
	<b>SAKARYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ FEN BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ DERGİSİ</b> <i>SAKARYA UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE</i>		
	<b>e-ISSN: 2147-835X</b> <b>Dergi sayfası: <a href="http://dergipark.gov.tr/saufenbilder">http://dergipark.gov.tr/saufenbilder</a></b>		
	<u>Geliş/Received</u> 08-09-2017 <u>Kabul/Accepted</u> 19-06-2017	<u>Doi</u> 10.16984/saufenbilder.337279	

## Evaluation of the pre-irradiation electrical characteristics of the RadFET dosimeters with diverse gate oxides by TCAD simulation program

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to determine the pre-irradiation threshold voltages of the RadFET dosimeters with gate oxide composed of high-k dielectrics and compare the results with the traditional sensors, the gate oxide of which is composed of SiO<sub>2</sub>. The effects of the p<sup>+</sup> regions with different concentration, depth and length on the electrical characteristic of the RadFETs were also investigated in the study. For these purposes, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, HfO<sub>2</sub> high-k dielectrics and SiO<sub>2</sub> with the thicknesses of 400 nm were used as the sensitive regions of the dosimeters. The sensors were designed in the Silvaco TCAD simulation program. While the lengths of the p<sup>+</sup> regions changed the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristics of the RADFETs, the depths and concentrations until a certain value of these regions did not play an important role in electrical characteristic. The lowest threshold voltages obtained from the SiO<sub>2</sub>, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFETs were found to be -5.22, -3.63, and -3.10 V, respectively. These results demonstrated that RadFETs with high-k dielectrics may be promising candidate for the new generated dosimeters in terms of broader measurable dose range providing their radiation tests.

**Keywords:** RadFET, TCAD, high-k, threshold voltage

### Farklı kapı oksitli RadFET dozimetrelerinin ışınlama öncesi elektriksel karakteristiklerinin TCAD benzetim programı ile değerlendirilmesi

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, kapı oksiti yüksek-k'lı dielektriklerden oluşan RadFET dozimetrelerinin ışınlama öncesi eşik gerilimlerini belirlemek ve sonuçları, kapı oksiti SiO<sub>2</sub>'den oluşan geleneksel sensörlerle kıyaslamaktır. Ayrıca çalışmada, farklı konsantrasyonlu, derinlikli ve genişlikli p<sup>+</sup> bölgelerinin RadFET'lerin elektriksel karakteristiği üzerine etkileri de incelenmiştir. Bu amaçla, dozimetrelerin duyar bölgeleri olarak 400 nm kalınlığında yüksek-k'lı Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, HfO<sub>2</sub> dielektrikleri ve SiO<sub>2</sub> kullanılmıştır. Sensörler, Silvaco TCAD benzetim programında tasarlanmıştır. p<sup>+</sup> bölgelerinin uzunlukları, I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> karakteristiğini değiştirirken, bu bölgelerin derinlikleri ve belirli bir değere kadar konsantrasyonları elektriksel karakteristikte önemli bir rol oynamamıştır. SiO<sub>2</sub>, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> ve HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET'lerden elde edilen en düşük eşik voltajları sırasıyla, -5.22, -3.63 ve -3.10 V olarak bulunmuştur. Bu sonuçlar, yüksek-k

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dielektrikli RadFET'lerin, radyasyon testlerinin yapılması koşuluyla, daha geniş ölçülebilir doz aralığı açısından yeni nesil dozimetreler için gelecek vaat eden bir aday olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** RadFET, TCAD, yüksek-k, eşik voltajı

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Radiation Sensing Field Effect Transistors (RadFETs), also known as pMOS transistor or p-MOSFET, has found many application areas such as radiotherapy, space radiation monitoring, high energy physics laboratories following the idea on its usability of ionizing radiation dosimeter or sensor reported by Holmes-Siedle [1-4]. The advantages of these dosimeters are: small size, excellent compatibility with CMOS technology, low power consumption, non-destructive and immediate read-out, wide dose range, etc. [5-6].

