

PLASMA CHEMISTRIES FOR HIGH DENSITY PLASMA ETCHING OF SiC

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ABSTRACT

A variety of different plasma chemistries, including SF₆, Cl₂, ICl and IBr, have been examined for dry etching of 6H-SiC in high ion density plasma tools (Inductively Coupled Plasma and Electron Cyclotron Resonance). Rates up to 4,500 Å·min⁻¹ were obtained for SF₆ plasmas, while much lower rates (≤800 Å·min⁻¹) were achieved with Cl₂, ICl and IBr. The F₂-based chemistries have poor selectivity for SiC over photoresist masks (typically 0.4-0.5), but Ni masks are more robust, and allow etch depths ≥10 μm in the SiC. A micromachining process (sequential etch/deposition steps) designed for Si produces relatively low etch rates (<2,000 Å·min⁻¹) for SiC.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advances in high power/high temperature SiC electronics for use in high voltage switches, power conditioning, electric drive trains and utility power management has renewed interest in the development of improved processing techniques for the material.⁽¹⁻¹⁵⁾ The chemical inertness of SiC in conventional acid and base solutions has focussed attention on dry etching methods, typically involving F₂-based plasmas. There has been some success with photochemical etching of SiC that operate by enhancing oxidation of the surface, followed by oxide dissolution.^(16,17) Most of the plasma etching methods developed for SiC have utilized conventional reactive ion etching (RIE) with high ion energies to efficiently break the bonds in the material.⁽¹⁸⁻²⁵⁾ The fluorinated etch products (SiF_x and CF_x species) are relatively volatile, and their removal from the surface is generally not the rate-limiting step.

Much less information is available on the dry etching characteristics of SiC in high density plasma reactors. A few reports have appeared on the use of Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP)^(26,27) and Electron Cyclotron Resonance (ECR)⁽²⁸⁻³⁴⁾ sources for SiC etching, in which higher rates were obtained than with RIE. The lower operating pressure and lower average ion energies in these sources is offset by the much higher ion flux. While F₂-based plasma chemistries have produced the highest etch rates, there is little information on alternatives such as iodine or bromine.

In this paper we compare use of SF₆ (with O₂ or Ar addition), Cl₂, ICl and IBr plasma chemistries in ECR and ICP tools for dry etching of 6H-SiC substrates. Rates around 0.45 μm·min⁻¹ were obtained with SF₆, while rates with the other chemistries were only a few hundred angstroms per minute.

EXPERIMENTAL

Bulk 6H-SiC substrates (Al doped; $p = 6 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$), with (0001) orientation (Si-face) were employed for the experiments. The samples were masked with either AZ4330 photoresists or electro-plated Ni, and etch depths were obtained from stylus profilometry measurements. Two different reactors were employed. The first was a Plasma-Therm 790, in which the sample is thermally bonded to a He backside cooled chuck biased with 13.56 MHz rf power, which controls the incident ion energy. The high density ICP Source is a 2 MHz 1500W 3-turn coil geometry. Electronic grade gases are injected directly into this source through mass flow controllers at typical rates of 10-30 standard cubic centimeters per minute (sccm). The second system is a Plasma-Therm SLR 770 which has similar characteristics except that the source is a Wavemat 440 ECR, operating at 2.45 GHz and powers up to 1000W.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(a) ECR

Figure 1 shows the influence of rf chuck power and pressure on SiC etch rates in 20SF₆/10 Ar discharges with 750 W of ECR source power. The rate increases rapidly with chuck power, in good correlation with the induced dc bias at the sample position. To check that the etch rate depends strongly on ion energy, we also included SiO₂ samples (whose etch products should be as volatile as those of SiC, but whose bond strength is higher). Note that the behavior of the SiO₂ mimics that of the SiC, but at a lower overall etch rate. A similar conclusion is drawn from the pressure data in the lower part of the figure. In the latter case the etch rates fall-off at higher pressure even though self-bias is increasing, due to increased recombination in the plasma. The selectivity for etching SiC over photoresist is very poor (<1), as expected.

Figure 2 shows the influence of microwave source power on both SiC etch rate and selectivity with respect to photoresist for fixed rf chuck power, pressure and plasma gas composition. The behavior of SiC again is mimicked by that of SiO₂, and the selectivity to photoresist is ~0.5 over the entire range of source powers investigated.

The effect of gas additive (Ar or O₂) is shown in Figure 3. The rates are slightly higher for Ar, partially due to the slightly higher self-biases. The highest etch rates are similar for the two mixtures, and the selectivity with respect to photoresist is poor. By contrast, the erosion rate of Ni was in the range 200-400 Å·min⁻¹ under these conditions, i.e. a selectivity for SiC over Ni of up to 20.

Representative scanning electron micrographs of features etched into SiC using either Ni masks (top and bottom left) or photoresist (top and bottom right) are shown in Figure 4. With a 4,000 Å thick Ni mask, we can etch up to ~12 μm deep without mask erosion affecting the feature profile. This process is of potential interest for forming through wafer vias in SiC for power device application. In that case, a minimum etch depth would be ~50 μm, requiring a comparatively thicker mask. Flemish et al.⁽³³⁾ reported previously that indium-tin-oxide performed well as a mask under ECR condition, and we reported selectivities as high as 70 for SiC over ITO under ICP conditions.⁽³⁵⁾

In the ECR tool we obtained much lower etch rates with Cl₂, ICl and IBr plasma chemistries, which appears to be due to the lower volatility etch products formed with these mixtures.

