

Method and Instrument for Automated Analysis of Fluid-Based Processing Systems

Cross Reference to Related Application

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This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional application Serial Number 60/305,437, filed July 13, 2001.

Field of the Invention

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The present invention is in the area of chemical analysis of fluid systems, such as wet baths used in processing, and pertains more particularly to instrumentation for sampling such systems, processing such samples for analysis, and presenting the processed samples to analytical equipment for measurement, in an automated fashion unattended for extended time periods.

Cross-Reference to Related Documents

The present application is related to an issued US Patent, No. 5,414,259, issued to Howard M. Kingston on May 9, 1995, incorporated herein in its entirety by reference, to a co-pending patent application S/N 09/015,469, filed January 29, 1998, also incorporated in its entirety by reference, and to a provisional patent application filed January 29, 2001, bearing S/N 60/264748, now U. S. Serial No. 10/004,627 filed December 4, 2001, which is also incorporated herein in its entirety by reference.

Background of the Invention

This invention relates specifically to instrumentation enabling methods
5 for in-process, automated, continuous analysis of fluid systems for such as
contamination, specified concentration of specific species, and the like. In the
present application analysis of liquid baths containing processing solutions
used in front-end processing in semiconductor manufacturing is used as a
specific example, but the uses of the instrument are not limited to this
10 exemplary application. The method and apparatus of the present invention are
applicable in many areas, such as environmental, medical, pharmaceutical,
industrial processing and other related and unrelated fields.

In a preferred embodiment the system of the invention uses a modified
form of Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry (IDMS), known to the inventors
15 as Speciated Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry (SIDMS). The exemplary
method is an elemental and speciation threshold measurement method that is
optimized for quality assurance at and near instrumental detection limits. The
threshold measurement method is automated for unattended operation, and
describes an In-process, Atmospheric Pressure Interface, Mass Spectrometer
20 (IP-API-MS). The IP-API-MS apparatus is designed for identification and
quantification of elemental contaminants or compounds and species in fluids,
and in the exemplary case, liquid solutions.

Mass Spectrometry instrumentation is frequently used as the technique
of choice in measuring parts-per-billion (ppb) and sub-ppb levels of elements
25 and compounds in aqueous and other solutions of other solvents and reagents,
as well as in gases. However, mass spectrometers typically must be operated
and regularly calibrated by experienced technicians. There are, however, a
wide variety of applications wherein continuous and unattended operation of
the Mass Spectrometer would be highly desirable. These cases include remote
30 operation, around the clock monitoring, and operation either in hostile
environments, or where human interaction must be minimized, among others.

One good example of an application wherein around-the-clock, unattended monitoring is highly desirable is that of contamination-monitoring and control for wet-bath processing in manufacturing in the semiconductor industry. There are a variety of processes in semiconductor manufacturing wherein wafers in process must be immersed and treated in various ways, such as cleaning, neutralizing, etching and the like.

In the example of semiconductor manufacturing, various types of contamination are a critical issue; in particular contamination by particulate matter, as even very tiny particles may be larger than device and connection geometry in various stages of manufacture. At least partly for this reason a rigid clean-room environment is absolutely necessary, and minimal human interaction is highly desirable. Because of this, development and implementation of real time, in-situ sensors into clean room processes is considered by many to be one of the top five defect reduction challenges in the future of the industry. For further information regarding defect reduction in this industry, the article from International Technology Roadmap for Semiconductors 1999 Edition: Defect Reduction, Sematech, Austin TX, 1999, (pg. 270), is incorporated herein by reference. There are many other references supporting this need, which is notoriously well-known in the art.

In order to accomplish unattended operation for wet bath contamination and constituent monitoring, apparatus must be developed that will automatically monitor constituent concentrations at their threshold level, accurately and without the need to compensate for inevitable systematic errors associated with instrument drift. Quantitation of concentration may then be obtained without the need for traditional calibration once the threshold level has been exceeded.

Prior art calibration techniques typically use calibration standards to generate a calibration curve relating instrument response to concentration of standards. Such a calibration curve is used to determine the concentration of unknown samples. A typical calibration curve of this sort is illustrated as Fig. 1 in this specification (curve A). Prior art techniques do not yield accurate results if the instrument response drifts or there is a response shift caused by a

difference in the matrices between a standard and a sample. Mass spectrometers, typically used in such measurements, are especially susceptible to rapid drift, causing a change in the calibration response as shown in Fig. 1 (curve B). Such rapid drift results in a need for frequent calibrations that are normally performed by experienced technicians.

In calibration procedures, a considerable effort must be made to match the matrices of the sample and standard, to ensure ionization efficiencies, ionization suppression, or enhancements remain constant between a sample and the standard. Viscosity differences between the sample and the standard matrices may also cause unequal instrument responses associated, for example, with changing sample introduction rates, and are inevitable in real-world situations. Matrix effects altering solution viscosity or ionization efficiency can result in calibration changes such as shown in Fig. 1 (curve C). Clearly, in order to achieve full-time, real-time, measurement without human intervention for calibration or maintenance, a method and apparatus must be provided that overcomes these prior-art requirements.

The present inventors have chosen an enhancement of a known technique for achieving calibration-free mass spectrometry measurements. The known technique is Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry, hereinafter IDMS. In IDMS, one takes advantage of well-known, naturally-occurring isotope ratios in essentially all elements. For example, it is well-known that the average atomic mass of copper (Cu) in the natural state is 63.546, consisting of isotopes 62.9396 at 69.2% and 64.9276 at 30.8%. Very generally speaking, assuming an analysis for Cu content is required, one takes a sample of the solution to be analyzed, spikes the sample with an enriched standard solution having a substantially different isotope ratio than the naturally-occurring ratio, introduces the spiked sample to a mass spectrometer, and records the measured mass ratio between the isotopes. The measurement is going to differ from the naturally-occurring ratio and the standard spike ratio, and from the measured ratio, knowing the quantity of the original sample, and the quantity of the spike solution, one can calculate the single unknown, that being the concentration of Cu in the original sample.

IDMS, in a form known as Speciated Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry, hereinafter SIDMS, is a patented technique, described in enabling detail in US Patent 5,414,259, issued May 9, 1995 to inventor Howard M. Kingston Ph.D, and incorporated herein in its entirety by reference. The teaching in the referenced patent describes both the general (previously known) and the special (patented) technique as adapted for the instrument in embodiments of the present invention.

There are a considerable number of other available references describing IDMS, among them:

Fassett, J. D., Paulsen, P. J. Isotope-dilution mass spectrometry for accurate elemental analysis, *Anal. Chem.* (1989) **61** 643A – 649A.

Rottmann, L., Heumann, K. G., Development of an on-line Isotope Dilution Technique with HPLC/ICP-MS for the accurate determination of elemental species, *Fresenius J. Anal. Chem.*, (1994) **350** 221-227.

Heumann, K. G., Rottmann, L., Vogl, J., Elemental Speciation with Liquid Chromatography-Inductively Coupled Plasma Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry, *J. Anal. Atom. Spectro.* (1994) **9** 1351-1355.

Fassett, J. D. and Kingston, H. M., Determination of Nanogram Quantities of Vanadium in Biological Material by Isotope Dilution Thermal Ionization Mass Spectrometry With Ion Counting Detection, *Anal. Chem.*, (1985) **57** 2474-2478,

all of which are incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

It will be apparent to the skilled artisan that employing the patented techniques of the above-referenced patent to Kingston is an excellent first step in accomplishing full-time, real-time mass spectrometry analysis of fluid systems, but that there are many other challenges in sample collection, sample handling, sample spiking, dilution, control, and many other areas to accomplish such a robust measurement and control system in real applications, such as in wet-bath analysis in semiconductor manufacturing, which has been

selected as an exemplary application for describing the apparatus and methods of the present invention.

What is clearly needed is a modular system for deployment in real-world applications, which provides for all of the logistics of sample collection, flow-rate manipulation with extreme accuracy, sample alteration and preparation, extremely accurate spiking, sample introduction to analytical systems (mass spectrometry), information gathering and communication, on-line cleaning and purging between sample collection, and overall control among other things; and it is to apparatus and methods for accomplishing these ends reliably and efficiently that the following enabling descriptions of such a system is devoted.

