When designing and characterizing process-, ESD- and I/O-TEG test chips for latch-up, there is a need to define the worst case stress conditions. Therefore, this paper provides guidelines for designing realistic worst case test structures for latch-up characterization. Furthermore, recommendations are provided regarding the use of a solid state voltage pulse generator in order to apply a realistic worst case stress approach to analyze for the standard current injection (‘I-test’) test defined by JEDEC/JEITA.
Analysis Methodology for Latch-up: Realistic Worst Case Stress Conditions for the Current Injection ‘I-test’

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50 Words Abstract – When designing and characterizing process-, ESD- and I/O-TEG test chips for latch-up, there is a need to define the worst case stress conditions. Therefore, this paper provides guidelines for designing realistic worst case test structures for latch-up characterization. Furthermore, recommendations are provided regarding the use of a solid state voltage pulse generator in order to apply a realistic worst case stress approach to analyze for the standard current injection (‘I-test’) test defined by JEDEC/JEITA.

Figure 1: Cross-section and some identified parasitics for the process technology used in this study. Both high-voltage (HV) and low-voltage (LV) MOS devices are available. Parasitics (2), (3) and (7) are NPN bipolar parasitics. Parasitics (1), (4), (5) and (6) are PNP bipolar parasitics. At least three parasitic SCRs are formed by combination of the NPN and PNP parasitics: SCR (2&4) is formed by NPN (2) and PNP (4), SCR (3&6) is formed by NPN (3) and PNP (6), SCR (4&7) is formed by NPN (7) and PNP (4). Because the combination of NPN (2) and PNP (4) is one of the most ‘sensitive’ parasitic SCRs for latch-up, SCR (2&4) is the subject of this study.

I. Introduction

Besides ESD qualification and functional verification, latch-up testing on ICs is an important aspect of product reliability. New application types (motor drivers) and harsh environments (automotive, industrial) add more stringent latch-up requirements to the process technology. Due to the strong competition in the commodity market for H-bridge ICs, DC-DC converters and other power management ICs, it is extremely important to evaluate the latch-up properties of the basic elements and device concepts before they are included into a final IC product. As Figure 1 shows, for a LV and HV IO, several parasitic NPNs and PNPs are inherently present in the IO or between the IOs. These parasitic NPNs and PNPs can latch on their own, or they can form parasitic SCRs, which are even more latch-up prone. A detailed latch-up characterization program is needed to evaluate the latch-up sensitiveness of the basic IO elements and their parasitics.

Figure 2 presents an overview of such a generic 6-step program conducted to define latch-up rules for a selected process technology. After a detailed study of the process technology and the design rules (step 1), the different parasitic devices are identified (step 2). The parasitic identification relies on a careful investigation of the device cross-sections. Important in this step is to prioritize the most dangerous parasitics and to eliminate the ‘safe’ parasitics (by also considering the bias conditions). Defining appropriate test structures (step 3), and executing a general and detailed silicon analysis (step 4 and 5) are very typical steps for any latch-up process characterization.
Finally, based on detailed measurements and analysis, latch-up rules are derived (step 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Study of process and technology</th>
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<tr>
<td># Investigation of design rules, layout rules, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Step 2: Identification of parasitic devices from device cross-section</th>
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<th>Step 3: Design of appropriate parasitic/parasitic device structures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Parasitic Bipolar Structures, Parasitic Combination Structures</td>
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<th>Step 4: General Silicon Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td># Characterize a well-chosen subset of ALL parasitic devices</td>
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<td># Identify the most latch-up sensitive devices for further characterization</td>
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<th>Step 5: Detailed Silicon Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td># Characterize the most latch-up sensitive parasitic devices in a detailed way</td>
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<th>Step 6: Development of Latch-up Design Rules &amp; Latch-up Checking Tools</th>
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Figure 2: Generic 6-step latch-up design rule program flow.

The paper has 5 sections: First, in Section II, the process technology and the parasitic devices are introduced. The next section summarizes the two most commonly used latch-up qualification tests (current injection ‘I-test’ for I/O pins, and over voltage ‘V-test’ for supply pins). Further, in section IV, two approaches for the ‘I-test’ are compared. In section V, the worst case conditions are defined, such that latch-up properties for complex ICs can be guaranteed. The paper concludes with basic guidelines for ‘I-test’ analysis interpretation, based on solid-state voltage pulse generator equipment.

