Model Development for Image Reversal Resist Lithography

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ABSTRACT

The variation due to batch-to-batch inconsistency and aging can be a major process control issue for image reversal resist. We experimentally found that the dose-to-activate and the develop-to-clear time can be used to characterize both the batch-to-batch variation and resist aging. Using simplifying assumptions, we have developed a new mathematical model that correlates both resist linewidth and undercut with basic resist characteristics and processing conditions. This model greatly simplifies the resist qualification process and saves engineering time.

INTRODUCTION

Metal lift-off process plays an important role in the metallization of GaAs IC’s since they account for about half of the lithography steps. In our wafer fab, image reversal (IR) resist is used for all lift-off layers. The chemistry of the image reversal resist was described by Buhr et al. [1]. Image reversal is achieved by crosslinking of Novolak resin. The crosslinker is activated by the acid that is generated photolytically. The process flow consists of resist coating and softbake on a track, image exposure using a stepper, reversal bake (also called post exposure bake), flood exposure, and a spray puddle develop [1, 2].

Due to the complexity of the resist system, the photoresist from different batches was usually not consistent enough to maintain the desired linewidth (CD) control. Photoresist from the same batch may change its characteristics dramatically due to aging. We experienced those problems when switching from one batch to another. The resist profile changed so much that metal could not be lifted, and the litho process needs to be regularly adjusted. The qualification of resist and maintaining process control are very time-consuming.

In this paper, we have identified some resist properties that are easy to measure and can be used to characterize the resist batch-to-batch variations and the resist aging. We have developed a mathematical model that correlates those resist properties and process variables to both resist CD and undercut (see Fig. 1), simplifying the resist qualification and process control.

Fig. 1 Reentrant resist profile for metal lift-off process

RESIST VARIATIONS

We used a dyed IR resist stored in a refrigerator per manufacturer’s specification. In the following discussion, we will designate the resist variation from different batches as batch-to-batch variation, and the changes over time for the same batch as resist aging.

In order to characterize batch-to-batch variation and resist aging, we looked at variables such as resist thickness, properties in positive tone such as dose-to-clear $E_0$, and develop-to-clear time $t_{d2c}$, and in negative tone such as dose-to-activate $E_a$, for different batches and within a batch over time. Dose-to-activate $E_a$ (also called interface gel dose), is the minimal image exposure dose that generates minimal amount of photoacid to activate crosslinking reactions. Develop-to-clear time $t_{d2c}$, is the minimal development time that just makes the wafer clear of resist. The samples we used for $t_{d2c}$ measurement were prepared by first coating a Silicon wafer with 1.3 um IR resist, followed by post exposure bake and develop.

Table 1 lists the $E_0$, $E_a$, and $t_{d2c}$ from different batches of resist. Both $E_a$ and $t_{d2c}$ vary as much as 77% and 50%, respectively, and we will see
that they dramatically affect both CD and \( u \). \( E_o \) showed a large batch-to-batch variation. However, since the flood exposure dose is about three times the dose-to-clear and the resist in positive tone is over exposed, its variation does not affect the linewidth and undercut. We found no obvious resist thinning or thickening over the shelf time for this resist. Similarly the resist thickness from different batches was relatively constant.

Table 1. Resist Characteristics for different batches of dyed resist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batch #</th>
<th>571</th>
<th>681</th>
<th>6D1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( E_o (\text{mJ/cm}^2) )</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change * in ( E_o )</td>
<td>-28%</td>
<td>-30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( E_a (\text{mJ/cm}^2) )</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change in ( E_a )</td>
<td>+88%</td>
<td>+77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( t_{d2e} (\text{sec}) ) **</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change in ( t_{d2e} )</td>
<td>-39%</td>
<td>+50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note *: % change is based on resist batch 571.
**: \( t_{d2e} \) is the initial value from each batch.

Table 2 lists changes in \( t_{d2e} \) over time at ambient conditions for four different bottles of resist from the same batch. The first three bottles had the same initial \( t_{d2e} \), but \( t_{d2e} \) increased with time for as much as 87% from its initial value. The last bottle after being in refrigerator for 5 months had an initial \( t_{d2e} \) of 165". This showed that the resist was slowly aging even under refrigeration. The \( E_a \) did not change over time within the same batch.