Summary of the Invention

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention an analytical apparatus to monitor fluid systems is provided, comprising at least one extraction module having a raw-sample reservoir connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones of said fluid systems, to extract raw samples for analysis from said fluid systems, one or more modification modules comprising additive materials to modify the extracted raw samples prior to analysis, an analytical device to receive at least a portion of said raw samples in an ordered sequence, and to determine concentration of at least one constituent of said sample portion, fluid-handling apparatus for transferring fluid through the analytical apparatus, and a computerized control and management system to manage operations of component modules and devices, and to report analytical results. The apparatus is further characterized in that the control and management system coordinates extraction of raw samples, modification as needed, introduction of fluids to the analytical device, and reporting of analytical results on a continuous basis over plural cycles.

In some cases there are a plurality of extraction modules associated one-to-one with a like plurality of fluid systems. Also in some cases the fluid systems are wet baths in a processing environment, and the extracted fluids are

liquids. In some more particular cases the processing environment is a fabrication system (fab) devoted to semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) manufacturing.

In some embodiments of the invention the modification modules
5 comprise chemicals for altering pH of extracted liquids. The analytical device may be a mass spectrometer, and further comprise an ionization apparatus for vaporizing and ionizing liquids prior to introduction to the mass spectrometer.

In some preferred embodiments analysis is based on isotopic ratio, the one or more modification modules comprise isotope dilution modules for
10 introducing isotope mixtures to liquids in the system, and the isotope mixtures are in a ratio not naturally occurring. There may also be a plurality of extraction modules and a plurality of modification modules, wherein the fluid-handling apparatus comprises one or more mixers having two or more inputs to one output, and switching valves between the modules and the inputs to the
15 mixers, and wherein the control and management system cycles the switching valves and causes movement of liquids, and of materials from the modification modules, to mix selected liquids with selected materials from the modification modules.

In embodiments of the invention individual ones of the mixers
20 comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing. In these and other embodiments the raw-sample reservoir in the at least one extraction module may be connected to a vacuum apparatus through a remotely-operable valve,
25 to draw a relative vacuum in the reservoir to draw material from the fluid system connected by conduit to the reservoir. In preferred embodiments the raw-sample reservoir is vertically-oriented and the conduit from the wet-bath enters at a height on the reservoir such that a liquid sample drawn into the reservoir may have a gas gap over the sample. There may be a cover-gas
30 source connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve to provide a cover gas over a raw sample in the reservoir, and nitrogen is a preferred cover gas.

In certain preferred embodiments there is a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw sample in the reservoir into the syringe. The syringe in these embodiments comprises a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control, and the control and management system may be enabled to vary rate of plunger translation. In some cases the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor. The syringe is preferably connected through a three-way switching valve to the intermediate conduit to the sample reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

In some embodiments there is a flush reservoir connected through additional valves to the syringe to the raw-sample reservoir, to a source of flushing liquids, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, such that the elements of the extraction module may be flushed and cleaned between sample cycles.

In some embodiments of the invention individual ones of the modification modules are chemical alteration modules comprising at least one chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals and apparatus for providing portions of the solution to other elements of the analytical apparatus. The apparatus for providing portions of the solution comprises a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the chemical reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical reservoir into the syringe. Further, the syringe may comprise a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control. Again, the control and management system may be enabled to vary rate of plunger translation, in some cases through use of a precision stepper motor.

In some embodiments the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the chemical reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus. Further, the portions provided to other elements may be provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected to another module in the analytical apparatus. In these cases individual ones of the mixers comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

In some preferred embodiments of the invention individual ones of the isotope dilution modules comprise at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring, and a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus. The mechanism for providing portions of the solution may comprise a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the isotope reservoir below a surface of the mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe, and the syringe may comprise a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control. Plunger translation may be varied, and may be through use of a precision stepper motor.

In particular cases the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus, and the portions provided to other elements may be provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected to another module in the analytical apparatus. Individual ones of the mixers comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output

conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

In some embodiments the isotope reservoir contains an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration, and further comprises a solvent reservoir in addition to the at least one isotope reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing the solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, and still further comprising a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers, enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus. In some cases the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixtures enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).

In specific embodiments the system of syringes comprises individual syringes each having a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe. The plunger may be driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control, and the precision translation mechanism may comprise a precision stepper motor.

In certain embodiments individual ones of the syringes in the system of syringes are connected by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single output of a precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.

In another aspect of the present invention, in an analytical apparatus to monitor liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of specific constituents, an extraction module is provided comprising a raw

sample reservoir connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones of said liquid systems, a vacuum source connected to the raw sample reservoir through a remotely-controllable valve, to draw raw samples into the reservoir, and a syringe connected by intermediate conduit through a switching valve to
5 the sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, and to an ejection conduit, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw sample in the reservoir into the syringe, and appropriately switching the valve and extending the plunger ejects the precise volume through the ejection
10 conduit.

In preferred embodiments of the extraction module the raw-sample reservoir is vertically-oriented and the conduit from the liquid systems enters at a height on the reservoir such that a liquid sample drawn into the reservoir may have a gas gap over the sample. There may further be a cover-gas source
15 connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve to provide a cover gas over a raw sample in the reservoir, and the cover gas may preferably be nitrogen.

In some embodiments of the extraction module the syringe comprises a plunger with a precision translation mechanism drivable by a control and
20 management system, enabling precision volume control. The precision translation mechanism is controllable in these embodiments at variable translation rates, enabling variation of fluid transfer rate. In some cases a stepper motor is used.

In some embodiments there is a flush reservoir connected through
25 additional valves to the syringe, to the raw-sample reservoir, to a source of flushing liquids, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, such that the elements of the extraction module may be flushed and cleaned between sample cycles.

In another aspect of the invention, in an analytical apparatus to monitor
30 liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of specific constituents, a chemical alteration module is provided, comprising a

chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals, and apparatus for providing portions of the solution to other elements of the analytical apparatus. The apparatus for providing portions of the solution may comprise a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the chemical
5 reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical reservoir into the syringe. The syringe may comprise a plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by a control and management system, enabling precision volume
10 control, and the rate of translation of the precision translation mechanism may be variable, enabling variation of rate of liquid transfer. In some cases a stepper motor is used.

In preferred embodiments the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the chemical reservoir and to an output
15 conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

In yet another aspect of the invention, in an analytical apparatus to monitor liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of
20 specific constituents, an isotope dilution modification module is provided, comprising at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring, and a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

25 The mechanism for providing portions of the solution may comprise a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the at least one isotope reservoir below a surface of the mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe. The syringe may comprise a
30 plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by a control and management system, enabling precision volume control, and the control and

management system may be enabled to vary rate of plunger translation, such as through a stepper motor.

In some embodiments the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus. The isotope reservoir in preferred embodiments contains an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration, and the system may further comprise a solvent reservoir in addition to the at least one isotope reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing a solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, and a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers, enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

In preferred embodiments of the dilution module the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixtures enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).

In preferred embodiments the syringes in the system of syringes comprise individual syringes each having a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe. The syringes may comprise each a plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by the control a management system, enabling precision volume control, and a stepping motor may be used in some cases.

In some embodiments of the isotope dilution module individual ones of the syringes in the system of syringes are connected by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single

output of a precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.

In yet another aspect of the present invention a method for monitoring fluid systems for concentration of selected species is provided, comprising the steps of (a) drawing raw samples of the fluid systems one-at-a-time into at least one raw-sample reservoir connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones of the fluid systems; (b) modifying the raw samples by addition of material from one or more modification modules; (c) providing measured portions of modified samples to an analytical device; and (d) determining concentration of the selected species by the analytical device. In preferred embodiments of the method, in step (a), there are a plurality of extraction modules associated one-to-one with a like plurality of fluid systems. Also in step (a), raw samples are drawn from wet-bath fluid systems in a processing environment, and the extracted fluids are liquids. In some preferred cases the wet baths are baths in a semiconductor fabrication unit (fab) devoted to semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) manufacturing.

In many cases in the method, in step (b), modification is accomplished by adding chemicals for altering pH of extracted liquids. Also in many cases the analytical device is a mass spectrometer, and there is a further step for vaporizing and ionizing liquids prior to introduction to the mass spectrometer.

