



(51) International Patent Classification:
H01L 31/048 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2010/039361

(22) International Filing Date:
21 June 2010 (21.06.2010)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
61/237,588 27 August 2009 (27.08.2009) US
12/818,959 18 June 2010 (18.06.2010) US

(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **SUN-POWER CORPORATION** [US/US]; 3939 North First Street, San Jose, California 95134 (US).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **BUNEA, Gabriela** [US/US]; 2058 Eucalyptus Court, Santa Clara, California 95050 (US). **BOITNOTT, Nicholas** [US/US]; 131 Tunitas Creek Road, Half Moon Bay, California 94019 (US).

(74) Agents: **BENEDICTO, Patrick D** et al.; OKAMOTO & BENEDICTO LLP, P.O. Box 641330, San Jose, California 95164-1330 (US).

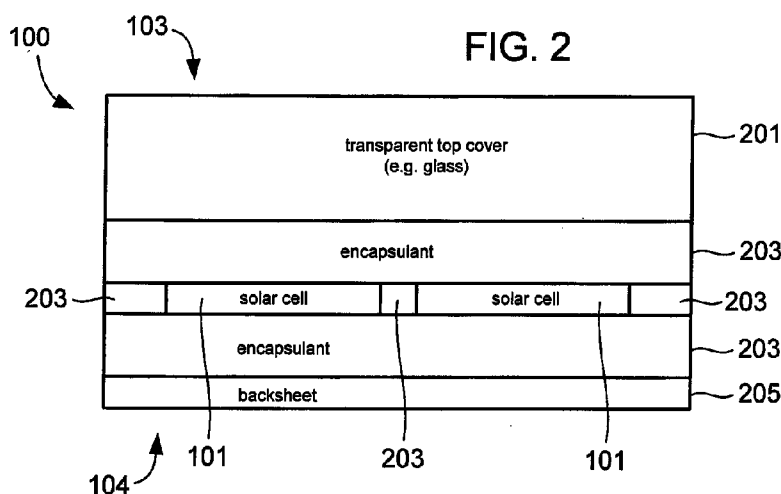
(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— with international search report (Art. 21(3))

(54) Title: MODULE LEVEL SOLUTION TO SOLAR CELL POLARIZATION USING AN ENCAPSULANT WITH OPENED UV TRANSMISSION CURVE



(57) Abstract: A solar cell module (100) includes interconnected solar cells (101), a transparent cover (201) over the front sides of the solar cells (101), and a backsheet (205) on the backside of the solar cells (101). An encapsulant (203) protectively packages the solar cells. The encapsulant (203) and the transparent cover (201) forms a top protection package that has a combined UV transmission curve and volume specific resistance that addresses polarization. The encapsulant has a relatively wide UV transmission curve.

MODULE LEVEL SOLUTION TO SOLAR CELL POLARIZATION
USING AN ENCAPSULANT WITH OPENED UV
TRANSMISSION CURVE

5

Inventor: Gabriela Bunea and Nicholas Boitnott

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No.
61/237,588, filed on August 27, 2009, entitled Module Level Solution To Solar
10 Cell Polarization Using An Encapsulant With Opened UV Transmission Curve.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to solar cells, and more
15 particularly but not exclusively to solar cell modules.

2. Description of the Background Art

Solar cells are well known devices for converting solar radiation to
electrical energy. They may be fabricated on a semiconductor wafer using
semiconductor processing technology. Generally speaking, a solar cell may be
20 fabricated by forming p-type regions and n-type regions in a silicon substrate.
Each adjacent p-type region and n-type region forms a p-n junction. Solar
radiation impinging on the solar cell creates electrons and holes that migrate to
the p-type and n-type regions, thereby creating voltage differentials across the p-
n junctions. In a back junction solar cell, the p-type and n-type regions are
25 formed on the backside along with the metal contacts that allow an external

electrical circuit or device to be coupled to and be powered by the solar cell.

Back junction solar cells are also disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,053,083 and 4,927,770, which are both incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

Several solar cells may be connected together to form a solar cell array.

- 5 The solar cell array may be packaged into a solar cell module, which includes protection layers to allow the solar cell array to withstand environmental conditions and be used in the field.

If precautions are not taken, solar cells may become polarized in the field, causing reduced output power. Solutions to solar cell polarization are disclosed
10 in U.S. Patent No. 7,554,031, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. The present disclosure pertains to a module-level solution to solar cell polarization using an improved encapsulant.

SUMMARY

- 15 In one embodiment, a solar cell module includes interconnected solar cells, a transparent cover over the front sides of the solar cells, and a backsheet on the backside of the solar cells. An encapsulant protectively packages the solar cells. The encapsulant and the transparent cover forms a top protection package that has a combined UV transmission curve and volume specific
20 resistance that addresses polarization. In one embodiment, the encapsulant has a relatively wide UV transmission curve.

These and other features of the present invention will be readily apparent to persons of ordinary skill in the art upon reading the entirety of this disclosure, which includes the accompanying drawings and claims.

5 DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows a solar cell module in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 shows a cross-section of the solar cell module of FIG. 1 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

10 FIG. 3 shows the transmission curves of glass and EVA used as encapsulant.

FIG. 4 shows the transmission curve of an encapsulant of a solar cell module in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

15 FIG. 5 shows results of an accelerated UV exposure test conducted on solar cell modules with an EVA encapsulant and with an encapsulant that has relatively wide UV transmission curve.