Table 2. Resist aging within the same batch of resist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dye Resist</th>
<th>Days on track</th>
<th>( t_{d2e} ) (sec)</th>
<th>% change from initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st gallon (o)*</td>
<td>initial</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd gallon (68)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>+43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>+87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd gallon (89)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>+87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>+87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th gallon (152)*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>+43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>+43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * the number in brackets denotes the number of days the resist was kept in refrigerators.

In summary, different batches of resist have variations in \( E_o \), \( E_a \), and \( t_{d2e} \). For the same batch of resist, the \( t_{d2e} \) increases over the time at ambient temperature but no \( E_a \) change over time is observed.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Reentrant resist profiles are required for clean lifts. Both the linewidth and the undercut need to be controlled simultaneously. In this work, we chose image exposure dose \( E \), and development time \( t_{dev} \), to control the linewidth and the undercut because they are easier to adjust than other variables related to the post exposure bake process.

In this section, we developed a system of equations that relates resist linewidth and undercut to the process variables \( E \) and \( t_{dev} \), and basic resist properties \( E_a \) and \( t_{d2c} \). The following is a list of assumptions used:

1) \( R \propto 1/E^{\gamma} \) (1)

The resist development rate \( R \) is inversely proportional to the exposure dose with exponent \( \gamma \). We reason that that more crosslinking of the resist matrix will decrease the development rate, and higher exposure dose will generate more photoacid and therefore there will be more crosslinking. \( \gamma \) is related to a reaction order for crosslinking reactions.

2) \( \frac{\partial C_D}{\partial t_{dev}} = -R_T \) (2)

This equation says the linewidth CD measured at the resist top, changes over development time is controlled by the development rate at top of resist, \( R_T \). Because the CD here is for resist linewidth, a negative sign is added on the right hand of the equation.

3) \( \frac{R_p}{R_B} = f_1(T_{PEB}.t_{PEB}.developer property) \) (3)

This equation indicates the ratio of development rate of resist in positive tone \( R_p \), to the development rate of bottom resist \( R_B \), is a function of post exposure conditions, the type of developer (with or without surfactant, etc.) and its concentration, but independent of resist batch-to-batch variations and aging. The resist at the film bottom is only partially crosslinked, its property would be much like the resist in the positive tone after the flood exposure. Therefore even though \( R_p \) could change dramatically because of batch-to-
batch variations and resist aging as indicated by the changes in $t_{d2c}$, the ratio of $R_p/R_B$ would remain relatively constant.

$$\frac{R_a}{R_p} = f_2(T_{PEB} \cdot T_{PER} \cdot \text{developer property})$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

This assumption is similar to 3). It says that the ratio of resist development rate at dose-to-activate, $R_a$, over $R_p$, is only affected by post exposure bake conditions, the type of developer and its concentrations, but independent of resist batches and resist aging.

5) $R_T << R_B$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

Here we assume the development rate of the top resist is much smaller than that of the bottom resist. The dye in the resist creates a gradient in light intensity, therefore a gradient in exposure dose, and resist crosslinking. This is very critical to create the negative resist profiles.

Using the assumptions 1), 2), and 4) and noting

$$R_p = h/t_{d2c}$$  \hspace{1cm} (6)

where $h$ is the resist thickness, we derived the following new relationship.

$$CD = CD_0 - N_{litho}^{-1} \times h \times f_2$$

$$N_{litho} = \left(\frac{E}{E_a}\right)^\gamma \left(\frac{t_{dev}}{t_{d2c}}\right)^{-1}$$  \hspace{1cm} (7)

Where $CD_0$ is an integration constant. In the second part of the CD equation, $h$ is the resist thickness, $f_2$ is only a function of temperature and time of post exposure bake, and the type of developer and its concentration (see assumption 4). Normally all those parameters are fixed once a process is set up. The $N_{litho}$ is a dimensionless number which involves not only processing variables E and $t_{dev}$, but also the basic resist characteristics, $E_a$ and $t_{d2c}$. The resist CD is now a monotonic function of $N_{litho}$. It means that if $N_{litho}$ number is kept constant, many different combinations of E and $t_{dev}$ will give the same CD. If we plot the resist CD versus the $1/N_{litho}$, we should get a straight line for resist CD from different batches, resist aging, exposures dose, and development times.

