

POLYSWITCH RESETTABLE DEVICES

Fundamentals

Overview

PolySwitch polymeric positive temperature coefficient (PPTC) devices help protect against damage caused by harmful overcurrent surges and overtemperature faults. Like traditional fuses, these devices limit the flow of dangerously high current during fault conditions. The PolySwitch device, however, resets after the fault is cleared and power to the circuit is removed, thereby helping to reduce warranty, service and repair costs.

PolySwitch circuit protection devices are made from a composite of semi-crystalline polymer and conductive particles. At normal temperature, the conductive particles form low-resistance networks in the polymer (Figure 1.a). However, if the temperature rises, either from high current through the part or from an increase in the ambient temperature, the crystallites in the polymer melt and become amorphous. The increase in volume during melting of the crystalline phase separates the conductive particles, resulting in a large non-linear increase in the resistance of the device.

Overcurrent Protection Using a PPTC Device

The PPTC device is a series element in a circuit. The PPTC device helps protect the circuit by going from a low-resistance to a high-resistance state in response to an overcurrent condition, as shown in Figure 2. This is referred to as “tripping” the device.

In normal operation the device has a resistance that is much lower than that of the circuit. In response to an overcurrent condition, the device increases in resistance (trips), reducing the current in the circuit to a value that can be safely carried by any of the circuit elements. This change is the result of a rapid increase in the temperature of the device caused by I^2R heating.

Principles of Operation

PolySwitch PPTC device's operation is based on an overall energy balance, as shown in Figure 3. Under normal operating conditions, the heat generated by the device and the heat lost by the device to the environment are in balance at a relatively low temperature, as shown between Points 1 and 2.

If the current through the device is increased while the ambient temperature is kept constant, the temperature of the device increases. Further increases in either current, ambient temperature, or both, will cause the device to reach a temperature where the resistance rapidly increases, as shown in Point 3.

Any further increase in current or ambient temperature will cause the device to generate heat at a rate greater than the rate at which heat can be dissipated, thus causing the device to heat up rapidly. At this stage, a very large increase in resistance occurs for a very small change in temperature, between Points 3 and 4. This is the normal operating region for a device in the tripped state. This large change in resistance causes a corresponding decrease in the current flowing to the circuit. This relation holds until the device resistance reaches the upper knee of the curve (Point 4). As long as the applied voltage remains at this level, the device will remain in the tripped state (that is, the device will remain latched in its protective state). Once the voltage decreases, the power is removed and the device cools, the device will reset.