In some preferred embodiments analysis is based on isotopic ratio, and there is a further step for introducing an isotope mixture to a liquid sample in the system, the isotope mixtures in a ratio not naturally occurring. In some cases additions are made to sample volumes by a fluid handling system through one or more mixers having two or more inputs to one output, the fluid-handling system switching valves between the modules and the inputs to the mixers.

In some embodiments of the mixers are implemented as conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing. Also in some embodiments, in step (a), samples are drawn into the raw-sample reservoir by opening a valve to a

vacuum apparatus connected to the reservoir, drawing a relative vacuum in the reservoir to draw material from the fluid system connected by conduit to the reservoir. In these embodiments a gas gap is maintained over a liquid sample drawn into the sample reservoir, by implementing the raw-sample reservoir as
5 a vertically-oriented container with conduit from the wet-bath entering at a height on the reservoir above a level anticipated for a sample volume in the reservoir. The gas gap may be maintained by a cover-gas source connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve, and the cover gas can be nitrogen.

10 In preferred embodiments there may be a further step for drawing a portion of a raw sample from the sample reservoir via a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the raw sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw
15 sample in the reservoir into the syringe. In these embodiments the syringe may be operated by a plunger driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control. Further, plunger translation may be controlled to control rate of fluid transfer. The precision translation mechanism may comprise a precision stepper motor, and rate of translation is
20 then controlled by controlling the stepping rate of the motor.

In some embodiments a portion of a raw sample withdrawn into the syringe is ejected to other elements through a three-way switching valve connected to an output conduit. There may further be steps for flushing and cleaning the reservoir and the syringe, by operating valves connecting both to
25 a source of cleaning liquid, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, and operating these elements to draw cleaning liquid into and through the elements, and then ejecting the cleaning liquid to drain.

In preferred embodiments of the method, in step (b), chemicals are added in solution to samples from chemical alteration modules comprising at
30 least one chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals and apparatus for providing portions of the solution to the samples. Chemicals are drawn from the chemical reservoir for addition to samples.

preferably by a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the chemical reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical reservoir into the syringe. The
5 syringe is preferably operated by a plunger driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control, and the rate of plunger translation may be varied, varying thereby the rate of liquid movement. The precision translation mechanism may be driven by a precision stepper motor.

10 Also in preferred embodiments chemicals are provided by operating a three-way switching valve connected to the conduit to the chemical reservoir and to an output conduit. Portions provided to other elements may be provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected to
15 another module in the analytical apparatus. Individual ones of the mixers may be formed of conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

In some cases the isotope mixture is provided from one or more
20 isotope dilution modules comprising at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring, through a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus. Further, the portions of the solution may be provided via a syringe connected by intermediate conduit
25 to the isotope reservoir below a surface of the mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe. Further the syringe in preferred embodiments is operated by a plunger driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control, and the
30 control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation. In some cases a precision stepper motor drives the translation mechanism.

In some embodiments the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus, and the portions provided to other elements are provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the isotope dilution module and another input connected to another module in the analytical apparatus. Individual ones of the mixers may be implemented by conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

In some embodiments isotope mixtures are provided in different concentration levels by maintaining an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration in the isotope reservoir, and diluting portions of that mixture with solvent from a solvent reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing the solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, doing the dilution through a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers, enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus. In a particular case the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixtures enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).

Preferably, individual syringes in the system of syringes are operated by a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe. Further, the plunger of an individual syringe may be driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control. In some cases a stepper motor is used. Individual ones of the syringes in the system of syringes are connected preferably by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two

syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single output of a precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.

In embodiments of the present invention, taught in enabling detail
5 below, for the first time a sampling system is provided wherein samples from fluid baths may be drawn, and concentrations analyzed and reported, on a continuous and fully automated basis.

Brief description of the Drawings

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Fig. 1 is an exemplary graph showing calibration curves for a mass spectrometry instrument, and how the curves may change under various circumstances.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating, at an abstract level, an exemplary
15 apparatus in an embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating in more detail a modular instrument after the abstract model of Fig. 2.

Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram illustrating an extraction module from Fig. 3 in expanded detail.

20 Fig. 5 is a schematic diagram illustrating a chemical introduction unit from Fig. 3 in expanded detail.

Fig. 6 is a schematic diagram illustrating a dilution module unit from Fig. 3 in expanded detail.

25 Fig. 7 is a block diagram of a control system used in an embodiment of the present invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Overview

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Speciated Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry (SIDMS), as described in the '259 patent to Kingston referenced above, has been developed to assess

the quantification of species and also their transformations. In SIDMS a predetermined species is specifically isotopically labeled and introduced to accomplish such measurements. The species of interest is previously known and specifically evaluated. In this invention the labeled species (frequently multiple species simultaneously) are being created in solution and are not previously determined in composition and structure until evaluated for structural information. Quantification is of the elemental ion and speciation information first established in-process through dynamic equilibrium established with a non-complexing salt of an enriched stable isotope in real time and in-process.

In the SIDMS method, as enabled in embodiments of the present invention, one may accomplish unattended operation of an apparatus that will accurately monitor elemental concentration threshold levels, identify, and quantify elemental contaminants or compounds and species in fluids. Unlike traditional IDMS this method enhances and improves measurement at and near the detection limit of mass spectrometers.

Generally, the apparatus in embodiments of the present invention uses the SIDMS method for In-process measurement, using an Atmospheric Pressure Interface coupled to a Mass Spectrometer (IP-API-MS). The IP-API-MS apparatus is designed for identification and quantification of elemental contaminants or compounds and species in fluids without reliance upon a high temperature argon plasma for equilibrium or requiring a high-pressure liquid chromatography HPLC separation step prior to measurement.

The instrument in its several embodiments described in enabling detail below, and others within the spirit and scope of the invention, integrates application flexibility and growth along with key attributes that must be incorporated to meet these needs. The instrument has multiple configurations. These multiple configurations are to deal with gases and liquids. Within the liquid analysis regime, the configurations accommodate ultra pure water (UPW) and a broad assortment of acids and bases that are typically utilized in manufacture of semiconductor devices, used as a particular example in this specification, and also in other industrial applications.

In embodiments to analyze liquids, the instrument utilizes an Electro Spray Time of Flight Mass Spectrometer (ES-TOF-MS) for high-speed measurement in very low parts-per-billion (ppb) range. This ES-TOF-MS is enabled with corrosive-resistant hardware where the application warrants. A
5 second configuration consists of a combination liquid chromatography (LC) pumping system and an Electro Spray Time of Flight Mass Spectrometer (LC-ES-TOF-MS) for measurements in the parts-per-trillion (ppt) range. The electro-spray (ES) is the interface between the LC and MS components and is operated in a non-classical manner.

10 The instrument in preferred embodiments is computer-controlled, with the flexibility to change operational conditions for various solution compositions, component analytes, and detection limit requirements. Concentration and chemical species quantification are also enabled in this configuration. The instrument in all preferred embodiments is compact, and
15 configured to be located in close proximity to the wet bench or gas related process equipment to be analyzed, and is implemented in materials compatible with a clean room manufacturing environment. Some instruments in current use, such as the inductively-coupled plasma mass spectrometers (ICP-MS), are not compatible with clean room manufacturing environments that are
20 envisioned in this application.

The instrument in preferred embodiments of the present invention is developed to operate unattended for long periods of time, maintaining high degrees of reliability in accuracy and precision. This is accomplished by relying on altered isotopic ratio measurements of elements, which minimizes
25 the use of calibration, and in many cases eliminates it entirely. Additionally, the instrument will measure elements and molecules, along with species of these components, providing data richness required by sophisticated chemistries and evaluation tools.

A clear objective of instruments in preferred embodiments of the
30 present invention is to analyze all the elements in all the solutions used in wafer manufacturing in near real time. In another embodiment the system of the invention has an interface with an interpretive advisory information system

that provides process control status and predictions on optimum timing for solution changes and information on whether each solution is within tolerances, based on the specific processes and end.

The analytical tools of the present invention in various embodiments provide near real-time analytical chemical metrology of contaminant concentrations of semiconductor fab reagents and cleaning solutions. These contaminants include, among others, transition metals (e.g., Co, Cr, Cu, Fe, Mn, Ni, Ti, V, and Zn) and complex species of these elements in fab solutions. Generally, however, it is desirable to measure any additional elements present at significant concentrations.

