

Plasma Source

The present invention relates to a plasma generating device for generating plasma as well as to a method for generating plasma in a vacuum coating facility, for example for the purpose of plasma etching, heating, nitrating and separating of layers by means of PE-CVD processes.

The invention is based on a plasma source operating based on the principle of thermal electron emission and applying a negative voltage to a heated emitter (schottky effect) or based on the principle of a hollow cathode plasma source. According to the invention, in the plasma generating device, the anode comprises an electrically delimited cavity mounted to a vacuum recipient in a scrolled manner. This cavity is closed upon deactivation of said plasma by means of a shutter mechanism, avoiding contamination due to subsequent process steps. Preferably, activation of the plasma source is ensured by means of shunts.

The invention is exemplified in detail having regard to the figures.

In the drawings is shown:

- Fig. 1: shows a plasma generating device comprising a plasma source, a hollow anode and ignition aids;
- Fig. 2: shows a representation of an etching distribution: etching rate in relation to the substrate position;
- Fig. 3a-3f: show modifications of the arrangement of the plasma source and hollow anode;
- Fig. 4: shows an arrangement of the plasma source and hollow anode in facilities having larger loading height; and
- Fig. 5: shows a plurality of anode hollow bodies and a switching unit.

Figure 1 shows an inventive plasma generating device for the treatment of workpieces, for example prior or during coating in a vacuum facility. Shown is a vacuum chamber 3 comprising a plasma source hollow body 1 being part of a plasma source, wherein the plasma source hollow body 1 is flange mounted in an electrically insulated manner via insulators. The plasma source further comprises an electron emission unit 5 which is used to produce free electrons. These means protrude into the plasma source hollow body 1, such that the electrons are generated into the plasma source hollow body 1. For example, a tungsten filament heated to a temperature of about 2700-3000K can be used as electron emission unit 5. Application of a negative voltage to the electron emission unit 5 by means of a voltage

source 8 results to the creation of an electron emitter. Gas is introduced into the plasma source hollow body 1 via a gas inlet 7a. The gas is ionized by means of free electrons produced by means of the electron emission unit 5. The gas can comprise argon, for example.

The positive pole of the voltage source 8 is electrically connected to the plasma source hollow body 1 by means of a plasma source shunt (PSSR). A current can flow through said shunt 6a upon activation of the voltage source, realizing feeding of energy into the plasma in the plasma source hollow body 1. The resulting plasma in the plasma source hollow body 1 extends through a plasma source opening 10 provided in the plasma source hollow body 1 into the space of the vacuum chamber 3 and fills said space.

Further, an additional hollow body is flange-mounted, electrically insulated, to the vacuum chamber 3 via insulators 4, wherein the additional hollow body is referred to as anode hollow body 2 in the following. The vacuum chamber 3 and the anode hollow body 2 are connected to each other via an anode opening 11. The anode hollow body 2 is directly electrically connected to the positive pole of the voltage source 8. The anode hollow body 2 is provided with a gas inlet 7b through which gas is introduced into the anode hollow body 2. This gas can be argon, for example.

Further, the wall of the vacuum chamber 3 is connected to the voltage source 8 via a second shunt 6b. Therefore, flow of a discharge current from the electron emission unit 5 to the chamber wall is accomplished. Since the anode hollow body 2 is directly connected to the positive pole of the voltage source 8, a discharge occurs through the anode hollow body 2 and plasma is built-up into the anode hollow body. Hence, a path which is high-current qualified is closed, which can receive a very high discharge current at lower voltages. The current can be some 100 amperes at a voltage of about 16V to 100V.

The characteristics of the plasma which is generated in this way, largely depend on the plasma source opening 10 and the anode opening 11. The electrons are accelerated along said openings due to a potential drop, and further a very strong ionization thereof occurs in front of as well as inside the openings due to the presence of argon gas atoms, for example. Advantageously, the diameter of said openings is in the range of 4mm and 30mm. Advantageously, the diameters are about 12mm. The distance between the plasma source and the hollow anode is in the range of 200 to 400mm. The distance between the openings of the substrates to be treated is in the range of 200 to 400mm.

In the following, additional typical operation parameters are exemplified:

Gas inlet argon:	50-200sccm into the plasma source and/or hollow anode
Discharge current:	200A
Discharge voltage plasma source:	16V - 30V
Discharge voltage hollow anode:	16 - 100V

The power converted into the plasma source and hollow anode needs to be conveyed away by means of measures known to the person skilled in the art (not shown in figure 1).

The plasma generating device as mentioned above realizes performance of a stable plasma method.

Maintenance prior to each process start, which maintenance is necessary as known so far, can be eliminated by means of the inventive plasma generating device, in particular by means of protecting the anode prior to the coating by means of screens. During the etching process the screen in front of the anode opening is opened, such that plasma can be established into the hollow anode. The screen can be closed by means of a shutter in order to allow an optional subsequent coating process, for example arc evaporation or sputtering (sputter). The same relates to the opening 10 of the plasma source to the vacuum chamber.

Compared to the prior art, since the anode itself is actively operated as a plasma source, the plasma volume is raised. Advantageously, the plasma generating device can be employed for plasma etching, plasma heating and for PECVD coating, for example.

