Printed Circuit Board Quality Assurance

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Outline

• Introduction to PCBs
• PCB requirements and quality verification
• Risk assessment
• Example
What is a PCB? Classification of PCBs

• Printed circuit boards are the baseline in electronic packaging – they are the interconnection medium upon which electronic components are formed into electronic systems.
  – PCB materials are glass reinforced PCBs, organic polyimide reinforced with woven glass.

• Classified on the basis of
  – Dielectrics used
  – Reinforcement
  – Circuit type
  – Component types
  – Board construction
  – Design complexity

Example of Bare PCBs
Typical Polyimide Laminate Supply Chain

- **Glass Raw Materials** (Silica, Limestone, Clay, Boric Acid)
  - **Glass Fiber Production** (Formation, Coating/Binders, Yarns)
    - **E-Glass Plies/Fabrics**
      - **Prepregs/Cores**
        - **Laminates**
          - **Copper Foil**
          - **Oxide Coatings**
          - **Drill Bits**
          - **ENIG/HASL/ENEPIG /OSP/other Plating**
            - **Printed Circuit Board Panels w/Coupons**
              - **Assembly Processes**

- **Polyimide Raw Materials** (Petrochemical Derivatives)
  - **Flame Retardants Fillers and Additives**
    - **Consumables (e.g., etchants, cleaners)**
      - **Solder Mask/Silk Screen**
      - **Design and Coupon Data**

SAFETY and MISSION ASSURANCE DIRECTORATE Code 300
PCB Quality

- NASA uses IPC standards (e.g., IPC-6012, 6013)
- Inspection, testing and requirements include:
  - External visual examination
  - Microsection evaluation
  - Electrical continuity and isolation
  - Solderability
  - Surface finish evaluation
  - Cleanliness
Significance of Board Requirements

• The requirements and coupons are a “front door”.
• Examples:
  – Internal Annular Ring:
    • Egregious violations indicate there may have been a serious problem in development of the board.
    • Minor violations don’t likely indicate any risk at all (IPC-6012DS)
  – Negative etchback:
    • With modern cleaning processes and flight experience can result in higher reliability with negative etchback.
  – Wicking of copper:
    • Requirements are conservative based on broad statistics.
    • A basic analysis of the board layout can indicate directly if there is risk or not, regardless of requirements violations.
Microsectioning

• Suppliers perform microsectioning and inspect per specifications.
• Secondary GSFC independent microsection analysis yielded 20-30% inspection rejects, caused by:
  – Screening escapes:
    • Test sample quality not consistent
    • Supplier microsection process
  – Requirement interpretations
  – Requirements flow-down issues
    • Alternative specifications (MIL, ECSS)
    • Buying heritage and off-the-shelf designs
Impact of Non-conformances

• Bare boards cost $$ and build schedules – expensive!!
• But failures are even more expensive!
• Test sample nonconformance is not the same as PCB failure.
• Risk-based decisions are used for disposition of non-conformances.
• Non-conformances may have little to no impact per application.
• Began to explore origins and merit of requirements (more later).
Risk Assessment

- Traceable PCB test coupons (designed per specs. such as IPC-2221B) are submitted to GSFC or to a GSFC-assessed laboratory.
- Reports that indicate nonconformance are dispositioned by risk assessment performed prior to refabricating or populating the PCB.
  - If risk assessment indicates elevated risk due to the nonconformance, then use is dispositioned by MRB.
- More than a 100 PCB lots assessed for risk since 2014, 95% dispositioned as UAI, significant cost and schedule savings.
- Risk assessment process eliminates waste and saves money and schedule, lowers overall risk for the project.
- The process reduces the need for repeated attempts to refabricate.
Example: PTH Copper Wrap Thickness Requirement

Per IPC-6012D for through-holes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Thickness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>AABUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>5 µm [197 µin]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3 &amp; 3/A</td>
<td>12 µm [472 µin]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AABUS = As Agreed Between User and Supplier

• Thermal cycle stresses act on interfaces, outer layers experience the greatest stress.
• Reason: materials selection and geometry.
PTh Copper Wrap Thickness: Disposition

- Mission had populated and integrated board with zero wrap, wrap planarization can cause 0.3mil or more variance in panel; manufacturers must target more wrap.
  - Wrap cannot be achieved at required thickness for designs with tight line-width spacing and/or with multiple lamination/plating steps

- Requirement was introduced to IPC with minimal data
  - Reliability reported to be better with wrap vs. butt joint
  - Half of barrel plating thought to be “good enough”
  - Higher quality limit used as safety margin against manufacturing variation during planarization

- **GSFC Studies:** Determined the impact of copper wrap plating thickness on PCB reliability, as characterized by thermal cycles to failure.
  - Able to determine acceptability of wrap defect based on reliability testing and analysis in context of mission environment and duration.
  - IPC voted to change the requirement (amendment in Rev. D and revisions in Rev. E).
PCB Assurance: Summary

- PCB assurance actives are informed by risk in context of the Project.
- Lessons are being applied across Projects for continuous improvements.
- Newer component technologies, smaller/high pitch devices: tighter and more demanding PCB designs:
  - Identifying new research areas.
  - New materials, designs, structures and test methods.
Thank you!

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