In preferred embodiments measurements are made with 50-500 microliter quantities of solution. The contamination concentration range that must be assessed is mid-ppb to low-ppt. As semiconductor chip geometries continue to shrink, contaminants have even greater effect on the viability of the final products. Additional chemical information will identify key chemical complex ligands and compositions that are responsible for specific chemical reaction events and enable precise optimization of chemical conditions.

Abstract Description of Instrument

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Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating, at an abstract level, an exemplary apparatus in an embodiment of the present invention, related, where appropriate, to monitoring of wet baths in semiconductor manufacturing as a specific example of application.

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In Fig. 2, sample reservoirs 201 represents one or more reservoirs for holding sample solutions prior to pre-processing, spike mixing, and analysis. Fig. 2 is an abstract model, and does not show detail such as apparatus for pulling sample from the processing baths that are monitored, but such apparatus may be assumed to be included, and is described in more detail below. An important function of the sample reservoirs is to provide for an air-gap separation from the wet-bath monitored, and to enable a significant change in flow rate, which is also described in additional detail below.

30

As described above relative to SIDMS samples may have to be pre-processed in some instances to prepare for analysis. There are a variety of reasons for such pre-treatment, and an equal variety of procedures and chemistry involved. As an example, one of the uses of wet-baths in semiconductor processing is etching oxides and other materials on wafer surfaces. The solutions used in the etching baths may be highly acidic in some cases and highly caustic in others. Some such solutions may be detrimental to elements of the instrument apparatus, and the raw samples have to therefore be treated to substantially neutralize the acid or base nature of the raw sample.

The nature of the instrument in embodiments of the invention is that sample from a sample reservoir is introduced to an equalibrator (equalizer) apparatus, typically a laminar-flow mixing junction to be described more fully below, and, in one instance chemical reagents in solution may be introduced to the same equalibrator. In another instance pre-processed sample is introduced to another equalibrator along with spike solution, and the resulting spiked solution is then introduced to an electrospray system integrated with an atmospheric ion generator for introduction to a mass spectrometer. The overall procedure, at an abstract level, is a sequentially cascaded process ending at injection to the mass spectrometer.

Sample introduction apparatus 203 represents a sub-system for controlled injection of sample from the one or more sample reservoirs 201 into, typically an equalibrator not shown. Spike introduction apparatus 205 represents a sub-system, of which there may be several, for preparing spike solution, that being, as described above, a known mixture of isotopes of the sought-after specie, the ratio differing significantly from the naturally-occurring ratio in the specie in the sample. Chemical modification apparatus 207 represents a subsystem, of which there may also be several in different embodiments of the invention, to serve the number of sample reservoirs and baths being monitored, for injecting in the cascaded process chemicals in precise amounts for pre-treatment of sample before or after spiking, and before analysis.

The order of the introduction and the modification sub-systems shown in Fig. 2 is exemplary only, and can vary considerably, which is why a path from apparatus 203 directly to apparatus 207 is shown, and direct paths are also shown.

5 Solution handling unit 209 represents sub-systems of fluid conduit, check valves, switching valves, vacuum sub-systems, drive units, and the like for moving samples in precisely-measured increments from one place to the next in the overall instrument.

10 Once a sample has traversed the cascading system and has been pre-treated as necessary and spiked as necessary it is delivered to an atmospheric ion generator 211 which comprises an electrospray sub-system for vaporizing and ionizing the prepared and spiked sample for introduction to a mass spectrometer 213, which may in some embodiments be a quadrupole
15 instrument, and in others a time-of-flight instrument.

 It will be appreciated by the skilled artisan that the description thus far has been of a system with potentially a plurality of reservoirs for sample, a plurality of chemical pre-treatment apparatus, and a similar plurality of spiking sub-systems, and that such a system may be dedicated to sequential
20 analysis of a variety of samples, several of which may in various stages of treatment and processing at the same time, with the instrument controlled to sequentially deliver prepared samples to the electrospray, and hence to the mass spectrometer. The mass spectrometer, then, may be generating one spectra after another, providing important information about the concentration
25 of one or more constituents of a plurality of baths connected to the modular system of various embodiments of the present invention.

 The instrument described herein in various embodiments is computer-controlled and managed, and various functions of the overall control and data management are provided by a microprocessor 215 and controller 217 in
30 Fig. 2. Microprocessor 215 comprises a data collection and analysis system 219 and an information distribution system 221. Mass spectra, among other information, is sent to unit 219, and data may be manipulated in any of a

variety of ways, under the auspices of controller 217, executing software proprietary to the system of the invention, and unit 221 delivers processed information to a system (and user) interface 223. In some cases interface 223 provides displayed information for technicians and the like to make decisions
5 involving bath maintenance, and in others, may provide data directly to automated systems enabling bath maintenance. Data and processed information may also be provided to overall fab maintenance software developing historical data to match for many purposes with semiconductor processors resulting subsequently from wafers processed in the monitored
10 baths.

Fig. 2 illustrates a sample analyzer system and path to data collection unit 215, which is an optional apparatus in embodiments of the present invention, and may be used for qualitative analysis of samples, such as pH, temperature, and the like. Fig. 2 also illustrates a gas chromatograph 227 and
15 a liquid chromatograph 229. These units are not needed and not used in many preferred embodiments of the invention, but are useful in some applications, and therefore illustrated at an abstract level herein.

Modular Instrument in a Preferred Embodiment

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Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating in more detail a modular instrument after the abstract model of Fig. 2. In the modular unit of Fig. 3 there are illustrated five extraction modules, three chemical introduction modules, and six dilution modules, all interconnected by fluid conduits and
25 switching valves to manage samples and ultimately deliver prepared samples to electrospray and hence to mass spectrometry. The chemical introduction modules and dilution modules are both dedicated to modifying samples or portions of samples extracted by the extraction modules.

More specifically extraction modules 301, 305, 309, 313, and 317 are
30 shown paired with wet-baths 303, 307, 311, 315, and 319 respectively. Each extraction module is connected to its wet bath by at least one fluid conduit, as module 301 is shown connected to bath 303 by exemplary conduit 321.

In practice, the extraction modules are a part of an instrument in an embodiment of the present invention, and are implemented in a cabinetry somewhat remote necessarily from the baths to be monitored. Part of the reason is that the baths are spaced apart by the needs of manufacturing steps in the fab, and the instrument of the invention is not necessarily a welcome guest in the clean room. Exemplary conduit 321 for each bath and extraction module pair, then, will be of significant length. This fact necessitates a relatively high flow rate of sample from a bath, say bath 303, to a reservoir in an extraction unit, for example unit 301. A relatively high flow rate is needed to ensure adequate sample to maximize efficiency of the monitoring system, partly because the distances between points within the system between which sample solution must be passed, are very much shorter distances than the initial distance from the bath to the first reservoir in the system.

The extraction modules are unique sub-systems which, under management by the computer control system partly described above, draw raw sample quickly from baths to be monitored, on a timed basis, effectively separate drawn sample volumes from the bath, preventing any backflow or migration of sample, and the separation allows provision of a portion of the drawn sample at a completely different flow rate (lower), and in precise volume, to other elements of the system.

In each sample cycle each extraction module provides a precise raw sample portion of the original draw, in this embodiment, to a switching valve (SV), represented in Fig. 3 as SV1. The SVs are valve apparatus that allow a number of incoming conduit paths to be selectively switched to a single directed output. For example, a precise sample volume from extraction module 1 (301) through exemplary conduit 323 will be switched through SV1 (325) into conduit 327 to be delivered into an equalibrator (mixer) 329, labeled here as Mixer 2.

In each extraction cycle for each extraction module a sample volume is drawn from the bath associated with the extraction module. The volume drawn is regulated, but need not be controlled with the precision imposed in subsequent operations, because only a precisely-measured portion of the

drawn sample will be sent on for analysis. It is known that sample constituency changes over time (which is the motivation for precision monitoring), so it is necessary to discard that portion of an originally-drawn sample that is not used, and also to flush, purge, and clean the extraction module for the next cycle, lest material remaining from a previous sample contaminate a new sample. Unique features of the extraction modules accomplish these necessities, and detail is provided below.

While one extraction module is delivering a precisely measured portion of an original sample to mixer 2 (329) all other extraction modules are isolated from the mixer. Also, to maximize efficiency, a maximum number of samples need be analyzed in a minimum time. Therefore, while one extraction module is delivering its sample, the others are in various other stages of their individual extraction cycles. The operations are precisely timed by the control system (not shown in Fig. 3) so, as soon as one module, 301 for example, finishes its delivery, another module is ready to deliver, and so on.

