

Back surface reflector optimization for thin single crystalline silicon solar cells

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It has been shown that for single crystalline silicon solar cells (Si-SC) with 180–200 μm thick base crystals, the optimum back surface reflector (BSR) is TiO_2/Al with 0.18 μm thick oxide layer. At such BSR, the reflection coefficient for photoelectric active sunlight reaching the back surface of Si-SC at 0.88–1.11 μm wavelengths attains 81 to 92 % against of 71 to 87 % at direct Al contact with back surface of silicon base crystal.

Показано, что для монокристаллических кремниевых фотоэлектрических преобразователей (Si-ФЭП) солнечной энергии с толщиной базовых кристаллов 180÷200 мкм наиболее оптимальным является тыльно-поверхностный рефлектор TiO_2/Al с толщиной оксидного слоя 0,18 мкм. Коэффициент отражения фотоэлектрически активного солнечного излучения указанным рефлектором, достигающего тыльной поверхности таких Si-ФЭП при длинах волн 0,88÷1,11 мкм, составляет 81÷92 % в отличие от 71÷87 % при непосредственном контакте Al с тыльной поверхностью базового кристалла кремния.

At present, solar batteries based on solar cells (SC) are the main electric power sources for the most spacecrafts [1–3]. The priority development way to new design-technological solutions (DTS) which are capable to ensure the highest efficiency and mass-power performances P_M of single crystalline Si-SC with enhanced radiation resistance at use of an available technological infrastructure is decreasing of silicon base crystal (Si-BC) thickness t and sunlight energy losses in Si-BC bulk, as well as on base crystals front and back surfaces [4, 5].

At the stage of design improvement on Si-SC with horizontal n^+ -p- p^+ diode structure, we have found the optimal ways to Si-BC thinning down to $t < 200 \mu\text{m}$ as well as to formation of n^+ - and p^+ - diffusion layers [4]. Researches and development of the

technology which will provide the optimum geometry of Si-BC photoreceiving surface structure shaped as inverted pyramids are in progress [5] that are necessary for an essential reduction of light reflection coefficient R by the specified surface. At the same time, Si-SC with $t < 200 \mu\text{m}$ show essential losses of solar energy due mainly to reduced photoactive volume of semiconductor material at direct radiation passage through Si-BC before interaction with one of electrodes [4] where the photoelectric active component of sunlight can be absorbed with heat release. As it was shown before [6], a radical way to the loss reduction is to provide a sunlight reflector on the side of the back surface consisting of two-layer structure SiO_2/Al . However, in corresponding information sources, there are no data on

SiO₂ oxide layer optimum thickness l_{OX}^{opt} in such structure. At the same time, that oxide seems to be not optimum for every Si-SC DTS; moreover, the above-mentioned bilayer structure has a principal drawback caused by its thermodynamic instability because of aluminum ability to active reduction of SiO₂ [7] that should result in R reduction during active life of Si-SC with this kind of back surface reflector. Therefore, the purpose of this work was to determine the optimum design of the back surface sunlight reflector with the transparent oxide (TO)/Al bilayer structure for efficiency and active lifetime improvement of single crystal Si-SC with horizontal rectifying junction.

The growing of good quality SiO₂ layer for the reflector under consideration with thickness over several tens nanometers requires a high-temperature oxidation of the silicon crystal surface. To that process, temperatures from 800 up to 1200°C [8–10] are necessary as a rule, that is fraught with undesirable changes in concentration profiles of n⁺- and p⁺- diffusion layers formed before at 900–1000°C [11]. At the same time, during the development and manufacture of the single crystal Si-SC with horizontal n⁺-p-n⁺ diode structure, a low-temperature manufacturing method of the transparent oxide TiO₂ layer coating was developed [11, 12], which is used as anti-reflection coating from the side of the Si-BC frontal surface. Between TiO₂ and n⁺-Si layer, an about 10 nm thick SiO₂ layer might be places which is formed at a temperature not exceeding 200°C and intended for n⁺-Si passivation [12]. With reference to the back surface reflector design, that circumstance allows to consider the TiO₂ layer made according to the low-temperature process as a prospective alternative to SiO₂ layer made using the high-temperature process. The arrangement of a thin (about 10 nm) SiO₂ passivation layer between TiO₂ and p⁺-Si from the side of Si-BC back surface formed at temperature not higher than 200°C is obviously expedient, too.