For example, argon and hydrogen can be employed for plasma heating, resulting in the generation of atomic hydrogen having high reactivity and which is suitable for the removal of organic residuals.

In the course of PE-CVD coating, argon can be used as purge gas for the plasma source as well as the hollow anode, for example. In the course of coating, if for example C_2H_2 and/or CH_4 or gas of a further monomer or polymer is introduced into the vacuum chamber, a carbon containing layer, for example a DLC layer (diamond like carbon), is deposited in the plasma and by using a negative substrate voltage. In case of the openings 10,11 of the plasma source and the hollow anode are formed correspondingly, a supersonic flow occurs therein. This, in addition to the high energy density, prevents coating of the plasma source and/or hollow anode. Hence, corresponding inner surfaces substantially remain uncoated and hence electrically conductive, which substantially contributes to process stability.

Figure 3 shows modifications of the arrangement of the plasma source and hollow anode, showing the inventive plasma generating device. In doing so, arrow tips always point to a hollow anode and the ends of arrows reside in the vicinity of a plasma source. The wiring corresponds to that of Figure 1. Figure 3a shows a simple flange-mounting to the sidewall of a vacuum chamber. Figures 3b, 3c, 3d, and 3f show a flange-mounting of two plasma sources and two anodes, wherein the flow directions exhibit different spatial orientations. Figure 3e schematically illustrates flange-mounting of a plasma source to the sealing of the vacuum chamber, and the flange mounting of a hollow anode to the bottom of the vacuum chamber. Vacuum chambers having a higher loading height allow the arrangement of two inventive plasma generation devices one over the other. This is mutatis mutandis schematically shown in Figure 4.

Advantageously, the shunts 6a and 6b mentioned in this specification are in the range of 10 Ohm to 100 Ohm, further advantageously in the range of 20 Ohm to 50 Ohm.

Advantageously, the plasma produced on the anode body is used solely. Therefore, in a further preferred embodiment, a plurality of anode hollow bodies by at least one plasma source hollow body are electrically driven by means of simultaneously or sequentially or overlapping activation of the switches of the switching unit 12. This is depicted in Figure 5, wherein means for igniting the discharge are omitted for the sake of simplicity.

According to a further embodiment of the present invention the discharge voltage at the anode can be increased by usage of magnetic fields. This resides to an acceleration of ions produced at the entrance opening of the anode hollow body as well as associated high-energy particles. Further, magnetic fields can be employed at the plasma source hollow body.

Figures 6a and 6b show a plasma hollow body and an anode hollow body having a magnetic field generation apparatus 13a and 13b.

While the magnetic field of the plasma hollow body 13b accomplishes guidance of the electrons and hence the ions into the vacuum recipient, the magnetic field 13a at the anode hollow body causes deflection of the electrons and hence increased voltage drop in front of the anode (hall effect). However, this potential accelerates ionized gas atoms and imparts increased energy thereof.

List of reference signs

- 1 Plasma source hollow body
- 2 Anode hollow body
- 3 Vacuum recipient
- 4 Insulators
- 5 Electron emission unit (for example a filament and feeding)

- 6a Shunt plasma source
- 6b Shunt anode
- 7a Gas inlet plasma source
- 7b Gas inlet anode
- 8 Voltage source
- 9a Screen in front of anode opening
- 9b Screen in front of plasma source opening
- 10 Opening of the plasma source
- 11 Opening of the anode
- 12 Switching unit
- 13a Magnetic field means
- 13b Magnetic field means

Claims

1. A plasma generating device, comprising:

- a plasma source having a plasma source hollow body (1) and an electron emission unit (5) which allows to emit free electrons into the plasma source hollow body, wherein the plasma source hollow body (1) comprises a first gas inlet (7a) and a plasma source opening (10) which forms an opening to a vacuum chamber,
- an anode comprising an anode hollow body (2), wherein the anode hollow body (2) comprises a second gas inlet (7b) and an anode opening (11) which forms an opening to the vacuum chamber, and
- a voltage source (8) the negative pole of which is connected to the electron emission unit (5) and the positive pole of which is connected to the anode hollow body (2),

characterized in that the positive pole of the voltage source (8) is additionally electrically connected to the plasma source hollow body by means of a first shunt (6a).

2. The plasma generating device according to claim 1, characterized in that the positive pole of the voltage source (8) is electrically connected to the vacuum chamber by means of a second shunt (6b).

3. The plasma generating device according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the plasma source opening (10) is provided with a screen (9b) which is adapted to close the plasma source opening as needed.

4. The plasma generating device according to one of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that the anode opening (11) is provided with a screen (9a) which is adapted to close the anode opening (11) as needed.

5. The plasma generating device according to one of the preceding claims, characterized in that the plasma source opening and/or the anode opening are formed such that supersonic flow through the opening and/or the openings is established during operation.

6. A method for coating of substrates by means of PE-CVD, comprising intake of a mono gas and/or polymer gas into a vacuum chamber comprising a plasma generating device, and establishing a plasma into the vacuum chamber by means of the plasma generating device, and applying negative voltage to the substrates to be coated, characterized in that the plasma generating device is a plasma generating device according to claim 5 and therefore neither the inner space of the plasma hollow body nor the inner space of the anode hollow body is coated.