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## Effect of the spin-on-glass curing atmosphere on In–Ga–Zn–O thin-film transistors

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### ABSTRACT

A solution-based spin-on glass (SOG) was applied to the gate insulator of an oxide thin-film transistor (TFT). The curing atmosphere of the SOG was investigated to enhance the performance of the self-aligned top-gate In–Ga–Zn–O (IGZO) TFT. After the SOG layer was formed on an IGZO active layer, curing was performed under N<sub>2</sub>, air, and O<sub>2</sub> atmospheres. The curing under an N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere resulted in the best device characteristics for the IGZO TFT. After curing, the SOG films were investigated via atomic force microscopy, secondary ion mass spectroscopy, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy, and capacitance measurement. The results showed that the N<sub>2</sub> pile-up at the back surface of the SOG is the main reason for the enhanced performance of the TFT after curing under an N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere.

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### KEYWORDS

Thin-film transistors; oxide semiconductor; spin-on glass; gate insulator; curing atmosphere

## 1. Introduction

Spin-on glass (SOG) is mainly used as an intermetal dielectric in semiconductor devices [1,2]. SOG is an insulator supplied in liquid form as a silicate polymer with an Si–O structure in an alcohol solvent system. It can be coated in a variety of ways, such as via spin coating, dipping, spraying, and printing [3,4]. After coating, it is cured in a furnace to form an SiO<sub>2</sub> layer. The sol–gel solution process has the advantages of planarization, low cost, and low process time compared with the vacuum process.

There are two types of SOG: inorganic silicate-based SOG and organic siloxane-based SOG. Siloxane-based SOG, which contains CH<sub>3</sub> or C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub> with an Si–O bond, has higher viscosity and shows higher planarity than the other SOG types [3,5]. SOG has been studied as an insulator for thin-film transistors (TFTs) and flexible and large area electronics, but there have not been many studies on the use of SOG as a gate insulator in TFTs, especially oxide TFTs [6–11]. The dilution of SOG using 2-propanol and deionized (DI) water was reported to reduce the curing temperatures, and curing at 200 °C was tested [6]. The dilution of SOG by DI water was also reported to be applied to a metal insulator diode, and curing of SOG was performed at a temperature as low as 200 °C; [7].

An SOG gate insulator was applied for the gate insulator of bottom-gate polycrystalline silicon, and the effect of planarization on the gate electrode was reported [8]. Also, the application of the SOG gate insulator was reported for both the ZnN and a-SiGe TFTs [9,11]. Even though several solution-based materials have been evaluated for TFTs, the SOG gate insulator is rarely applied to oxide TFTs [10,12].

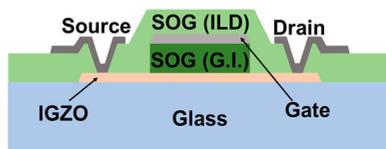
In this study, siloxane-based SOG was used for the gate insulator and interlayer dielectric in self-aligned top-gate amorphous In–Ga–Zn–O (IGZO) TFTs. Figure 1 shows the structure of the top-gate TFT studied in this paper. The top-gate TFT has a low parasitic capacitance due to the reduced overlap between the gate and the source/drain. Another advantage is that the active layer is protected from atmospheric impurities like hydrogen and moisture [13].

Device processes like annealing are generally performed under an N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere [2,4,14–16]. For certain processes, the annealing environment is a significant parameter that determines the device characteristics. Therefore, it is important to reveal the effect of the curing atmosphere on the SOG and TFT performance. The effect of the annealing ambient atmosphere (O<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>, air, etc.) on the bottom-gate IGZO TFT with an SOG

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**Figure 1.** Cross-sectional structure of the fabricated top-gate IGZO TFTs using SOG as a gate insulator (GI) and an interlayer dielectric (ILD).

passivation layer has been reported, and the best performance was obtained when annealing was performed under an  $N_2$  ambient atmosphere [17]. This study considered the effects of the curing atmosphere during the gate insulator process of SOG on the performance of an oxide TFT. The  $N_2$ ,  $O_2$ , and air atmospheres were investigated.