According to [13], the optimum oxide thickness l_{OX}^{opt} for bilayer TO/metal reflector to provide the reflection maximum at the chosen wavelength λ can be calculated as

$$l_{OX}^{opt} = \frac{2\pi m + \arg r_2}{4\pi n_{OX}} \lambda, \quad (1)$$

where

$$\arg r_2 = \arctg \left(\frac{2n_{OX}k_M}{n_{OX}^2 - n_M^2 - k_M^2} \right), \quad (2)$$

$n_{OX} = n_{OX}(\lambda)$ is the refraction coefficient of oxide dielectric layer; $n_M = n_M(\lambda)$ and $k_M = k_M(\lambda)$ are refraction and extinction coefficients of metal, respectively; $m = 1, 2, 3, \dots$

In the case of oxide dielectric layer of interferential thickness between silicon and metal, when t exceeds considerably λ of the radiation incident from the side of Si-SC frontal surface, the expression for $R(\lambda)$ looks like

$$R = 1 - \frac{(1 - |f_0|^2)(1 - |r_1|^2)}{1 - |f_0|^2|r_1|^2}. \quad (3)$$

where

$$f_0 = \frac{n_0 - n_{Si}}{n_0 + n_{Si}}. \quad (4)$$

$$|r_1|^2 = \frac{|f_1|^2 + |r_2|^2 + 2|f_1||r_2|\cos(n_{OX}l_{OX}^{opt}4\pi/\lambda - \arg r_2)}{1 + |f_1|^2|r_2|^2 + 2|f_1||r_2|\cos(n_{OX}l_{OX}^{opt}4\pi/\lambda - \arg r_2)}, \quad (5)$$

$$f_1 = \frac{n_{Si} - n_{OX}}{n_{Si} + n_{OX}}. \quad (6)$$

$$|r_2| = \left[\frac{(n_{OX} - n_M)^2 + k_M^2}{(n_{OX} + n_M)^2 + k_M^2} \right]^{1/2}, \quad (7)$$

$n_0 = n_0(\lambda)$ is the refraction coefficient of environment (air or covering glass) with which the Si-SC front surface is in contact; $n_{Si} = n_{Si}(\lambda)$ is the Si-BC refraction coefficient.

It is obvious that calculation of l_{OX}^{opt} and $R(\lambda)$ values is expedient with reference to SC in the case when t is smaller than depth $X_{100}(\lambda)$ for full (100 %) light absorption at the set λ value. On the other hand, efficiency, P_M and longevity of a SC with horizontal diode structure n⁺-p-p⁺ or p⁺-n-n⁺ type increases at reduction of the t/L ratio, where L is the diffusion length of minority charge carriers in Si-BC of p- or n- type, respectively [14]. Therefore, a range of λ values for which calculation of l_{OX}^{opt} and $R(\lambda)$ is expedient should be limited from the side of longer waves by the red edge of an internal photoelectric effect in Si-BC corre-

sponding to $\lambda_{max} \approx 1.11 \mu\text{m}$ [13], and from the side of shorter waves, by the value λ_{min} at which the following conditions are simultaneously satisfied:

$$t/L < 1, \quad (8)$$

$$t < X_{100}(\lambda_{min}), \quad (9)$$

$$R(\lambda_{min}) \div R(\lambda_{max}) \geq 0.8. \quad (10)$$

According to [14],

$$L_{n,p} = \left(\frac{kT\mu_{n,p}\tau_{n,p}}{e} \right)^{1/2}, \quad (11)$$

where k is the Boltzmann constant; T , temperature; e , charge of electron; $\mu_{n,p}$ and $\tau_{n,p}$, mobility and lifetime of minority charge carriers in Si-BC, respectively.

