TYPES OF SEMICONDUCTOR DIODE

Types:

There are several types of junction diodes, which either emphasizes a different physical aspects of a diode often by geometric scaling, doping level, choosing the right electrodes, are just an application of a diode in a special circuit, or are really different devices like the Gunn and laser diode and the JFET:

Normal (p-n) diodes

which operate as described above. Usually made of doped silicon or, more rarely, germanium. Before the development of modern silicon power rectifier diodes, cuprous oxide and later selenium was used; its low efficiency gave it a much higher forward voltage drop (typically 1.4–1.7 V per "cell", with multiple cells stacked to increase the peak inverse voltage rating in high voltage rectifiers), and required a large heat sink (often an extension of the diode's metal substrate), much larger than a silicon diode of the same current ratings would require. The vast majority of all diodes are the p-n diodes found in CMOS integrated circuits, which include 2 diodes per pin and many other internal diodes.

Switching diodes

Switching diodes, sometimes also called small signal diodes, are a single p-n diode in a discrete package. A switching diode provides essentially the same function as a switch. Below the specified applied voltage it has high resistance similar to an open switch, while above that voltage it suddenly changes to the low resistance of a closed switch. They are used in devices such as ring modulation.

Schottky diodes

Schottky diodes are constructed from a metal to semiconductor contact. They have a lower forward voltage drop than any p-n junction diode. Their forward voltage drop at forward currents of about 1 mA is in the range 0.15 V to 0.45 V, which makes them useful in voltage clamping applications and prevention of transistor saturation. They can also be used as low loss rectifiers although their reverse leakage current is generally much higher than non Schottky rectifiers. Schottky diodes are majority carrier devices and so do not suffer from minority carrier storage problems that slow down most normal diodes — so they have a faster “reverse recovery” than any p-n junction diode. They also tend to have much lower junction capacitance than PN diodes and this contributes towards their high switching speed and their suitability in high speed circuits and RF devices such as switched-mode power supply, mixers and detectors.

Super Barrier Diodes

Super barrier diodes are rectifier diodes that incorporate the low forward voltage drop of the Schottky diode with the surge-handling capability and low reverse leakage current of a normal p-n junction diode.

“Gold-doped” diodes

As a dopant, gold (or platinum) acts as recombination centers, which help a fast recombination of minority carriers. This allows the diode to operate at signal frequencies, at the expense of a higher forward voltage drop. Gold doped diodes are faster than other p-n diodes (but not as fast as Schottky diodes). They also have less reverse-current leakage than Schottky diodes (but not as good as other p-n diodes).. A typical example is the 1N914.

Snap-off or Step recovery diodes

The term ‘step recovery’ relates to the form of the reverse recovery characteristic of these devices. After a forward current has been passing in an SRD and the current is interrupted or reversed, the reverse conduction will cease very abruptly (as in a step waveform). SRDs can therefore provide very fast voltage transitions by the very sudden disappearance of the charge carriers.

Point-contact diodes

These work the same as the junction semiconductor diodes described above, but its construction is simpler. A block of n-type semiconductor is built, and a conducting sharp-point contact made with some group-3 metal is placed in contact with the semiconductor. Some metal migrates into the semiconductor to make a small region of p-type semiconductor near the contact. The long-popular 1N34 germanium version is still used in radio receivers as a detector and occasionally in specialized analog electronics.

Cat’s whisker or crystal diodes

These are a type of point contact diode. The cat’s whisker diode consists of a thin or sharpened metal wire pressed against a semiconducting crystal, typically galena or a piece of coal. The wire forms the anode and the crystal forms the cathode. Cat’s whisker diodes were also called crystal diodes and found application in crystal radio receivers. Cat’s whisker diodes are obsolete.

PIN diodes

A PIN diode has a central un-doped, or *intrinsic*, layer, forming a p-type / intrinsic / n-type structure. They are used as radio frequency switches and attenuators. They are also used as large volume ionizing radiation detectors and as photodetectors. PIN diodes are also used in power electronics, as their central layer can withstand high voltages. Furthermore, the PIN structure can be found in many power semiconductor devices, such as IGBTs, power MOSFETs, and thyristors.