## 2. Experiment

The oxide TFT was developed with siloxane-based SOG, which was used for both the gate insulator and the interlayer dielectric in the experiment. The gate electrode was Cr, and the source/drain was Al. The TFTs were fabricated on a glass substrate via photolithography, as shown in Figure 1. After cleaning the glass substrate, a 50-nm-thick IGZO active layer was deposited thereon at 250°C via RF magnetron sputtering using a target with a 1:1:1 In:Ga:Zn atomic ratio, under the following conditions: 50 W RF power, 0.7 Pa working pressure, and  $Ar:O_2 = 25:7.5$  flow ratio. The IGZO layer was patterned via wet etching with a buffered-oxide-etch (BOE) solution diluted with DI water at a 500:1 ratio. After the IGZO patterning, the IGZO layer was annealed at 250°C for 1 h under an  $O_2$  atmosphere to reduce the oxygen vacancies and the process-related defects. For the gate insulator on the IGZO layer, the SOG solution (Cospeen-1225G from NEPES) without dilution was spin-coated at 3000 rpm and soft-baked at 80°C for 1 min, followed by baking at 180°C for 1 min. After the soft baking, final curing was done to obtain a 360-nm-thick SOG gate insulator by increasing the temperature from 150°C to 450°C in 100°C intervals (the curing was performed for 15 min at 150, 250, 350, and 450°C, respectively). A 75-nm-thick Cr layer was deposited for the gate electrode via DC magnetron sputtering, and was patterned via wet etching. The gate insulator was etched via reactive ion etching (RIE), with the gate electrode used as an etching mask. The RF power, etching time, and working pressure were 180 W, 270 s, and 13.3 Pa, respectively.  $CF_4$  and  $O_2$  were used as the etching gases, and the  $CF_4:O_2$  gas mixing ratio was 60:20. After etching the gate insulator, IGZO was doped via  $O_2$  plasma treatment at room temperature for

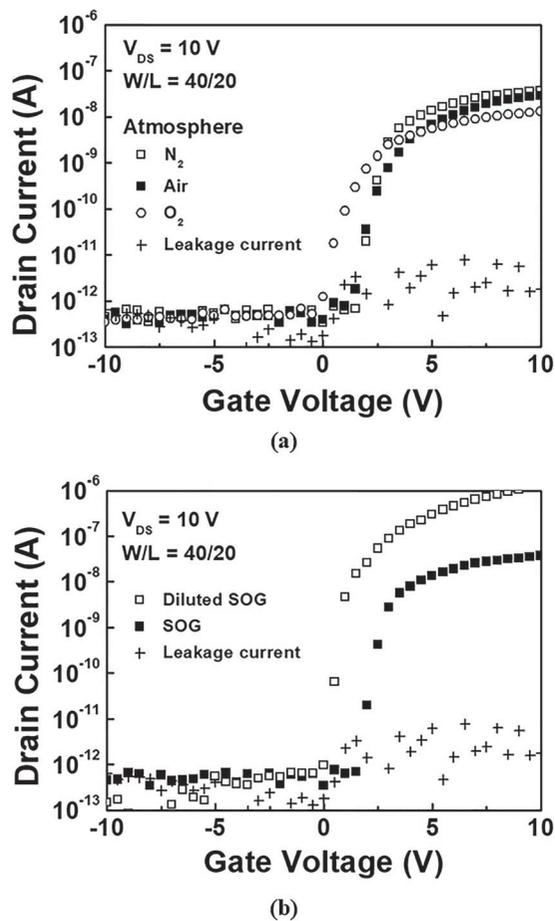
30 s in an RIE chamber, under the following process conditions: 180 W RF power, 60 sccm  $O_2$  flow, and 13.3 Pa working pressure. After doping, a 360-nm-thick SOG interlayer dielectric layer was formed via spin coating and curing, under the same conditions as those for the gate insulator. For the source/drain contact, a contact hole was formed in the interlayer dielectric. Before the contact hole patterning, oxygen plasma treatment under the same conditions as those for the doping was carried out to make the SOG surface hydrophilic. After performing contact hole dry etching for 170 s under the same conditions as those for the gate insulator etching, 75-nm-thick source and drain Al was deposited via DC magnetron sputtering, and was patterned via wet etching. The channel width and length of the fabricated TFTs were 40 and 20  $\mu m$ , respectively.

The electrical characteristics of the fabricated TFTs were measured in a dark box to avoid light illumination instability. In addition to electrical characterization, the surface roughness of the SOG film was analyzed for various curing conditions via atomic force microscopy (AFM). Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) was used for investigating the bonding state, and secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS) was used for obtaining the depth profile of the  $N_2$  concentration in the SOG film. For the above analyses, the SOG film was formed on a bare silicon wafer. The leakage current through the SOG layer was measured using a metal–insulator–metal (MIM) device with an Al–SOG–ITO structure.

