

Press Release

APEX-Micro is Getting the Lead Out

Vancouver, BC, Canada, September 29, 2004:

The Lead-Free initiative mandated by the European Commission takes effect in July 2006. Ecological concerns demand that non-recyclable lead be removed from the waste stream to avoid possible contamination of our environment. Ultimately this new requirement will have an impact on everyone involved in electronic manufacturing. Some major Asian OEMs have already converted their products to lead-free in anticipation of the new regulations. In much the same way that the European ISO Standards rippled out to become a worldwide prerequisite in electronic manufacturing, the Lead-Free initiative will surely become a marketing essential.

APEX-Micro has been attentively observing the developments in lead-free research for the past three years, as the industry strives to find the most suitable replacement for the eutectic Sn63 alloy that has been the standard. Any alloy that eliminates the 37% lead component will naturally have very different characteristics and while there is no "drop-in replacement", the goal has been to find one that most closely fills the bill. Considerations include, reflow temperatures, bond strength, surface tension, wetting ability and of course, price.

SAC, or tin-silver-copper, has emerged as the most suitable alloy and APEX-Micro has begun adapting our procedures to this new alloy in order to develop a complete and robust lead-free electronic manufacturing process. APEX-Micro plans to offer our clients a fully lead-free process well in advance of the European deadline. We currently anticipate having complete lead-free capabilities by April, 2005.

The lead-free mandate extends beyond the assembly process to include specific PC board and component requirements. All SMT components, in addition to having lead-free leads, will also have to be designed to withstand the higher reflow temperatures necessitated by the new alloy.

APEX-Micro will be working closely with our clients and our supply-chain partners to assist in converting current bills of materials to become lead-free compliant.

Resistance is futile! Individual European countries already have restrictions on certain substances used in electronic manufacturing. Failure to comply with these restrictions has cost some exporters millions of dollars in lost revenue, as goods have been quarantined pending resolution. Many will see this shift in technology as an unavoidable headache, however APEX-Micro views it as a major marketing opportunity for our partners. We invite our clients to review their lead-free strategic planning with us and to take advantage of this golden window of opportunity.