FIG. 6 shows plots of test data from an experiment comparing solar cell modules with encapsulant having a wide UV transmission curve versus a solar cell module with EVA encapsulant.

20 FIG. 7 shows field test results comparing output power of modules with an EVA encapsulant to modules made with an encapsulant that has wide UV transmission curve and high volume electrical resistance.

FIG. 8 shows the transmission curve of an encapsulant that may be employed in embodiments of the present invention.

FIGS. 9-11 show plots of test data comparing solar cell modules with a front protection package in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention and solar cell modules with glass transparent cover and EVA encapsulant.

The use of the same reference label in different drawings indicates the same or like components. The figures are not drawn to scale.

10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the present disclosure, numerous specific details are provided, such as examples of apparatus, components, and methods, to provide a thorough understanding of embodiments of the invention. Persons of ordinary skill in the art will recognize, however, that the invention can be practiced without one or more of the specific details. In other instances, well-known details are not shown or described to avoid obscuring aspects of the invention.

FIG. 1 shows a solar cell module 100 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The solar cell module 100 is a so-called "terrestrial solar cell module" in that it is typically used in stationary applications, such as on rooftops or by power generating stations. In the example of FIG. 1, the solar cell module 100 includes an array of interconnected solar cells 101. Only some of the solar cells 101 are labeled in FIG. 1 for clarity of illustration. The solar cells 101 may comprise back junction solar cells, which are especially vulnerable to

polarization. Visible in FIG. 1 are the front sides of the solar cells 101, which face the sun during normal operation. The backsides of the solar cells 101 are opposite the front sides. A frame 102 provides mechanical support for the solar cell array.

5 The front portion of the solar cell module 100, which is labeled as 103, is on the same side as the front sides of the solar cells 101 and is visible in FIG. 1. The back portion 104 of the solar cell module 100 is under the front portion 103. As will be more apparent below, the front portion 103 includes an optically transparent encapsulant.

10 FIG. 2 shows a cross-section of the solar cell module 100 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The solar cell module 100 includes a transparent cover 201, encapsulant 203, the solar cells 101, and a backsheet 205. The transparent cover 201, which is the topmost layer on the front portion 103, protects the solar cells 101 from the environment. The solar
15 cell module 100 is installed such that the transparent cover 201 faces the sun during normal operation. The front sides of the solar cells 101 face towards the sun by way of the transparent cover 201. In the example of FIG. 2, the transparent cover 201 comprises glass (e.g., 3.2mm thick).

 The backsides of the solar cells 101 face the backsheet 205, which is
20 attached to the encapsulant 203. In one embodiment, the backsheet 205 comprises Tedlar/Polyester/EVA ("TPE") from the Madico company. In the TPE, the Tedlar is the outermost layer that protects against the environment, the polyester provides additional electrical isolation, and the EVA is a non-crosslinked thin layer that promotes adhesion to the encapsulant 203.

Alternatives to TPE for use as the backsheet 205 include Tedlar/Polyester/Tedlar ("TPT"), for example. Other backsheets may also be used without detracting from the merits of the present invention.

5 The encapsulant 203 cures and bonds the solar cells 101, the transparent cover 201, and the backsheet 205 to form a protective package. As will be more apparent below, in one embodiment, the encapsulant 203 has an optimized UV (ultraviolet) transmission curve to allow more UV light to pass through. In one embodiment, the encapsulant 203 allows more UV light to pass through compared to conventional encapsulants.

10 Conventional solar cell modules use glass as the transparent cover and poly-ethyl-vinyl acetate ("EVA") as encapsulant. FIG. 3 shows the transmission curves of glass and EVA. Glass blocks light having a wavelength of about 275nm and shorter, while EVA blocks light having a wavelength of about 350 nm and shorter. For reference, UV light has a wavelength of 10nm to 400nm.

15 Because UV is believed to degrade solar cells, solar cell modules are typically designed to have a relatively narrow UV transmission curve to limit exposure of solar cells to UV radiation. However, the inventor believes that the UV transmission curve can be opened up without substantial solar cell degradation. As can be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, "block" does not

20 necessarily mean complete blocking. As used in the present disclosure, "block" means a substantial reduction, including less than or equal to 1% transmission.

FIG. 5 shows results of an accelerated UV exposure test conducted on solar cell modules with an EVA encapsulant (plots 501 and 502) and with an encapsulant that has wide UV transmission curve (plots 503 and 504). The solar

cells in the modules are back junction solar cells from Sunpower Corporation.

FIG. 5 shows the resulting Efficiency ("Eff") test data versus time. Each day of the test simulates approximately 1/3 of one year of field use; the test simulates approximately the equivalent 11 years of UV exposure in the field. Plots 501 and 502 are test data from solar cell modules with EVA encapsulant, while plots 503 and 504 are test data from solar cell modules with an encapsulant that has wide UV transmission curve. As can be seen from the efficiency data of FIG. 5, use of encapsulant with wide UV transmission curve has no significant impact on the UV stability of the solar cell modules.