Varicap or varactor diodes

These are used as voltage-controlled capacitors. These are important in PLL (phase-locked loop) and FLL (frequency-locked loop) circuits, allowing tuning circuits, such as those in television receivers, to lock quickly, replacing older designs that took a long time to warm up and lock. A PLL is faster than a FLL, but prone to integer harmonic locking (if one attempts to lock to a broadband signal). They also enabled tunable oscillators in early discrete tuning of radios, where a cheap and stable, but fixed-frequency, crystal oscillator provided the reference frequency for a voltage-controlled oscillator.

Zener diodes

Diodes that can be made to conduct backwards. This effect, called Zener breakdown, occurs at a precisely defined voltage, allowing the diode to be used as a precision voltage reference. In practical voltage reference circuits

Zener and switching diodes are connected in series and opposite directions to balance the temperature coefficient to near zero. Some devices labeled as high-voltage Zener diodes are actually avalanche diodes (see below). Two (equivalent) Zeners in series and in reverse order, in the same package, constitute a transient absorber (or Transorb, a registered trademark). They are named for Dr. Clarence Melvin Zener of Southern Illinois University, inventor of the device.

Avalanche diodes

Diodes that conduct in the reverse direction when the reverse bias voltage exceeds the breakdown voltage. These are electrically very similar to Zener diodes, and are often mistakenly called Zener diodes, but break down by a different mechanism, the *avalanche effect*. This occurs when the reverse electric field across the p-n junction causes a wave of ionization, reminiscent of an avalanche, leading to a large current. Avalanche diodes are designed to break down at a well-defined reverse voltage without being destroyed. The difference between the avalanche diode (which has a reverse breakdown above about 6.2 V) and the Zener is that the channel length of the former exceeds the “mean free path” of the electrons, so there are collisions between them on the way out. The only practical difference is that the two types have temperature coefficients of opposite polarities.

Transient voltage suppression diode (TVS)

These are avalanche diodes designed specifically to protect other semiconductor devices from high-voltage transients. Their p-n junctions have a much larger cross-sectional area than those of a normal diode, allowing them to conduct large currents to ground without sustaining damage.

Photodiodes

All semiconductors are subject to optical charge carrier generation. This is typically an undesired effect, so most semiconductors are packaged in light blocking material. Photodiodes are intended to sense light(photodetector), so they are packaged in materials that allow light to pass, and are usually PIN (the kind of diode most sensitive to light). A photodiode can be used in solar cells, in photometry, or in optical communications. Multiple photodiodes may be packaged in a single device, either as a linear array or as a two dimensional array. These arrays should not be confused with charge-coupled devices.

Light-emitting diodes (LEDs)

In a diode formed from a direct band-gap semiconductor, such as gallium arsenide, carriers that cross the junction emit photons when they recombine with the majority carrier on the other side. Depending on the material, wavelengths (or colors) from the infrared to the near ultraviolet may be produced. The forward potential of these diodes depends on the wavelength of the emitted photons: 1.2 V corresponds to red, 2.4 to violet. The first LEDs were red and yellow, and higher-frequency diodes have been developed over time. All LEDs are monochromatic; “white” LEDs are actually combinations of three LEDs of a different color, or a blue LED with a yellow scintillator coating. LEDs can also be used as low-efficiency photodiodes in signal applications. An LED may be paired with a photodiode or phototransistor in the same package, to form an opto-isolator.

Laser diodes

When an LED-like structure is contained in a resonant cavity formed by polishing the parallel end faces, a laser can be formed. Laser diodes are commonly used in optical storage devices and for high speed optical communication.

Esaki or tunnel diodes

these have a region of operation showing negative resistance caused by quantum tunneling, thus allowing amplification of signals and very simple bistable circuits. These diodes are also the type most resistant to nuclear radiation.

Gunn diodes

These are similar to tunnel diodes in that they are made of materials such as GaAs or InP that exhibit a region of negative differential resistance. With appropriate biasing, dipole domains form and travel across the diode, allowing high frequency microwave oscillators to be built.

Peltier diodes

are used as sensors, heat engines for thermoelectric cooling. Charge carriers absorb and emit their band gap energies as heat.

Current-limiting field-effect diodes

These are actually a JFET with the gate shorted to the source, and function like a two-terminal current-limiting analog to the Zener diode; they allow a current through them to rise to a certain value, and then level off at a specific value. Also called **CLDs**, **constant-current diodes**, **diode-connected transistors**, or**current-regulating diodes**.,

Other uses for semiconductor diodes include sensing temperature, and computing analog logarithms.

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