based on the occupying item. If the system in the vehicle is a vehicle communication system, then an output representative of the number of occupants and/or their health or injury state in the vehicle may be produced based on the categorization of the signal(s) and the vehicle communication system thus controlled based on such output. Similarly, if the system in the vehicle is a vehicle entertainment system or heating and air conditioning system, then an output representative of specific seat occupancy may be produced based on the categorization of the signal(s) and the vehicle entertainment system or heating and air conditioning system thus controlled based on such output. In one embodiment designed to ensure safe operation of the vehicle, the attentiveness of the occupying item is determined from the signal(s) if the occupying item is an occupant, and in addition to affecting the system in the vehicle based on the categorization of the signal, the system in the vehicle is affected based on the determined attentiveness of the occupant.

[0318] One embodiment of the interior monitoring system in accordance with the invention comprises means for irradiating at least a portion of the passenger compartment in which an occupying item is situated, receiver means for receiving radiation from the occupying item, e.g., a plurality of receivers, each arranged at a discrete location, processor means coupled to the receivers for processing the received radiation from each receiver in order to create a respective electronic signal characteristic of the occupying item based on the received radiation, each signal containing a pattern representative of the occupying item, categorization means coupled to the processor means for categorizing the signals, and output means coupled to the categorization means for affecting another system within the vehicle based on the categorization of the signals characteristic of the occupying item. The categorization means may use a pattern recognition technique for recognizing and thus identifying the class of the occupying item by processing the signals into a categorization thereof based on data corresponding to patterns of received radiation and associated with possible classes of occupying items of the vehicle. Each signal may comprise a plurality of data, all of which is compared to the data corresponding to patterns of received radiation and associated with possible classes of contents of the vehicle. In one specific embodiment, the system includes location determining means coupled to the processor means for determining the location of the occupying item, e.g., based on the received radiation such that the output means which are coupled to the location determining means, in addition to affecting the other system based on the categorization of the signals characteristic of the occupying item, affect the system based on the determined location of the occupying item. In another embodiment to determine the presence or absence of an occupant, the categorization means comprise pattern recognition means for recognizing the presence or absence