With a relatively wider UV transmission curve, the use of encapsulant 203 in the solar cell module 100 helps prevent the solar cells 101 from polarizing. FIG. 6 shows plots of test data from an experiment comparing solar cell modules with encapsulant having a wide UV transmission curve (plots 601 and 602) versus a solar cell module with EVA encapsulant (plot 603). The experiment was performed at 85 degrees Centigrade with a 1kV bias, and shows nominal relative efficiency change versus time. The loss in nominal relative efficiency is due to polarization. As can be seen from plots 601 and 602, the solar cell modules having an encapsulant with relatively wide UV transmission curve are able to recover from polarization after less than 4 hours sun exposure. The plot shows that the solar cell modules with encapsulant that has increased UV transmission have a faster recovery rate from polarization during sun exposure than encapsulant without increased UV transmission (see 621).

Solar cell polarization can be further prevented by increasing the volume specific resistance of the encapsulant 203 to at least 5×10^{13} Ohm-cm (measured

as per the ASTM standard D257 for measuring resistivity) in the normal operating temperature range of -40°C to 90°C. The increased volume specific resistance together with the wide UV transmission curve advantageously allow for a module level solution to solar cell polarization.

5 Preferably, the encapsulant 203 has a transmission curve that allows light having a wavelength less than 350nm. FIG. 4 shows the transmission curve of the encapsulant 203 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 4 also shows the transmission curve of glass used as a transparent cover 201 and EVA. In the example of FIG. 4, the encapsulant 203 has a UV
10 transmission curve that starts at 280nm. That is, the encapsulant 203 of FIG. 4 allows light having a wavelength of 280nm and longer to pass through; light having shorter wavelengths is blocked. The encapsulant 203 thus allows more UV light to pass through compared to EVA.

In one embodiment, the encapsulant 203 comprises an encapsulant
15 having a UV transmission curve that allows UV light having a wavelength shorter than 350nm to pass through and having a volume specific resistance higher than 5×10^{13} Ohm-cm over the temperature range -40°C to 90°C measured using the ASTM standard D257 for measuring resistivity.

FIG. 7 shows test results comparing solar cell modules with an EVA
20 encapsulant (samples #1, #2, and #3) to solar cell modules with an encapsulant that has wide UV transmission curve and high volume specific resistance (sample #4, #5, and #6). All of the solar cell modules in the test comprise back junction solar cells from Sunpower Corporation. The vertical axis represents normalized power output of the solar cell modules. Three measurements were

done for each solar cell module sample. The graphs from left to right represent measurements taken on different days, with the leftmost graph being on the first day of the test, the middle graph being on the fourth day, and the rightmost graph being on the thirteenth day. Note that the power outputs of samples #1, #2, and #3 have degraded on the thirteenth day compared to those of samples #4, #5, and #6, evidencing the advantageous effect of an encapsulant with wide UV transmission curve and high volume specific resistance.

The UV-optimized encapsulant 203 allows for prevention of polarization without having to make changes to the solar cells 101 or changing the electrical configuration, such as grounding, of the solar cell module 100. The module-level solution as described herein can thus be readily implemented in currently available or new design solar cell modules.

In light of the present disclosure, one of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the transparent top cover and the encapsulant on the front portion of the solar cell module may be treated collectively as a front protection package having a combined UV transmission curve and volume specific resistance. For example, the transparent top cover 201 and the encapsulant 203 on the front side of the solar cells 101, together, may have a combined UV transmission curve shown in FIG. 8 and a volume specific resistance of at least 5×10^{13} Ohm-cm as measured using the ASTM standard D257 for measuring resistivity. In the example of FIG. 8, the encapsulant 203 on the front side of the solar cells 101 has a thickness of about $450\mu\text{m}$, plus or minus $50\mu\text{m}$. In the example of FIG. 8, the transparent top cover 201 and the encapsulant 203 on

the front side of the solar cells 101 has a stop band at less than 350nm wavelength (1% transmission).

FIGS. 9-11 show plots of test data comparing solar cell modules with a front protection package in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention (labeled as "improved") and solar cell modules with glass transparent cover and EVA encapsulant (labeled as "control"). The solar cells in the improved and control solar cell modules are back junction solar cells from Sunpower Corporation. In FIGS. 9-11, the top protection package of the improved solar cell modules has a UV transmission curve that allows light having a wavelength shorter than 350nm, has a volume specific resistance greater than 5×10^{13} Ohm-cm (measured as per the ASTM standard D257 for measuring resistivity), and an encapsulant on the front side of the solar cells having a thickness of about 450 μ m on the front side, plus or minus 50 μ m.

In FIG. 9, the vertical axis represents normalized change in weighted transmission, and the horizontal axis represents equivalent years of UV exposure. Weighted transmission is defined as the net encapsulant transmission weighted at each wavelength by the solar AM 1.5G spectrum and the solar cell quantum efficiency. The "X" plots are for the improved solar cell modules and the diamond plots are for the control solar cell modules. The improved solar cell modules show a less significant drop in transmission compared to the control solar cell modules.

FIG. 10 shows how fast the improved solar cell modules recover their efficiency from a degraded or polarized state compared to the control solar cell modules. In FIG. 10, the vertical axis represents relative efficiency change and

the horizontal axis represents time in hours. The solid plot is for the improved solar cell modules and the dotted plot is for the control solar cell modules. Note that the improved solar cell modules recover within an hour while the control solar cell modules remain in polarized state even after seven hours.

