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***Reliability of Photovoltaic Cells,
Modules, Components, and
Systems II***

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Editors

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Contents

- vii *Conference Committee*
- ix *Introduction*
- xi *Concentrating solar energy for utility scale applications (Plenary Paper) [7407-106]*
R. Sherif, eSolar, Inc. (United States)
- xvii *Recent progress in photocatalysts for overall water splitting under visible light (Plenary Paper) [7408-103]*
T. Hisatomi, K. Domen, The Univ. of Tokyo (Japan)

METROLOGY AND CERTIFICATION

- 7412 02 **Development and application of a UV light source for PV-module testing (Invited Paper)** [7412-01]
M. Koehl, D. Philipp, Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems (Germany); N. Lenck, SCHOTT Solar GmbH (Germany); M. Zundel, SLZ Maschinenbau GmbH (Germany)
- 7412 03 **Measurement and simulation of dynamic mechanical loads on PV-modules** [7412-02]
K.-A. Weiss, M. Assmus, S. Jack, M. Koehl, Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems (Germany)
- 7412 04 **Striving for a standard protocol for preconditioning or stabilization of polycrystalline thin film photovoltaic modules** [7412-03]
J. A. del Cueto, C. A. Deline, D. S. Albin, S. R. Rummel, A. Anderberg, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States)

RELIABILITY OF CONCENTRATOR CELLS AND OPTICS: JOINT SESSION WITH CONFERENCE 7407

- 7412 06 **Stress in large-area optics for solar concentrators (Invited Paper)** [7412-05]
R. Leutz, L. Fu, H. P. Annen, Concentrator Optics GmbH (Germany)
- 7412 08 **Assuring long-term reliability of concentrator PV systems** [7412-08]
R. McConnell, V. Garboushian, J. Brown, C. Crawford, K. Darban, D. Dutra, S. Geer, V. Ghassemian, R. Gordon, G. Kinsey, K. Stone, G. Turner, Amonix, Inc. (United States)

ENCAPSULANT/BACKSHEETS

- 7412 09 **Influence of glass morphology and internal topography on moisture penetration for glass/PVB/glass laminates (Invited Paper)** [7412-09]
S. Krull, I. Sinicco, Oerlikon Solar (Switzerland)

- 7412 0A **Impact of moisture on PV module encapsulants** [7412-10]
T. Swonke, R. Auer, Bavarian Ctr. of Applied Energy Research (Germany)
- 7412 0B **A semi-empirical method of predicting the lifetime of EVA encapsulant and polyester based backsheet materials (Invited Paper)** [7412-11]
Z. Xia, J. H. Wohlgemuth, D. W. Cunningham, BP Solar International Inc. (United States)
- 7412 0C **Research on the non-thermal DBD surface modification and the humidity-heat aging resistant performance in solar cell modules of FFC backsheet** [7412-12]
Q. Si, Z. Fei, J. Jin, Jolywood (Suzhou) Solar Material Technology Co., Ltd. (China); H. Qiu, Hangzhou Normal Univ. (China); Y. Zhang, Jolywood (Suzhou) Solar Material Technology Co., Ltd. (China)

RELIABILITY OF BOS COMPONENTS AND PV SYSTEMS

- 7412 0E **Temperature of rooftop photovoltaic modules: air gap effects (Invited Paper)** [7412-14]
B. L. Shrestha, Arizona State Univ. (United States); E. G. Palomino, Salt River Project (United States); G. TamizhMani, Arizona State Univ. (United States) and TÜV Rheinland PTL (United States)
- 7412 0F **2008 performance analysis of a large scale grid connected solar system** [7412-15]
A. Alami, R. Batista, D. Williams, Renewable Ventures, a Fotowatio Co. (United States)
- 7412 0G **Using probabilistic methods to define reliability requirements for high power inverters** [7412-16]
R. W. Morris, The Boeing Co. (United States); J. M. Fife, PV Powered, Inc. (United States)
- 7412 0H **Study on the heat dissipation performance of different types of junction boxes** [7412-17]
F. Kong, J. Zhao, J. Cai, Phono Solar Technology Co., Ltd. (China)