III. Latch-up Test Overview

Two tests are widely used in the industry to qualify final processed product ICs for latch-up: the I/O current injection ‘I-test’ and the supply over voltage ‘V-test’ (Figure 3).

The ‘V-test’ is applied at the Vdd pins of the circuit and is mainly relevant to detect latch-up caused by avalanche multiplication in parasitic elements.

![Figure 3: Overview of the two most commonly used latch-up tests for ICs: supply over voltage test (‘V-test’, left side) and I/O current injection test (‘I-test’, right side).](image)

An example of the ‘V-test’ is shown in Figure 4 where the supply voltage is increased by 50% (typical specification). Depending on technology, such an increased potential could generate avalanche multiplication current at the drain-well junction, which can lead to triggering of the intrinsic parasitic NPN device.

![Figure 4: Example of ‘V-test’ applied at an inverter structure. The PMOS source is biased at 1.5 * Vsupply. When the inverter gate is pulled low, the PMOS drain is pulled high, increasing the NLOS drain potential leading to an increased avalanche current generation at the NMOS drain-bulk junction, which can lead to triggering of the intrinsic parasitic NPN device.](image)
During the ‘I-test’, a fixed current pulse (typical 100 mA) is forced into the I/O terminal. Such injection is shown in Figure 5.

![Figure 5: Applied ‘I-test’ at an input pad, protected with a dual diode approach. The stress forward biases the P+/Nwell junction in the ‘diode up’ which leads to injection of holes into the substrate through the vertical PNP.](image)

Positive current injection at an I/O pad typically injects holes into the substrate that subsequently flow through the P+/substrate connection(s) to the ground bus. However, before reaching the guard band the holes can forward bias P-substrate/N+ or P-substrate/Nwell junctions leading to a latch-up situation [1] [2].

Both ‘I-test’ and ‘V-test’ are standardized by several organizations such as JEDEC [3] and JEITA [4], and provide only a ‘pass/fail’ result for IC qualification. However, during CMOS process technology development, a more detailed analysis is required. In this study, the ‘I-test’ and ‘V-test’ are mimicked through the use of solid state pulse generators [5] and current measurement through digital oscilloscopes. Figure 6 shows such an accurate current measurement where the sudden increase in collector current of a NPN device signals when the device is triggered into latch-up.

![Figure 6: NPN collector current versus time during nearby substrate current injection. At a certain time (32 us) the NPN device is latched (current measurement is clipped at 40 mA by the scope input). Before latch-up occurs, the bipolar current conduction can be measured (~20 mA).](image)

**IV. Voltage versus Current Source**

The ‘I-test’ can be performed through two test approaches as shown by Figure 7: on the right side, the current injection is realized through a current source, while on the left side a voltage pulse generator is used to inject current into the NPN base terminal. Both approaches generate identical collector current versus emitter current (I<sub>c</sub> vs. I<sub>e</sub>) behavior.

![Figure 7: The current injection test (‘I-test’) can be performed with two approaches. On the left, the ‘I-test’ is simulated through the use of a voltage pulse generator used as voltage source with amplitude ‘V<sub>p</sub>’. Measurement probes at base and collector are used to analyze the current versus time. On the right, a real current pulse is injected at the base of the NPN parasitic.](image)

Figure 8: Stepwise increase (1-2-3) of injected current, and corresponding current flow visualized in the SCR schematic. When the ‘I-test’ is performed with a current source (top figures) the injected current is limited and the positive SCR feedback is prohibited. When a voltage pulse generator is used (bottom figures) the current is not limited, and the SCR is triggered into a low ohmic state as soon as the NPN device is turned on, as this initiates the positive feedback mechanism.

![Figure 8: Stepwise increase (1-2-3) of injected current, and corresponding current flow visualized in the SCR schematic. When the ‘I-test’ is performed with a current source (top figures) the injected current is limited and the positive SCR feedback is prohibited. When a voltage pulse generator is used (bottom figures) the current is not limited, and the SCR is triggered into a low ohmic state as soon as the NPN device is turned on, as this initiates the positive feedback mechanism.](image)

The main difference between the two approaches is related to the current limitation for the injected current in the base terminal. A current source provides a constant—and thus limited—current level to the base-emitter junction. A voltage source on the other hand, has a low output impedance, to ensure a constant voltage, independent of the load current. This leads to an uncontrolled behavior, as evident from Figure 8. It is obvious that the use of a voltage pulse generator for the analysis of the current injection latch-up properties of a SCR parasitic represents a worst case condition.