There is, following the above description of extraction cycles, a steady sequence of raw samples delivered to mixer 2 by the extraction modules in order, and each sample is a precisely measured portion of an original sample. Each sample to mixer 2, however, is not ready for injection into an analytical instrument. Some chemical treatment may be necessary, and introduction of spike solution is always necessary for the methods of the invention.

There are in the illustrated preferred embodiment six dilution modules, labeled Dilution Module 1 through Dilution Module 6, and each is connected via fluid conduit and appropriate check and pinch valves (not shown) and the like to a switching valve 3 (363), which is analogous to SV 1 described above, in that it provides selective passage to one out line for several in lines. By controlling SV3 (363) one may introduce spike solution from any one of the dilution modules through SV3 into conduit 357, and hence into Mixer 1 (341).

Dilution modules 1-6 provide a range and variety of spiking solutions, each of which has an isotope constituency for an element to be measured in one of the known wet baths to be monitored, and the ratio of isotopes is known and differs substantially from the isotope ratio occurring naturally for a specie

to be measured. Each of the dilution modules, in fact, is a sophisticated subsystem capable not just of selecting an isotope mix for introduction, but also of preparing isotope spikes of very low concentration on-the-fly for reasons that will be made clear in further description to follow.

5 There are three chemical introduction units labeled as units 1, 2, and 3, and labeled also element numbers 331, 333 and 335 respectively. These modules are for introducing chemicals for any of a range of purposes as described briefly above, such as to neutralize strong acid or base components of introduced samples. Each of these units is charged with appropriate chemicals
10 for the kinds of baths to which the system will be devoted. Further, each is capable of introducing precisely measured quantities of these chemicals, under control of the computerized control system described briefly above. These chemical constituents are provided on demand to switching valve SV2, and thence to mixer 1 (341) via conduit 365.

15 As previously described, selected spikes from dilution modules 1 through 6 are also provided to mixer 341, which mixes the appropriate spike with appropriate chemical (if needed), and the resultant mixture goes to mixer 2 via conduit 359. Timing and control is such that all of the appropriate constituents, being the precisely measured sample, the appropriate treatment
20 chemicals, and the isotope spike, meet in mixer 2 and are equilibrated there. The mixed result is conducted via conduit 361 to an electrospray ionization unit (atmospheric ion generator 211) from Fig. 2. The treated and spiked sample, vaporized and ionized, now goes to the mass spectrometer, and the ratio of isotopes found by the mass spectrometer may be used to determine the
25 concentration of the specie sought for the bath monitored.

 It will be apparent to the skilled artisan that the number and arrangement of modules may differ in different embodiments, and may be determined, at least in part, by the nature of the systems to be monitored and analyzed. Also, the chemicals and spikes with which modules will be charged
30 will be largely determined by the application and nature of system to be analyzed. Further, although Fig. 3 shows chemicals mixed with spike before mixing with sample, another order may be used in some embodiments.

Extraction Modules

Fig. 4 is a somewhat more detailed illustration of one of the five
5 extraction modules from Fig. 3. For illustration purposes the module shown is
module 301, as indicated, connected to bath 303 by conduit 321. A primary
component of the extraction module is a mini-reservoir 401 for collecting an
original sample from bath 303. Mini-reservoir 401 is connected by a conduit
409 to a pressure-controlled nitrogen source through a pinch valve 403, and by
10 a second conduit 407 through a pinch valve 405 to a venturi vacuum source

To draw a sample from bath 303, which, as described previously may
be at a considerable distance from the extraction module, valve 405 is opened
with valve 411 held closed, which creates a vacuum in the mini-reservoir and
causes fluid to be drawn from bath 303. In some cases valve 403 may also be
15 opened allowing nitrogen to flow into the mini-reservoir, and the pressure on
the nitrogen source is controlled to help control the vacuum in the reservoir,
while also providing a protective cover of nitrogen. This is a timed operation
under control of the computer-control system, operating through an
input/output (I/O) interface which controls diaphragms, for example, in valves
20 403 and 405. In this example liquid is quickly drawn into reservoir 401 in a
time short enough that the overall cycle of the system will not be impeded.

When enough liquid is in reservoir 401, valves 403 and 405 are closed,
stopping the liquid draw, and leaving a protective nitrogen blanket over the
sample. The next operation is to draw a precise-volume sample from reservoir
25 401 into a syringe 433. This is done by opening valve 411, switching valve
413 to provide an exclusive path from conduit 415 to conduit 431, switching
valve 435 to provide an exclusive path from conduit 431 into the syringe, and
withdrawing plunger 434 by a precise distance to draw in the precise volume
of the raw sample. Plunger 434 is operated in a preferred embodiment by the
30 computerized control through a precision electric motor, such as a stepper
motor, and a threaded mechanism, providing precise distance and time control

for the plunger, and allowing the rate at which the plunger is withdrawn or extended to be varied in a highly accurate manner.

When the precise volume of sample is drawn, valve 413 is operated to close the path from conduit 417 to conduit 431. Now the precision sample is isolated in syringe 433, and ready to be injected through valve SV1 (325) into mixer 329. This injection operation is programmed to occur at the proper time in concert with injection from a dilution module, and possibly a chemical introduction module, through mixer 1 to mixer 2. Also, the rate of injection may be precisely controlled by the management and control system through whatever translation device drives the plunger of the syringe.

After a precision sample is in place for injection, reservoir 401 and connecting conduit and the like may be purged and prepared for a next sample. This done by opening valve 402 to introduce one or both of nitric acid and ultra-pure water (UPW), while opening valve 425 to provide vacuum to drain reservoir 421. Valve 413 has already been shifted after the draw of precision-volume sample to provide a path from conduit 417 to conduit 419. Nitrogen may again be used by opening valve 427 to reservoir 421 through conduit 429. In this operation the remaining contents of reservoir 401 are drawn into reservoir 421 along with one or both of UPW and nitric acid, leaving reservoir 401 flushed, cleaned, and empty except for a protective nitrogen atmosphere.

At this time reservoir 401 is ready for another extraction cycle, and may proceed to draw another raw sample from the associated bath, although this will typically be delayed according to a predetermined schedule. Once all refuse material is in reservoir 421, valve 420 is opened with valve 425 closed and valve 427 open, and nitrogen pressure urges all the refuse to drain. During this time the precision sample in syringe 433 may have been injected into mixer 2 via SV 1, or may still be waiting for the proper time to do so.

Chemical Introduction Modules

Fig. 5 is a schematic diagram illustrating a chemical introduction unit from Fig. 3 in expanded detail. In this description, module 331 from Fig. 3 is

shown. Module 331 has a chemical reservoir 501 containing the appropriate chemical. A syringe 513 is connected to reservoir 501 via conduit path 509 through a three-way valve 511, a second three-way valve 507, and a pinch valve 503. A pressure-controlled nitrogen source is connected through a pinch
5 valve 505.

In operation, plunger 434 is withdrawn with valve 511 connecting the syringe to path 509 through valve 507 switched to provide the proper path and open valve 503. A precise volume of the chemical solution is drawn into the syringe, and may then be injected at the appropriate time and at an appropriate
10 rate by switching valve 511 to provide a path between the syringe and conduit 337 (see Fig. 3), which conducts the chemical introduced to SV2 and then mixer 1. A source of UPW is also made available through three-way valve 507, and nitrogen through valve 505. During syringe loading valve 505 is
15 opened to prevent a vacuum being drawn on the reservoir by the syringe action.

Dilution Modules

Fig. 6 is a schematic diagram illustrating a dilution module unit from
20 Fig. 3 in expanded detail. A primary purpose of a dilution module in embodiments of the present invention is to provide spike solution in any of several very dilute concentrations. It is necessary in embodiments of the invention that the relative concentration of the spike for any specie for which monitoring is accomplished be in the same general range as the expected
25 concentration in the sample. If the spike concentration is either much too high or much too low, then the mass spectrometer will not be able to provide a ratio of isotopes with adequate resolution to determine the sample concentration. Further, it is known to the inventors that spike solution in most cases remains stable in concentration down to about 1 ppm. Much below that value the spike
30 concentration cannot stay constant for a number of reasons. For example, there are boundary layer effects that are involved in solution stability. At and above about 1ppm isotopes tend to reach an equilibrium in adhering to and

escaping from walls of a reservoir. Below that concentration the concentration will fall as more isotopes precipitate from solution at walls of the reservoir, and are not replaced. There are other effects as well that render lower concentrations unstable.