In [15], we have shown results of the first performed researches of τ_n and L_n values for electrons in domestic SC based on p-type Si-BC, with specific resistance $10 \Omega\text{-cm}$ and mobility $\mu_n \approx 1200 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V}\cdot\text{s})$. The τ_n values determined from the dependence of SC open circuit voltage drop on time after illumination cutoff and L_n values calculated from those for such SC with $t = 190 \pm 10 \mu\text{m}$, textured front surface and optimized manufacturing conditions of $n^+\text{-p-p}^+$ diode structure were $53\text{--}74 \mu\text{s}$ and $408\text{--}483 \mu\text{m}$, respectively. The subsequent refinement of the mentioned parameters of minority charge carriers carried out by us for the same Si-SC taking into account the $n^+\text{-p}$ homojunction capacity influence on experimental dependence of SC open circuit voltage U_{OC} drop on time τ after illumination cutoff, and also by use of the advanced method [16] for analytical processing of the $U_{OC} = U_{OC}(\tau)$ dependences, has shown, that more realistic values are $20 \leq \tau_n \leq 26 \mu\text{s}$ and $250 \leq L_n \leq 286 \mu\text{m}$. It follows therefrom that taking into account the expression (8) and nearest prospects of technological possibilities evolution for domestic single crystalline Si-SC production [4, 15] it is just $t = 180 \mu\text{m}$ appropriate to calculation of l_{OX}^{opt} and $R(\lambda)$ values.

Taking into account expression (9), it is possible to determine λ_{min} value from dependence of depth corresponding to absorption of 99.995 % of light quanta total amount (which practically corresponds to the parameter X_{100} entered above) on λ in

an interval $(\lambda; \lambda+d\lambda)$ as follows. According to [17], the expression describing light absorption in Si-BC looks as

$$N_X(\lambda) = N_0(\lambda) \exp\left[-\frac{X}{X_{63}(\lambda)}\right], \quad (12)$$

where N_X is the density of photon flow passing into Si-BC from the side of its front surface up to depth X ; N_0 , density of photon flow crossing the Si-BC front surface; X_{63} , classical value of light absorption depth corresponding to absorption of approximately 63 % of the photons which have crossed the Si-BC frontal surface ($X_{63} = \alpha^{-1}$, $\alpha = 4\pi k/\lambda$, k , extinction coefficient [17]).

If $N_X(\lambda)$ value in (12) is assumed to be $0.00005 \cdot N_0(\lambda)$, it is easy to show that after the natural logarithm of expression (12) is found it is possible to get the following expression for X_{100} calculation: $X_{100} = -X_{63} \cdot \ln 0.00005$. It is obvious that, for example, the expression for X_{90} calculation can be obtained in similar way, which has the form $X_{90} = -X_{63} \cdot \ln 0.1$. Since the spectral dependence $X_{63}(\lambda)$ for silicon single crystal is well-known [17], it is easy to calculate $X_{90}(\lambda)$ and $X_{100}(\lambda)$ using these expressions.

Since t for domestic Si-SC for space applications being now in development approaches $180 \mu\text{m}$, therefore, the X_{63} , X_{90} and X_{100} values are to be determined with reference to $t = 180 \mu\text{m}$. This allows to limit in zero approximation the wavelength range of photoactive radiation being of interest as $0.8 < \lambda \leq 1.1 \mu\text{m}$ [17].

That wavelengths range was defined more precisely using the above-mentioned $X_{63}(\lambda)$, $X_{90}(\lambda)$ and $X_{100}(\lambda)$ dependences, that were plotted using numerical values of $X_{63}(\lambda)$ from [17], as well as $X_{90}(\lambda)$ and $X_{100}(\lambda)$ calculated based on those. In Fig. 1, the $X_{63}(\lambda)$, $X_{90}(\lambda)$ and $X_{100}(\lambda)$ dependences are presented in semi-logarithmic coordinates ($\lg X; \lambda$). The lower limit of photoactive radiation range being of interest was determined using the $X_{100}(\lambda)$ curve at a sufficient accuracy as follows. In Fig. 1, a straight line parallel an abscissas axis corresponding to function $\lg[X(\lambda)_{X=t}] = \text{const}$ (where for considered SC $t = 180 \mu\text{m}$ as noted above) was drawn. In this case, $\lg 180 = 2.26$. That operation allows to determine the limiting wavelength value at which the photoelectric active absorption of radiation practically completely ceases at direct pass-