## 3. Results and discussion

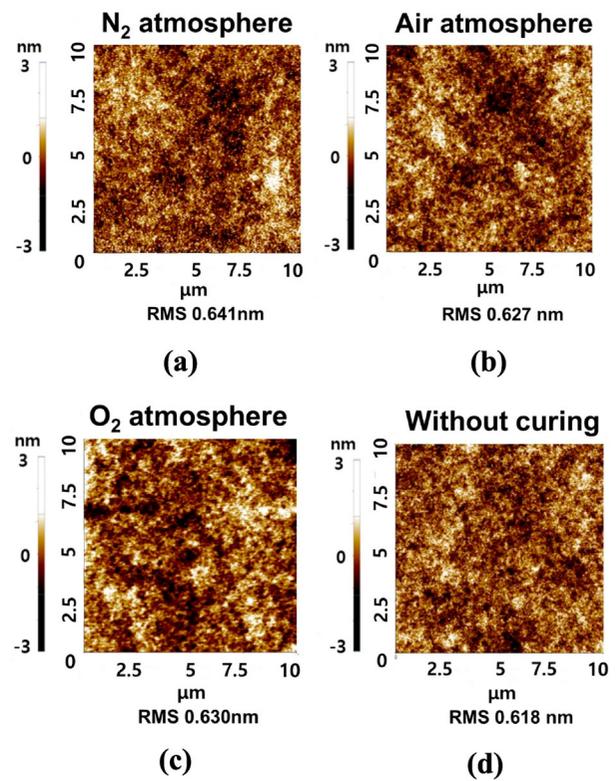
All the three kinds of IGZO TFT with different SOG gate insulator curing conditions were prepared for analyzing the electrical characteristics. The transfer characteristics of the TFTs were measured at a 10 V drain-to-source voltage ( $V_{DS}$ ). Figure 2(a) shows the transfer characteristics of the IGZO TFTs with SOG gate insulators cured in  $N_2$ , air, and  $O_2$  atmospheres. The effects of the dilution of SOG are shown in Figure 2(b), in which the mobility was shown to have been improved by the dilution of SOG [10]. As the gate insulator was formed from a non-diluted SOG solution, the mobilities were less than those of the TFTs with gate insulators obtained from the diluted SOG. The graph, however, clearly shows the effects of the different curing atmospheres. The on-currents and sub-threshold slopes depended on the curing conditions, and the best performance was obtained for the TFT with an SOG gate insulator cured under a  $N_2$  atmosphere.

The IGZO TFTs with SOG annealed under an  $N_2$  atmosphere had the best electrical characteristics, as shown in Figure 2(a). This shows that  $N_2$  plays a positive



**Figure 2.** Transfer characteristics of the IGZO TFTs: (a) with different SOG curing atmospheres ( $N_2$ , air, and  $O_2$ ) and (b) with diluted SOG curing in an  $N_2$  atmosphere.

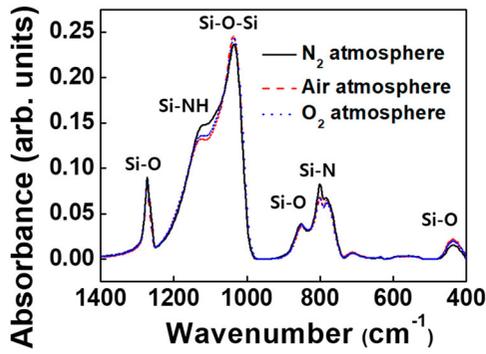
role in determining the TFT characteristics. Several factors can affect the TFT characteristics, such as the surface state of the gate insulator, the states in the semiconductor layer, and the interface state between the gate insulator and semiconductor layers. A gate insulator with a rough surface causes low mobility due to the increase in carrier scattering at the surface [18]. As such, AFM analysis was performed to investigate the surface roughness of the SOG gate insulator. The SOG film formed on a bare silicon wafer was used for the AFM as well as for the FTIR and SIMS. Figure 3 shows the root mean square (RMS) roughness of the SOG gate insulator in each annealing atmosphere. The RMS value of the SOG without curing was 0.618 nm while that of the SOG cured in  $N_2$ ,  $O_2$ , and air atmospheres were 0.641, 0.630, and 0.627 nm, respectively. The RMS values before and after the curing showed a very small change (about 0.02 nm). This suggests that the annealing atmosphere does not affect the surface roughness and is not a major factor in determining the TFT characteristics.