5 FIG. 11 shows the energy output of the improved solar cell modules and the control solar cell modules in the field in a twelve week period. In FIG. 11, the vertical axis represents weekly energy output (in kWh) and the horizontal axis represents weeks since installation. The dark bars are for the control solar cell modules and the light bars are for the improved solar cell modules. As
10 evidenced in FIG. 11, in terms of energy output, the improved solar cell modules have equivalent or better performance compared to the control solar cell modules. The module level solutions presented herein thus prevent or minimize the effects of polarization without adversely affecting energy output.

 While specific embodiments of the present invention have been provided,
15 it is to be understood that these embodiments are for illustration purposes and not limiting. Many additional embodiments will be apparent to persons of ordinary skill in the art reading this disclosure.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A solar cell module comprising:
 - a plurality of interconnected solar cells, each of the solar cells having a
 - 5 front side that faces the sun during normal operation and a backside opposite the front side;
 - a transparent cover over the front sides of the solar cells;
 - a backsheet on the backsides of the solar cells; and
 - an encapsulant bonding the solar cells, the transparent cover, and the
 - 10 backsheet to form a protective package, the encapsulant having a UV (ultraviolet) transmission curve that allows light having a wavelength of 350nm or shorter to pass through.
2. The solar cell module of claim 1 wherein the solar cells comprise back junction solar cells.
- 15 3. The solar cell module of claim 1 wherein the transparent cover comprises glass.
4. The solar cell module of claim 1 wherein the encapsulant has a volume specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$.
5. The solar cell module of claim 1 wherein the encapsulant has a volume
- 20 specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$ in the temperature range -40°C to 90°C .
6. A solar cell module comprising:

a plurality of interconnected solar cells, each of the solar cells comprising back junction solar cells having a front side that faces the sun during normal operation and a backside opposite the front side;

a transparent cover over the front sides of the solar cells;

5 a backsheet on the backsides of the solar cells; and

an encapsulant protectively bonding the solar cells and the backsheet, the encapsulant and the transparent cover collectively having a UV transmission curve with a stop band at less than 350nm wavelength and a volume specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$.

10 7. The solar cell module of claim 6 wherein the collective UV transmission curve of the encapsulant and the transparent cover allows UV light having a wavelength of 350nm and less to pass through.

8. The solar cell module of claim 6 wherein the transparent cover comprises glass.

15 9. The solar cell module of claim 6 wherein the backsheet comprises Tedlar/Polyester/E.

10. The solar cell module of claim 6 wherein the encapsulant has the volume specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$ in the temperature range -40°C to 90°C .

20 11. A solar cell module comprising:

a plurality of interconnected solar cells, each of the solar cells having a front side that faces the sun during normal operation and a backside opposite the front side;

a transparent cover and an encapsulant over the front side of the solar
5 cells, the transparent cover and the encapsulant having a combined UV transmission curve that has a stop band less than 350nm and a combined volume specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$.

12. The solar cell module of claim 11 wherein the solar cells comprise back junction solar cells.

10 13. The solar cell module of claim 11 wherein the transparent cover comprises glass.

14. The solar cell module of claim 11 further comprising a backsheet on the backside of the solar cells.

15 15. The solar cell module of claim 11 wherein the encapsulant protectively bonds the solar cells and the backsheet.

16. The solar cell module of claim 11 wherein the encapsulant has the volume specific resistance of at least $5 \times 10^{13} \Omega \text{cm}$ in the temperature range -40°C to 90°C .