Figure 1
How a PolySwitch Device Works

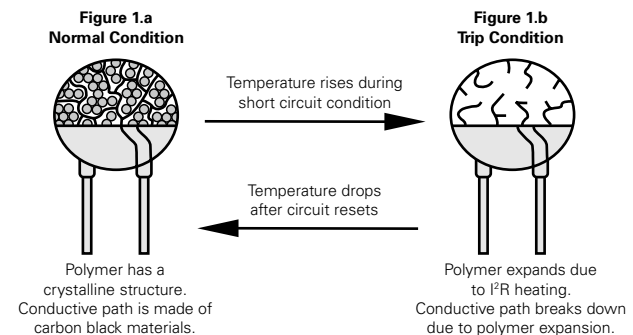


Figure 2
Typical PPTC Application

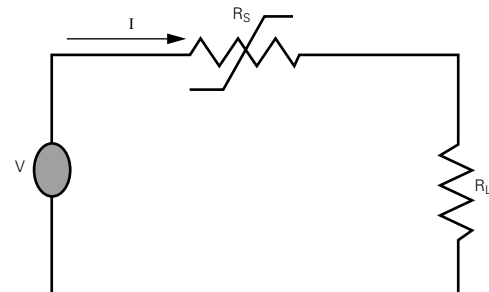
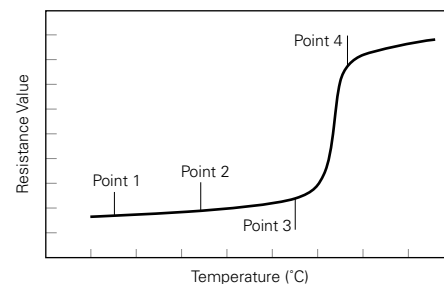
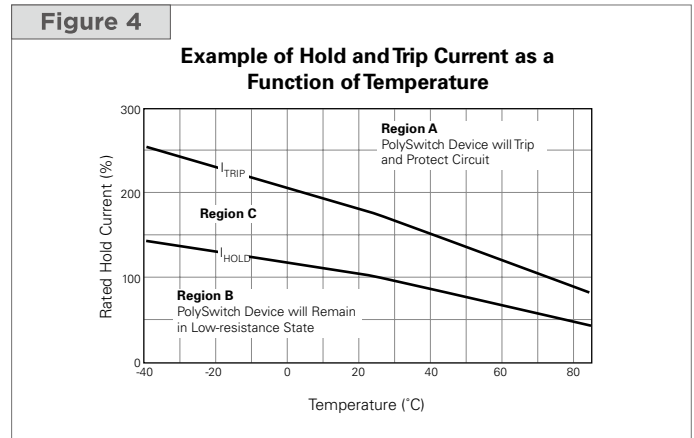


Figure 3
Example of Operating Curve for PPTC Device



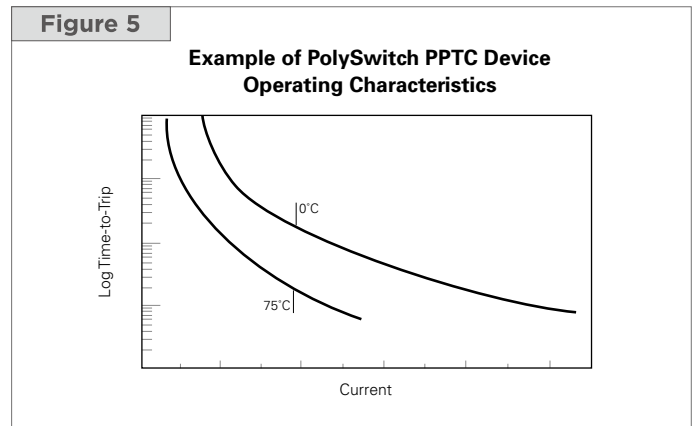
Example of Hold and Trip Current as a Function of Temperature

Figure 4 illustrates the hold- and trip-current behavior of a PolySwitch PPTC device as a function of temperature. One such curve can be defined for each available device. Region A describes the combinations of current and temperature at which the PolySwitch device will trip (go into the high-resistance state) and protect the circuit. Region B describes the combinations of current and temperature at which the PolySwitch device will allow for normal operation of the circuit. In Region C, it is possible for the device to either trip or remain in the low-resistance state (depending on individual device resistance).



Operating Characteristics of a PolySwitch PPTC Device

Figure 5 shows a typical pair of operating curves for a PolySwitch device in still air at 0°C and 75°C. The curves are different because the heat required to trip the device comes both from electrical I^2R heating and from the device environment. At 75°C the heat input from the environment is substantially greater than it is at 0°C, so the additional I^2R needed to trip the device is correspondingly less. This results in a lower trip current at a given trip time (or a faster trip at given trip current).



Typical Resistance Recovery After a Trip Event

Figure 6 shows typical behavior of a PolySwitch device that is tripped and then allowed to cool. This figure illustrates how, even after a number of hours, the device resistance is still greater than the initial resistance. Over an extended period of time, device resistance will continue to fall and will eventually approach initial resistance.

However, since this time can be measured in days, months, or years, it is not practical to expect that the device resistance will reach the original value for operational purposes. Therefore, when PolySwitch devices are chosen, R_{IMAX} should be taken into consideration when determining hold current. R_{IMAX} is the resistance of the device one hour after the thermal event.

