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(54) **LIGHT DISTRIBUTION USING A LIGHT  
EMITTING DIODE ASSEMBLY**

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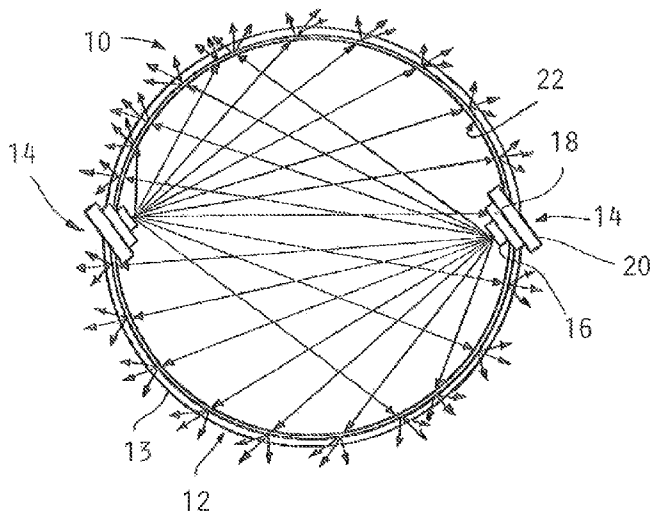
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A fluorescent light tube retrofit with light emitting diodes (LEDs) that evenly distribute light to avoid bright spots is disclosed. One LED lighting unit includes a tubular housing and a plurality of LED assemblies mounted about a circumference of the tubular housing. LEDs face inward from a mounting surface that is angled offset of the tube. Alternatively, at least one LED can be oriented to emit light parallel to a tangent of the housing into a light pipe that curves inside at least a portion of the tubular housing.

**19 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets**



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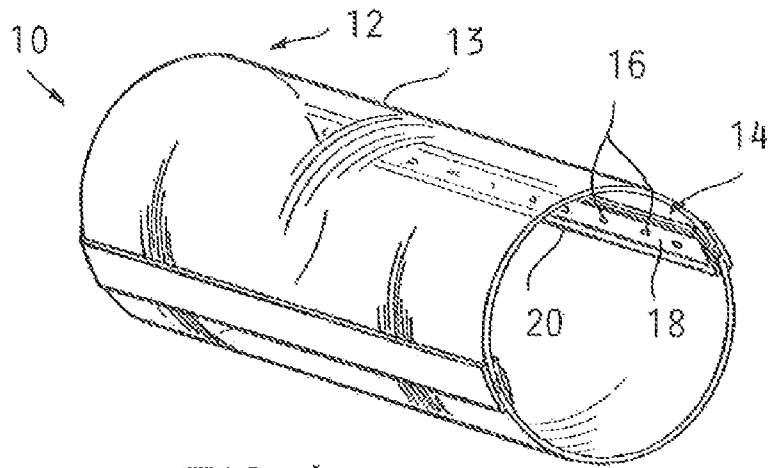


