X-ray Inspection Test Condition Recommendations

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AN98527 discusses the X-ray inspection test conditions and recommendations that should be used to prevent damage to ICs.

1 Introduction

It has been well established that semiconductor ICs can suffer damage caused by X-ray inspection. While this phenomenon does not always result in a system level failure, customers might have no means to recover from the effects of the X-ray exposure if data corruption or other failure mode occurs. Cypress studies have shown that programmed cells within a flash array may experience a change in threshold voltage (Vt) as a result of certain X-ray inspection conditions. Any significant negative perturbation in the Vt of a programmed cell will result in incorrect sensing of the programmed bit logic state during a read operation, resulting in such bits incorrectly reading in the unprogrammed logic state.

2 Cypress X-ray Qualification Test Conditions

Below are the test conditions and equipment parameters that Cypress employs when conducting X-ray inspection as part of the product qualification process. Cypress can guarantee that its products will suffer no damage when these conditions are applied:

- **X-ray Inspection Test Equipment**
  - Shimadzu (Model SMX-160GT) *(See Note)*
  - Dosimeter: High Dose LiF TLD
  - 300-µm thick Zn Filter

- **X-ray Inspection System Conditions**
  - Tube Voltage: 110 kV
  - Tube Current: 40 µA
  - Center Distance to Source: 40 mm
  - Exposure Time: 240s

- **X-ray Inspection Test Procedure**
  - Products are functionally tested and programmed to a known data pattern containing both programmed '0' and unprogrammed '1' logic states prior to X-ray inspection.
  - Products are arranged in a circular pattern around the center of the X-ray system stage to insure uniform exposure.
  - The Zn filter is placed between the X-ray source and the products being inspected.
  - A dosimeter is included in each batch of units to record the X-ray dose absorbed during inspection.
  - Products are exposed to the X-ray beam for 240s (4 minutes), which corresponds to the worst case inspection time of most circuit board inspection systems and has been determined to be adequate to assess any board assembly issues.
  - After exposure, products are retested to insure there is no loss of functionality or change in pre-programmed data pattern has occurred.
  - With this test procedure, X-ray dose received by the products will not exceed 10 rads, while still enabling adequate imaging and resolution required for circuit board inspection.
3 X-ray Inspection Recommendations

There are many commercially available circuit board inspection systems and each employs different X-ray set up conditions and exposure doses. It is not possible to provide a single set of recommendations that will apply to all inspection systems. However, in order of effectiveness, the following are the mitigation techniques Cypress recommends to minimize the effects of any potential damage resulting from X-ray inspection:

1. If X-ray inspection is performed after the flash has been programmed, consider erasing and reprogramming the flash data.
2. Use a 300-µm thick Zn filter; 1-mm thick Al or Brass filters are also effective.
3. Use the smallest X-ray tube kV-peak possible that still produces adequate images during board inspection.
4. Use the smallest X-ray tube current possible that produces adequate images.
5. Use the largest X-ray tube to sample distance (i.e. lowest magnification) possible.
6. Use the shortest inspection time possible, preferably on a sampling basis rather than 100% board inspection.

4 X-ray Inspection References

These Cypress documents provide additional information on X-ray effects on flash:

Impact of X-Ray Inspection on Cypress Flash Memory (Application Note)
Cypress X-ray Physics.pptx (Tutorial Presentation)
## Document History Page

**Document Title:** AN98527 - X-ray Inspection Test Condition Recommendations  
**Document Number:** 001-98527

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rev.</th>
<th>ECN No.</th>
<th>Orig. of Change</th>
<th>Submission Date</th>
<th>Description of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>07/11/2012</td>
<td>Initial version</td>
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<tr>
<td>*A</td>
<td>4958468</td>
<td>MSWI</td>
<td>10/12/2015</td>
<td>Updated in Cypress template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*B</td>
<td>5841679</td>
<td>AESATMP8</td>
<td>08/02/2017</td>
<td>Updated logo and Copyright.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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