5 Because of these effects the present inventors have provided a dilution module that stores a stable solution of isotopes at a not-naturally-occurring ratio, in this case at 1ppm, and prepares lower concentrations as needed by precision dilution and mixing. Referring now to Fig. 6, a reservoir 611 stores a relatively large volume of spike solution at 1ppm. By a relatively large
10 volume is meant enough to allow the instrument to operate for a considerable period of time, such as several days, without requiring replenishment. A primary syringe 601 is provided, connected to the 1ppm reservoir 611 through conduits and valves, and also to an arrangement of secondary syringes 619, 643, 645, 647 and 653, and to mixers 607, 631, 653 and 657 through other
15 conduits and valves, and all of these elements are interconnected in a manner that allows for sequential and precision dilution of the 1ppm solution in steps from 1ppm, to 33 ppb, to 1 ppb, to 33 ppt, and finally to 1 ppt. The steps in this example, and the arrangement of elements to accomplish same, are exemplary, and the skilled artisan will recognize that there are many other
20 arrangements and steps that might be accomplished completely within the spirit and scope of the invention.

 Communication between primary syringe 601 and the arrangement of secondary syringes and other elements is through a switching valve 609. In the event 1ppm spike is needed, for example, syringe 619 is used through
25 valve 621 and 623 to draw a precise amount from reservoir 611, and the 1ppm volume is then transferred to syringe 601 by switching valve 621 to the right-hand position, and switching valve 609 to transfer the volume through valve 603 and into syringe 601. When the spike is needed for a sample to be analyzed, switching valve 609 is positioned with valve 603 open to syringe
30 601 to allow syringe 601, by driving its plunger, to move the spike into conduit 355 and on to SV3 (see Fig. 3).

The arrangement and sizing of syringes, as well as the distance of driving plungers and the rate of plunger travel, is such that a 1ppm spike may be mixed with a syringe of dilution solution to accomplish a syringe of 33 ppb, and a 33 ppb spike in a syringe may be mixed again with a syringe of dilution
5 solution to accomplish a 1 ppb solution, and so on. A description of every operation in all instances would be highly redundant, so only a smaller description is given here.

Assume that a 33 ppb spike is required. The first step is the same as for the 1 ppm spike as described above, that is, 1 ppm spike is drawn from
10 reservoir 611 into syringe 619. During this operation valve 613 may be opened to a controlled-pressure nitrogen source for the same purposes as previously described. While the 1 ppm solution is drawn into syringe 619, valves 641, 639, and 667 are set to connect syringe 645 to reservoir 669, and a precise volume of dilution solution is drawn into syringe 645. Now valve 667
15 is closed, and valves 641, 639, 637, and 635 are reset to straight-through, connecting syringe 645 to mixer 631. At the same time, after syringe 619 is filled with the 1 ppm solution, valves 621 and 623 re set to connect syringe 619 to mixer 631. Syringes 619 and 645 are now operated in concert with syringe 643 with valves 625 and 627 set straight-through, and the volume of 1
20 ppm solution from syringe 619 is mixed with the dilution solution in syringe 645 through mixer 631 and into syringe 643. At the end of this operation accomplished through valve manipulation and manipulation of the appropriate syringe plungers, syringe 643 has a precise spike at 33 ppb.

From this point valves 627, 609, and 603, along with the plungers of
25 syringes 601 and 645 are operated to transfer the 33 ppb spike into syringe 601, where it will be ready for transfer, as described above, again through valve 609 into conduit 355 and on to SV 3 (see Fig. 3).

Given the arrangement of the elements labeled in odd numbers from 601 through 669 in Fig. 6, given the description above and the teaching of the
30 invention provided herein, the skilled artisan can easily understand operation of the elements to accomplish the further dilutions to six orders of magnitude below 1 ppm. There are, in fact, a variety of options in the ways that elements

may be controlled to accomplish dilutions, and the apparatus illustrated and described in Fig. 6, given different starting concentration, and different programming in different embodiments is capable of providing near-real-time dilutions from any reasonable starting concentration with any reasonable species and solvents, to many other lesser concentrations. In many cases as well, there may be more than a single specie with unnatural isotope ratios in individual ones or each of the several dilution modules shown in Fig. 3, and described with the aid of Fig. 6.

10 Control System

Fig. 7 is a block diagram of a control system for an instrument in an embodiment of the present invention. Instrument 707 in Fig. 7 represents an instrument as shown abstractly in Fig. 2. With the exception of a computer station 215, comprising a computer 705 and a display unit 703, all of the components of the instrument are housed in a common cabinet, which may be positioned in a convenient location to fluid systems to be monitored, such as in a maintenance area outside the strict clean-room environment in a semiconductor fab. Computer 215 is analogous to the element with the same number in Fig. 2, and can be such as a high-end PC. Computer 215 is connected by a communication link 704 to the instrument, and this link can be any of several types, such as a serial link or a parallel communication link. Other links are also possible.

Computer station 215 is connected within the instrument cabinet to a computer interface 711, which comprises a microcontroller 217, which is analogous to controller 217 in Fig. 2. Microcontroller 217 comprises firmware, some of which is in standard form (proprietary), and some of which may be pre-programmed for a specific application. For example, in a semiconductor clean room application, firmware may be provided to cycle elements of the instrument in a manner dictated by and compatible with certain specific fluid systems to be monitored.

Microprocessor 217 is connected to an I/O interface 709 for controlling the fluid-handling and other elements of the instrument. It is well-known in the art that drive motors as used for such as syringe plungers, solenoids to drive diaphragms for pinch valves, multi-path switching valves, and the like, are all driven by AC or DC signals providing the voltage and current necessary to drive the specific elements. The I/O interface accepts computer-level signals from microprocessor 217 for manipulating elements of the instrument, and provides the correct signals as needed for each element in the voltage, current, and time required. There are also in many instances signals delivered back to interface 709 from sensors in the instrument, such as position sensors on syringe plungers, which are translated to appropriate computer voltage and provided to microcontroller 217.

Fig. 3 also illustrates sample inputs 1-n, which are analogous to conduits 321 of Fig. 3, delivering samples from monitored fluid systems to the instrument. In operation, the samples come in, chemical corrections are made, spikes are added, samples are vaporized and ionized, and analyzed by the mass spectrometer, all within portion 713 within instrument 707. Data and information derived is transmitted to computer station 215, and may be further manipulated, then displayed on monitor 703 for elucidation of maintenance personnel. In other cases data may be integrated with other control code and archived for historical purposes, and also used in other automated control functions. There are many possibilities. Computer station 215 operates executing a program suite proprietary to the instrument described herein, and is the subject of one or more separate patent applications.

Description Summary

A general instrument has been described above for monitoring, and in some cases triggering maintenance of concentration of species in fluid systems, and also for monitoring contamination of the systems. In specific embodiments, the instrument has been described as an instrument applied to monitoring wet-baths in semiconductor manufacturing. The invention,

however, has considerably broader application, and may be configured for a broad variety of other purposes without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, such an instrument has broad application in such as trace element contamination of well water and ground water in
5 environmental studies, and in many other environmental applications.

The instrument as described in embodiments herein is broadly applicable to analytical techniques that may vary in considerable detail from the exemplary applications discussed thus far. For example, in some cases addition of standard concentrations of monoisotopic elements, that is,
10 elements that do not exhibit a plurality of isotopes in the natural state, may be used in many procedures, for example to validate estimates. Further, in many alterations of the invention the analytical technique may be other than mass spectroscopy, such as non-mass spectroscopy (for example optical spectroscopy), and chromatography:

15 In another embodiment a verification technique may be used incorporating addition of a known amount of an element to a sample to see if the signal increase is proportional and quantifiable with the amount added.

Further, although the instrument has been described having a specific number of inputs and a specific number of dilution modules and the like, these
20 numbers can be altered considerably without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. The nature of the modules may also be altered in alternative embodiments, and there are a broad variety of such changes that could be made. Accordingly the invention must be accorded the scope of the claims below.

