

This paper discusses methods and materials recommended for protection of ICs against ESD damage or degradation during manufacturing operations vulnerable to ESD exposure. Areas of concern include dice prep and handling, dice and package inspection, packing, shipping, receiving, testing, assembly and all operations wherever ICs are involved.

All integrated circuits are sensitive to electrostatic discharge (ESD) to some degree. Since the introduction of integrated circuits with MOS structures and high quality junctions, safe and effective means of handling these devices have been of primary importance.

If static discharge occurs at a sufficient magnitude, 2kV or greater, some damage or degradation will usually occur. It has been found that handling equipment and personnel can generate static potentials in excess of 10kV in a low humidity environment; thus it becomes necessary for additional measures to be implemented to eliminate or reduce static charge. Avoiding any damage or degradation by ESD when handling devices during the manufacturing flow is therefore essential.

ESD Protection and Prevention Measures

One method employed to protect gate oxide structures is to incorporate input protection diodes directly on the monolithic chip. However, there is no completely foolproof system of chip input protection in existence in the industry.

In areas where ICs are being handled, certain equipment should be utilized to reduce the damaging effects of ESD. Typically, equipment such as grounded work stations, conductive wrist straps, conductive floor mats, ionized air blowers and conductive packaging materials are included in the IC handling environment. Any time an individual intends to handle an IC, in any way, they must insure they have been grounded to eliminate circuit damage.

Grounding personnel can, practically, be performed by two methods. First, grounded wrist straps which are usually made of a conductive material, such as Velostat or metal. A resistor value of 1 megohm (1/2 watt) in series with the strap to ground completes a discharge path for ESD when the operator wears the strap in contact with the skin. Another method is to insure direct physical contact with a grounded, conductive work surface.

This consists of a conductive surface like Velostat, covering the work area. The surface is connected to a 1 megohm (1/2 watt) resistor in series with ground.

In addition to personnel grounding, areas where work is being performed with ICs, should be equipped with an ionized air blower. Ionized air blowers force positive and negative ions simultaneously over the work area so that any nonconductors that are near the work surface would have their static charge neutralized before it would cause device damage or degradation.

Relative humidity in the work area should be maintained as high as practical. When the work environment is less than 40% RH, a static build-up condition can exist on nonconductors allowing stored charges to remain near the ICs causing possible static electricity discharge to ICs.

Integrated circuits that are being shipped or transported require special handling and packaging materials to eliminate ESD damage. Dice or packaged devices should be in conductive carriers during all phases of transport and handling. Leads of packaged devices can be shorted by tubular metallic carriers, conductive foam or foil.

Do's and Don'ts for Integrated Circuit Handling

Do's

Do keep paper, nonconductive plastic, plastic foams and films or cardboard off the static controlled conductive bench top. Placing devices, loaded sticks or loaded burn-in boards on top of any of these materials effectively insulates them from ground and defeats the purpose of the static controlled conductive surface.

Do keep hand creams and food away from static controlled conductive work surfaces. If spilled on the bench top, these materials will contaminate and increase the resistivity of the work area.

Do be especially careful when using soldering guns around conductive work surfaces. Solder spills and heat from the gun may melt and damage the conductive mat.

Do check the grounded wrist strap connections daily. Make certain they are snugly fitted before starting work with the product.

Do put on grounded wrist strap before touching any devices. This drains off any static build-up from the operator.

Do know the ESD caution symbols.

Do remove devices or loaded sticks from shielding bags only when grounded via wrist strap at grounded work station. This also applies when loading or removing devices from the antistatic sticks or the loading on or removing from the burn-in boards.

Do wear grounded wrist straps in direct contact with the bare skin never over clothing.

Do use the same ESD control with empty burn-in boards as with loaded boards if boards contain permanently mounted ICs as part of driver circuits.

Do insure electrical test equipment and solder irons at an ESD control station are grounded and only uninsulated metal hand tools be used. Ordinary plastic solder suckers and other plastic assembly aids shall not be used.