ing through 180 μm thick silicon crystal. It is obvious that the required wavelength corresponds to abscissa of the intersection point of the function $\lg [X(\lambda)]_{X=t} = \text{const}$ with the function $X_{100}(\lambda)$. As to the wavelength range of interest, the required wavelength has the sense of λ_{min} . As is obvious from Fig. 1, $\lambda_{\text{min}} \approx 0.88 \mu\text{m}$ in the considered case. Thus, the wavelength range of the photoactive radiation being of interest from the viewpoint of l_{OX}^{opt} and $R(\lambda)$ calculation as well as for determination of optimum SiO_2 and TiO_2 thickness $l_{OX}^{\text{opt,max}}$ for back surface reflectors SiO_2/Al and TiO_2/Al (providing their maximal integrated reflectivity in the set wavelength range), is $0.88 \leq \lambda \leq 1.11 \mu\text{m}$. It is to note that using the procedures similar to that described for determination λ_{min} for practically complete absorption of photoactive radiation, it is easy to determine λ_{min} for absorption of 90 % and 63 % of photoactive radiation. As is obvious from Fig. 1, these values approximately are 0.99 μm and 0.96 μm , respectively.

As follows from the above, the main study objects were layered $\text{Si}/\text{SiO}_2/\text{Al}$ and $\text{Si}/\text{TiO}_2/\text{Al}$ structures with oxide layers of interferential thickness. At the same time, to illustrate the contribution from those oxide layers into the enhanced back surface reflector reflectivity, the $R(\lambda)$ were calculated for the case of oxide layer absence between Si and Al , i.e. for structure Si/Al , when $l_{OX} = 0$. According to [13], the $|r_1|^2$ value in expression (3) for $R(\lambda)$ was assumed to be

$$|r_1|^2 = \frac{(n_{\text{Si}} - n_M)^2 + k_M^2}{(n_{\text{Si}} + n_M)^2 + k_M^2}.$$

The $l_{OX}^{\text{opt}}(\lambda)$ and $R(\lambda)$ values were calculated using expressions (1) and (3) basing on the Excel 2003 software. The f_0 value was defined both for the case of SC front surface contacting with air and under account for the SC front surface protection by covering glass of not-interference thickness glued to the crystal by silicon rubber with optical properties similar to protecting glass [17]. For the specified reason, the n_0 value in the expression (4) was assumed to be 1.0 in the first case and 1.5 (by analogy with [13, 17]) in the second one. The m value in the expression (1) was adopted to be 1. The spectral dependences $n_{\text{Si}}(\lambda)$, $n_{\text{OX}}(\lambda)$, $n_M(\lambda)$ and $k_M(\lambda)$ required to calculate the $l_{OX}^{\text{opt}}(\lambda)$

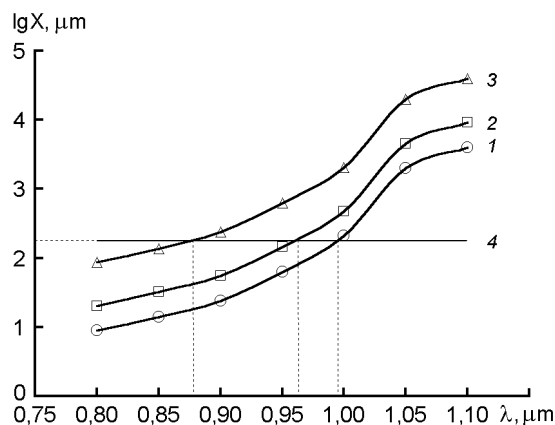


Fig. 1. $\lg X(\lambda)$ dependences for the radiation absorption in silicon single crystal at absorption degree of 63 % (X_{63} , curve 1), 90 % (X_{90} , curve 2) and essentially complete (X_{100} , curve 3) as well as the $\lg [X(\lambda)]_{X=t} = \text{const}$ function at $t = 180 \mu\text{m}$ (curve 4).

and $R(\lambda)$ values were taken from the sources: $n_{\text{Si}}(\lambda)$ from [18], $n_{\text{SiO}_2}(\lambda)$ from [19], $n_{\text{TiO}_2}(\lambda)$ from [20, 21], $n_{\text{Al}}(\lambda)$ and $k_{\text{Al}}(\lambda)$ from [22, 23].