THIN FILM PV RELIABILITY

- 7412 0I **Degradation and capacitance: voltage hysteresis in CdTe devices (Invited Paper)** [7412-18]
D. S. Albin, R. G. Dhere, S. C. Glynn, J. A. del Cueto, W. K. Metzger, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States)
- 7412 0J **Stability of TCO window layers for thin-film CIGS solar cells upon damp heat exposures: part II** [7412-19]
R. Sundaramoorthy, F. J. Pern, C. DeHart, T. Gennett, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States); F. Y. Meng, Shanghai Jiao Tong Univ. (China); M. Contreras, T. Gessert, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States)
- 7412 0K **Stability of TCO window layers for thin-film CIGS solar cells upon damp heat exposures: part III (Invited Paper)** [7412-20]
F. J. Pern, S. H. Glick, X. Li, C. DeHart, T. Gennett, M. Contreras, T. Gessert, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States)
- 7412 0L **Understanding and mitigating effects of nonuniformities on reliability of thin film photovoltaics (Invited Paper)** [7412-21]
V. G. Karpov, D. Shvydka, Univ. of Toledo (United States)

- 7412 OM **Mechanical scribing as a quality and reliability analysis tool for CIGSeS thin film solar cells** [7412-22]
S. A. Pethe, M. J. Mendoza, A. Kaul, N. G. Dhere, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

LONG TERM PV MODULE RELIABILITY

- 7412 ON **Product reliability and thin-film photovoltaics (Invited Paper)** [7412-23]
R. Gaston, R. Feist, S. Yeung, M. Hus, M. Bernius, M. Langlois, S. Bury, The Dow Chemical Co. (United States); J. Granata, M. Quintana, Sandia National Labs. (United States); C. Carlson, G. Sarakakis, D. Ogden, A. Mettas, ReliaSoft Corp. (United States)
- 7412 OP **Failure analysis methods applied to PV module reliability (Invited Paper)** [7412-25]
W. J. Gambogi, E. F. McCord, H. D. Rosenfeld, R. H. Senigo, S. Peacock, K. M. Stika, E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., Inc. (United States)
- 7412 OQ **Effects of cerium removal from glass on photovoltaic module performance and stability (Invited Paper)** [7412-26]
M. D. Kempe, T. Moricone, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States); M. Kilkenny, Skyline Solar (United States)
- 7412 OR **Accelerated testing of metal foil tape joints and their effect of photovoltaic module reliability** [7412-27]
N. R. Sorensen, M. A. Quintana, J. D. Puskar, S. J. Lucero, Sandia National Labs. (United States)
- 7412 OS **Outdoor monitoring and high voltage bias testing of PV modules as necessary test for assuring long term reliability** [7412-28]
N. G. Dhere, S. A. Pethe, A. Kaul, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

POSTER SESSION

- 7412 OU **Diagnostic methods of solar cells in dependence on temperature** [7412-30]
J. Dolensky, A. Vesely, J. Vanek, J. Hrozek, Brno Univ. of Technology (Czech Republic)
- 7412 OX **Pyretic test and breakdown test for c-Si PV cells and single-cell PV modules** [7412-34]
T. Doi, T. Yamada, K. Ikeda, National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (Japan)
- 7412 OY **Effects of module performance and long-term degradation on economics and energy payback: case study of two different photovoltaic technologies** [7412-35]
K. Davis, H. Moaveni, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

SOLAR ENERGY PLENARY SESSION

- 7412 OZ **Photovoltaic-reliability R&D toward a solar-powered world (Plenary Paper)** [7412-104]
S. Kurtz, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States); J. Granata, M. Quintana, Sandia National Labs. (United States)

Author Index

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Session Chairs

- 1 Metrology and Certification
John H. Wohlgemuth, BP Solar International Inc. (United States)
- 2 Reliability of Concentrator Cells and Optics: Joint Session with Conference 7407
Dan T. Ton, U.S. Department of Energy (United States)
- 3 Encapsulant/Backsheets
John Pern, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (United States)