Do use ionizing air blowers in static controlled areas when the use of plastic (nonconductive) materials cannot be avoided.

Don'ts

Don't allow anyone not grounded to touch devices, loaded sticks or loaded burn-in boards. To be grounded they must be standing on a conductive floor mat with conductive heel straps attached to footwear or must wear a grounded wrist strap.

Don't touch the devices by the pins or leads unless grounded since most ESD damage is done at these points.

Don't handle devices or loaded sticks during transport from work station to work station unless protected by shielding bags. These items must never be directly handled by anyone not grounded.

Don't use freon or chlorinated cleaners at a grounded work area.

Don't wax grounded static controlled conductive floor and bench top mats. This would allow build-up of an insulating layer and thus defeating the purpose of a conductive work surface.

Don't touch devices or loaded sticks or loaded burn-in boards with clothing or textiles even though grounded wrist strap is worn. This does not apply if conductive coats are worn.

Don't allow personnel to be attached to hard ground. There must always be 1 megohm series resistance (1/2 watt between the person and the ground).

Don't touch edge connectors of loaded burn-in boards or empty burn-in boards containing permanently mounted driver circuits when not grounded. This also applies to burn-in programming cards containing ICs.

Don't unload stick on a metal bench top allowing rapid discharge of charged devices.

Don't touch leads. Handle devices by their package even though grounded.

Don't allow plastic "snow or peanut" polystyrene foam or other high dielectric materials to come in contact with devices or loaded sticks or loaded burn-in boards.

Don't allow rubber/plastic floor mats in front of static controlled work benches.

Don't solvent-clean devices when loaded in antistatic sticks since this will remove antistatic inner coating from sticks.

Don't use antistatic sticks for more than one throughput process. Used sticks should not be reused unless recoated.

Recommended Maintenance Procedures

Daily

Perform visual inspection of ground wires and terminals on floor mats, bench tops, and grounding receptacles to ensure that proper electrical connections via 1 megohm resistor (1/2 watt) exist.

Clean bench top mats with a soft cloth or paper towel dampened with a mild solution of detergent and water.

Weekly

Damp mop conductive floor mats to remove any accumulated dirt layer which causes high resistivity.

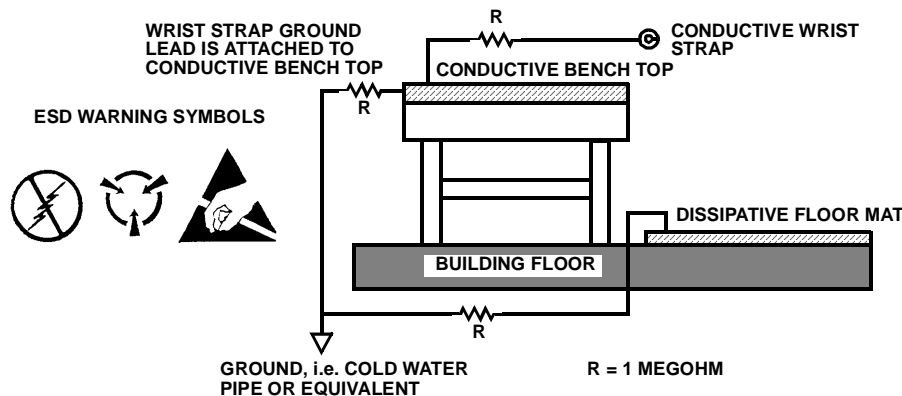
Annually

Replace nuclear elements for ionized air blowers.

Review ESD protection procedures and equipment for updating and adequacy.

Static Controlled Work Station

The figure below shows an example of a work bench properly equipped to control electro-static discharge. Note that the wrist strap is connected to a 1 megohm resistor. This resistor can be omitted in the setup if the wrist strap has a 1 megohm assembled on the cable attached.



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