The dependences $l_{OX}^{\text{opt}}(\lambda)$ and $R(\lambda)$, $l_{OX}^{\text{opt}}(\lambda)$ at $n_0 = 1.0$ and $n_0 = 1.5$ for back surface reflector SiO_2/Al are plotted in Fig. 2, a-c, and for back surface reflector TiO_2/Al , in Fig. 3, a-c. The $R(\lambda)$ plots at $n_0 = 1.0$ and $n_0 = 1.5$ in case $l_{OX} = 0$ are presented in Figs. 2b, c and 3b, c, respectively. As seen from Figs. 2b, c and 3b, c, the substitution of Al back surface reflector by SiO_2/Al and TiO_2/Al ones provides an essential increase of the reflectivity as compared to that of Al in $\lambda > 0.8 \mu\text{m}$ range at specified values l_{OX}^{opt} .

Consideration of the all $R[\lambda l_{OX}^{\text{opt}}(\lambda), n_0]$ curves presented in Figs. 2 and 3 shows that both at $n_0 = 1.0$ and at $n_0 = 1.5$, the optimal thickness $l_{OX}^{\text{opt,max}}$ values of SiO_2 and TiO_2 providing the maximal integrated reflectivity of SiO_2/Al and TiO_2/Al back surface reflectors in the preset wavelength range, according to criterion (10), are:

$$l_{OX}^{\text{opt,max}} = 0.32 \mu\text{m} \text{ for } \text{SiO}_2/\text{Al};$$

$$l_{OX}^{\text{opt,max}} = 0.18 \mu\text{m} \text{ for } \text{TiO}_2/\text{Al}.$$

The advantages of such reflectors in $R(\lambda)$ as compared to $R(\lambda)$ for Al reflector are seen most clearly in Fig. 4 and in Table. Besides, the oxide interlayer between silicon and aluminum hinders the degradation of the re-

