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Silicon Carbonitride Thin Films Deposited by Reactive High Power Impulse Magnetron Sputtering

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Abstract

Amorphous silicon carbonitride thin films for biomedical applications were deposited in an industrial coating unit from a silicon target in different argon/ nitrogen/acetylene mixtures by reactive high power impulse magnetron sputtering (rHiPIMS). The effects of acetylene (C_2H_2) flow rate, substrate temperature, substrate bias voltage, and HiPIMS pulse frequency on the film properties were investigated. Low C_2H_2 flow rates (< 10 sccm) resulted in silicon nitride-like film properties, seen from a dense morphology when viewed in crosssectional scanning electron microscopy, a hardness up to ~ 22 GPa as measured by nanoindentation, and Si-N bonds dominating over Si-C bonds in X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy core-level spectra. Higher C_2H_2 flows resulted in increasingly amorphous carbon-like film properties, with a granular appearance of the film morphology, mass densities below 2 g/cm^3 as measured by X-ray reflectivity, and a hardness down to 4.5 GPa. Increasing substrate temperatures and bias voltages resulted in slightly higher film hardnesses and higher compressive residual stresses. The film H/E ratio showed a maximum at film carbon contents ranging between 15 - 30 at.% and at elevated substrate temperatures from 340 °C to 520 °C.

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