

Wave Soldering of Surface Mount Components

ABSTRACT

In facing the upcoming surge of "surface mount technology", many manufacturers of printed circuit boards have taken steps to convert some portions of their boards to this new process. However, as the availability of surface mount components is still limited, many have taken to mixing the lead-inserted standard dual-in-line packages (DIPs) with the surface mounted devices (SMDs). Furthermore, to take advantage of using both sides of the board, surface-mounted components are generally adhered to the bottom side of the board while the top side is reserved for the conventional lead-inserted packages. If processed through a wave solder machine, the semiconductor components are now subjected to extra thermal stresses (now that the components are totally immersed into the molten solder).

A discussion of the effect of wave soldering on the reliability of plastic semiconductor packages follows. This is intended to highlight the limitations which should be understood in the use of wave soldering of surface mounted components.

ROLE OF WAVE-SOLDERING IN APPLICATION OF SMDs

The generally acceptable methods of soldering SMDs are vapor phase reflow soldering and IR reflow soldering, both requiring application of solder paste on PW boards prior to placement of the components. However, sentiment still exists for retaining the use of the old wave-soldering machine. The reasons being:

- 1) Most PC Board Assembly houses already possess wave soldering equipment. Switching to another technology such as vapor phase soldering requires substantial investment in equipment and people.
- 2) Due to the limited number of devices that are surface mount components, it is necessary to mix both lead inserted components and surface mount components on the same board.
- 3) Some components such as relays and switches are made of materials which would not be able to survive the temperature exposure in a vapor phase or IR furnace.

PW BOARD ASSEMBLY PROCEDURES

There are two considerations in which through-hole ICs may be combined with surface mount components on the PW Board:

- a) Whether to mount ICs on one or both sides of the board.
- b) The sequence of soldering using Vapor Phase, IR or Wave Soldering singly or combination of two or more methods.

The various processes that may be employed are:

A) Wave Solder before Vapor/IR reflow solder.

1. Components on the same side of PW Board.
 - Lead insert standard DIPs onto PW Board Wave solder (conventional)
 - Wash and lead trim
 - Dispense solder paste on SMD pads
 - Pick and place SMDs onto PW Board
 - Bake
 - Vapor phase/IR reflow
 - Clean

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2. Components on opposite side of PW Board.
 - Lead insert standard DIPs onto PW Board
 - Wave Solder (conventional)
 - Clean and lead trim
 - Invert PW Board
 - Dispense solder paste on SMD pads
 - Dispense drop of adhesive on SMD sites (optional for smaller components)
 - Pick and place SMDs onto board
 - Bake/Cure
 - Invert board to rest on raised fixture
 - Vapor/IR reflow soldering
 - Clean
- B) Vapor/IR reflow solder then Wave Solder.
 1. Components on the same side of PW Board.
 - Solder paste screened on SMD side of Printed Wire Board
 - Pick and place SMDs
 - Bake
 - Vapor/IR reflow
 - Lead insert on same side as SMDs
 - Wave solder
 - Clean and trim underside of PCB
- C) Vapor/IR reflow only.
 1. Components on the same side of PW Board.
 - Trim and form standard DIPs in "gull wing" configuration
 - Solder paste screened on PW Board
 - Pick and place SMDs and DIPs
 - Bake
 - Vapor/IR reflow
 - Clean
 2. Components on opposite sides of PW Board.
 - Solder paste screened on SMD-side of Printed Wire Board
 - Adhesive dispensed at central location of each component
 - Pick and place SMDs
 - Bake
 - Solder paste screened on all pads on DIP-side or alternatively apply solder rings (performs) on leads
 - Lead insert DIPs
 - Vapor/IR reflow
 - Clean and lead trim
- D) Wave Soldering Only
 1. Components on opposite sides of PW Board.
 - Adhesive dispense on SMD side of PW Board
 - Pick and place SMDs
 - Cure adhesive
 - Lead insert top side with DIPs
 - Wave solder with SMDs down and into solder bath
 - Clean and lead trim

All of the above assembly procedures can be divided into three categories for I.C. Reliability considerations:

- 1) Components are subjected to both a vapor phase/IR heat cycle then followed by a wave-solder heat cycle or vice versa.
- 2) Components are subjected only a vapor phase/IR heat cycle.
- 3) Components are subjected to wave-soldering only and SMDs are subjected to heat by immersion into a solder pot.

