ELECTRICAL PROPERTIES OF PLASMA-ENHANCED CHEMICAL VAPOR DEPOSITED GERMANIUM SELENIDE FILMS

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A study of electrical properties of PECVD a-Ge-Se films has been conducted. Steady-state conductivity measurements show that PECVD samples are different from thermally evaporated (TE) layers. The conductivity in the former is thermally activated with much lower activation energy $E_\sigma$, never above 0.7 eV. Moreover, the data do not fit with Meyer-Neldel relation which is universally observed in amorphous semiconductors. PECVD of Ge-Se films may provide a way of changing their electrical properties, while essentially preserving the optical ones with respect to TE films. The presence of hydrogen could be responsible for these changes.

(Received May 17, 2005; accepted July 21, 2005)

Keywords: Plasma-enhanced chemical vapour deposition, Germanium selenide, Electrical properties

1. Introduction

Plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) has become one of the standard methods of preparing amorphous silicon-type materials due to the presence of hydrogen which effectively reduces the density of localized gap states [1]. However, PECVD has had considerably less impact on the preparation of chalcogenide layers. After some initial investigations by Fritzscche and co-workers [2,3] failed to show significant differences between PECVD and thermally evaporated (TE) films for the As-S and As-Se systems, interest only picked up again [4, 5, 6], when also a-Ge-Se layers were being produced. In these references the optical properties, infrared (IR) and Raman spectra of these materials were studied.

In this work, we report on steady-state conductivity measurements to study the electronic properties of PECVD Ge-Se films. The results will be compared with those of films prepared through traditional TE technique [7].

2. Samples

Amorphous Ge$_x$Se$_{1-x}$ films were prepared by 13.5 MHz plasma discharge of hydrogen-diluted mixtures of GeH$_4$ and H$_2$Se gasses. All samples examined in this study are listed in Table 1. The molecular fraction of GeH$_4$ to H$_2$Se in the gas flow was 1/8, 1/12, 1/18 and 1/24. Electron microprobe analysis showed that the Ge content varies between 40 and 24.5 and the stoichiometric composition GeSe$_2$ is achievable by using a 1/8 ratio [7]. Corning 7059 glass substrates were placed on either the radio frequency (rf) or the grounded (gr) electrode of the reactor; comparable Ge contents were achieved in films on both electrodes. The substrate temperature during deposition was kept at either room temperature or 175 °C. Deposition at high substrate temperature is found to increase the germanium content in the deposited films while the gas ratio is kept constant; 1/12 gas

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ratio for example usually yields 27 at.% germanium, but this amount grows to 35.6 at.% by heating the substrate. Film thickness varies between 0.6 and 2.5 µm. For the conductivity measurements, coplanar gold electrodes were evaporated onto the a-Ge₅Se₁₀₀₋ₓ layers to provide gap cells with an active area of 0.5x10 mm².

Extensive sets of measurements were carried out for the dark and photo-conductivity as a function of temperature and - for the photocurrent - light intensity.