Radiation dosimeters are divided into two groups as active and passive dosimeters. TLDs are most commonly used in passive dosimeters. A great change is observed in the sensitivities of TLDs and their use is time consuming due to the complicated annealing mechanism and calibration process [7]. The use of diode detectors depends on dose rate and temperature [7]. However, the response of RadFETs is independent of dose rate up to  $10^8$  Gy/s and is less affected from temperature than diode's response [8-9].

The most important parameter affecting the sensitivity of the RadFET is gate oxide thickness. It is expected that the sensitivity/threshold voltage shift increases with increasing thickness of the gate oxide [10]. For instance, the RadFET with the gate oxide thickness of 100 nm (100 nm-RadFET) for 6 MV X-ray and 6 MeV electron beams obtained from LINAC (Linear Accelerator) showed lower sensitivity compared to 400 nm-RadFET [6]. However, deviation from the linearity is observed with increasing gate oxide thickness ( $\sim 1 \mu\text{m}$ ) in the lower dose range. Because, more oxide trapped charges occur due to increasing interaction probability of radiation with medium and this case leads to electric field screening [5-6]. Most of the commercial RadFETs have gate oxide thickness of 400 nm due to their linear performances for a wide dose range compared to pMOS with thicker gate oxide and higher sensitivity compared to RadFET with thin gate oxide [5, 11].

The literature studies on RadFET can be separated into a few groups: i) Investigation of the package lid effect on the sensitivity of the sensor [12-13], ii) Determination of the short and long term fading characteristics of pMOS transistor [5, 14], iii) The calculation of the trap densities for pre-irradiation and post-irradiation [15-16], iv) Investigation of the effects of different production parameters such as annealing, boron ion ( $B^+$ ) implantation on the sensitivity of dosimeter [17]. However, most of the studies are based on RadFETs with  $\text{SiO}_2$  (gate oxide/sensitive region) grown by wet-dry oxidation process. The studies on the RadFET with high-k dielectric are very few in the literature [12, 18-19]. The reason of the choice of the  $\text{SiO}_2$  as gate dielectric is the perfect interface formation between the Si and  $\text{SiO}_2$ . The interface between the high-k and Si contains many structural defects due to the lattice mismatch and so, the interface traps increase. However, the post deposition annealing process improves the interface quality and it is possible to fabricate the RadFET with thinner gate oxide by high-k dielectrics due to the larger charge storage capacity of the high-k MOS structure compared to the device with  $\text{SiO}_2$  [20-21]. On the other side, some experimental studies on the MOS capacitors having the oxide with high-k dielectric have shown that their responses to  $^{60}\text{Co}$  gamma source are higher than traditional MOS capacitor with  $\text{SiO}_2$  gate oxide [22-24]. There are also studies showing that MOS capacitors with different dielectrics are less sensitive to radiation compared to the structure with  $\text{SiO}_2$  [25-26]. These results may also be valid for the pMOS transistor including the MOS structure. These findings are crucial in pointing out that RadFETs are sensors that can be designed for their intended use.

Low threshold voltage ( $V_{th}$ ) for pre-irradiation is an important factor in terms of production of RadFET with broader measurable dose range and the studies on zero threshold voltage adjustment of  $\text{SiO}_2$ -RadFET have continued [11, 17]. Therefore, investigation of the electrical characteristics of the RadFETs with high-k dielectrics is quite important to determine the minimum pre-irradiation threshold voltages of different sensors.

The zero threshold voltage adjustment for  $\text{SiO}_2$ -RadFET is made by  $B^+$  ion implantation to the gate