FIG. 1

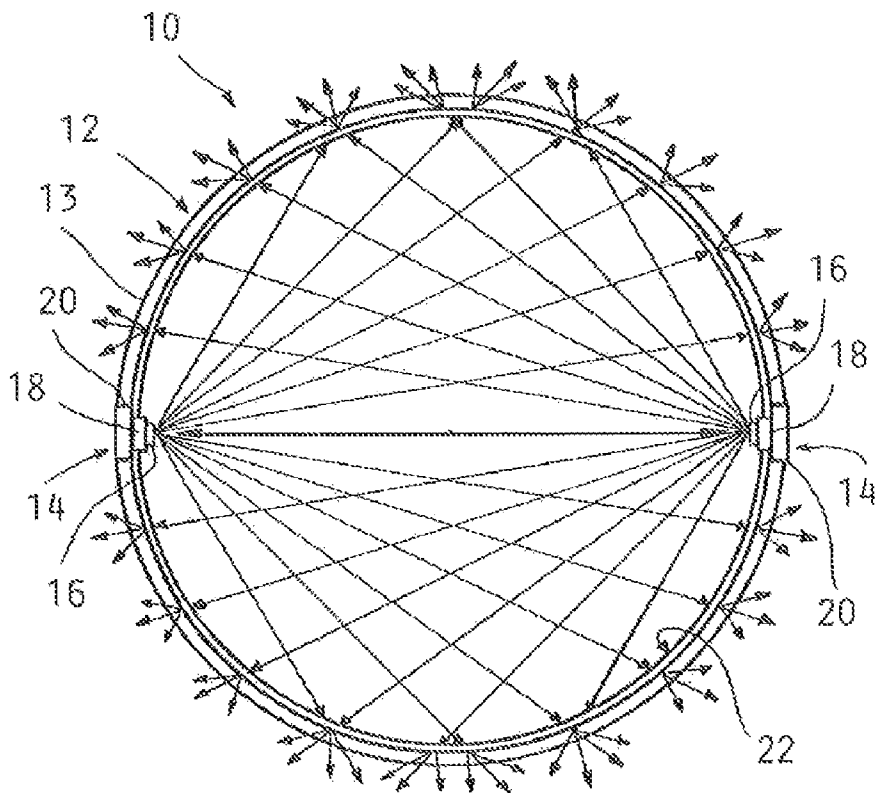


FIG. 2

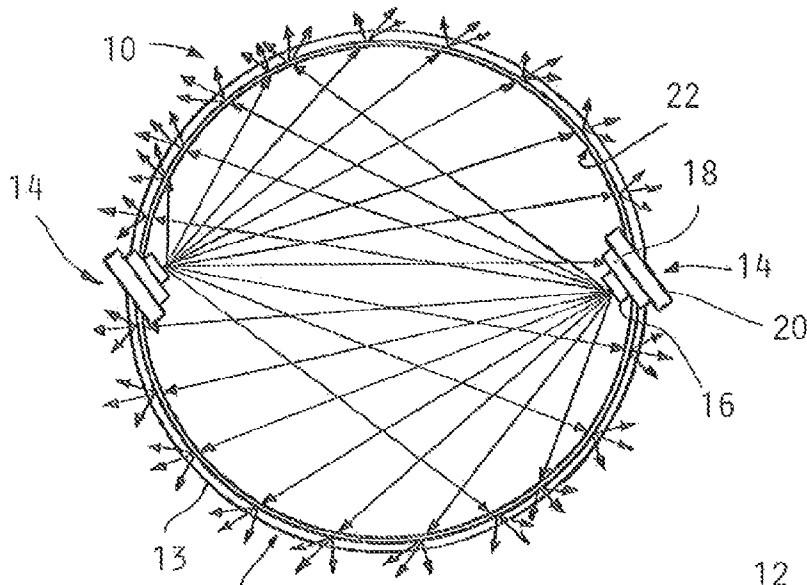


FIG. 3

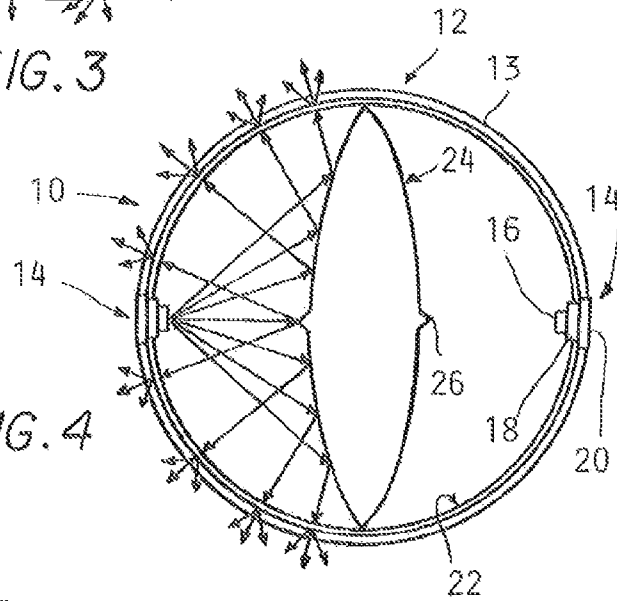


FIG. 4

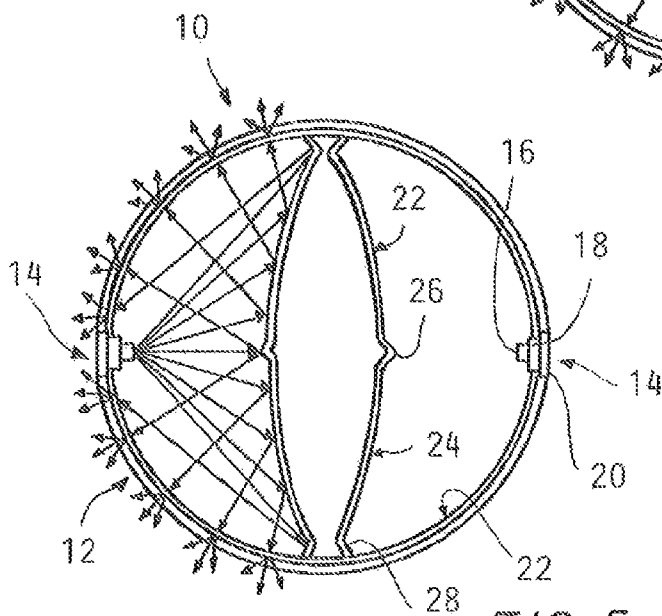


FIG. 5

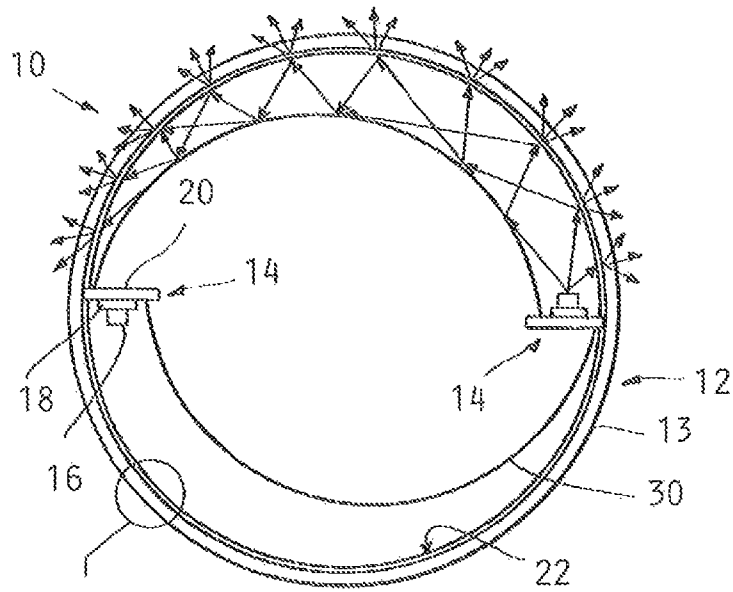


FIG. 6A

FIG. 6

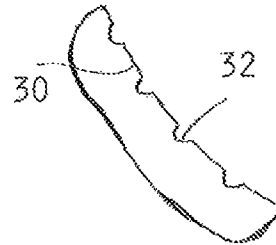


FIG. 6A

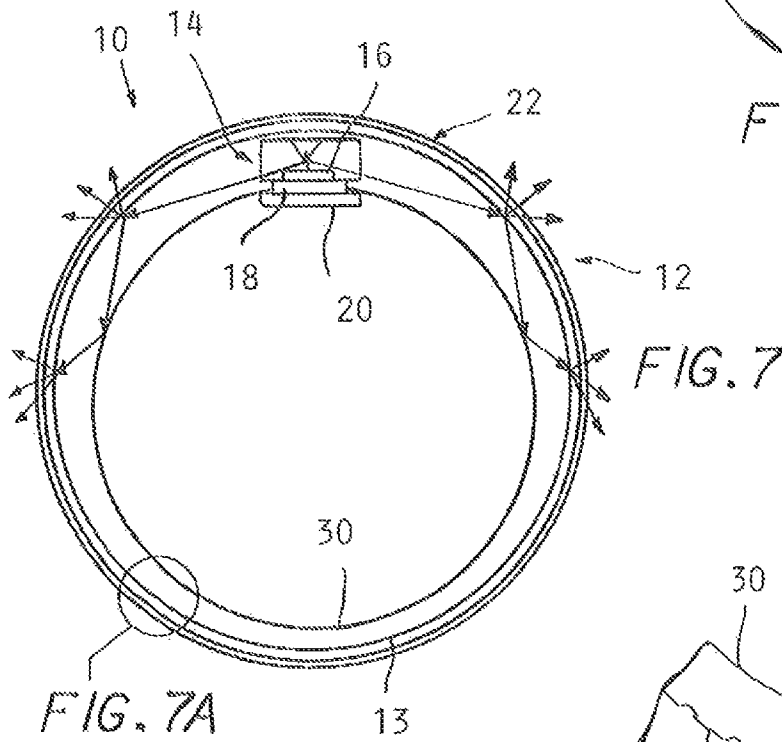


FIG. 7A

FIG. 7

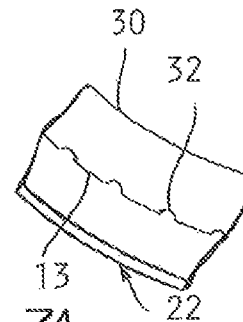


FIG. 7A

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## LIGHT DISTRIBUTION USING A LIGHT EMITTING DIODE ASSEMBLY

### CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/962,995, filed Dec. 21, 2007, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,712,918.

### TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a light emitting diode (LED) assembly, and more specifically, to a LED assembly that can replace a conventional fluorescent light in a conventional fluorescent light fixture.

### BACKGROUND

Light emitting diodes (LEDs) have many advantages over fluorescent lights. LEDs are more efficient, last longer, and are less sensitive to vibrations and low temperatures. To take advantage of the benefits of LEDs, conventional fluorescent light tubes have been retrofit to include LEDs. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 7,049,761 discloses a tube having the shape of a conventional fluorescent light tube encasing a group of LEDs. Known fluorescent light tubes retrofit with LEDs are constrained by the directional light output of the LEDs, in contrast to the uniform non-directional light output of fluorescent tubes.