The difference between the two approaches is confirmed by measurements on ‘simple’ SCR test structures, containing parasitic NPN (2) and PNP (4).
Figure 9: Current injection by using a voltage source on PNP of SCR (2&4). Because the current is not limited, latch-up occurs as soon as NPN (2) goes into bipolar operation. 38 mA is injected into the emitter of the PNP (4).

Figure 10: Current injection by using a current source on PNP of SCR (2&4). Because the current is limited, latch-up does not occur as soon as NPN (2) goes into bipolar operation. 56 mA needs to be injected into the emitter of the PNP (4), before latch-up occurs. For lower injection currents, the NPN is already conducting current, while no latch-up occurs (Figure 10, green crosses).

V. Realistic Worst Case I/O Latch-up Test Structures

In many cases, for investigating the latching characteristics of a parasitic SCR device, ‘simple’ test structures are used which contain (parameter variations of) the parasitic SCR, but which do mostly not contain the other parasitic devices found in a real I/O.

In this section, we will show that there is a complex interaction between the different parasitics usually found in a real I/O. This interaction influences the latch-up behavior in two ways, at the same time: (1) the existence of extra parasitics might lead to lower levels of latch-up triggering (i.e. detrimental effect), (2) at the same time, the existence of extra parasitic devices might also shunt some current away from the substrate, leading to higher levels of latch-up triggering (i.e. beneficial effect). Both effects are present in a real I/O, and cannot be captured by the ‘simple’ (single-SCR) test structures. Therefore, there is a need for using more ‘complex’ (multi-SCR) test structures, mimicking a real I/O with its different parasitics.

Figure 11 depicts such a special test structure, where 2 P+ diffusions are incorporated in the HV NWell. This corresponds to the realistic case of a PMOS device in a HV output or I/O driver. In this case, two vertical bipolar PNPs (parasitic (4) and parasitic (4')) are present.

This happens when 38 mA is injected into the emitter of the PNP (4). For lower injection currents, the NPN is not turned on (Figure 9, red triangles and blue circles). Figure 10 shows that in case current injection is performed by using a current source on the PNP of SCR (2&4), latch-up does not occur as soon as NPN (2) goes into bipolar operation. In this case, 56 mA needs to be injected into the emitter of the PNP (4), before latch-up occurs. For lower injection currents, the NPN is already conducting current, while no latch-up occurs (Figure 10, green crosses).
When performing a (positive) constant current injection latch-up test (‘I-test’) on the HV output, current is forced into the drain of the PMOS (see also Figure 12). As such, parasitic SCR (2&4) (combination of NPN (2) and PNP (4)) is driven by a current-limiting current source (as the JEITA/JEDEC standard describes). However, in the real case of a HV I/O, an additional SCR (2&4') is also present (see Figure 14). Because SCR (2&4') is biased by a voltage supply – and thus not current-limited – this SCR will be the SCR that latches more easily, even when injecting on the anode of SCR (2&4) (the output node). In order to determine realistic worst case conditions for latch-up testing, both in terms of test structure design and current injection method, 3 different setups (Figure 12 to Figure 14) are compared.

Figure 12: Setup 1: Injection on vertical PNP of SCR (2&4) by using a current source. Only SCR (2&4) is stressed.

Figure 13: Setup 2: Injection on vertical PNP of SCR (2&4) by using a voltage source. Only SCR (2&4) is stressed.

Figure 14: Setup 3: Injection on vertical PNP of SCR (2&4) by using a current source. The drain of the HV PMOS is connected to Vsupply – and thus not current-limited – this SCR will be the SCR that latches more easily, even when injecting on the anode of SCR (2&4) (the output node). In order to determine realistic worst case conditions for latch-up testing, both in terms of test structure design and current injection method, 3 different setups (Figure 12 to Figure 14) are compared.

Figure 15: The injection current waveforms triggering latch-up (I_{inj,LU}) (for the 3 different setups).

Figure 16: The cathode current waveforms for the injection steps triggering latch-up (I_{cathode,LU}) (for the 3 different setups).