oxide (SiO<sub>2</sub>) [11, 17]. Therefore, fabrication time/step is increasing with this process. However, RadFETs with high-k dielectrics have lower threshold voltages without ion implantation [27] and thus RadFETs with broader measurable dose range can be obtained. On the other hand, the investigation of the effect of the B<sup>+</sup> ion concentrations in p<sup>+</sup> regions on the electrical characteristics of RadFET is also very important for the evaluation of fabrication processes, because the variation in the concentration in these regions can affect the current and threshold voltages. For this reasons, the aims of the present study are: i) to investigate the electrical characteristics of RadFETs with different gate oxide layers and to determine the initial threshold voltages, ii) to examine the effect of B<sup>+</sup> ion concentration on the electrical characteristic of RadFET. In this context, the pre-irradiation threshold voltages of RadFETs with high-k dielectrics of HfO<sub>2</sub> (~25) [28] and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (~9) [29] were investigated by Silvaco TCAD simulation program and the results were compared with the traditional RadFET with SiO<sub>2</sub> (~3.9) [29]. For all of the RadFETs, the effects of the depth, wide and concentrations of the p<sup>+</sup> regions on the current-voltage (I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub>) characteristics of RadFETs were also determined. These results form the basis of further experimental works on RadFET with high-k dielectric. In this work, theoretical/simulation results for RadFETs are given.

## 2. THEORY AND STRUCTURE

The RadFET fabricated on n-type Si wafer has four terminals: source, gate, drain and bulk-silicon. Boron is used as p-type dopant for the p<sup>+</sup> regions in these transistors. The channel should be formed between the two p<sup>+</sup> regions for the current transition and number of charge carriers in the channel is controlled by the gate voltage. The events in the structure depending on the applied gate voltage (V<sub>g</sub>) are: i) The negative charges in the Si move to channel with applied positive gate voltage (accumulation regime), ii) The depletion region occurs with the applied negative voltage (depletion regime), iii) By increasing the applied negative voltage, hole concentration exceeds the electron concentration in the channel or near oxide/Si interface (inversion regime). For the positive charge flows, V<sub>g</sub> should be more negative than V<sub>th</sub>. In this study, the intersection of the straight line obtained from linear region of I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub>

characteristic curve with voltage axis was taken as threshold voltage of RadFET [30].

The operation principle of the RadFET is based on the electron-hole pairs, occurring as a result of radiation interaction with sensitive region (gate oxide) of RadFET. Few of the electrons and holes recombine within a short time and most of them move under DC voltage. Electrons can easily escape from the traps due to their relatively higher mobility compared to holes. Due to their slow mobility, holes are trapped in the oxide layer or oxide/Si interface. The trapped charges cause the threshold voltage shift of the RadFET and post-irradiation V<sub>th</sub> is more negative than before. The threshold voltage shifts corresponding to each applied dose are determined and these values constitute the calibration curve of the sensor. The schematic structure of the RadFET and radiation induced events are given in Figures 1a and 1b, respectively.

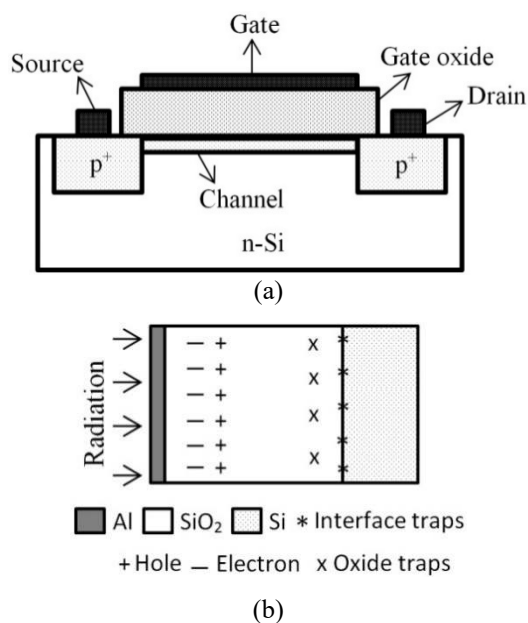


Figure 1. (a) Schematic view of the RadFET, (b) Radiation induced events in the sensor

The minimum detectable dose for SiO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET is 1 cGy and the maximum dose is 1 kGy or higher, depending on the application requirements. There is more than one device in a single chip, and their channel width/length ratios are different. For electron and photon beams, the sensitivity of the sensor increases with decreasing channel length [6]. In the RadFET used in the simulation, the thickness of the Si layer and the channel width were selected as 500 μm and 15 μm, respectively. The length of the channel changed depending on the length of the p<sup>+</sup> regions.