3. Dark conductivity

Dark conductivity measurements were made by applying 10 to 100 V across the gap. Selected representative electrical dark conductivity results are shown in Fig. 1. It is clear that for all samples the dark conductivity is thermally activated according to $\sigma = \sigma_0 \exp(-E_\sigma/kT)$ in the temperature range 294 to 400 K. From the curves the activation energy, $E_\sigma$, and the prefactor $\sigma_0$ were calculated, and the conductivity at room temperature, $\sigma_{300}$, was measured for each sample. The parameters $E_\sigma$, $\sigma_{300}$, and $\sigma_0$, are listed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample No.</th>
<th>GeH/HeSe ratio</th>
<th>Electrode type</th>
<th>Substrate temp. (°C)</th>
<th>Ge at. %</th>
<th>$\sigma_{300}$ ($\Omega \cdot \text{cm})^{-1}$</th>
<th>$\sigma_0$ ($\Omega \cdot \text{cm})^{-1}$</th>
<th>$E_\sigma$ (eV)</th>
<th>$E_{\text{ph}}$ (eV)</th>
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<tr>
<td>333</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>gr</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>5x10⁻¹⁴</td>
<td>8.4x10⁻³</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>335</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>rf</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9x10⁻¹⁴</td>
<td>1.0x10⁻³</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>339</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>gr</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>2x10⁻⁸</td>
<td>1.0x10⁻²</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>1/8</td>
<td>rf</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>- PC</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1/8</td>
<td>gr</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2x10⁻¹³</td>
<td>1.1x10⁻²</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<tr>
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<td>gr</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>0.61</td>
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<td>gr</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>1/18</td>
<td>rf</td>
<td>RT</td>
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<td>1x10⁻⁶</td>
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<td>gr</td>
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<tr>
<td>413</td>
<td>1/12</td>
<td>rf</td>
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<td>2x10⁻¹¹</td>
<td>2.2x10⁻³</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The variations of $E_\sigma$ and $\sigma_{300}$ with germanium content are drawn in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 respectively. The figures include a set of data, from reference [6], for thermally evaporated films for comparison. It is obvious from the results that these parameters are not systematic with the Ge content of the PECVD samples, while a more systematic relation has been observed for TE layers. In Fig. 2 the activation energy for TE films never drops below 0.8 eV and shows a maximum of $\sim$1.2 eV at the stoichiometric composition GeSe₂, while $E_\sigma$ never rises above 0.7 eV for all measured
PECVD samples, and does not show any particular trend. The high conductivity values in PECVD films allow measurements around room temperature (300 K). Since this was not possible for TE layers, they are compared in Fig. 3 with TE values measured at 400 K. While $\sigma$ values in PECVD films are spread over a range of nine orders with no apparent trend, the TE values change with composition and a minimum is revealed near $\sim 40\%$ Ge.

![Graph](image1)

**Fig. 1.** Electrical dark conductivity temperature dependence for PECVD samples, the (×) represents sample 333, (♦) 348, (●) 361, (□) 362, (─) 411 and (●) 363 respectively.

![Graph](image2)

**Fig. 2.** Activation energy, $E_o$, of the dark conductivity vs. Ge content for PECVD samples (full symbols) and evaporated layers (open symbols).
A relationship between $\sigma_0$ and the activation energy $E_\sigma$, the so called Meyer-Neldel relation (MNR) \([8] \sigma_0 \propto \exp(E_\sigma/E^*)\), is widely seen in disordered semiconductors. It is observed in many activated processes including time-dependent transport behaviour, as well as steady-state properties such as conductivity. Fig. 4 shows MNR for PECVD and evaporated samples. While the data for TE layers of a-Ge-Se (from reference [7]) shows a nice fit to the MNR rule, PECVD data are scattered in a wide range of the graph with no trend to be found among them.

### 4. Steady-state photoconductivity

#### 4.1 Temperature dependence

Representative photoconductivity data as a function of temperature for PECVD films are shown in Fig. 5; their corresponding dark current measurements are shown in Fig. 1. In general an exponential decrease with temperature is revealed, sometimes with high uncertainty for the
activation energy, depending on sample quality. Comparing the ratio photocurrent/dark current (i.e. the photosensitivity $I_{ph}/I_d$) between TE and PECVD samples, one observes that low photosensitivity generally characterizes PECVD samples. The relative photo-insensitivity made it impossible to measure spectrally resolved photocurrents, whence the full spectral range of the lamp, i.e. white light, was used for illumination. To first approximation the values for the activation energy ($E_{ph}$) - the slopes of the curves in Fig. 5 - are listed in Table 1 for all samples under investigation. $E_{ph}$ values generally vary between 0.2 and 0.3 eV, and their composition dependence are compared with TE ones in Fig. 6. Again there is no systematic relation between $E_{ph}$ and the composition for PECVD films. However, the general trend for $E_{ph}$ seems to be maintained here in that lower $E_{ph}$ values are obtained with PECVD samples, in particular in the Se-rich films.

Sample 340 shows completely different photocurrent behaviour from all others; it is observed that illumination causes the current to decrease to values smaller than the dark current level, what is known as negative photoconductivity. Details of this phenomenon are described elsewhere [9].