Next we establish the relationship between the resist undercut, $u$, and the process conditions. Using the photoresist segment development concept [3], we begin with the following relationship:

$$u = -R_T t_{dev} + R_B (t_{dev} - t_{d2c})$$  \hspace{1cm} (8)

Then with assumptions 3) and 5), we derive the second new relationship of our model. This equation relates the develop time and the resist undercut as follows:

$$\frac{t_{dev}}{t_{d2c}} = a + \frac{u}{h} \times f_1$$  \hspace{1cm} (9)

where $a$ is a constant that depends on the quality of aerial image and the resist contrast. For ideal aerial image or infinity resist contrast, $a = 1$. The above equation shows that the resist undercut is a linear function of the dimensionless development time $t_{dev}/t_{d2c}$. With these two equations (Eq. 7 and 9) we can determine which E and $t_{dev}$ to use for a targeted CD and undercut.

VERIFICATION OF THE MODEL

In order to verify equation (7), resist CD data were collected from different batches listed in Table 1 in a wide range of exposure and develop conditions (exposure dose from 250 mJ/cm$^2$ to 425 mJ/cm$^2$, and development time from 220 to 600 seconds). Figure 2 shows the CD vs. the exposure dose. Different lines represent the CD from a different development time or from different batches of resist though the same development time was used. It can be seen that the CD could be very different for the same E and $t_{dev}$ due to variations in $E_a$ and $t_{d2c}$. Therefore it can be tedious to locate the correct combination E and $t_{dev}$ for a specific targeted CD and for a resist that has both batch-to-batch variation and aging effects.

Next we want to plot CD vs. $N_{litho}^{-1}$. We determined the $\gamma$ value to be 1.56 by solving the
following nonlinear least square problem. \( \hat{a} \) and \( \hat{b} \) were found to be 2.61 and 0.35, respectively.

\[
\min_{\alpha, \beta, \gamma} \left\| CD_{\text{Mes}} - (\hat{a} - \hat{b} N_{\text{litho}}^{-1}) \right\|^2 \tag{10}
\]

After the \( \gamma \) value was determined, we calculated the \( N_{\text{litho}} \) number for each data point in Figure 2 and plotted the CD vs. \( N_{\text{litho}}^{-1} \) in Figure 3. All the CD lines in Figure 2 fall closely on a single straight line as predicted by Eq. (7), showing resist CD is a linear and monotonic function of \( N_{\text{litho}}^{-1} \).

Fig. 3 Generalized Relationship between resist CD and the dimensionless \( N_{\text{litho}} \)

![Graph showing correlation between CD and dimensionless N_litho](image)

Eq. (9) indicates that if we keep the undercut the same, and for fixed resist thickness, post exposure bake conditions, developer type, and developer concentration, the dimensionless development time must remain the same. In other words if we plot \( t_{\text{dev}} \) versus \( t_{d2c} \) for fixed undercut, we should get a straight line passing through the origin. This is proved in Fig. 4 (in the left column) where resist under cut is 0.25 um.

**APPLYING THE MODEL**

After the model is validated, we can solve two equations with two unknowns to determine the processing conditions. Once the required resist undercut is specified, the \( t_{\text{dev}}/t_{d2c} \) can be determined from Eq. (9). For a targeted CD, the \( N_{\text{litho}} \) value can be uniquely determined from Eq. (7) or using Figure 3. Then, \( E \) and \( \gamma \) can be determined from the measured properties \( E_a \) and \( t_{d2c} \). This dramatically reduces the number of tests including the time-consuming cross-sectioning. In addition, the model can be used to speedup the process development for other CD and undercut requirements. The above model has been used in production for more than a year in the GaAs Fab in HP. We have reduced engineering time for resist qualification by more than 50%. We also have saved a lot of test wafers by the new resist qualification procedure.

**SUMMARY**

We experimentally found that the dose-to-activate and the develop-to-clear can be used to characterize both the batch-to-batch variation and resist aging. Furthermore, we have developed a new mathematical model that correlates both linewidth and undercut with basic resist characteristics and processing conditions through dimensionless numbers. A new resist qualification procedure was developed based on this model. The new procedure greatly saves engineering time and test wafers.

**REFERENCE**