1/9

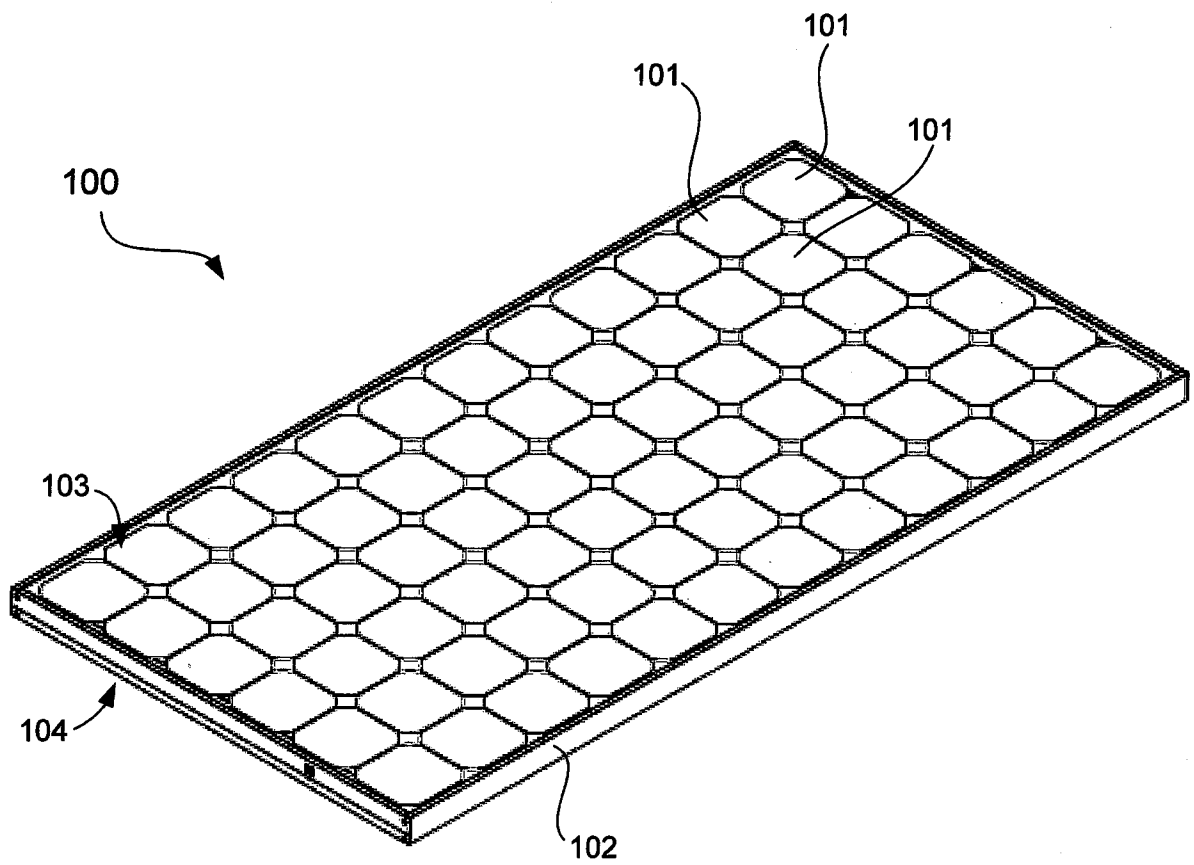


FIG. 1

2/9

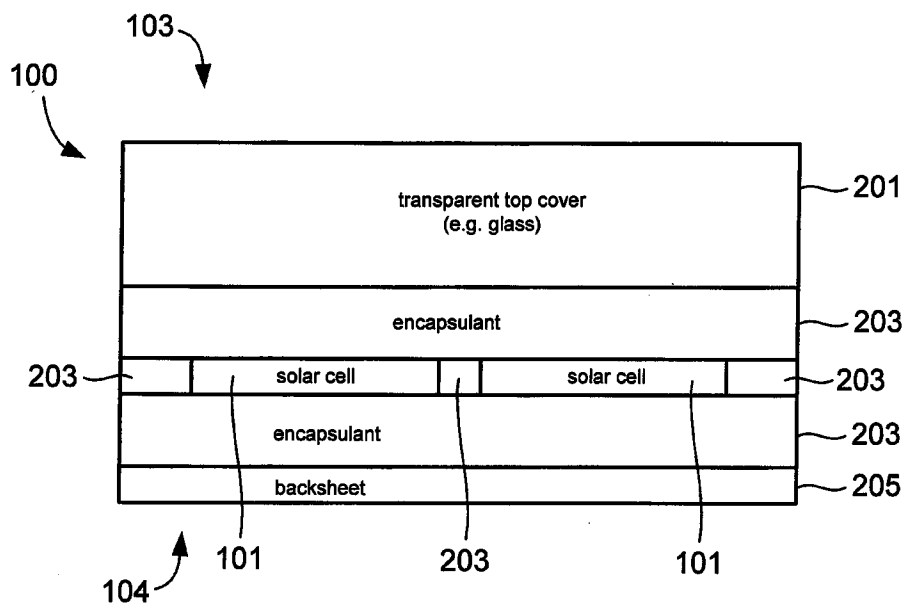


FIG. 2

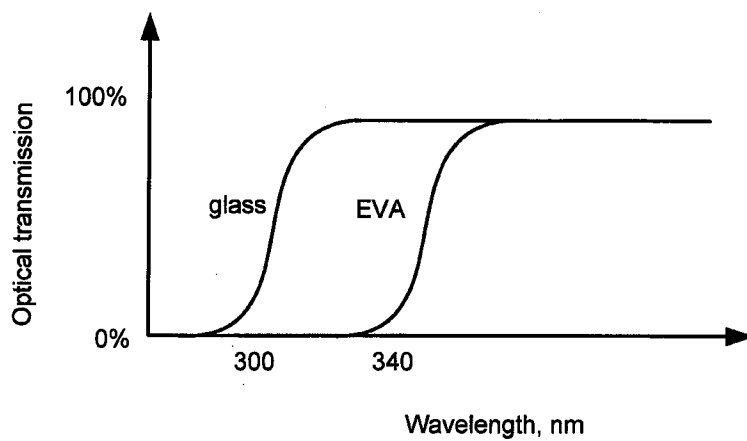


FIG. 3

3/9

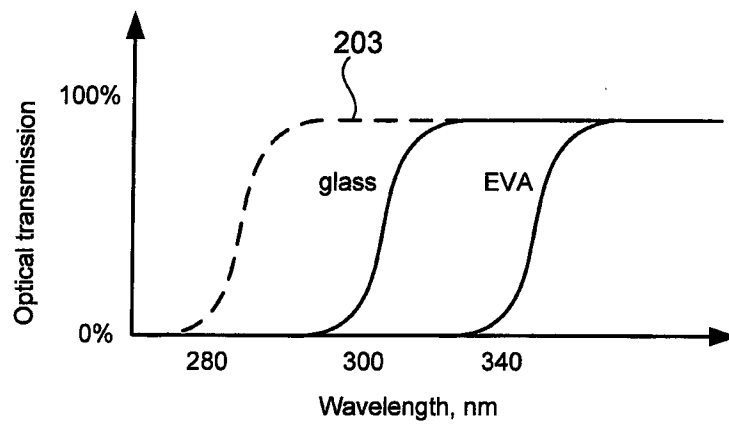


FIG. 4

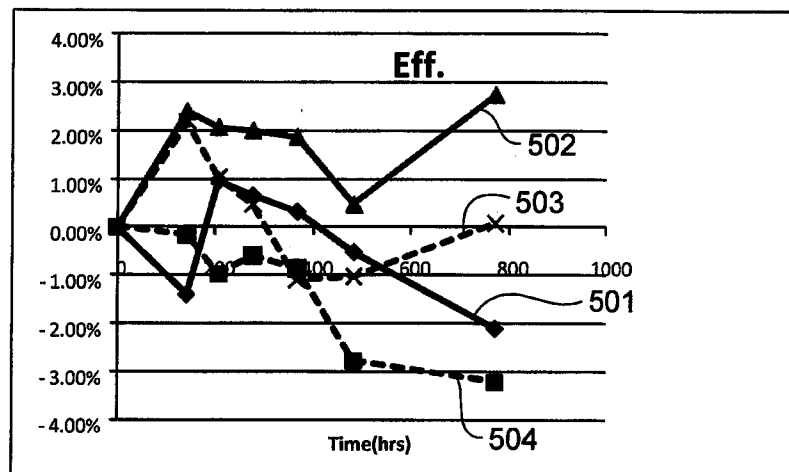


FIG. 5

4/9

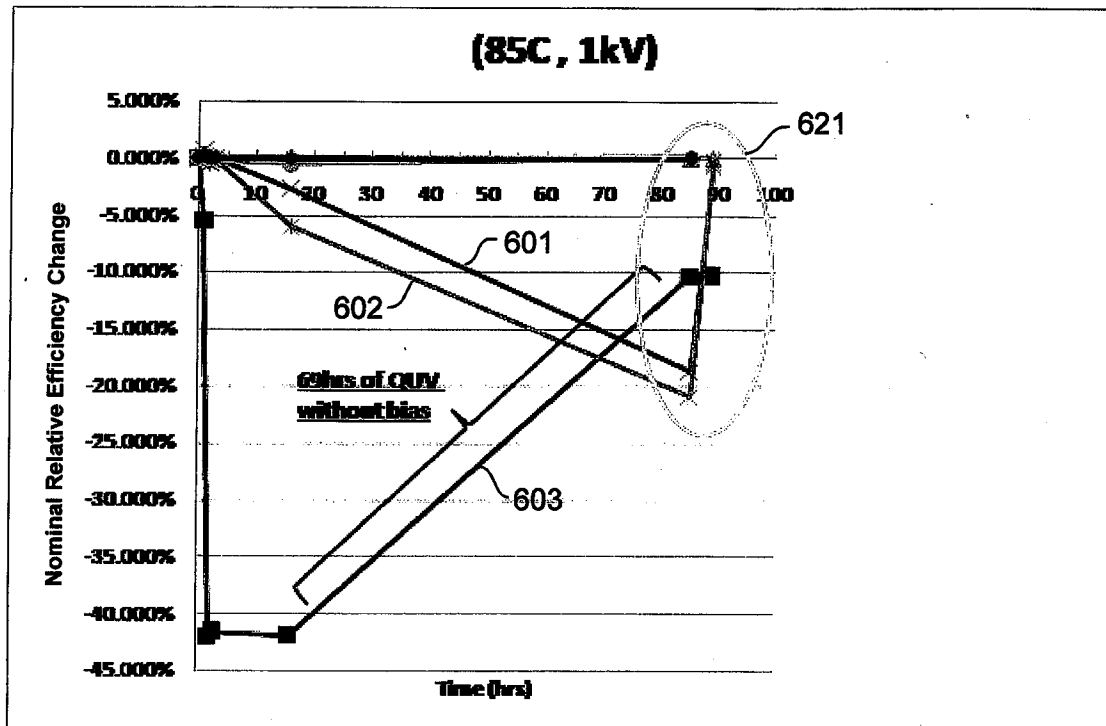


FIG. 6

5/9

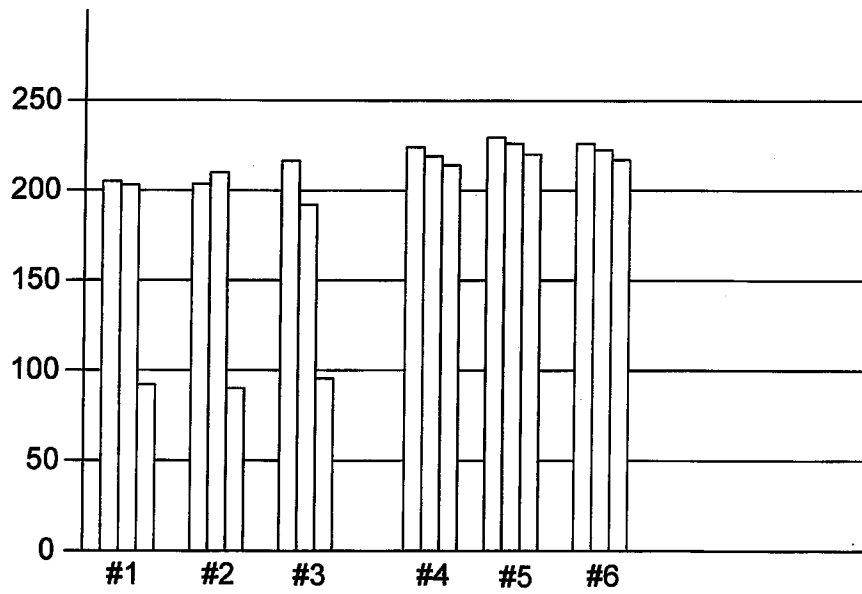


FIG. 7

6/9

