# IPC-HDBK-830A

## 2013 - August

## Guidelines for Design, Selection and Application of Conformal Coatings

Supersedes IPC-HDBK-830
October 2002

*A standard developed by IPC*



*Association Connecting Electronics Industries*

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- Contain simple (simplified) language
- Just include spec information
- Focus on end product performance
- Include a feedback system on use and problems for future improvement

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- Increase time-to-market
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# Guidelines for Design, Selection and Application of Conformal Coatings

Developed by the Conformal Coating Handbook Task Group (5-33c) of the Cleaning and Coating Committee (5-30) of IPC

Users of this standard are encouraged to participate in the development of future revisions.

Contact:

IPC
3000 Lakeside Drive, Suite 309S
Bannockburn, Illinois
60015-1219
Tel 847 615.7100
Fax 847 615.7105

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# Acknowledgment

Any document involving a complex technology draws material from a vast number of sources. While the principal members of the Conformal Coating Handbook Task Group (5-33c) of the Cleaning and Coating Committee (5-30) are shown below, it is not possible to include all of those who assisted in the evolution of this standard. To each of them, the members of the IPC extend their gratitude.

**Cleaning and Coating Committee**

Chair
Doug O. Pauls
Rockwell Collins

Vice Chair
Debora L. Obitz
Trace Laboratories - Baltimore

**Conformal Coating Handbook Task Group**

Co-Chairs
Jason M. Keeping
Celestica

and

Amy M. Hagnauer
Raytheon Company

Vice Chair
Fonda B. Wu
Raytheon Company

**Technical Liaison of the IPC Board of Directors**

Bob Neves
Microtek Laboratories

**Conformal Coating Handbook Task Group**

Maria D'Aniello, 3M Canada Company
Larry Ennett, 3M Company
Michele Nelson, 3M Company
Douglas Schueller, AbelConn, LLC
Ross Dillman, ACI/EMPF
Constantino Gonzalez, ACME Training & Consulting
Greg Alexander, Ascentech, LLC
Thomas Cleere, BAE Systems Platform Solutions
Joseph Kane, BAE Systems Platform Solutions
Gerald Leslie Bogert, Bechtel Plant Machinery, Inc.
Barbara Kanegsberg, BFK Solutions
Edward Kanegsberg, BFK Solutions
Joseph Riendeau, Boeing Research & Development
Thomas Crist, CBC Coating, Inc.
Jason Keeping, Celestica
Louis Hart, Compunetics Inc.
Laura Cote, Continental Automotive Systems
Brian Madsen, Continental Automotive Systems
Mary Muller, Crane Aerospace & Electronics
Jawn Swan, Crystal Mark, Inc.
Winn Cannon, Cytec Industries Inc.
Rick Jordan, Cytec Industries Inc.
David Corbett, Defense Supply Center Columbus
Lowell Sherman, Defense Supply Center Columbus
Henry Sanfilippo, Delphi Electronics and Safety
Kati Weeks, Dow Corning
Carlos Montemayor, Dow Corning Corporation
Barry Ritchie, Dow Corning Corporation
Jonathan Galaska, Dymax Corporation
Michael Suwe, ELANTAS Beck GmbH
Robert Phelps, ELANTAS PDG, INC.
James Stockhausen, ELANTAS PDG, INC.
Mark Winkeler, ELANTAS PDG, INC.
Jade Bridges, Electrolube
Amanda Stuart, Electrolube
Arthur Perkowski, Electronic Coating Technologies Inc.
Eric Moffatt, Elzly Technology Corporation
Graham Naisbitt, Gen3 Systems Limited
Richard Davidson, Honeywell Aerospace
Richard Rumas, Honeywell Canada
Bob Teegarden, Honeywell International - Torrance
Matthew Eveline, HumiSeal Division of Chase Corporation
Jeffrey Sargeant, HumiSeal Division of Chase Corporation
John Waryold, HumiSeal Division of Chase Corporation
Michael McLaughlin, IEC Electronics Corp.
Mark Northrup, IEC Electronics Corp.
Jagadeesh Radhakrishnan, Intel Corporation
Emmanuelle Guene, Inventec Performance Chemicals
Manfred Suppa, Lackwerke Peters GmbH & Co KG
Vijay Kumar, Lockheed Martin Missile & Fire Control
Sam Polk, Lockheed Martin Missiles & Fire Control

Alisha Amar, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company

Megan Brecht, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company

Michael Green, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company

Hue Green, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company

Dung (Young) Tiet, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company

Dennis Fritz, MacDermid, Inc.

Albert Mastrangelo, Material Matters International, LLC

MaryAnne Mosher, Max Q Systems

Christopher Hunt, National Physical Laboratory

Hector Pulido, Nordson ASYMTEK

Randy McNutt, Northrop Grumman Corp.

Gustavo Arredondo, Para Tech Coating Inc.

William Yager, Para Tech Coating Inc.

Richard Litavis, Paradign Inc.

Paula Vandenberg, Plasma Ruggedized Solutions

Michah Pledger, Pledger Consulting

Richard Kraszewski, Plexus Corp.

Kirk Van Dreel, Plexus Corp.

