photodiode

A two-electrode, radiation-sensitive junction formed in a semiconductive material. A junction is formed by two successive regions of a semiconductive material having, respectively, an excess of electrons (n-type) or holes (p-type). A bias potential applied to the *detector* creates a region at the interface that is depleted of majority carriers. Each incident photon produces electron-hole pairs in the depletion region resulting in a measurable signal current. The photodiode can be operated either with zero bias in the photovoltaic mode where the photodiode is actually generating the electric potential supplied to the load. In a biased mode, the photoconductive mode, the reverse current is proportional to the irradiation.

A Schottky-barrier photodiode is constructed by deposition of a metal film on a semiconductor surface in such a way that no interface layer is present. The barrier thickness depends on the impurity dopant concentration in the semiconductor layer. The incident radiation generates electon-hole pairs within the depletion region of the barrier where they are collected efficiently and rapidly by the built-in field.

A PIN (p-intrinsic-n) diode is a planar diffused diode consisting of a single crystal having an intrinsic (undoped or compensated) region sandwiched between p- and n-type regions. A bias potential applied across the detector depletes the intrinsic region of charge carriers, constituting the radiation sensitive detector volume. The number of electron-hole pairs produced is dependent on the energy of the incident photons.

An avalanche photodiode is a photodiode in which the photogenerated electron-hole pairs are accelerated by a bias potential near to breakdown potential so that further electron-hole pairs are formed leading to saturation of the photocurrent. This operational mode for photon counting is the so-called Geiger mode, similar to that of the gas filled *Geiger counter*. Avalanche photodiodes can also be operated in the proportional mode.

1995, *67*, 1755