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Gaseous Electronics Conference
RF Reference Cell

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The Gaseous Electronics Conference Radio-Frequency Reference Cell

Preface

One of the most important commercial applications of low-temperature, radio-frequency (rf) glow discharges is the fabrication of microelectronic circuitry. However, many plasma-based production processes suffer from reliability problems. A process may work well for some time and then fail mysteriously, or a process may yield certain results in one plasma reactor, and completely different results in another. These types of uncertainties in process and reactor performance cause decreased manufacturing efficiency, increased costs, and limit the development of increasingly complex semiconductor devices.

The unpredictability of semiconductor fabrication processes has been attributed to subtle differences in reactor conditions that could not easily be detected, such as feed gas impurities, surface conditioning, surface charging, and minor variations in electrical circuits. However, progress in isolating the effects of these conditions was slowed by the fact that the plasma reactors used by many researchers were so vastly different in design from one another, that differences in experimental data due to reactor conditions could not be separated from the effects of different reactor geometries.

An attempt to formally address this problem at the 1988 Gaseous Electronics Conference (GEC) resulted in the design of the GEC RF Reference Cell: a parallel plate, capacitively-coupled, rf plasma reactor that, in principle, is suitable for studies of basic discharge phenomena, investigation of industrial-type plasmas, and theoretical modeling. The use of several of these chambers to perform similar experiments in different laboratories, with subsequent comparison of results, was proposed to isolate the effects of reactor geometry from other experimental variables. Over the years, the number of GEC Cells has increased from 6 to 25, and they are now found in 19 different laboratories throughout the United States and Europe. Work performed on GEC Cells has resulted in the publication of over 75 articles and reports, and has been presented at numerous conferences.

At the 1993 Gaseous Electronics Conference, it was determined that a sufficient amount of research had been performed on GEC Cells that a review of the available data would be useful, and so it was decided that a Special Issue of the *Journal of Research of the National Institute of Standards and Technology* would be dedicated to work performed on GEC RF Reference Cells. Submission of articles to this Special Issue corresponded to the hosting of the 1994 Gaseous Electronics Conference by NIST. The issue before you is the result of that decision. This issue contains 12 articles that review nearly all of the experiments and theoretical modeling efforts that have been performed over the last 5 years using GEC Cells. While the emphasis of these articles is on the comparison of data obtained on different GEC Cells, together they serve as a “users’ guide” to the operation and performance of the GEC Cell. Hopefully, this makes this issue useful to both novices and experts in the plasma processing community.

All of the articles in this issue have been reviewed, and I am grateful to the many scientists at NIST and elsewhere who served as referees. I also wish to thank Julian Ives for his invaluable assistance in the production of this Special Issue.

James K. Olthoff
Editor

Contents

The Gaseous Electronics Conference Radio-Frequency Reference Cell

Preface

Articles

The Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell— An Introduction	J. K. Olthoff and K. E. Greenberg	327
Current and Voltage Measurements in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	Mark A. Sobolewski	341
Optical Emission Spectroscopy on the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	J. R. Roberts	353
Optical Diagnostics in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	G. A. Hebner and Kenneth E. Greenberg	373
Studies of Ion Kinetic-Energy Distributions in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	J. K. Olthoff, R. J. Van Brunt, and S. B. Radovanov	383
Microwave Diagnostic Results from the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	Lawrence J. Overzet	401
Langmuir Probe Measurements in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	M. B. Hopkins	415
An Inductively Coupled Plasma Source for the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	Paul A. Miller, Gregory A. Hebner, Kenneth E. Greenberg, Paul D. Pochan, and Ben P. Aragon	427
Reactive Ion Etching in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	M. L. Brake, J. T. P. Pender, M. J. Buie, A. Ricci, J. Soniker, P. D. Pochan, and P. A. Miller	441
Dusty Plasma Studies in the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	H. M. Anderson and S. B. Radovanov	449
One-Dimensional Modeling Studies of the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	T. R. Govindan and M. Meyyappan	463
Two-Dimensional Self-Consistent Radio Frequency Plasma Simulations Relevant to the Gaseous Electronics Conference RF Reference Cell	Dimitris P. Lymberopoulos and Demetre J. Economou	473

Conference Reports

Forty-Seventh Annual Gaseous Electronics Conference	Richard J. Van Brunt and Jean W. Gallagher	495
---	---	-----