Gaussian distribution was used for the B<sup>+</sup> implantation in the simulation and the concentration is expressed as [31]:

$$N(x) = \frac{\phi}{\sqrt{2\pi}\Delta R_p} \exp\left(-\frac{(x-R_p)^2}{2\Delta R_p^2}\right) \quad (1)$$

Where N(x) is the B<sup>+</sup> concentration from the surface to x (μm) depth, φ is the B<sup>+</sup> ion dose, R<sub>p</sub> is the projected range and ΔR<sub>p</sub> is the standard deviation.

The threshold voltage of a p-type MOSFET (n-type substrate) is expressed as [32]:

$$V_{th} = V_{fb} - 2\phi_F - \frac{\sqrt{2\varepsilon_s q N_d (2\phi_F)}}{C_{ox}} \quad (2)$$

Where V<sub>fb</sub> is the flat band voltage, φ<sub>F</sub> is the Fermi potential, ε<sub>s</sub> is the dielectric permittivity of Si, q is the electric charge, and N<sub>d</sub> is the concentration of donor atoms.

The I<sub>d</sub> current in RadFETs is given by [32]:

$$I_d = \frac{\mu W C_{ox}}{2L_{eff}} (V_g - V_{th})^2 \quad (3)$$

Where μ is the charge-carrier effective mobility, W is the gate width, L is the effective channel length.

### 3. SIMULATION PROCEDURE

Silvaco TCAD simulation program consists of ATHENA and ATLAS simulators. The DeckBuild Command Menu is used to create the input files and activates the sub-programs. ATHENA is used for the process (fabrication steps) simulation and ATLAS is a physically-based device simulator [31, 33]. The electrical characteristics (I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub>) of the RadFETs were obtained from the ATLAS. The design steps of the RadFET in the ATLAS are: i) The Si and gate oxide (SiO<sub>2</sub>, HfO<sub>2</sub>, and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) with 400 nm thickness were defined to program as region 1 and region 2, respectively. ii) Gate, source, drain and substrate electrodes of the RadFET were determined on the structure. iii) Uniform n-type doping with 10<sup>15</sup> atoms/cm<sup>3</sup> was applied to previously determined region of the Si (previously labelled as region 1 in the program). So, n-type Si was formed in the program. iv) p-type doping by Gaussian profile with different peak concentrations (10<sup>20</sup>, 10<sup>19</sup>, 10<sup>18</sup>, and 10<sup>17</sup>

atoms/cm<sup>3</sup>) was applied to form the p<sup>+</sup> regions of the RadFET. The junction and length data of the p<sup>+</sup> regions was externally defined to the program for Gaussian distribution. The view of minimized RadFET obtained from Tonyplot of TCAD is given in Figure 2.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristics of the RadFET with SiO<sub>2</sub> were obtained depending on different depths of the p<sup>+</sup> region with 10<sup>20</sup> atoms/cm<sup>3</sup> and the results were given in the Figure 3. As shown in this figure, increasing depths of the p<sup>+</sup> regions did not lead to important variation on the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> curves and no shifts in the threshold voltages of the SiO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET were observed. This result is in compliance with the literatures [19, 32] since the drain current (I<sub>d</sub>) depends on oxide capacitance, gate and threshold voltages, width and length of the gate/channel area.

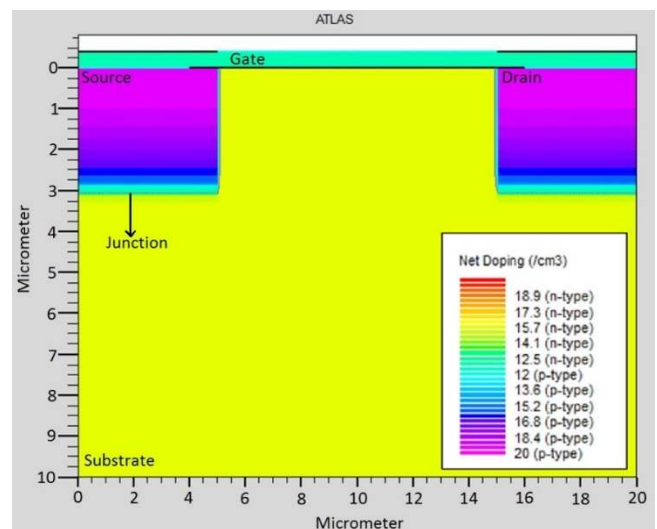


Figure 2. RadFET with the junction of 3 μm obtained from Tonyplot of TCAD (peak concentration of 10<sup>20</sup> atoms/cm<sup>3</sup>)