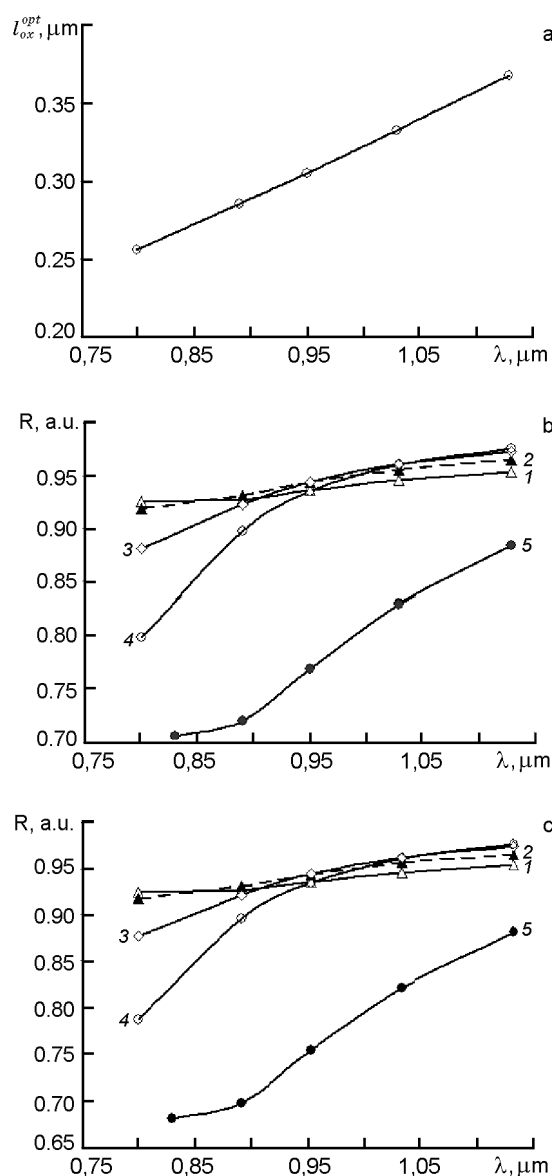


Fig. 2. Calculated dependences for SiO₂/Al back surface reflector: $l_{OX}^{opt}(\lambda)$ (a); $R(\lambda)$ for l_{OX}^{opt} (μm): 0.26 ($\lambda_1 = 0.8 \mu\text{m}$) (1); 0.29 ($\lambda_2 = 0.9 \mu\text{m}$) (2); 0.32 ($\lambda_3 = 1.0 \mu\text{m}$) (3); 0.35 ($\lambda_4 = 1.1 \mu\text{m}$) (4); $l_{OX} = 0$ (5) at $n_0 = 1.0$ (b) and $n_0 = 1.5$ (c).

flector optical properties and ensures lowering of surface recombination on the Si-BC back surface [6]. As is seen in Figure 4 and Table, it is just the SiO₂/Al back surface reflector that provides the highest integrated reflectivity in the $0.88 \leq \lambda \leq 1.11 \mu\text{m}$ wavelength range. However, according to the analysis carried out before, in conditions of domestic single crystal Si-SC production for domestic single crystal Si-SC now under development with base crystal