Table 1: Comparison between the injection current needed for triggering latch-up (I_{inj,LU}) for three different setups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setup</th>
<th>Current source</th>
<th>Voltage source</th>
<th>Current source</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>only SCR (2&amp;4)</td>
<td>only SCR (2&amp;4)</td>
<td>SCR (2&amp;4) &amp; SCR (2&amp;4')</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Voltage source</td>
<td>only SCR (2&amp;4)</td>
<td>SCR (2&amp;4) &amp; SCR (2&amp;4')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Current source</td>
<td>SCR (2&amp;4) &amp; SCR (2&amp;4')</td>
<td>SCR (2&amp;4) &amp; SCR (2&amp;4')</td>
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Table 1: Comparison between the injection current needed for triggering latch-up (I_{inj,LU}) for three different setups.

The question now arises: which are the most recommended latch-up testing conditions? From our setup experiments, it is clear that a primary requirement, for accurate latch-up characterization, is to design ‘complex’ test structures, which do not only incorporate the parasitic SCRs and bipolars present in the I/O.

The measurement results of setup 1 show that, if one uses ‘simple’ test structures, incorporating only the SCR present between output pin and ground, but which do also contain the other parasitic SCRs and bipolars present in the I/O.

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latches more easily. However, in the case one is limited to using ‘simple’ parasitic SCR test structures, it is recommended to use a non-current-limiting voltage source instead of a current-limiting current source.

How can the differences in latch-up trigger current be explained? The anode current of SCR (2&4’) is measured through a CT-2 Tektronix current probe, connected to channel 3 (CH3) of the oscilloscope (Figure 14 and Figure 18). The measurement of the current at the anode of SCR (2&4’), shows that just before latch-up a lateral current of 5.5 mA flows through the lateral PNP (4’’), formed between the two anodes of the two parasitic SCRs (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Cathode current for the parasitic SCRs for setup 3.

Figure 18 also shows that the anode current reverses polarity at the moment SCR (2&4’) latches. From this study and previous research it appears that a critical level of current has to be injected by the vertical PNP into the substrate and the base of the NPN (2), corresponding to the base current for bipolar NPN action, before the SCR latches [1]. Because the lateral PNP (4’’) drains away a part of the injected current, in order to trigger latch-up for setup 3, more current will need to be injected into the emitter of the PNP injector than for the case where only parasitic SCR (2&4) is connected (setup 1). Because the collector versus emitter current (Ic vs. Ie) curve has a typical sub-linear shape, due to saturation, the increase of injection current needed will be substantially higher than 5.5 mA (the collector current of the lateral PNP (4’’)). Due to this beneficial effect the latch-up trigger current is increased significantly. The second SCR (2&4’), which is also present, is not limited in current. Therefore, SCR (2&4’) latches as soon as NPN (2) starts bipolar operation. This is a detrimental effect for latch-up, because SCR (2&4’) needs less substrate current to latch than SCR (2&4).

Figure 19: Current balance visualized on the Ic-Ie curve of the vertical PNP for injection on the emitter of PNP (4), for the case SCR (2&4’) is connected (setup 3). When only SCR (2&4) is connected (setup 2), 36 mA of injection current triggers latch-up. When also SCR (2&4’) is connected (setup 3), the lateral PNP (4’’) between the two anodes of the two SCRs draws 5.5 mA of collector current, and the injection current needs to be increased to 56 mA in order to trigger latch-up, i.e. a ‘gain’ of 20 mA of injection current with regard to the case only parasitic SCR (2&4) is connected and stressed with a voltage source (setup 2).

**Conclusion**

This paper presents a generic analysis methodology for characterizing parasitic bipolar and SCR elements in a HV CMOS technology for latch-up. Data of a ±20V HV-CMOS technology is used to demonstrate different measurement approaches for defining design rules for the standard current injection (‘I-test’) latch-up test. It is evident from the measurement results and discussion that the current source as described in the standard (JEITA/JEDEC) does not always represent the worst case stress condition. An improved analysis methodology based on solid state voltage pulse generators is provided. The paper also presents latch-up relevant test structures, containing the different parasitics, as found in a real I/O. Only results obtained from these ‘complex’ test structures will be relevant with regard to latch-up occurrence in a real product.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Mr. Sato and Mr. Ogura from New Japan Radio and Mr. Verhaege from Sarnoff Europe for supporting the analysis project and the publication of the results.

**References**

[3]  JEDEC Standard No. 78A for IC Latch-up test (‘V-test’ and ‘I-test’)
[4]  JEITA Standard No. EIAJ ED-4701/300-2 for IC latch-up Test (‘V-test’ and ‘I-test’)  
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- ESD testing and analysis

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May 2011