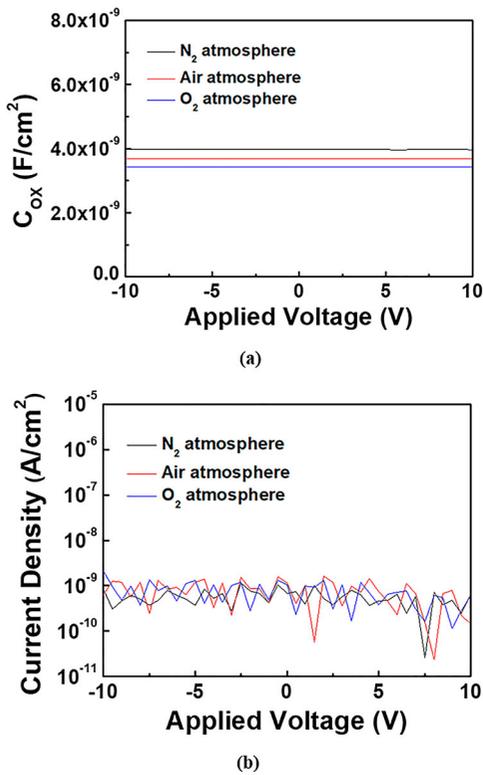
**Figure 3.** After the coating of a silicon wafer with the SOG films, the surface roughness was measured via AFM for various curing conditions: (a)  $N_2$  atmosphere; (b) air atmosphere; (c)  $O_2$  atmosphere; and (d) without curing.

Figure 4 shows the FTIR absorption spectra of SOG thin films on a bare silicon wafer annealed under  $N_2$ ,  $O_2$ , and air atmospheres. There were five major absorption peaks in the  $400\text{--}1400\text{ cm}^{-1}$  range. The absorption peaks at  $810$  and  $1130\text{ cm}^{-1}$  were assigned to the Si–N and Si–NH bonds, respectively [19,20]. One absorption peak at  $1036\text{ cm}^{-1}$  was related to the Si–O–Si bonds while two peaks at  $438$  and  $1274\text{ cm}^{-1}$  were assigned to the Si–O bonds [20–22]. The SOG thin films have an Si–O network, as evidenced by Figure 4. The Si–N bond peak at  $810\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and the Si–NH bond peak at  $1130\text{ cm}^{-1}$  were related to the amount of  $N_2$  in the SOG, and had the largest intensity when annealed in an  $N_2$  atmosphere. This can be attributed to the diffusion of a large amount of  $N_2$  into the SOG during curing.

To explore the effect of  $N_2$  on the dielectric constant and leakage currents of SOG thin films, the capacitances and leakage currents were measured for the MIM sample with an Al/SOG/ITO structure on a glass substrate. A larger capacitance of the gate dielectric layer improves the characteristics of TFTs through the larger induced channel charge due to the gate voltage [23,24]. As shown in Figure 5(a), the capacitances of all the samples were almost the same, suggesting that there is no significant



**Figure 4.** Infrared absorbance spectra of the SOG films on a bare silicon wafer. The spectra were obtained for various curing conditions ( $N_2$ , air, and  $O_2$  atmospheres). The  $N_2$ -related bonds increased for the sample cured in an  $N_2$  atmosphere.

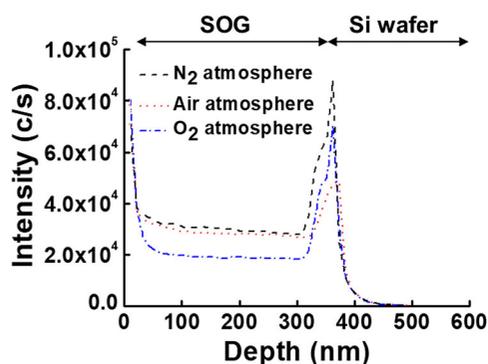


**Figure 5.** Measured capacitances (a) and leakage currents (b) for the MIM sample with an Al/SOG/ITO structure on a glass substrate. The dielectric properties were nearly the same, and the leakage currents were sufficiently low for TFT applications.

change in the dielectric constant of the SOG after curing in various atmospheres. Therefore, the annealing of SOG in various atmospheres hardly changes the dielectric properties of the SOG, which plays a small role in determining the electrical properties of TFTs. Figure 5(b) shows the leakage currents of the SOG thin films in this study, which were very small for all the three atmospheres. This suggests that the SOG gate insulators are good-quality insulators.