- 4 Stability and Degradation Processes in Organic Solar Cells: Joint Session with Conference 7416
Steve Hogan, Spire Corporation (United States)
 - 5 Reliability of BOS Components and PV Systems
Kristopher O. Davis, University of Central Florida (United States)
 - 6 Thin Film PV Reliability
Jennifer E. Granata, Sandia National Laboratories (United States)
 - 7 Long Term PV Module Reliability
David S. Albin, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (United States)
- Solar Energy Plenary Session
Martha Symko-Davies, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (United States)

Introduction

Development of a sustainable renewable energy source is the need of the day and photovoltaic (PV) technology has a very important role to play in this effort. With the increasing concern over high carbon emission and the effects of global warming and the high fuel prices, the need for establishing PV as the alternative source of energy has become of paramount importance. For any technology to sustain, it is absolutely essential that the product be reliable and that it operates properly over its useful lifetime.

The Reliability of PV Modules session of the SPIE 2008 Optics and Photonics event was the first step in achieving the reliability and long term durability of PV modules. This effort was taken further during the SPIE 2009 Optics and Photonics event where a platform was provided, through a two day session on reliability of PV modules, for PV researchers from various companies, national laboratories, and universities to discuss their research.

Twenty-nine papers were presented and twenty-seven papers were published for this conference. The conference was divided into one plenary session, seven oral sessions, and one poster session extending over a four-day period from 3–6 August 2009. Session one, titled Metrology and Certification, had interesting presentations discussing development of UV light sources, the effect and accurate measurement of mechanical loads such as wind loads and establishing a standard protocol for preconditioning and stabilizing thin film PV modules prior to testing.

One of the talks during the plenary session by Sarah Kurtz, titled Photovoltaic-Reliability R&D toward a Solar-Powered World, discussed the importance of reliability as well as the necessity to study the reliability aspect of PV modules in order to develop PV technology as one of the major source of energy in the world.

With higher efficiencies achieved by III-V single junction and multi-junction cells, the topic of session two, Reliability of Concentrator Cells and Optics, was garnering a lot of interest. This session was a joint session with conference 7407: High and Low Concentrator Systems for Solar Electric Applications IV. Research work on the reliability of the concentrator optics and cells as well as various testing techniques and models was discussed during this session.

A good packaging scheme means an improved reliability of PV modules. Encapsulants and backsheets are two of the widely researched materials of the packaging scheme. Session three discussed various encapsulant and backsheet materials as well as various techniques to determine the lifetime of these materials.

Session four, titled Stability and Degradation Processes in Organic Solar Cells, was held as a joint session with conference 7416: Organic Photovoltaics X. Another aspect that needs attention towards establishing PV as a sustainable alternative source of energy is the reliability of the balance of system (BOS) components.

Session five, titled Reliability of BOS Components and PV Systems, had presentations discussing BOS components such as inverters, junction boxes, as well as PV systems as a whole.

The market share of thin film PV is increasing by the day; however, there is not enough understanding of some the key issues involved with reliability of thin film PV modules. The degradation mechanisms in thin film PV modules are different from that in c-Si PV and need to be understood to improve the processing techniques and eventually the reliability of PV modules. Session six discussed various issues involved in reliability of thin film PV modules.

Accelerated testing tackles the issues of infant mortality of PV modules; however, there is a need to carry out field testing of various PV technology modules in order to determine the useful lifetime and to estimate the degradation rates for various technologies. Session seven had several presentations discussing various methods to carry out long term reliability testing of PV modules and the need for a combined, sustained, and symbiotic effort among various universities and PV manufacturers to develop a program that allows the growth of the PV community as a whole.

As part of this conference a short course on design and reliability of photovoltaic modules was offered. The course was well attended and appreciated by the attendees. The focus of the tutorial was on various packaging configurations, application of concepts of physics of failure to PV systems with several examples, development of accelerated tests for various technologies, and the application of this knowledge in development of new products and technologies such as organic PV.

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