What is claimed is:

1. An analytical apparatus to monitor fluid systems, comprising:
 - at least one extraction module having a raw-sample reservoir
 - 5 connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones of said fluid systems, to extract raw samples for analysis from said fluid systems;
 - one or more modification modules comprising additive materials to modify the extracted raw samples prior to analysis;
 - an analytical device to receive at least a portion of said raw samples in
 - 10 an ordered sequence, and to determine concentration of at least one constituent of said sample portion;
 - fluid-handling apparatus for transferring fluid through the analytical apparatus; and
 - a computerized control and management system to manage operations
 - 15 of component modules and devices, and to report analytical results;
 - characterized in that the control and management system coordinates extraction of raw samples, modification as needed, introduction of fluids to the analytical device, and reporting of analytical results on a continuous basis over plural cycles.
 - 20
2. The analytical apparatus of claim 1 comprising a plurality of extraction modules associated one-to-one with a like plurality of fluid systems.
3. The analytical apparatus of claim 1 wherein the fluid systems are wet baths
- 25 in a processing environment, and the extracted fluids are liquids.
4. The analytical apparatus of claim 3 wherein the processing environment is a fabrication system (fab) devoted to semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) manufacturing.
- 30
5. The analytical apparatus of claim 3 wherein the modification modules comprise chemicals for altering pH of extracted liquids.

6. The analytical apparatus of claim 3 wherein the analytical device is a mass spectrometer, and further comprising an ionization apparatus for vaporizing and ionizing liquids prior to introduction to the mass spectrometer.
- 5
7. The analytical apparatus of claim 6 wherein analysis is based on isotopic ratio, the one or more modification modules comprise isotope dilution modules for introducing isotope mixtures to liquids in the system, and the isotope mixtures are in a ratio not naturally occurring.
- 10
8. The analytical apparatus of claim 1 comprising a plurality of extraction modules and a plurality of modification modules, wherein the fluid-handling apparatus comprises one or more mixers having two or more inputs to one output, and switching valves between the modules and the inputs to the
- 15 mixers, and wherein the control and management system cycles the switching valves and causes movement of liquids, and of materials from the modification modules, to mix selected liquids with selected materials from the modification modules.
- 20
9. The analytical apparatus of claim 8 wherein individual ones of the mixers comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.
- 25
10. The analytical apparatus of claim 3 wherein the raw-sample reservoir in the at least one extraction module is connected to a vacuum apparatus through a remotely-operable valve, to draw a relative vacuum in the reservoir to draw material from the fluid system connected by conduit to the reservoir.
- 30
11. The analytical apparatus of claim 10 wherein the raw-sample reservoir is vertically-oriented and the conduit from the wet-bath enters at a height on the

reservoir such that a liquid sample drawn into the reservoir may have a gas gap over the sample.

12. The analytical apparatus of claim 11 further comprising a cover-gas
5 source connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve to provide a cover gas over a raw sample in the reservoir.

13. The analytical apparatus of claim 12 wherein the cover gas is nitrogen.

10 14. The analytical apparatus of claim 11 further comprising a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw sample in the reservoir into the syringe.

15 15. The analytical apparatus of claim 14 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.

20 16. The analytical apparatus of claim 15 wherein the control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation.

16. The analytical apparatus of claim 15 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

25 17. The analytical apparatus of claim 14 wherein the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the intermediate conduit to the sample reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

30 18. The analytical apparatus of claim 14 further comprising a flush reservoir connected through additional valves to the syringe to the raw-sample

reservoir, to a source of flushing liquids, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, such that the elements of the extraction module may be flushed and cleaned between sample cycles.

- 5 19. The analytical apparatus of claim 3 wherein individual ones of the modification modules are chemical alteration modules comprising at least one chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals and apparatus for providing portions of the solution to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

10

20. The analytical apparatus of claim 19 wherein the apparatus for providing portions of the solution comprises a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the chemical reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise
15 distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical reservoir into the syringe.

21. The analytical apparatus of claim 20 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision
20 translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.

22. The analytical apparatus of claim 21 wherein the control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation.

- 25 22. The analytical apparatus of claim 21 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

23. The analytical apparatus of claim 20 wherein the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the chemical reservoir
30 and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

24. The analytical apparatus of claim 20 wherein the portions provided to other elements are provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected to another module in the analytical apparatus.

5

25. The analytical apparatus of claim 24 wherein individual ones of the mixers comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

10

26. The analytical apparatus of claim 7 wherein individual ones of the isotope dilution modules comprise at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring, and a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

15

27. The analytical apparatus of claim 26 wherein the mechanism for providing portions of the solution comprises a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the isotope reservoir below a surface of the mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.

20

28. The analytical apparatus of claim 27 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.

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29. The analytical apparatus of claim 28 wherein the control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation.

30

29. The analytical apparatus of claim 28 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

30. The analytical apparatus of claim 27 wherein the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

31. The analytical apparatus of claim 26 wherein the portions provided to other elements are provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected to another module in the analytical apparatus.

32. The analytical apparatus of claim 31 wherein individual ones of the mixers comprise conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

33. The analytical apparatus of claim 27 wherein the isotope reservoir contains an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration, and further comprising a solvent reservoir in addition to the at least one isotope reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing the solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, and a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers, enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

34. The analytical apparatus of claim 33 wherein the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixtures enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).

35. The analytical apparatus of claim 33 wherein the syringes in the system of syringes comprises individual syringes each having a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.

5

36. The analytical apparatus of claim 35 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger driven by the control and management system through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.

10 37. The analytical apparatus of claim 36 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

38. The analytical apparatus of claim 27 wherein individual ones of the syringes in the system of syringes are connected by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single output of a precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.

39. In an analytical apparatus to monitor liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of specific constituents, an extraction module comprising:

25 a raw sample reservoir connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones of said liquid systems;
a vacuum source connected to the raw sample reservoir through a remotely-controllable valve, to draw raw samples into the reservoir; and
30 a syringe connected by intermediate conduit through a switching valve to the sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, and to an ejection conduit, such that withdrawing

a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw sample in the reservoir into the syringe, and appropriately switching the valve and extending the plunger ejects the precise volume through the ejection conduit.

5

40. The extraction module of claim 39 wherein the raw-sample reservoir is vertically-oriented and the conduit from the liquid systems enters at a height on the reservoir such that a liquid sample drawn into the reservoir may have a gas gap over the sample.

10

41. The extraction module of claim 39 further comprising a cover-gas source connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve to provide a cover gas over a raw sample in the reservoir.

15

42. The extraction module of claim 41 wherein the cover gas is nitrogen.

43. The extraction module of claim 39 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger with a precision translation mechanism drivable by a control and management system, enabling precision volume control.

20

44. The extraction module of claim 43 wherein the precision translation mechanism is controllable at variable translation rates, enabling variation of fluid transfer rate.

25

45. The extraction module of claim 43 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

46. The extraction module of claim 39 further comprising a flush reservoir connected through additional valves to the syringe, to the raw-sample reservoir, to a source of flushing liquids, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, such that the elements of the extraction module may be flushed and cleaned between sample cycles.

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47. In an analytical apparatus to monitor liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of specific constituents, a chemical alteration
5 module comprising:

a chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals; and

apparatus for providing portions of the solution to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

10

48. The chemical alteration module of claim 47 wherein the apparatus for providing portions of the solution comprises a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the chemical reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the
15 syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical reservoir into the syringe.

49. The chemical alteration module of claim 48 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by a
20 control and management system, enabling precision volume control.

50. The chemical alteration module of claim 49 wherein rate of translation of the precision translation mechanism is variable, enabling variation of rate of liquid transfer.

25

51. The chemical alteration module of claim 49 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

52. The chemical alteration module of claim 48 wherein the syringe is
30 connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the chemical reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

53. In an analytical apparatus to monitor liquid systems, the apparatus having modules for extracting samples, modifying the samples, and analyzing the samples for concentration of specific constituents, an isotope dilution
5 modification module comprising:

at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring; and

10 a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

54. The isotope dilution module of claim 53 wherein the mechanism for providing portions of the solution comprises a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the at least one isotope reservoir below a surface of the
15 mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.

55. The isotope dilution module of claim 54 wherein the syringe comprises a
20 plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by a control and management system, enabling precision volume control.