### BRIEF SUMMARY

The present invention teaches LEDs in various orientations to evenly distribute light around the circumference and along the length of a tube, resulting in even lighting without obvious point sources of light. One such configuration includes a first LED assembly and a second LED assembly, each having a plurality of LEDs. A tube includes at least one tube portion, and the first and second LED assemblies are attached to longitudinal lengths of the tube portion and are oriented to face the interior of the tube. The areas of the tube that receive the least amount of light from each LED assembly receive light from multiple LED assemblies, while the sections of the tube that receive the greatest amount of light from each LED assembly only receive light from one LED assembly. Thus, in the aggregate, a similar amount of light strikes the tube around its entire circumference and along its entire length.

Another such configuration includes, for example, a tubular housing including at least one tube portion and at least one LED assembly including a plurality of LEDs. Each LED assembly is mounted to a longitudinal length of the tubular housing and is oriented to emit light parallel to a tangent of the tubular housing. This configuration also includes a light pipe associated with each LED assembly and curving inside at least a portion of the tubular housing.

Details of these embodiments, and others, are described in further detail hereinafter.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The description herein makes reference to the accompanying drawings wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views, and wherein:

FIG. 1 is an isometric view of a transparent tube with two center-facing LED assemblies mounted along longitudinal lengths of the tube;

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FIG. 2 is a side view of a tube with two center-facing LED assemblies mounted along longitudinal lengths of the tube;

FIG. 3 is a side view of a tube with two offset LED assemblies mounted along longitudinal lengths of the tube;

FIG. 4 is a side view of a tube with two center-facing LED assemblies and a reflecting surface positioned between the two LED assemblies;

FIG. 5 is a side view of a tube similar to the tube shown in FIG. 4, but the reflecting surface has bends to direct light back toward the perimeters of the LED assemblies;

FIG. 6 is a side view of a tube with two radially mounted LED assemblies and two light pipes to direct light around an arc of the tube;

FIG. 6A is a partial fragmentary view of FIG. 6;

FIG. 7 is a side view of a tube with a side-emitting LED and a light pipe; and

FIG. 7A is a partial fragmentary view of FIG. 7.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

Known fluorescent light tubes retrofit with LEDs distribute light directly toward objects to be illuminated. However, distributing light directly toward objects to be illuminated can result in harsh, uneven light and the appearance of bright spots due to the narrow viewing angle of LEDs. In contrast, embodiments of a linear distribution light emitting diode assembly that provide even light are disclosed herein. By placing LEDs in certain orientations, the appearance of bright spots is overcome, and even light is provided.