![Fig. 5. Temperature dependence of the photoconductivity for PECVD samples, the symbol (●) represents sample 333, (△) 348, (Δ) 361, (■) 362, (□) 411 and (○) represents sample 363. White light was used for illumination.](image)

![Fig. 6. Activation energy of the photoconductivity as a function of Ge content for PECVD samples (full symbols) and thermal evaporation layers (open symbols).](image)
4.2 Intensity dependence

We also studied the light-intensity dependence of the photocurrents. A typical set of intensity dependence curves in PECVD samples is shown in Fig. 7. It exhibits a power-law relation $I_{ph} \propto I^\gamma$, with $\gamma$ having a constant value around 0.75 at all temperatures. Chalcogenides generally show a change in the value of $\gamma$ with changing light intensity, indicating a change-over from monomolecular to bimolecular recombination behavior. However, the use of white light for illumination can induce different excitation densities in successive sample depths and thus generate curves with intermediate $\gamma$ values. But in that case the value of $\gamma$ is expected to be a function of temperature. About 100 K difference in temperature normally is enough to show differences in $\gamma$ values, but none are seen in Fig. 7.

Fig. 7. Light intensity dependence of the photocurrents of sample 347 under white light illumination at $T= 382\ (\circ), 341\ (\odot), 211\ (\Delta)$, and 295 K (o).

5. Discussion

The values for the dark current activation energy $E_a$ in PECVD samples differ drastically from those of samples prepared by TE technique. $E_a$ values, to first approximation, indicate the position of the Fermi energy in the band gap of the materials relative to the conducting band. Generally, in chalcogenides, the Fermi level is located roughly in the middle of the band gap, a situation which corresponds to the data for TE samples where $E_a \approx 1.1 - 1.2$ eV for a-GeSe$_2$ and the band gap is in the order of 2.3 eV [10, 11]. However, this is not the case for the PECVD layers. As reported by Sleichx et al. [7] our PECVD-prepared films do contain up to a few percent of hydrogen at room temperature, mainly bonded to Se atoms, but also to Ge in films which are Ge-rich with respect to the GeSe$_2$ composition. Heat treatment is found to drive out the hydrogen from the material when heated at ~150 °C [12]. However, it is not expected that the hydrogen plays the same role in chalcogenide glasses as it does in tetrahedral coordinated amorphous semiconductors because the defect chemistry in the two materials is different. Here, while the over-all electronic bonding structure remains the same [13,14], the presence of hydrogen may cause some changes in the distribution of localized states in the gap in a way that pushes the Fermi level towards the band edge. Another immediate indication for the changed defect distribution is the appearance of a power-law relation with constant exponent at all temperatures between the photocurrent and the light intensity (Fig. 7) in most PECVD samples, instead of the expected variation in the 1 to 0.5 range. It suggests that the quasi-Fermi level may be shifting in a more or less exponential distribution of localized states, rather than being held in place by the charged defects of the traditional model. It would then follow, in agreement with our observations (Fig. 6), that also $E_{ph}$ should be smaller since that quantity to first approximation then refers to the position of the quasi-Fermi level under illumination. Other consequence of such off-centre location of the Fermi level would be that the measured conductivity itself should be larger (see Table 1) as the occupation probability for the
transport states will have increased. It also has to be noted that PECVD films are not only different from others prepared by other techniques, but they also strongly differ among themselves. For example no systematic dependence of the electrical properties upon composition is seen for the PECVD samples, while such relationship always does exist for the TE layers. In addition, it is well known that a collection of differently prepared TE samples can contain different concentration of defects, thereby changing the distribution of gap states, nevertheless a nice exponential relation between $\sigma_0$ and $E_\sigma$ (MNR) does occur. In PECVD samples the presence of hydrogen seems to change the defect distribution such that the observed values of $\sigma_0$ vary randomly irrespective of $E_\sigma$ values.

6. Conclusion

The differences in the dark and photoconductivity behaviours between the PECVD and standard thermal evaporated films raises the question of the way in which the presence of hydrogen has been able to change the defect distribution of the glow-discharge material and neutralizes the negative-U centres which normally pin the Fermi level of the chalcogenides. Both the PECVD material and the TE samples that were used for comparison have been condensed from the gas phase, but obviously from vastly different precursors. So, conceivably, surviving hydrides induce a much larger degree of disorder in the PECVD network.

Acknowledgement

NQ is grateful to the Semiconductor Physics Group of the University of Leuven for the visiting scientist fellowships. We thank Prof. Piet Nagels from University of Antwerp for many fruitful discussions, and for providing the PECVD samples.

References