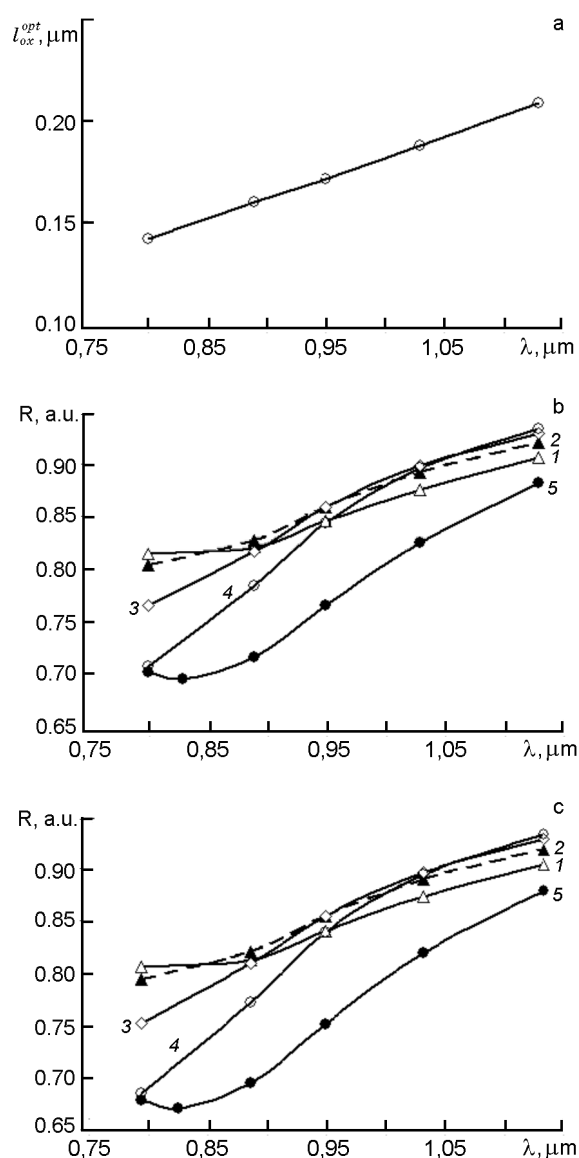


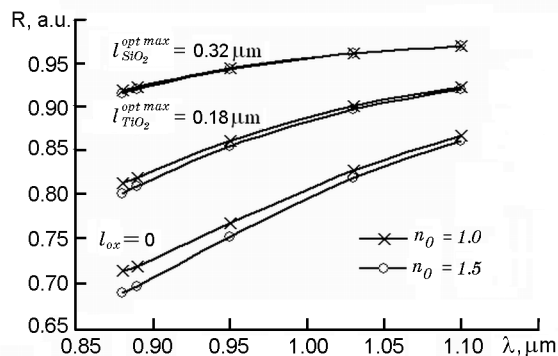
Fig. 3. Calculated dependences for TiO₂/Al back surface reflector: $l_{OX}^{opt}(\lambda)$ (a); $R(\lambda)$ for l_{OX}^{opt} (μm): 0.14 ($\lambda_1 = 0.8 \mu\text{m}$) (1); 0.16 ($\lambda_2 = 0.9 \mu\text{m}$) (2); 0.18 ($\lambda_3 = 1.0 \mu\text{m}$) (3); 0.20 ($\lambda_4 = 1.1 \mu\text{m}$) (4); $l_{OX} = 0$ (5) at $n_0 = 1.0$ (b) and $n_0 = 1.5$ (c).

thickness of 180 to 200 μm, optimum is rather the TiO₂/Al back surface reflector with the $l_{OX}^{opt,max}$ value mentioned above.

Thus, basing on the actuality of high-efficiency and long-lived domestic single crystal Si-SC development with base crystal thickness $t = 180$ to $200 \mu\text{m}$, the spectral dependences of oxide layer optimum thickness $l_{OX}^{opt,max}$ of SiO₂/Al and TiO₂/Al back surface reflectors for such Si-SC as well as the spectral

Table. $R(\lambda)$ values for the investigated back surface reflectors with the optimum thickness of transparent oxides in the wavelength range $0.88 \leq \lambda \leq 1.11 \mu\text{m}$

Reflector	Al	SiO ₂ /Al	TiO ₂ /Al
$l_{OX}^{opt,max}$, μm	0.00	0.32	0.18
$n_0 = 1.0$, $R(0.88) \div R(1.11)$, %	71.4 \div 86.8	91.9 \div 97.0	81.3 \div 92.3
$n_0 = 1.5$, $R(0.88) \div R(1.11)$, %	68.9 \div 86.2	91.6 \div 97.0	80.1 \div 92.1

Fig. 4. $R(\lambda)$ dependences for SiO₂/Al and TiO₂/Al back surface reflectors with $l_{OX}^{opt} = l_{OX}^{opt,max}$ as well as for Al reflector ($l_{OX} = 0$) at $n_0 = 1.0$ and $n_0 = 1.5$.

dependences of reflection coefficient $R(\lambda)$ at various l_{OX}^{opt} and refraction coefficients n_0 of environment (air or covering glass at the front surface of Si-SC contacts) for $0.88 \leq \lambda \leq 1.11 \mu\text{m}$ were calculated using the Excel 2003 software taking into account the key expressions (1) and (3). The limits of λ range are defined by the smaller t value mentioned above and the band gap width of crystalline silicon. The optimum thickness $l_{OX}^{opt,max}$ of SiO₂ and TiO₂ layers providing the maximal integrated reflectivity of considered reflectors in the whole specified λ range have been determined from calculated dependences $R[\lambda, l_{OX}^{opt}(\lambda), n_0]$ taking into account the criterion $R(\lambda) \geq 0.8$. It is shown that in conditions of domestic Si-SC production, the optimum back surface reflector is TiO₂/Al with $l_{OX}^{opt,max} = 0.18 \mu\text{m}$.

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Оптимізація тильно-поверхневого рефлектора тонких монокристалічних кремнієвих фотоелектричних перетворювачів

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Показано, що для монокристалічних кремнієвих фотоелектричних перетворювачів (Si-ФЕП) сонячної енергії з товщиною базових кристалів 180–200 мкм оптимальним є тильно-поверхневий рефлектор TiO_2/Al з товщиною оксидного шару 0,18 мкм. Коefіцієнт відбиття зазначеним рефлектором фотоелектрично активного сонячного випромінювання, яке досягає тильної поверхні таких Si-ФЕП, при довжинах хвиль 0,88–1,11 мкм становить 81–92 % на відміну від 71–87 % при безпосередньому контакті Al з тильною поверхнею базового кристала кремнію.