

CCC: What is it and Why is it Important to Your Test Times and Yields?

by
Harlan L. Faller, PE, MSEE
Jeff Sherry, PE, MSEE
Johnstech International

How well do you understand current carrying capacity (CCC) and its impact on your test operations? Have you experienced melted or softened device plating during test? How do handle testing if thermal breakdown of the device occurs? Does your test program require you to pulse your device numerous times to handle temperature rise and allow for cool down? Are your test times higher and your yields lower than expected due to thermal issues?

To answer these questions, let's take a closer look at CCC in its relation to semiconductor test.

CCC can be technically defined as the maximum current which an electric device is rated to carry without excessive overheating and consequent premature breakdown or combustion. To a semiconductor test contactor, CCC is a measure of the amount of current passing through a metal contact pin or circuit trace that will raise the temperature of the contact by 20°C. There is nothing magic about this number, it could just as well be 30°C or 40°C, but convention dictates that 20°C is a safe and reasonable temperature rise. By definition, it has become the unofficial *de facto* standard. Now we'll look at CCC using basic principles of physics.

All metal elements and their alloys are comprised of atoms arranged in the particular crystal lattice structure that their nature demands. An atom has a nucleus and electrons. It is the valence electrons that are the most free to move about in the electron "sea" or "wind" and by doing so, they constitute a current flow through the material when a voltage (forcing function) is impressed across the metallic material.

Now, this flow of electrons comes at a price. The path of the flow is dependent upon several factors, including the inherent conductivity of the material, its temperature, and the magnitude of the forcing function (voltage). In simple terms, the current flow obeys Ohms Law, which states that current flow is equal to the magnitude of the applied voltage divided by the inherent resistance of the contact itself. This resistance is due primarily to three things namely, the resistivity, length, and area of the contact. We can express this by the following equation.

$$R = (\rho * L)/A$$

Where:

ρ is the resistivity of the material

L is the length, and

A is the cross-sectional area normal to the flow of current

Since there is resistance to the flow of current, there will be internal heating ($I^2 * R$ losses) of the contact. If the current flow is dense enough, the temperature of the contact may rise significantly. In a suitable test fixture, we can measure this rise (via a thermocouple affixed to the side of the contact pin) and determine the CCC.

Why is CCC important? It is a measure of the "goodness" of the contact to current flow. For instance, if it takes several amperes of current to raise the temperature 20°C, then the contact is a good conductor of



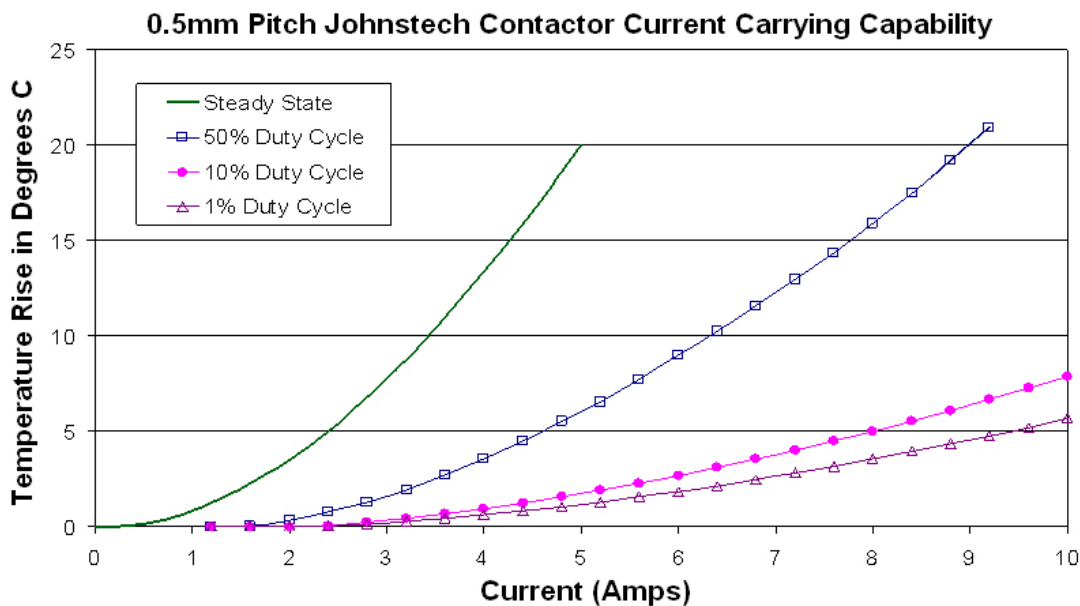
electricity and will draw heat quickly from the device under test (DUT) and divert it into the ambient environment. This effect will protect the dies in the DUT and prevent damage to them. Conversely, a contact that has a CCC with less current flow is not such a good conductor of current and heat. Consequently it will not dissipate as much heat energy away from the DUT. A corollary to this fact is that for every 10°C rise in junction temperature within the DUT, there is a corresponding decrease in its semiconductor life by 50%.