Embodiments of a linear distribution light emitting diode assembly are illustrated in FIGS. 1-7. The light rays illustrated in the figures are for illustrative purposes only and are not intended to accurately portray the actual dispersion of light from the LEDs. As illustrated in FIG. 1, an LED lighting unit 10 includes a tube 12 and a LED assembly 14. The tube 12 is shaped to enable the LED lighting unit 10 to be compatible with a conventional fluorescent light fixture and includes end caps for inserting the unit 10 into such a light fixture. The LED assemblies 14 extend along longitudinal lengths of the tube 12, i.e., lengths of the tube 12 parallel to the axis of the tube 12, in order to provide light to the entire length of the tube 12. The tube 12 is formed by attaching two semi-circular tube portions 13 to the LED assemblies 14. The attachment between the tube portions 13 and the LED assemblies 14 can be by way of glue, screws, snap-fit mechanisms, or other suitable attachment mechanisms known to those of skill in the art.

If, however, the LED lighting unit 10 includes only one LED assembly 14 on a circumference of the tube 12 as illustrated in FIG. 7, one tube portion 13 can extend nearly a full circle from one side of the LED assembly 14 to the other. Alternatively, the tube 12 can be a conventional fluorescent light tube with LED assemblies 14 attached to its interior as illustrated by example in FIG. 5. The attachment between the tube 12 and the LED assemblies 14 can be by way of glue, screws, snap-fit mechanisms, or other suitable attachment mechanisms known to those of skill in the art. Also, the specific shape of the tube 12 depends on the desired use of the LED lighting unit 10. For example, the tube 12 need not be an elongated shape; it can be U-shaped, toroidal, or any other shaped required by the specific application. In such a case, the one or more LED assemblies 14 would still extend parallel to the axis of the tube (that is, would still extend in a longitudinal direction), but would be shaped to be compatible with the tube 12. For example, if the tube 12 is intended to replace a conventional ring-shaped fluorescent light, the LED assemblies

**14** extend longitudinally around the inner and outer circumferences of the ring-shaped tube to follow the curve of the tube **12**. The tube **12** can be formed of polycarbonate, glass, acrylic, and other materials known to those of skill in the art.

In the illustrated FIG. 2, the tube **12** includes a diffusing surface **22**. The diffusing surface **22** as illustrated is a diffusing film applied to the interior surface of the tube **12**. Alternatively, the diffusing surface can include light diffusing particles in a light transmitting resin applied to the interior of a transparent tube **12**. Or, instead of fixing a separate diffusing layer to a transparent tube, the tube **10** can be made of a translucent material. The tube **12** can also undergo a treatment to create a diffusing surface **22** on its interior, such as roughening the interior surface of the tube **12**. Alternatively, as illustrated in FIG. 7, light extraction structures, such as ridges **32**, dots, bumps, dimples, and other uneven surfaces, can be included on the interior surface of the tube **12**, in which case a separate diffusing layer can be included on the exterior of the tube **12**.

Each LED light assembly **14** includes a plurality of LEDs **16** and an electric circuit. The LEDs **16** included in the LED light assembly **14** emit white light. However, if desired, LEDs **16** that emit blue light, ultra-violet light or other wavelengths of light can be included. Printed circuit boards (PCB) **18** make up the electric circuitry in the illustrated embodiments. However, other types of circuit boards, for example metal core circuit boards, can be used in place of PCBs **18**. Alternatively, the circuitry can be formed directly on the interior surface of the tube **12**, such as by depositing copper onto the interior of the tube portions **13** before assembly. Likewise, wires can be used in place of a printed circuit board **18**, so long as the LEDs **16** are electrically connected and adequately supported. When wires are used, LEDs **16** can be glued directly to a heat sink **20** or, if no heat sink is necessary in the application, to the tube **12**. Because the danger of LED failure is low, the LEDs **16** can be connected in series or parallel. Heat sinks **20** are illustrated attached to each PCB **18**. However, the tube portions **13** can be formed of heat-conducting plastic materials that do not require heat sinks **20**. In an application where the tube **12** is arranged in a ring-shape, for example, it is desirable that the electric circuit include a flexible circuit board.

To facilitate a physical and electrical connection with a conventional fluorescent lighting fixture, end caps (not shown) are attached to each end of the tube **12**. The end caps include a transformer, if necessary, and any other required electrical components. Alternatively, the electrical components can reside in a portion of the tube **12**. The end caps include a necessary physical and electrical connection, such as the two-pin configuration commonly used in conventional fluorescent light fixtures. Such a structure is shown in, for example, U.S. Pat. No. 7,049,761.