Of these three categories, the last is the most severe regarding heat treatment to a semiconductor device. However, note that semiconductor molded packages generally possess a coating of solder on their leads as a final finish for solderability and protection of base leadframe material. Most semiconductor manufacturers solder-plate the component leads, while others perform hot solder dip. In the latter case the packages may be subjected to total immersion into a hot solder bath under controlled conditions (manual operation) or be partially immersed while in a 'pallet' where automatic wave or DIP soldering processes are used. It is, therefore, possible to subject SMDs to solder heat under certain conditions and not cause catastrophic failures.

THERMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MOLDED INTEGRATED CIRCUITS

Since Plastic DIPs and SMDs are encapsulated with a thermoset epoxy, the thermal characteristics of the material generally correspond to a TMA (Thermo-Mechanical Analysis) graph. The critical parameters are (a) its Linear thermal expansion characteristics and (b) its glass transition temperature after the epoxy has been fully cured. A typical TMA graph is illustrated in *Figure 1*. Note that the epoxy changes to a higher thermal expansion once it is subjected to temperatures exceeding its glass transition temperature. Metals (as used on lead frames, for example) do not have this characteristic and generally will have a consistent Linear thermal expansion over the same temperature range.

In any good reliable plastic package, the choice of lead frame material should be such to match its thermal expansion properties to that of the encapsulating epoxy. In the event that there is a mismatch between the two, stresses can build up at the interface of the epoxy and metal. There now exists a tendency for the epoxy to separate from the metal lead frame in a manner similar to that observed on bi-metallic thermal range.

In most cases when the packages are kept at temperatures below their glass transition, there is a small possibility of separation at the epoxy-metal interface. However, if the package is subjected to temperature above its glass-transition temperature, the epoxy will begin to expand much faster than the metal and the probability of separation is greatly increased.

CONVENTIONAL WAVE-SOLDERING

Most wave-soldering operations occur at temperatures between 240–260°C. Conventional epoxies for encapsulation have glass-transition temperature between 140–170°C. An I. C. directly exposed to these temperatures risks its long term functionality due to epoxy/metal separation.

Fortunately, there are factors that can reduce that element of risk:

- 1) The PW board has a certain amount of heat-sink effect and tends to shield the components from the temperature of the solder (if they were placed on the top side of the board). In actual measurements, DIPs achieve a temperature between 120–150°C in a 5-second pass over the solder. This accounts for the fact that DIPs mounted in the conventional manner are reliable.
- 2) In conventional soldering, only the tip of each lead in a DIP would experience the solder temperature because the epoxy and die are standing above the PW board and out of the solder bath.