In the semiconductor test industry, CCC can be stipulated under steady-state or pulse current conditions. Steady-state typically means a duty cycle of 100%, such as would be prevalent in a circuit where direct current (DC) was applied to the DUT. This is a “worst case” situation with maximum temperature rise across the die in the device. Under pulse current application, the current applied to the DUT is turned on for a limited time period, then turned off for the remainder of the cycle. This may be a single-shot pulse or a string of pulses in a prescribed cycle.

In many instances, CCC under these conditions may be much greater than CCC for the DC case. This is particularly true if the applied pulse of current is of short duration (heating part of the cycle), is turned off and the remaining time frame (cooling part of the cycle) is long. This is not too atypical and is happening more frequently with devices used in switching regulators and certain aspects of automotive electronics. With respect to CCC under pulse conditions, we could say that frequently encountered duty cycles are 50%, 10%, and 1%.

Figure 1 shows a graph of the CCC for a Johnstech test contactor product under steady state conditions then plotted out at 50%, 10%, and 1% duty cycles for a 300ms pulse, which is similar to the length of test time for many parts. If the customer can handle a larger than 20°C temperature rise, CCC will also increase. A 20°C rise is specified in case customers are testing at high temperatures (+155°C) and don't want their chip die temperature to exceed 175°C.

Figure1



If the pulse width is shorter, more current can be handled for each duty cycle, but the device may need to be turned on multiple times to finish the testing, which will allow for contact and contactor to cool down.



This could increase the test time. At very low pulse widths, CCC can exceed 120 amps for a rigid contact. A rigid, one-piece contact will always be able to handle more current than an option that includes multiple moving parts which create higher C_{res} and IR voltage drop. This is essential for devices handling moderate to high current levels since Matte Tin is a standard plating for devices and the softening voltage of Matte Tin is only 0.07V.

In summation, CCC is a measure of the “goodness” of a contact pin or ground insert because it denotes the ability of a contact to safely function as a conduit for current and heat under normal operating conditions. CCC applies to steady-state and pulse current conditions alike. It is up to the user to assess the data according to the situation at hand.

If you have any comments or questions regarding CCC or any other kind of engineering data around final test, please don't hesitate to contact a Johnstech representative. You can find the Johnstech rep for your area by visiting www.johnstech.com or by calling 612-378-2020.

Harlan Faller PE, MSEE, is an Advanced Senior Technologist at Johnstech and is responsible for the development of future products. Harlan has a long association with the RF/Microwave/High Speed Digital area and has been a circuit and system designer in many aspects of these engineering disciplines (50 years experience) both in the Defense Industry and in the commercial world. He has BSEE and MSEE degrees from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, and a MA degree from the University of Dallas. Harlan also has completed significant coursework toward a doctorate in Electrical Engineering. Harlan can field your questions and comments by email at hlfaller@johnstech.com or by phone at 612-656-6308.

Jeff Sherry PE, MSEE, is a Senior RF/High Speed Digital R&D Engineer at Johnstech, with almost three decades of semiconductor industry experience. He has experience in designing and modeling microwave circuits up to 100 GHz. Jeff has a BSEE and MSEE from the University of Minnesota and an Advanced Technology Degree through Honeywell International. He also has an MBA from the University of Minnesota. Jeff has presented numerous papers at BITs, Semicon West, and ITC conferences, and he has been widely published in industry journals and magazines. Jeff may be contacted by calling 612-656-6314 or by email at jcsherry@johnstech.com.

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