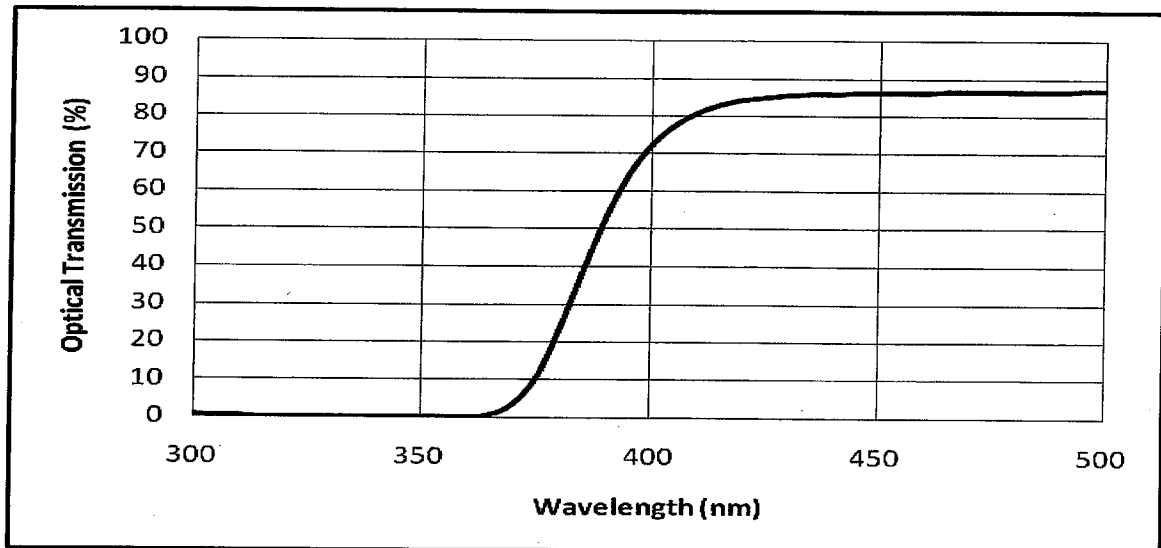


FIG. 8

7/9

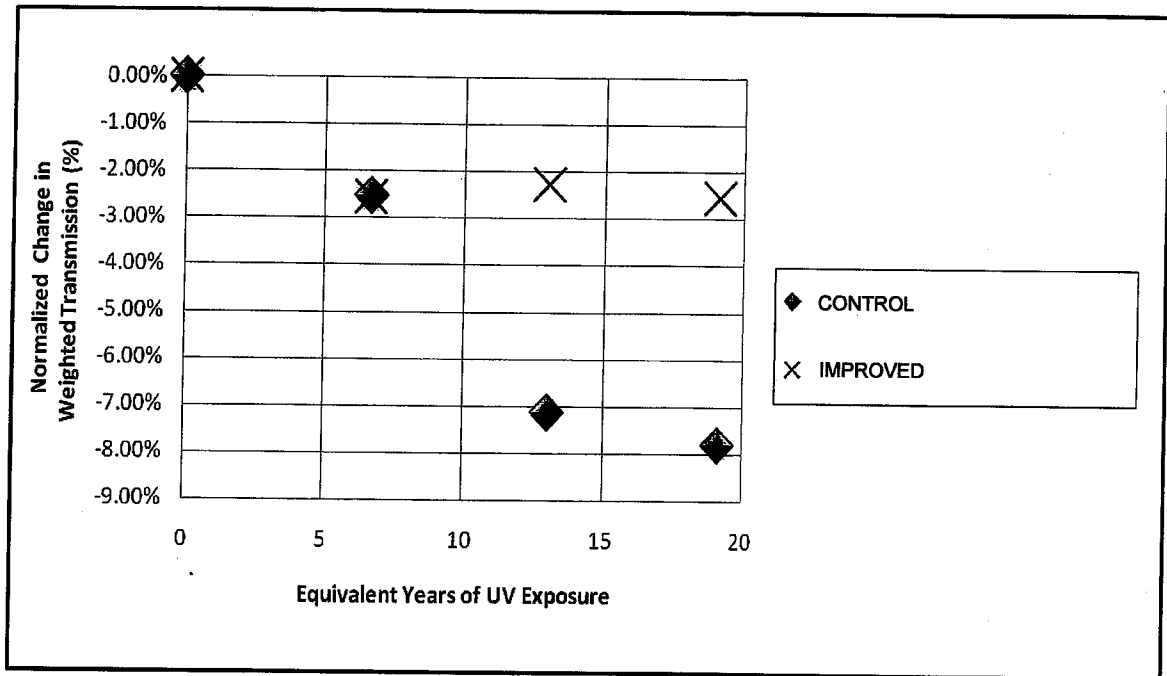


FIG. 9

8/9

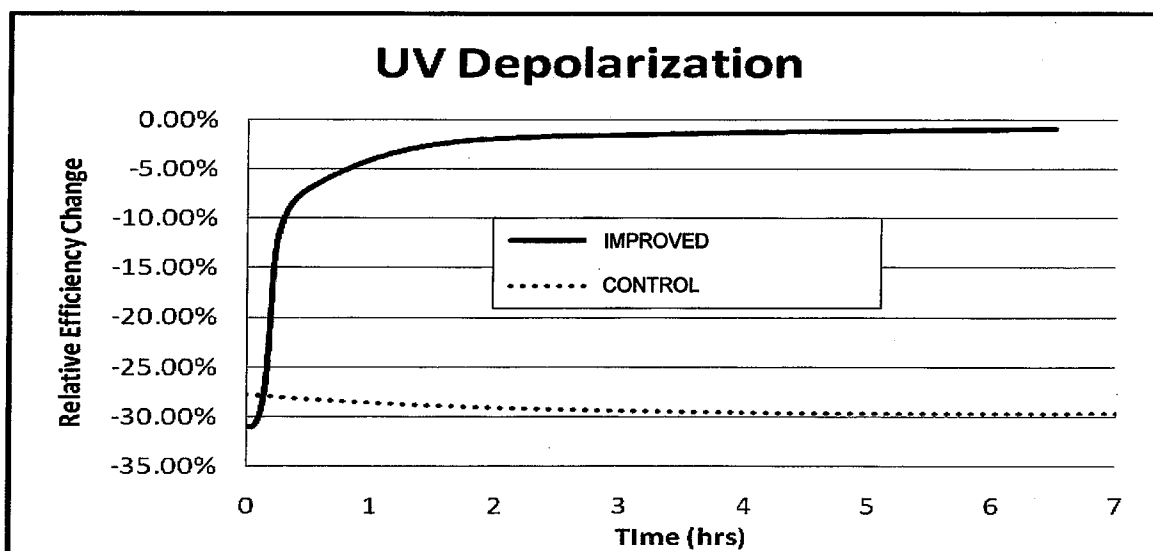


FIG. 10

9/9

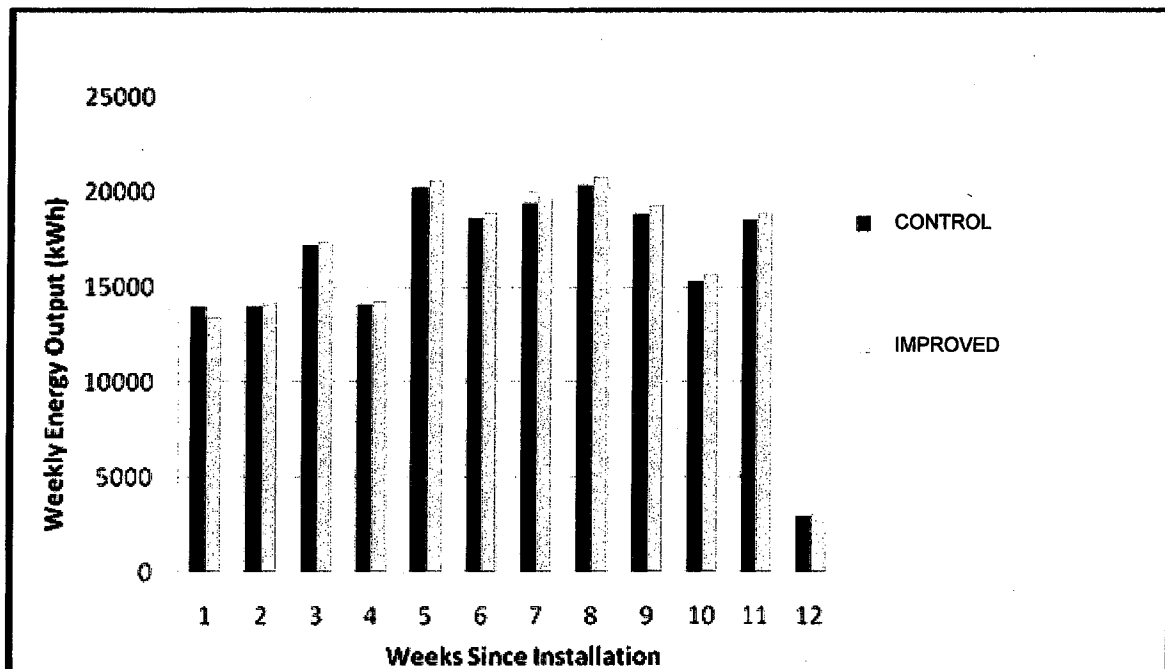


FIG. 11

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2010/039361

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - H01L 31/048 (2010.01)

USPC - 136/259

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC(8) - H01L 31/00, 0203, 042, 048 (2010.01)

USPC - 136/244, 251, 256, 259

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

PatBase, Google Patents

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 7,554,031 B2 (SWANSON et al) 30 June 2009 (30.06.2009) entire document	1-16
Y	US 5,512,757 A (CEDERSTRAND et al) 30 April 1996 (30.04.1996) entire document	1-16
Y	US 5,391,235 A (INOUE) 21 February 1995 (21.02.1995) entire document	4-16

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

05 August 2010

Date of mailing of the international search report

19 AUG 2010

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450

Facsimile No. 571-273-3201

Authorized officer:

Blaine R. Copenheaver

PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300
PCT OSP: 571-272-7774