In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2, two LED assemblies **14** are attached to longitudinal lengths of tube portions **13** to form tube **12**. The LED assemblies **14** are spaced apart 180° relative to the center of the tube **12**, and the LED assemblies **14** are oriented to face the center of the tube **12**. While LEDs **16** emit light in multiple directions, the direction a LED **16** is said to be “facing” is determined by reference to the direction in which emitted light travels. That is, if a line were to run in the direction an LED assembly **14** is oriented to “face”, an equal amount of light emitted by the LED **16** would pass on both sides of any plane including the line.

The light emitted by an LED **16** is the most concentrated in the region surrounding the direction the LED **16** faces. By placing two LED assemblies **14** on opposite sides of the tube **12** and orienting them to face the center of the tube **12**, an even

distribution of light around the circumference of the tube **12** is achieved because the parts of the tube **12** that receive the least amount of light from each LED assembly **14**, such as the top and bottom portions of the tube **12** as shown in FIG. 2, receive light from both LED assemblies **14**. The parts of the tube **12** that receive the most amount of light from each LED assembly **14**, such as the area of the tube **12** in the region around where the LED **16** faces, only receive light from one LED assembly **14**. Thus, in the aggregate, a similar amount of light strikes the tube **12** around its entire circumference. Further, the diffusing surface **22** provides additional bright-spot eliminating capability by diffusing the light before it exits the tube **12**. While only two LED assemblies **14** are contemplated on a single circumferential path of the tube **12** in the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2, additional LED assemblies **14** could be placed about the tube **12** for additional brightness. It is desirable but not necessary that such LED assemblies **14** be evenly-spaced about the tube **12**.

A second embodiment is illustrated in FIG. 3. Here, the LED assemblies **14** are in an offset orientation; i.e., instead of facing the center of the tube **12**, the LED assemblies **14** in FIG. 3 are angled slightly above and below the center of the tube **12**, respectively. The LED assembly **14** orientation in the first embodiment results in some light being blocked from exiting the tube **12** by the opposing LED assembly **14**. Compared to the center-facing orientation of the first embodiment, the offset orientation of the second embodiment permits an increased amount of light to exit the tube **12**, resulting in an increased overall brightness of the LED lighting unit **10**. The number of LED assemblies **14** around one circumference of the tube **12** and the spacing of the LED assemblies **14** can be varied from the configuration shown in FIG. 3, but it is desirable that such assemblies **14** be distributed evenly around the circumference of the tube **12** as mentioned above. Additionally, the offset angle, i.e., the angle between the direction a LED **16** faces and the center-facing direction, can be varied. The greater the offset angle, the less light is blocked by the opposing LED assembly **14**. However, the trade-off of increasing the offset angle is that the light distribution becomes less even as the angle increases.

In another embodiment, as shown in FIG. 4, a reflecting surface **24** is placed inside the tube **12**. The reflecting surface **24** is made of a reflective material, such as a mirror made of glass or plastic with a metallic coating on its backside, and can include a diffusing surface if desired. The reflecting surface **24** spans a diameter of the tube **12**. Alternatively, the reflecting surface **24** can have a major length less than the diameter of the tube **12** and can be buttressed by brackets in the tube **12** or attached to end caps at each end of the tube **12**. The reflecting surface **24** has a convex shape designed to evenly distribute light throughout an arc of the tube **12**. The specific curvature of the reflecting surface **24** is dependent on the viewing angle of the LEDs **16**, the distance from each LED **16** to the reflecting surface **24**, and the number of LEDs **16** around the circumference of the tube **12**. For example, a LED **16** with a narrow viewing angle requires a greater angle of deflection than a LED **16** with a wide viewing angle in order to achieve the same distribution of light across an arc of the tube **12**. Additionally, a lip **26** projects from the reflecting surface **24** near the point where each LED **16** faces the reflecting surface **24**. The lip **26** is a projection from the reflecting surface **24** that directs light around the LED assembly **14** that would otherwise be reflected off the reflecting surface **24** right back toward the LED assembly **14**. Thus, the lip **26** increases the amount of light that is able to exit the tube **12**, thereby increasing the brightness of the LED lighting unit **10**.