56. The isotope dilution module of claim 55 wherein the control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation.
25

57. The isotope dilution module of claim 55 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.

58. The isotope dilution module of claim 54 wherein the syringe is connected
30 through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

59. The isotope dilution module of claim 54 wherein the isotope reservoir contains an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration, and further comprising a solvent reservoir in addition to the at least one isotope reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing a solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, and a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers, enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus.
60. The isotope dilution module of claim 59 wherein the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).
61. The isotope dilution module of claim 60 wherein the syringes in the system of syringes comprises individual syringes each having a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.
62. The isotope dilution module of claim 61 wherein the syringe comprises a plunger having a precision translation mechanism drivable by the control management system, enabling precision volume control.
63. The isotope dilution module of claim 62 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor.
64. The isotope dilution module of claim 59 wherein individual ones of the syringes in the system of syringes are connected by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a

second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single output of a precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.

5

65. A method for monitoring fluid systems for concentration of selected species, comprising the steps of:

(a) drawing raw samples of the fluid systems one-at-a-time into at least one raw-sample reservoir connected by input fluid conduit to individual ones
10 of the fluid systems;

(b) modifying the raw samples by addition of material from one or more modification modules;

(c) providing measured portions of modified samples to an analytical device; and

15 (d) determining concentration of the selected species by the analytical device.

66. The method of claim 65 wherein, in step (a), there are a plurality of extraction modules associated one-to-one with a like plurality of fluid systems.

20

67. The method of claim 66 wherein, in step (a), raw samples are drawn from wet-bath fluid systems in a processing environment, and the extracted fluids are liquids.

25 68. The method of claim 67 wherein the wet baths are baths in a semiconductor fabrication unit (fab) devoted to semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) manufacturing.

69. The method of claim 67 wherein, in step (b), modification is
30 accomplished by adding chemicals for altering pH of extracted liquids.

70. The method of claim 67 wherein the analytical device is a mass spectrometer, and further comprising a step for vaporizing and ionizing liquids prior to introduction to the mass spectrometer.

- 5 71. The method of claim 70 wherein analysis is based on isotopic ratio, and further comprising a step for introducing an isotope mixture to a liquid sample in the system, the isotope mixtures in a ratio not naturally occurring.

72. The method of claim 65, wherein in step (b), additions are made to sample
10 volumes by a fluid handling system through one or more mixers having two or more inputs to one output, the fluid-handling system switching valves between the modules and the inputs to the mixers.

73. The method of claim 72 wherein mixers are implemented as conduit
15 junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

74. The method of claim 65 wherein, in step (a), samples are drawn into the
20 raw-sample reservoir by opening a valve to a vacuum apparatus connected to the reservoir, drawing a relative vacuum in the reservoir to draw material from the fluid system connected by conduit to the reservoir.

75. The method of claim 65 wherein, in step (a), a gas gap is maintained over
25 a liquid sample drawn into the sample reservoir, by implementing the raw-sample reservoir as a vertically-oriented container with conduit from the wet-bath entering at a height on the reservoir above a level anticipated for a sample volume in the reservoir.

- 30 76. The method of claim 75 wherein the gas gap is maintained by a cover-gas source connected to the sample reservoir through a remotely-operable valve.

77. The method of claim 76 wherein the cover gas is nitrogen.
78. The method of claim 65 further comprising a step for drawing a portion of a raw sample from the sample reservoir via a syringe connected by
5 intermediate conduit to the raw sample reservoir at a height on the reservoir to enter beneath the surface of a sample in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the raw sample in the reservoir into the syringe.
- 10 79. The method of claim 78 wherein the syringe is operated by a plunger driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.
80. The method of claim 79 wherein rate of plunger translation is controlled
15 to control rate of fluid transfer.
81. The method of claim 80 wherein the precision translation mechanism comprises a precision stepper motor, and rate of translation is controlled by controlling the stepping rate of the motor..
20
82. The method of claim 78 wherein a portion of a raw sample withdrawn into the syringe is ejected to other elements through a three-way switching valve connected to an output conduit.
- 25 83. The method of claim 78 further comprising a step for flushing and cleaning the reservoir and the syringe, by operating valves connecting both to a source of cleaning liquid, to a second vacuum source, to a cover-gas source, and to a drain line, and operating these elements to draw cleaning liquid into and through the elements, and then ejecting the cleaning liquid to drain.
- 30 84. The method of claim 65 wherein, in step (b), chemicals are added in solution to samples from chemical alteration modules comprising at least one

chemical reservoir having a solution of precisely compounded chemicals and apparatus for providing portions of the solution to the samples.

85. The method of claim 84 wherein chemicals are drawn from the chemical
5 reservoir for addition to samples by a syringe connected by intermediate
conduit to the chemical reservoir in a manner to enter beneath the surface of
solution in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a
precise distance draws a precise volume of the solution in the chemical
reservoir into the syringe.

10

86. The method of claim 85 wherein the syringe is operated by a plunger
driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume
control.

15 87. The method of claim 86 wherein the rate of plunger translation is varied,
varying thereby rate of liquid movement.

88. The method of claim 86 wherein the precision translation mechanism is
driven by a precision stepper motor.

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89. The method of claim 85 wherein the chemicals are provided by operating
a three-way switching valve connected to the conduit to the chemical reservoir
and to an output conduit.

25 90. The method of claim 89 wherein the portions provided to other elements
are provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with
one input connected to the chemical alteration module and another connected
to another module in the analytical apparatus.

30 91. The method of claim 90 wherein individual ones of the mixers are formed
of conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output

conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

5 92. The method of claim 71 wherein the isotope mixture is provided from one or more isotope dilution modules comprising at least one isotope reservoir containing a mixture of isotopes of a specie to be evaluated, the mixture of isotopes at a ratio not naturally occurring, through a mechanism to provide a portion of the mixture to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

10 93. The method of claim 92 wherein the portions of the solution are provided via a syringe connected by intermediate conduit to the isotope reservoir below a surface of the mixture in the reservoir, such that withdrawing a plunger of the syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.

15 94. The method of claim 93 wherein the syringe is operated by a plunger driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume control.

20 95. The method of claim 94 wherein the control and management system is enabled to vary rate of plunger translation.

25 96. The method of claim 95 wherein the rate is varied by controlling the step rate of a precision stepper motor driving the translation mechanism.

97. The method of claim 93 wherein the syringe is connected through a three-way switching valve to the conduit to the isotope reservoir and to an output conduit to provide the precise volume sample to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

30 98. The method of claim 97 wherein the portions provided to other elements are provided through a mixer having two or more inputs to one output, with

one input connected to the isotope dilution module and another input connected to another module in the analytical apparatus.

99. The method of claim 98 wherein individual ones of the mixers are
5 implemented by conduit junctions having two or more input conduits feeding one output conduit, with the conduit paths arranged to provide for laminar flow and substantial direction change to influence mixing.

100. The method of claim 92 wherein isotope mixtures are provided in
10 different concentration levels by maintaining an isotope mixture in a solvent at a specific concentration in the isotope reservoir, and diluting portions of that mixture with solvent from a solvent reservoir, the solvent reservoir containing the solvent common to the isotope mixture in the isotope reservoir, doing the dilution through a system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixers,
15 enabling portions of the isotope mixture to be diluted to lesser concentrations before being provided to other elements of the analytical apparatus.

101. The method of claim 100 wherein the isotope reservoir holds an isotope mixture in a concentration of 1 part isotope in one million parts of the mixture
20 (1ppm), and the system of syringes, connecting conduits and mixtures enables dilution of six orders of magnitude to one part per trillion (1ppt).

102. The method of claim 101 wherein individual syringes in the system of syringes are operated by a plunger, such that withdrawing the plunger of the
25 syringe by a precise distance draws a precise volume of the mixture in the isotope reservoir into the syringe.

103. The method of claim 102 wherein the plunger of an individual syringe is driven through a precision translation mechanism, enabling precision volume
30 control.

104. The method of claim 103 wherein the precision translation mechanism is driven by a precision stepper motor.

105. The method of claim 103 wherein individual ones of the syringes in the
5 system of syringes are connected by switching valves to individual inputs to a mixer having a single output, such that, with one syringe holding a precise volume of an isotope mixture at a first concentration and a second syringe holding a precise volume of the solvent, driving the plungers of the two syringes simultaneously creates an isotope mixture at the single output of a
10 precise expected concentration less than the concentration of the mixture in the one syringe.