The  $N_2$  depth profile was measured via SIMS for the SOG films on a silicon wafer, as shown in Figure 6. The SIMS depth profiles showed the  $N_2$  depth profile from the front surface of the SOG film to the back surface, which was the interface with a silicon wafer. In the samples annealed under an  $N_2$  atmosphere, a much higher  $N_2$  concentration was observed at the interface between the SOG and the Si substrate as well as in the SOG film itself. This supports the excellent electrical properties obtained at the IGZO TFTs cured with  $N_2$ . The SIMS results showed that  $N_2$  diffuses into the SOG layers and piles up at the SOG/IGZO interface during curing under an  $N_2$  atmosphere, which means that  $N_2$  atoms can diffuse into the IGZO layer and affect the electrical properties of the IGZO TFTs. In the case of the  $O_2$  atmosphere,  $N_2$  was detected even when the concentration was lowest at the bulk compared to those in the  $N_2$  and air atmospheres. It is speculated that the remaining  $N_2$  in the furnace diffused during the flow of  $O_2$ . At the interface, the  $N_2$  concentration was higher than that for the air atmosphere, which shows the reversed distribution of  $N_2$  at the interface over the bulk. More discussion and research are thus required. In general, the objective of  $N_2$  doping in oxide semiconductors is to passivate the oxygen vacancy defects because the metal (Ga, In, Zn) can easily react with  $N_2$ . Therefore,  $N_2$  occupies the oxygen vacancy sites, which results in less oxygen vacancies and better electrical performance of TFTs [25,26]. The in-situ incorporation of  $N_2$  during the sputtering of IGZO was also reported to have enhanced the performance of the IGZO TFT [27]. The SIMS data showed that the  $N_2$  concentration in the SOG film was the highest in the case of  $N_2$  curing. Also, the  $N_2$  atoms diffuse and reach the back surface during curing. The SIMS data in Figure 6 show that the  $N_2$  atoms were piled up near the back surface, and that the highest  $N_2$  concentration was obtained with  $N_2$  curing. As shown in Figure 6, similar  $N_2$  concentrations were observed near the surfaces of the SOGs, regardless of the ambient gases. This was attributed to the surface effect determined via SIMS analysis resulting from the fact that the outer surface reacts actively with the elements of the air and that the surface is a region whose SIMS profile is not reliable.

As diffused atoms exist as interstitial atoms or at the vacancy site, a higher concentration at the back surface means that the interface between the SOG and the Si wafer should be improved to reduce the vacancy and any other defect site that piles up with  $N_2$ . The SIMS data showed that  $N_2$  could diffuse into the IGZO layer through the SOG layer in the top-gate IGZO TFT. The larger defect states at the interface usually result in the piling up of the diffused elements. It has been reported that the F concentration is higher at the interface due to the defects



**Figure 6.** SIMS analysis results of the N<sub>2</sub> depth profiles of the SOG films formed on Si wafer in various curing atmospheres. The profile shows that the N<sub>2</sub> atoms piled up near the back surface and that the highest N<sub>2</sub> concentration was obtained for N<sub>2</sub> curing.

existing therein [28]. The field effect mobility, threshold voltage, and subthreshold swing of the TFTs annealed under an N<sub>2</sub> ambient atmosphere were 1.64 cm<sup>2</sup>/V·s, 1.82, and 0.36 V/dec, respectively. As N<sub>2</sub> atoms can create a bond with dangling bonds, such as oxygen vacancies, the increase in N<sub>2</sub> concentration at the back surface suggests that the concentration of defects near the back surface is much larger than that inside the SOG due to the formation of the lattice mismatch with the underlayer near the back surface. In the case of N<sub>2</sub> annealing, the 1.64 cm<sup>2</sup>/V·s mobility and the 0.35 V/dec subthreshold swing were the best compared to 1.32 cm<sup>2</sup>/V·s and 0.65 V/dec for air annealing and 0.47 cm<sup>2</sup>/V·s and 0.50 V/dec for O<sub>2</sub> annealing. This can be explained by the following argument: the largest N<sub>2</sub> concentration inside the SOG for N<sub>2</sub> annealing, as shown in Figure 6, can cause the lowest number of defects inside the SOG due to the passivation of the oxygen-deficient sites by the N<sub>2</sub> atoms, indicating that the TFTs annealed under an N<sub>2</sub> ambient atmosphere had the best device properties. Therefore, the increased N<sub>2</sub> concentration near the back interface originated from the passivation of the defect states, which reduce the scattering of the carrier at the interface, leading to an increase in the field effect mobility.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this study, IGZO TFTs were developed using siloxane-based SOG as a gate insulator and an interlayer dielectric. The effects of curing the SOG gate insulator in different atmospheres were investigated. The curing of SOG in various atmospheres hardly changed the dielectric properties of the SOG, which played a small role in determining the electrical properties of the TFTs. The surface roughness of the SOG gate insulator was not a major factor in the TFT characteristics, as evidenced by the results of the AFM analysis. The IGZO TFTs with an SOG

annealed under an N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere showed the best electrical performance in terms of the on/off drain current ratio, threshold voltage, mobility, and subthreshold slope. This was mainly attributed to the introduction of N<sub>2</sub> at the highest concentration near the interface between the SOG and IGZO active layers, as confirmed by the SIMS analysis.

#### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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