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Another embodiment includes a bend **28** in the reflecting surface **24** as illustrated FIG. 5. The reflecting surface **24** in this embodiment is similar to the reflecting surface **24** in the previous embodiment, except bends **28** are disposed near the junction of the reflecting surface **24** and the tube **12**. Each bend **28** is angled to direct light through the area of the tube **12** just outside the perimeter of an LED assembly **14**. By directing light through the tube **12** in the vicinity of the LED assembly **14**, the occurrence of dark spots created by the LED assemblies **14** is reduced. This embodiment also features a diffusing surface **22** on the reflecting surface **24**.

An embodiment illustrated in FIG. 6 features at least one LED assembly **14** mounted radially to the tube **12**. In this orientation, the radially-mounted LED assembly **14** faces parallel to a tangent of the tube **12** at the location the LED assembly **14** is mounted. A first end of a light pipe **30** is adjacent to each LED **16** to receive the emitted light. The pipe **30** then curves around the inside of the tube **12** until the second end of the pipe **30** is adjacent to the backside of the next LED assembly **14**. The light pipe **30** tapers as it arcs around the circumference of the tube **12**. The large cross section of the light pipe **30** in the vicinity of LED **16** allows a high proportion of light to arc around the tube **12** instead of exiting. As the light arcs around the tube **12** and the quantity of light in the light pipe **30** decreases due to a portion of the light exiting the tube **12**, the smaller cross section of the light pipe **30** forces a higher proportion of light out of the tube **12**. Thus, an even amount of light exits the tube **12** through the entire arc of the tube **12**. The light pipe **30** is constructed of plastic with a metallic coating to reflect light. The light pipe **30** can also be constructed of mirrored glass. Regardless of the material selected, the light pipe **30** should have as close to total internal reflection as possible in order to maximize the brightness of the LED lighting unit **10**.

The surface of the light pipe **30** in this embodiment includes light extraction structures, specifically ridges **32** as illustrated. Light extraction structures can take other shapes, such as dots, bumps, dimples, and other uneven surfaces. The size and shape of such light extracting structures can vary over a circumference and a length of the tube **12** to create a uniform distribution of light over the circumference and length of the tube **12**. For example, the structures can be small and sparse near the LED **16** where the flux of light is high, and larger and more dense away from the LED **16** where the flux of light is low. If multiple LEDs **16** are placed around a circumference of the tube **12**, there can be multiple areas around the circumference of the tube **12** that have densely spaced light extracting structures. The placement of light extracting structures is determined by software, such as the software disclosed in Michael Zollers, "Integrated Optimization Capabilities Provide a Robust Tool for LED Backlight Design," LEDs Magazine (October 2006), pp. 27-29, which is hereby incorporated by reference. The light extracting structure placement can also be determined in other ways, such as through experimentation or hand calculation. Alternatively, the surface of the light pipe **30** can be smooth; the light pipe **30** need not include light extraction structures.

If there is only one LED assembly **14** on a circumference of the tube **12**, the light pipe **30** completes almost an entire rotation inside the tube **12** before ending on the opposite side of the LED assembly **14** from which it started, thereby distributing light over nearly the entire circumference of the tube **12**. In operation, a portion of the light emitted by an LED **16** hits the tube **12** having an angle of incidence less than the critical angle of the tube **12** and exits the tube **12**, a portion hits the tube **12** having an angle of incidence equal to or greater than the critical angle of the tube **12** and is deflected back into the

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tube **12**, and a portion initially contacts the light pipe **30**. The light pipe **30** deflects the light that hits it back toward the tube **12**. Thus, light rays can ricochet through an arc before exiting the tube **12**, resulting in an even distribution of light through the arc.

An embodiment illustrated in FIG. 7 features a side-emitting LED **16** and a light pipe **30** similar to the light pipe **30** in the fifth embodiment. The side-emitting LED **16** emits a disc of light at approximately a right angle to the direction the LED **16** faces. The LEDs **16** about the tube **12** such that the LEDs **16** emit light parallel to a local tangent of the tube **12**. In this embodiment, the circuit board **18** and heat sink **20** are mounted below the LED **16** on the interior of the tube **12**. Alternatively, the circuit board **18** and heat sink **20** can be mounted on the outside of the tube **12**. The light pipe **30** curves around the inside of the tube **12**, extending from one side of the LED **16** to the other and forming a channel between the tube **12** and the light pipe **30**. The light pipe **30** is tapered such that the portion of the light pipe **30** furthest from the LED **16** is closest to the tube **12**. The tapered shape of the light pipe **30** causes a high proportion of light to exit the tube **12** when the quantity of light is low and results in an even distribution of light around the circumference of the tube **12**. Thus, light exits the side of the LED **16** and curves around a circumference of the tube **12**, reflecting between the tube **12** and the light pipe **30** until the light strikes the tube **12** at an angle less than the critical angle and exits the tube **12**. Alternatively, multiple LED assemblies **14** can be disposed about the circumference of the tube **12**, in which case a light pipe **30** extends between each of the LED assemblies **14**. Also, light extracting structures can be placed on the light pipe **30** as discussed in the previous embodiment.