(b) ICP

A common process for micromachining of Si is the use of a sequential etch/deposition technique to prevent sidewall undercutting. We employed this process with higher dc self-bias

during the etch step in order to overcome the higher bond strength of the SiC. Figure 5 shows the effect of both pressure and dc bias on the etch rates of SiC, Si and SiO₂. In both cases the deposition step was performed at ~23 mTorr, whereas the etch step occurred at 2-10 mTorr. The two strongly-bonded materials (SiC and SiO₂) show little influence of bias or pressure under our conditions and the selectivity over photoresist is again poor.

The true value of the micromachining process for Si is seen in Figure 6, which displays etch rates as a function of self-bias for two different pressures. The etch rates for Si are in the range 4-5 $\mu\text{m}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$, roughly two orders of magnitude higher than those of SiC and SiO₂ at the 23 mTorr condition. However, the process does not produce any advantage for SiC etching, where the main limitation is simply etch rate and not the prevention of sidewall undercutting.

We have previously reported that F₂-based plasma chemistries work well under ICP conditions^(27,35), producing rates up to ~3,500 $\text{\AA}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$, but that Cl₂ plasmas were much less effective. In an effort to determine if the inert gas additive was important, we studied the influence of He, Ar and Xe addition to ICP Cl₂ discharges. Figure 7 shows the effect of both chlorine percentage and ICP source power on SiC etch rate in Cl₂/He, Cl₂/Ar and Cl₂/Xe. In both cases the Xe addition produces the highest rates, but they are a factor of ~20 lower than obtained with F₂-based plasma chemistries. Increasing the chuck self-bias did not improve the rates, as shown in Figure 8. Indeed, the rates may actually decrease at higher biases, probably due to ion-assisted desorption of the chlorine radicals on the SiC surface before they can react to form etch products.

No better success in obtaining high rates for SiC was found with ICl on IBr plasma chemistries. Figure 9 shows the effect of halide gas percentage in ICl/Ar and IBr/Ar discharges at fixed pressure, rf chuck power and ICP source power. The rates for IBr reach ~800 $\text{\AA}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$,

well above those obtained with ICl. These results suggest that SiBr_x and CBr_x species are more volatile than their chlorine and iodine counterparts. Increasing either source power (Figure 10) or rf chuck power (Figure 11) did not produce acceptable SiC rates.

Only F_2 -based plasma chemistries are found to produce acceptable SiC etch rates under high density plasma conditions. The SiF_x and CF_x etch products are volatile, and readily leave the surface once they are formed. By contrast their chlorine, bromide and iodide counterparts are much less volatile, leading to substantially lower etch rates. A sequential etch/deposition process developed for micromachining of Si is much less effective in SiC, even with increased ion energy and lower pressure, and produces etch rates less than half those obtained with straightforward SF_6/Ar etching. We assume this is a result of the polymer formation during the deposition step shielding the SiC during the subsequent etch step, reducing the effectiveness of bond-breaking by incident ions.

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Figure Captions

- Figure 1.** Etch rates of SiC and selectivity over photoresist in 20SF₆/10Ar, 750 W source power discharges, as a function of either rf chuck power (top) or pressure (bottom).
- Figure 2.** Etch rates of SiC and selectivity over photoresist in 20SF₆/10Ar, 250 W chuck power, 2 mTorr discharges, as a function of source power.
- Figure 3.** Etch rates of SiC and selectivity over photoresist in SF₆/Ar on SF₆/O₂/Ar discharges (250 W chuck power, 750 W source power, 2 mTorr).
- Figure 4.** SEM micrographs of features etched into SiC using Ni masks (left, top and bottom) or photoresist masks (right, top and bottom) in 20SF₆/10Ar, 2 mTorr, 750 W source power, 375 W chuck power discharges.
- Figure 5.** Etch rates of SiC and selectivity over photoresist in an SF₆-based micromachining process (etch/deposition), as a function of self-bias (top) and pressure (bottom).
- Figure 6.** Etch rates of SiC and selectivity over photoresist in an SF₆-based micromachining process (etch/deposition), as a function of self-bias at two different pressures.
- Figure 7.** Etch rates of SiC in Cl₂/He, Cl₂/Ar and Cl₂/Xe discharges as a function of both percentage Cl₂ (top) or ICP source power (bottom).

Figure 8. Etch rates of SiC (top) and dc chuck self-bias (bottom) as a function of rf chuck power in Cl₂/He, Cl₂/Ar and Cl₂/Xe discharges (5 mTorr, 750 W source power).

Figure 9. Etch rates of SiC and dc chuck self-bias in IBr/Ar and ICl/Ar discharges (750 W source power, 250 W chuck power, 5 mTorr) as a function of halide percentage.

Figure 10. Etch rates of SiC and dc chuck self-bias in 2ICl/13Ar and 2IBr/13Ar discharges (750 W source power, 5 mTorr), as a function of rf chuck power.

Figure 11. Etch rates of SiC and dc chuck self-bias in 2ICl/13Ar and 2IBr/13Ar discharges (250 W chuck power, 5 mTorr), as a function of source power.





