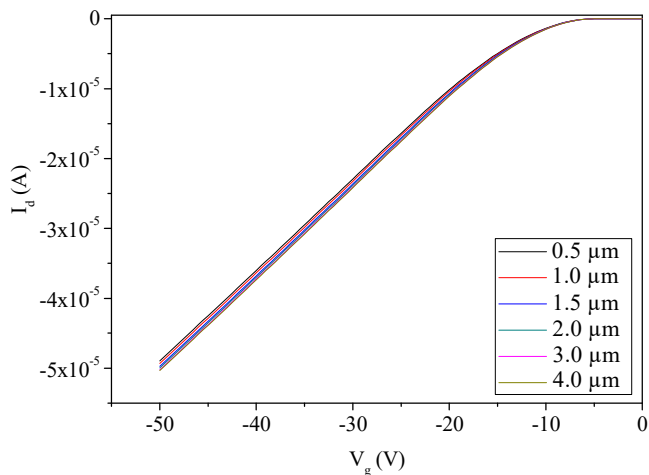


Figure 3.  $I_d$ - $V_g$  characteristics of the  $\text{SiO}_2$ -RadFET with different junctions/depths of the  $p^+$  regions

The  $I_d$ - $V_g$  curves of the RadFETs with the gate oxides of  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{HfO}_2$  for different depth and width of the  $p^+$  regions were presented in Figures 4, 5, and 6, respectively. It can be clearly seen from these figures that drain current increases with increasing dielectric constants ( $k$ ) of the oxides. Because, the capacitance of the MOS structure depends on the dielectric constant of the gate oxide and the charge storage capacity is enhanced with increasing dielectric constant. On the other side,  $I_d$  changed with decreasing channel length or increasing  $p^+$  region's lengths due to easy transportation of the charges from the source to the drain. The obtained results are in agreement with Eq. (3).

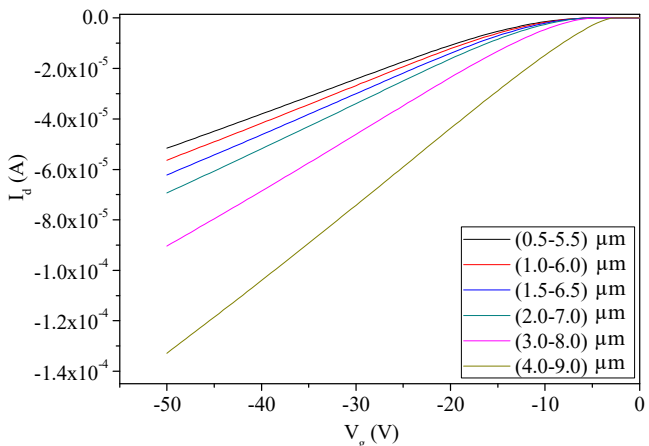


Figure 4.  $I_d$ - $V_g$  characteristics of the  $\text{SiO}_2$ -RadFET with different depths and lengths of the  $p^+$  regions

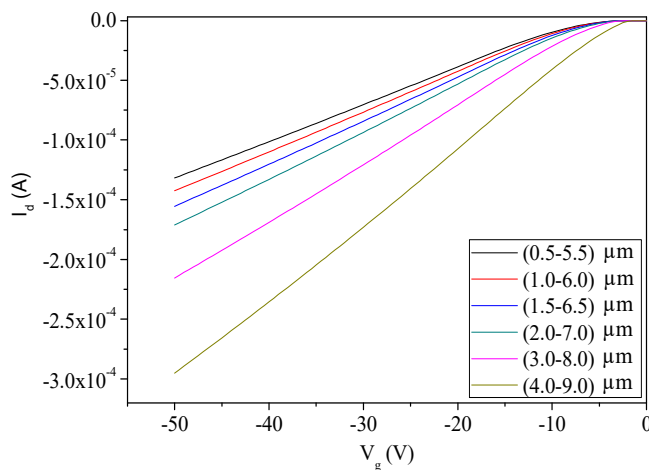


Figure 5.  $I_d$ - $V_g$  characteristics of the  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ -RadFET with different depths and lengths of the  $p^+$  regions