The above-described embodiments have been described in order to allow easy understanding of the invention and do not limit the invention. On the contrary, the invention is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent arrangements included within the scope of the appended claims, which scope is to be accorded the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all such modifications and equivalent structure as is permitted under the law.

What is claimed is:

1. An LED lighting unit for replacing a conventional fluorescent bulb of a conventional fluorescent lighting fixture comprising:

a tubular housing including at least one tube portion; and a plurality of LED assemblies spaced about a circumference of the tubular housing and extending in a longitudinal direction along the tubular housing; and wherein each of the plurality of LED assemblies includes a plurality of LED devices mounted on a respective mounting surface, and each mounting surface is angled offset from a tangent of the tubular housing that is centered at a mounting location of that mounting surface.

2. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, wherein the plurality of LED assemblies comprises a first LED assembly and a second LED assembly spaced 180° apart about the circumference of the tubular housing.

3. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, further comprising a reflecting surface inside the tubular housing.

4. The LED lighting unit of claim 3, wherein the reflecting surface spans a diameter of the interior of the tube wherein an equal number of LED assemblies are located on the circumference of the tubular housing on each side of the diameter.

5. The LED lighting unit of claim 4, wherein the reflecting surface includes a diffusing surface.

6. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, wherein each tube portion has an arc-shaped cross-section, a transparent outer

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layer, a diffusing interior layer, and is made of at least one of polycarbonate, acrylic and glass.

7. The LED lighting unit of claim 6, further comprising: a first semicircular tube portion attached to a first LED assembly and a second LED assembly of the plurality of LED assemblies; and

a second semicircular tube portion attached to the first LED assembly and the second LED assembly.

8. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, further comprising: a heat sink attached to each of the plurality of LED assemblies.

9. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, wherein the tubular housing includes one tube portion having a circular cross-section.

10. The LED lighting unit of claim 1, wherein each mounting surface includes a circuit board.

11. The LED lighting unit of claim 1 wherein the tubular housing comprises a single tubular housing having an inner surface and the plurality of LED assemblies is equidistantly spaced about the inner surface of the tubular housing.

12. The LED lighting unit of claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of LED devices is mounted on its respective mounting surface so that its emitted light is oriented to face away from an exterior of the tubular housing at the mounting location of that mounting surface.

13. An LED lighting unit for replacing a conventional fluorescent tube of a conventional fluorescent lighting fixture comprising:

a tubular housing including at least one tube portion and a hollow center;

at least one LED assembly including a plurality of LEDs on a mounting surface, each LED assembly mounted to a

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longitudinal length of the tubular housing with the mounting surface oriented such that an emitting direction of the plurality of LEDs is parallel to a tangent of the tubular housing, the tangent of the tubular housing being centered at a mounting location of the mounting surface respectively associated with each of the at least one LED assembly; and

a light pipe associated with each LED assembly and having an opening extending radially from an inner surface of the tubular housing, the opening facing the emitting direction of the plurality of LEDs, and the light pipe curving inside the inner surface of the tubular housing and about at least a portion of the hollow center.

14. The LED lighting unit of claim 13, wherein each LED assembly includes a circuit board mounted radially to the longitudinal length of the tubular housing.

15. The LED lighting unit of claim 13, wherein each LED assembly includes a side-emitting LED.

16. The LED lighting unit of claim 13, wherein the surface of the light pipe includes a plurality of light extracting structures.

17. The LED lighting unit of claim 16, wherein the density of light extracting structures on the interior surface of the tubular housing varies over an arc of the light pipe.

18. The LED lighting unit of claim 13, further comprising: a plurality of light extracting structures on the interior surface of the tubular housing; and a diffusing layer on the exterior of the tubular housing.

19. The LED lighting unit of claim 13, further comprising a plurality of LED assemblies equidistantly spaced about the hollow center.

\* \* \* \* \*