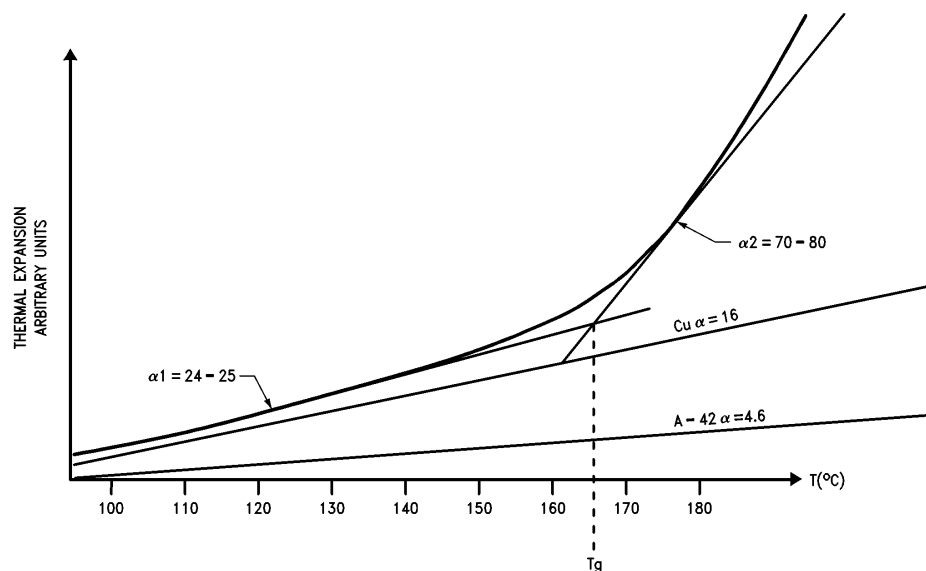


FIGURE 1. Thermal Expansion and Glass Transition Temperature

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EFFECT ON PACKAGE PERFORMANCE BY EPOXY-METAL SEPARATION

In wave soldering, it is necessary to use fluxes to assist the solderability of the components and PW boards. Some facilities may even process the boards and components through some form of acid cleaning prior to the soldering temperature. If separation occurs, the flux residues and acid residues (which may be present owing to inadequate cleaning) will be forced into the package mainly by capillary action as the residues move away from the solder heat source. Once the package is cooled, these contaminants are now trapped within the package and are available to diffuse with moisture from the epoxy over time. It should be noted that electrical tests performed immediately after soldering generally will give no indication of this potential problem. In any case, the end result will be corrosion of the chip metallization over time and premature failure of the device in the field.

VAPOR PHASE/IR REFLOW SOLDERING

In both vapor phase and IR reflow soldering, the risk of separation between epoxy/metal can also be high. Operating temperatures are 215°C (vapor phase) or 240°C (IR) and duration may also be longer (30 sec–60 sec). On the same theoretical basis, there should also be separation. However, in both these methods, solder paste is applied to the pads of the boards; no fluxes are used. Also, the devices are not immersed into the hot solder. This reduces the possibility of solder forcing itself into the epoxy-lead frame interface. Furthermore, in the vapor phase system, the soldering environment is “oxygen-free” and considered “contaminant free”. Being so, it could be visualized that as far as reliability with respect corrosion, both of these methods are advantageous over wave soldering.

BIAS MOISTURE TEST

A bias moisture test was designed to determine the effect on package performance. In this test, the packages are pressured in a stream chamber to accelerate penetration of moisture into the package. An electrical bias is applied on the device. Should there be any contaminants trapped within the package, the moisture will quickly form an electrolyte and cause the electrodes (which are the lead fingers), the gold wire and the aluminum bond-pads of the silicon device to corrode. The aluminum bond-pads, being the weakest link of the system, will generally be the first to fail.

This proprietary accelerated bias/moisture pressure-test is significant in relation to the life test condition at 85°C and 85% relative humidity. Once cycle of approximately 100 hours has been shown to be equivalent to 2000 hours in the 85/85 condition. Should the packages start to fail within the first cycle in the test, it is anticipated that the boards with these components in the harsh operating environment (85°C/85% RH) will experience corrosion and eventual electrical failures within its first 2000 hours of operation.

Whether this is significant to a circuit board manufacturer will obviously be dependent on the products being manufactured and the workmanship or reliability standards. Generally in systems with a long warranty and containing many components, it is advisable both on a reputation and cost basis to have the most reliable parts available.

TEST RESULTS

The comparison of vapor phase and wave-soldering upon the reliability of molded Small-Outline packages was performed using the bias moisture test (see Table I). It is clearly seen that vapor phase reflow soldering gave more consistent results. Wave-soldering results were based on manual operation giving variations in soldering parameters such as temperature and duration.