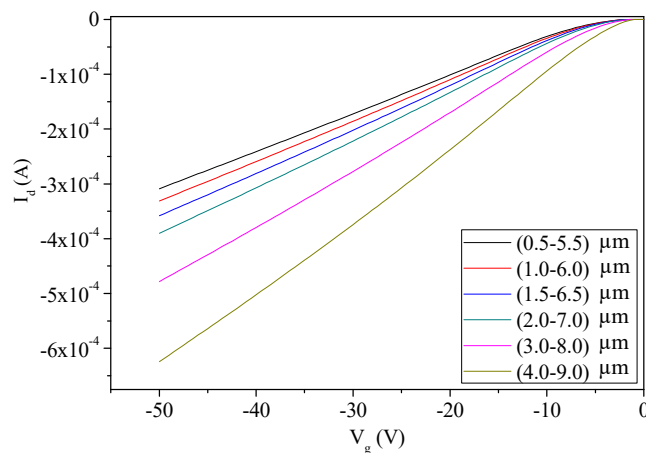


Figure 6.  $I_d$ - $V_g$  characteristics of the  $\text{HfO}_2$ -RadFET with different depths and lengths of the  $p^+$  regions

The threshold voltage results are presented in Table 1. These data demonstrated that the threshold voltage was getting closer to zero with increasing dielectric constant of the oxide. The oxide capacitance ( $C_{ox}$ ) increases with increasing dielectric constant and the threshold voltage decreases as seen from Eq. (2). These results meet the theoretical expectation. The channel between the source and drain can be easily formed in the  $\text{HfO}_2$ -RadFET with the highest dielectric constant compared to others due to increasing charge storage capacity. Therefore, the threshold voltage shifts towards less negative values in the case of  $\text{HfO}_2$ -RadFET than others. The threshold voltages for the RadFETs with the gate oxides of  $\text{SiO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{HfO}_2$  were found in the range of  $-8.96 - -11.59$  V,  $-3.63 - -7.73$  V,  $-3.10 - -5.98$  V, respectively. The lowest  $V_{th}$  value was obtained as  $-3.10$  V for  $\text{HfO}_2$ -RadFET with the  $4.0$   $\mu\text{m}$  depth and  $9.0$   $\mu\text{m}$  length of  $p^+$  region. The highest  $V_{th}$  value was found to be  $-11.59$  V for  $\text{SiO}_2$ -RadFET with the  $0.5$   $\mu\text{m}$  depth and  $5.5$   $\mu\text{m}$  length of  $p^+$  region.

Table 1. Threshold voltages for different RadFETs

Sensor (k)	D-L (µm)	V <sub>th</sub> (V)	Sensor (k)	D-L (µm)	V <sub>th</sub> (V)
SiO <sub>2</sub> -RadFET (~3.9)	0.5-5.5	-11.59	Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> -RadFET	2.0-7.0	-6.64
	1.0-6.0	-11.11		3.0-8.0	-5.68
	1.5-6.5	-10.76		4.0-9.0	-3.63
	2.0-7.0	-10.16	HfO <sub>2</sub> -RadFET (~25)	0.5-5.5	-5.98
	3.0-8.0	-8.96		1.0-6.0	-5.36
4.0-9.0	-5.22	1.5-6.5		-5.11	
0.5-5.5	-7.73	2.0-7.0		-5.01	
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> -RadFET (~9)	1.0-6.0	-7.26	3.0-8.0	-4.36	
	1.5-6.5	-6.90	4.0-9.0	-3.10	

The effect of p-type doping concentration on the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristic of the HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFETs was investigated and the results are given in Figure 7. No significant change was observed in the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> curves with increasing p-type doping concentration except 10<sup>17</sup> atoms/cm<sup>3</sup>.

