Aleaciones de Berilio S.L. Buen Suceso 13 - 28008 Madrid - tel. 915 488 187 - fax 915 489 307 - paco_aguirre@aleacionesdeberilio.com

Technical Tidbits

Back in the Saddle Again
This issue marks the return of Technical Tidbits in its new format with the introduction of a new material.

a publication by

BRUSHWELLMAN
ENGINEERED MATERIALS

Electronic Connector Market - Material Spotlight

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Editor's Note: Technical Tidbits has been on a temporary hiatus, but we are happy to be back in the New Year. No longer a monthly publication, Technical Tidbits will come to you bi-monthly. This issue not only marks its return, but also a new and improved format. While we strive to bring you timely information dealing with issues associated with the design of electrical and electronic contacts and connectors, we also will be updating you on additional markets such as bearings, oil and gas, and undersea communication. As you have come to expect, our emphasis will be on design issues and material properties. In addition we will focus on materials that would be of interest to you as a designer. We hope that you will find the new information and improved format a welcome change to Technical Tidbits.

Introducing Alloy 390™

Current trends in connectors point to smaller form factors and higher currents. This requires materials with high strength in order to withstand the stress necessary to generate adequate contact force without yielding. The higher currents require materials with increased conductivity, as well as increased resistance to stress relaxation.

Burn-in Test Sockets are seeing smaller pins with higher pin counts and greater current, resulting in increased stress and higher ambient temperatures. Notebook computers and other devices are requiring even more power, which means that conductivity becomes critical in power connectors.

Alloy 390™ is a new copper beryllium strip material. Its strength is comparable to the familiar high strength copper beryllium alloys such as 190 and 290. However, it has a conductivity of 45% IACS, which is comparable to the higher conductivity copper beryllium materials. This high strength/high conductivity combination is obtained without a dramatic loss of formability, making it ideal for use in many challenging high performance connector designs. Table 1 compares the properties of Alloy 390™ with other common electrical contact/connector materials.

Elastic Modulus - Alloy 390™ has an elastic modulus at the high end of the range for copper alloys. The elastic modulus is the most important material property for determining what the spring rate of a contact is. The high modulus also helps prevent buckling during crimping processes and makes the connector more tolerant of vibration.

Alloy	Temper	Elastic Modulus	0.2% Offset Yield Strength	Electrical Conductivity	Elastic Resilience	90° Bend Formability Ratio (R/t)	
		10^6 psi	ksi	%IACS	10^{-3} psi/psi	L	T
390™	HT	20	135 - 153	44	6.8 - 7.7	2.0	2.0
Brush 60®	HT	20	105 - 125	50	5.3 - 6.3	1.5	1.5
190	XHM	19	135 - 170	17	7.1 - 8.9	4.0	5.0
174	HT	20	100 - 120	48	5.0 - 6.0	1.2	5.0
C70250	TM03	19	95 - 120	40	5.0 - 6.3	2.5	2.0
C70260	S	19	95	40	5.0	0.5	1.0
C72500	XS	20	95	11	4.8	2.0	3.0
C19900	EH	18	148	10	8.2	-	7.0
C68800	H	17	101	18	5.9	2.0	2.0
C65400	H	17	109	7	6.4	2.0	3.5
C52100	S	16	100 - 113	13	6.3 - 7.1	2.0	7.0
C51000	S	16	92 - 108	15	5.8 - 6.8	3.0	8.0

Table 1. Alloy 390™ Property Comparison.

Yield Strength - As connectors become smaller, there is less mass available to provide the required spring force necessary for good electrical contact. The only way to increase the contact force is to increase the stress in the material. This increase in stress requires the use of higher yield strength materials such as Alloy 390™.

Elastic Resilience - The total amount of deflection a contact can withstand is governed by the ratio of yield strength to elastic modulus, also known as **elastic resilience**. Materials with a high resilience are more tolerant of abuse than those with low resilience.

Electrical Conductivity - Consumer products such as cell phones, computers, automobiles, and even refrigerators are becoming increasingly complex. The amount of electrical and electronic devices in these products is continually increasing as well. This requires more electrical power to drive these devices. In order to provide more power to a device, one must raise either the voltage or the current supplied to it. There are practical limits to how much voltage one can run through a device. Arcing becomes a concern when the electrical potential exceeds 12 Volts. Higher voltages may also pose a potential safety risk to human beings. Automotive contacts are already operating near these limits. Therefore, an increase in current may be mandatory. The conductivity of Alloy 390™ makes it ideal for applications which require high strength materials at increased power levels.

Stress Relaxation Resistance - The increased power seen in many devices means that there is an increase in temperature, both internally generated and experienced in the environment. This requires greater resistance to stress relaxation in order to maintain the normal force necessary for good electrical contact.

Fatigue Strength - Alloy 390™ shows a fatigue strength similar to other copper beryllium alloys. This will allow for its use in highly cycled applications.

Formability - Alloy 390™ has been engineered to make 90 degree bends in both the longitudinal and transverse orientations at a bend radius to material thickness ratio of 2.0. (Currently, this R/t ratio is valid for thicknesses of 0.002”-0.004”. A Lean Six Sigma black belt project is underway to extend this formability to thicker gauges of material.) This formability allows for the formation of complex shapes and miniaturized designs, while still retaining the strength and resilience to function as a spring contact material.

Alloy 390™ is a new material that has an intriguing combination of strength, conductivity, and formability. This should make it a material of choice in highly demanding electrical contact applications.

Coming Next Month: The next edition of Technical Tidbits will be a design spotlight focusing on connector insertion force.

Written by Mike Gedeon of the Brush Wellman Alloy Marketing Applications Engineering and Technical Service Department. Mr. Gedeon is a mechanical engineer whose primary focus has been on electronic connector markets with emphasis on Finite Element Analysis, design and material selection.

Health and Safety

Handling copper beryllium in solid form poses no special health risk. Like many industrial materials, beryllium-containing materials may pose a health risk if recommended safe handling practices are not followed. Inhalation of airborne beryllium may cause a serious lung disorder in susceptible individuals. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has set mandatory limits on occupational respiratory exposures. Read and follow the guidance in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) before working with this material. For additional information on safe handling practices or technical data on copper beryllium, contact Brush Wellman Inc.

(216) 486-4200 Phone
(216) 383-4005 Fax

Brush Wellman Inc.
17876 St. Clair Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44110

(800) 375-4205 Tech. Service
www.brushwellman.com