Amy Hagnauer, Raytheon Company

Bill Vuono, Raytheon Company

Fonda Wu, Raytheon Company

Lance Brack, Raytheon Missile Systems

Mradul Mehrotra, Raytheon Missile Systems

Robert Monier, Raytheon Missile Systems

Martin Scionti, Raytheon Missile Systems

Nick Webb, Raytheon Missile Systems

Amanda Rickman, Raytheon Systems Company

DeAnn Gibbs, Rockwell Collins

Nate Grinvalds, Rockwell Collins

Eddie Hofer, Rockwell Collins

Douglas Pauls, Rockwell Collins

Debie Vorwald, Rockwell Collins

Gordon Sullivan, Royal Adhesives & Sealants

Greg Hurst, RSI, Inc.

Gaston Hidalgo, Samsung Telecommunications America

Yanmei Li, Schlumberger Well Services

Giovanni Casanova, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, Inc

Greg Simpson, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, Inc

Stephen Craig, Shin-Etsu Silicones of America, Inc

Kim Atkins, Specialized Coating Services

Lamar Young, Specialty Coating Systems Inc.

el Parrish, STI Electronics, Inc.

Per-Erik Tegehall, Swerea IVF AB

Rick Carlson, Taiyo America Inc.

Cary Schmidt, Teknetix Inc.

Thomas Farrell, Thomas G. Farrell Associates

Renee Michalkiewicz, Trace Laboratories - Baltimore

Debora Obitz, Trace Laboratories - Baltimore

Lee Wilmot, TTM Technologies, Inc.

Calette Chamness, U.S. Army Aviation & Missile Command

Bobby Norman, U.S. Army Aviation & Missile Command

Sharon Ventress, U.S. Army Aviation & Missile Command

Crystal Vandeman, UL LLC

Andrea Cote, Underwriters Laboratories Inc.

Tim Minko, Viasystems Group, Inc.

Peter Newell, Whirlpool Corporation

Lionel Fullwood, WKK Distribution Ltd.

Jianfeng Liu, ZTE Corporation

Zhe (Jacky) Liu, ZTE Corporation

Jiamin Zhang, ZTE Corporation

John Rohlfing

David Vaughan

Tom Walker

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# Guidelines for Design, Selection and Application of Conformal Coatings

## 1 PREFACE

**1.1 Introduction** Conformal coatings are used in conjunction with printed circuit assemblies (PCAs). The designer and the users of conformal coatings for electronics applications should be aware of the properties of various types of conformal coatings and their interactions with PCAs to protect the PCAs in the end-use environment for the design-life of the PCA (or beyond). This document has been written to assist the designers and users of conformal coatings in understanding the characteristics of various coating types, as well as the factors that can modify those properties when the coatings are applied. Understanding and accounting for these materials can ensure the reliability and function of electronics.

**1.2 Purpose** The purpose of this handbook is to assist the individuals who either make choices regarding conformal coating or who work in coating operations. This handbook represents the compiled knowledge and experience of the IPC Conformal Coating Handbook Task Group. It is not enough to understand the properties of the various conformal coatings; the user needs to understand what is to be achieved by applying the conformal coating and how to verify that the desired results have been realized.

**1.3 Scope** Conformal coating, for the purpose of this document, is defined as a thin, transparent, polymeric coating that is applied to the surfaces of PCAs to provide protection from the end-use environment. Typical coating thickness ranges from 12.5 µm [0.49 mil] to 200 µm [7.9 mil].

Processing characteristics and curing mechanisms are dependent on the coating chemistries used. The desired performance characteristics of a conformal coating depend on the application and should be considered when selecting coating materials and coating processes. Users are urged to consult the suppliers for detailed technical data.

This guide enables a user to select a conformal coating based on industry experience and pertinent considerations. It is the responsibility of the user to determine the suitability, via appropriate testing, of the selected coating and application method for a particular end use application.

A conformal coating may have several functions depending on the type of application. The most common are:

a. To inhibit current leakage and short circuit due to humidity and contamination from service environment.

b. To inhibit corrosion.

c. To improve fatigue life of solder joints to leadless packages.

d. To inhibit arcing, corona and St. Elmo's Fire.

e. To provide mechanical support for small parts that cannot be secured by mechanical means, to prevent damage due to mechanical shock and vibration.

**1.4 Classification** This standard recognizes that electrical and electronic assemblies are subject to classifications by intended end-item use. Three general end-product classes have been established to reflect differences in producibility, complexity, functional performance requirements and verification (inspection/test) frequency. It should be recognized that there may be overlaps of equipment between classes.

The user is responsible for defining the product class. The product class should be stated in the procurement documentation package.

**CLASS 1 General Electronic Products**

Includes products suitable for applications where the major requirement is function of the completed assembly.

**CLASS 2 Dedicated Service Electronic Products**

Includes products where continued performance and extended life is required, and for which uninterrupted service is desired but not critical. Typically the end-use environment would not cause failures.

**CLASS 3 High Performance Electronic Products**

Includes products where continued high performance or performance-on-demand is critical, equipment downtime cannot be tolerated, end-use environment may be uncommonly harsh, and the equipment must function when required, such as life support or other critical systems.