News Briefs

GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS	501
New Web Site Serves as Guide to NII Photovoltaic Hot Water System Exceeds Expectations Stress Measurements Assess Railroad Wheel Safety	
August Conference Focuses on Diamond Applications Accurate Prices Goal of New NCWM Procedure USDA Adopts Updated Versions of Two NIST Handbooks Energy-Related Inventions Program Recommendations	502
NIST Helps Company with Measurement of Pulse Energy for Inkjet Print-Heads Bioelectrical Impedance Analyzers Studied Partial Discharge Measurement Laboratory Established	503
NIST Facilitates International Workshop on Ultra-Shallow Profiles in Semiconductors NIST Testing Machining Centers for Industry NIST and Private Company Collaborate in Presenting the Practical Application of Scanned Probe Microscopy NIST'S Participation in the Newly Launched Apparel Research Network Program	504
X-Ray Spectrometry in Electron Beam Instruments New Publication Focuses on Analytical Methods for Cancer Chemopreventive Agents Workshop on the "Treatment of Gaseous Emissions via Plasma Technology" Hosted by NIST NIST Parallel Applications Development Environment (PADE) Released	505
Nanodetector Produces First Images CRADA Signed with Private Company to Share Parallel Computing Software NIST and the Council on Ionizing Radiation Measurements and Standards Host Workshop on Radiation Protection Photonic Films	506
Workshop on Materials Property Measurements X-Ray Diffraction Imaging of ZnSe Substrates for Blue-Green LEDs Thermal Barrier Coatings Workshop NIST Work Featured at Automotive Conference	507
Thermal Behavior of Polymer Ultrathin Films Thermal Diffusivity Measurements in Multilayer Thermal Barrier Coatings NSF Renews Support for the Center for High Resolution Neutron Scattering	508
NIST Develops New Method for Measuring Refrigerant Flammability NIST Participates in Development of Remote Database Access Standard Secretary of Commerce Approves Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) for Document Application Profile	509
New Publication Looks at Object-Oriented Technology Information Security Training Attracts Large Federal Audience NVCASE Public Workshop Held Calibration Accreditation Cryptographic Module Validation	510

Patent Issued on the Application of Arrays of Miniature Hotplates to Materials Processing Latest Gage Block Calibration System at NIST NIST Asserts New Approach to Unifying Rockwell Hardness Standards	511
First Technical Meeting of Computer-Aided Manufacturing Forum Held International Comparison of Humidity Standards at NIST Synthesis and In Situ Characterization of Superparamagnetic Nanocomposites from Vapor Phase Condensation in a Flame	512
Computational Thermochemistry of $\text{Si}_x\text{H}_y\text{O}_z$ Reactions Role of Radiocarbon Measurement Technology in Meeting Urban Air Quality Standards Eighth Annual Workshop on Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry	513
Workshop on Infrared Microspectroscopy With Synchrotron Radiation Sources Ocean Radiometry Workshop at NIST CRADA Investigates Radiation Engineering for Environmental Cleanup	514
NIST Assists Industry in Thermoplastics Engineering Design Method Developed to Measure Material Density at Surfaces Micromagnetic Modeling Workshop	515
NIST Researchers Receive Patent for a Welding Control System NIST Hosts Joint Meeting with NSF Center for Science and Technology of Advanced Cement-Based Materials NIST Models Radon Transport in Large Multizone Buildings Fault Detection and Diagnosis Using Artificial Neural Networks	516
Proceedings of Text Retrieval Conference Published New Publication Gives Blueprint for Electronic Access to Historical Information Report Details Benefits of Electronic Workshop Commerce, Energy Join Forces to Aid Manufacturers	517
First Full-Scale Fire Tests for High Ceilings Done Distribution Amplifiers Yield Low Noise, High Isolation	518
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIALS SRM 2391—PCR-Based DNA Profiling Standard	518
Eight Thousand Series RMs for Fine Gold, Fine Silver, and Gold Bullion from the Royal Canadian Mint (RCM) SRM 1632b, 1635 Trace Elements in Coal SRM 656—Silicon Nitride Powders for Quantitative Analysis by Powder Diffraction	519
NIST Issues Radiopharmaceutical SRM for Health Care Providers NIST Sets Standard for Domestic Sludge	520