TABLE I. Vapor Phase vs. Wave Solder

1. Vapor phase (60 sec. exposure @ 215°C)	
= 9 failures/1723 samples	
= 0.5% (average over 32 sample lots)	
2. Wave solder (2 sec total immersion @ 260°C)	
= 16 failures/1201 samples	
= 1.3% (average over 27 sample lots)	
Package:	SO-14 lead
Test:	Bias moisture test 85% R. H., 85°C for 2000 hours
Device:	LM324M

In Table II we examine the tolerance of the Small-Outlined (SOIC) package to varying immersion time in a hot solder pot. SO-14 lead molded packages were subjected to the bias moisture test after being treated to the various soldering conditions and repeated four (4) times. End point was an electrical test after an equivalent of 4000 hours 85/85 test. Results were compared for packages by itself against packages which were surface-mounted onto a FR-4 printed wire board.

TABLE II. Summary of Wave Solder Results
(85% R.H./85°C Bias Moisture Test, 2000 hours)
(# Failures/Total Tested)

	Unmounted	Mounted
Control/Vapor Phase 15 sec @ 215°C	0/114	0/84
Solder Dip 2 sec @ 260°C	2/144 (1.4%)	0/85
Solder Dip 4 sec @ 260°C	—	0/83
Solder Dip 6 sec @ 260°C	13/248 (5.2%)	1/76 (1.3%)
Solder Dip 10 sec @ 260°C	14/127 (11.0%)	3/79 (3.8%)
Package:	SO-14 lead	
Device:	LM324M	

Since the package is of very small mass and experiences a rather sharp thermal shock followed by stresses created by the mismatch in expansion, the results show the package being susceptible to failures after being immersed in excess of 6 seconds in a solder pot. In the second case where the packages were mounted, the effect of severe temperature excursion was reduced. In the second case where the packages were mounted, the effect of severe temperature excursion was reduced. In any case, because of the repeated treatment, the package had failures when subjected in excess of 6 seconds immersion in hot solder. The safety margin is therefore recommended as maximum 4 seconds immersion. If packages were immersed longer than 4 seconds, there is a probable chance of finding some long term reliability failures even though the immediate electrical test data could be acceptable.

Finally, Table III examines the bias moisture test performed on surface mount (SOIC) components manufactured by various semiconductor houses. End point was an electrical test after an equivalent of 6000 hours in a 85/85 test. Failures were analyzed and corrosion was checked for in each case to detect flaws in package integrity.

**TABLE III. U.S. Manufacturers Integrated Circuits
Reliability in Various Solder Environments
(# Failure/Total Tested)**

Package SO-8	Vapor Phase 30 sec	Wave Solder 2 sec	Wave Solder 4 sec	Wave Solder 6 sec	Wave Solder 10 sec
Manuf A	8/30*	1/30*	0.30	12/30*	16/30*
Manuf B	2/30*	8/30*	2/30*	22/30*	20/30*
Manuf C	0/30	0/29	0/29	0/30	0/30
Manuf D	1/30*	0/30	12/30*	14/30*	2/30*
Manuf E	1/30**	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/30
Manuf F	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/30
Manuf G	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/30	0/30

*Corrosion-failures

**No Visual Defects—Non-corrosion failures

Test: Accelerated Bias Moisture Test; 85% R.H./85°C, 6000 equivalent hours.

SUMMARY

Based on the results presented, it is noted that surface-mounted components are as reliable as standard molded DIP packages. Whereas DIPs were never processed by being totally immersed in a hot solder wave during printed circuit board soldering, surface mounted components such as SOICs (Small Outline) are expected to survive a total immersion in the hot solder in order to capitalize on maximum population on boards. Being constructed from a thermoset plastic of relatively low Tg compared to the soldering temperature, the ability of the package to survive is dependent on the time of immersion and also the cleanliness of material. The results indicate that one should limit the immersion time of package in the solder wave to a maximum of 4 seconds in order to truly duplicate the reliability of a DIP. As the package size is reduced, as in a SO-8 lead, the requirement becomes even more critical. This is shown by the various manufacturers' performance. Results indicate there is room for improvement since not all survived the hot solder immersion without compromise to lower reliability.

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