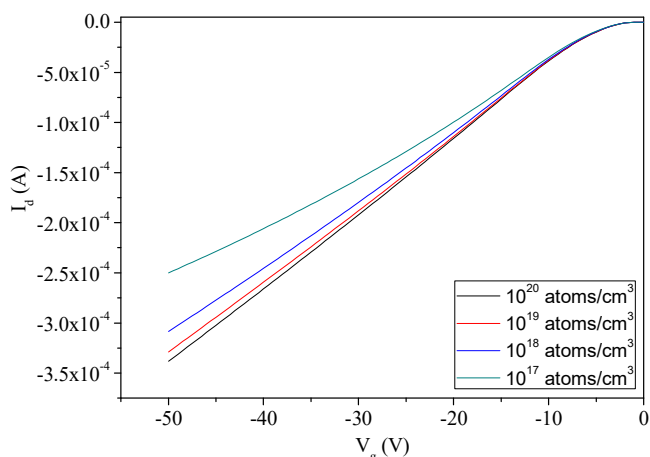


Figure 7. The I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristic of the HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET with different p-type doping concentration

### 5. CONCLUSION

In this work, the results of the pre-irradiation threshold voltages of the RadFET dosimeters with SiO<sub>2</sub>, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and HfO<sub>2</sub> gate oxides and the effect of the diverse depths/junctions and lengths of the p<sup>+</sup> regions of the sensor on the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristics were presented. The depth of the p<sup>+</sup> region of the SiO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET was changed in the range of 0.5-4.0 µm and the electrical characteristic was investigated. The obtained results demonstrated that the depth of the p<sup>+</sup> regions did not change the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> curves and threshold voltages. The V<sub>th</sub> values were obtained from the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> curves of the SiO<sub>2</sub>, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFETs for the diverse depths and lengths of the p<sup>+</sup> regions. Threshold voltages were decreased with decreasing channel length due to easy transition of the charges between the source and drain. Increasing dielectric constant of the gate oxide also caused the threshold voltage to decrease due to higher charge storage capacity of the RadFET with high-k gate oxide compared to

traditional sensor, the sensitive region of which is composed of SiO<sub>2</sub>. In other words, The V<sub>th</sub> value of the sensors was in descending order is: HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET>Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-RadFET>SiO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET. The lowest V<sub>th</sub> was obtained from the HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET with 4.0 µm lengths and 9.0 µm depths as -3.10 V. The HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFETs with the different concentrations of the p<sup>+</sup> regions were designed for evaluation the effect of p<sup>+</sup> region's concentration on the electrical characteristic of the sensor. The results for the p-type doping concentrations varying from 10<sup>17</sup>-10<sup>29</sup> atoms/cm<sup>3</sup> demonstrated that the different concentrations did not lead to an important variation in the I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> characteristic of the HfO<sub>2</sub>-RadFET except 10<sup>17</sup> atom/cm<sup>3</sup>. All of the results show that the RadFETs comprising of high-k dielectrics may play an important role for the dosimeter with broader measurable dose range. In RadFETs formed with high-k dielectrics, it is obvious that the threshold voltage is observed at lower values without applying any implantation process to the gate oxide layer compared to the structure with SiO<sub>2</sub>. This is also very important in terms of shortening the production process. The I<sub>d</sub>-V<sub>g</sub> curves shift to greater negative voltages (shift to the left). Reduction in threshold voltage shift with radiation dose will extend the period of use of the sensor in high radiation dose environment such as space applications. On the other hand, it is essential to develop sensitivity to low doses for environmental measurements (greater shift of threshold voltage). The sensor can be designed to suit the application area with different high-k dielectrics. For these reasons, it is important to perform radiation tests of such sensors in future studies.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) 1002-Short Term R&D Funding Program under Contract Number: 114F260 and the Ministry of Development of Turkey under Contract Numbers: 2012 K 120360.

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