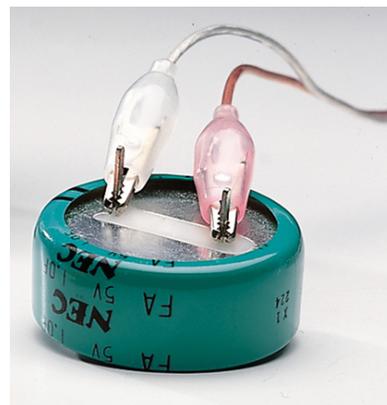


Capacitor 1 Farad

P6-8012



BACKGROUND:

A capacitor is a device which has the ability to store an electrical charge. Traditional capacitors are made of two pieces of metal, called plates, separated by an insulator called the dielectric. The capacitance of a capacitor depends primarily on the size of the plates, the distance between the plates, and the permeability of the dielectric to electric fields. Moving the plates closer together and enlarging the plates are two ways of increasing capacitance.

Capacitance is measured in Farads. One Farad is the capacitance of a capacitor which can hold one Coulomb of charge (6.25×10^{18} charged particles) when a voltage of one volt is connected across its leads. Most capacitors are measured in microfarads (10^{-6} Farads) or picofarads (10^{-12} Farads).

Fairly large capacitors (on the order of several thousand microfarads) can be achieved when one plate is simply oxidized and pressed against another plate. The very thin layer of oxidized metal acts as a dielectric: the distance between plates is greatly reduced and the capacitance increased accordingly.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

The NEC Supercap from Arbor Scientific has a rating of one Farad. How do they get so much capacitance in such a tiny package? It's done with activated carbon and sulfuric acid. It is believed that at every interface there exists an array of oriented dipoles (atoms or molecules with their ends oppositely charged). When an electric field is applied across this array, it orients these dipoles in such a way as to cause this layer to act as a dielectric (a very thin dielectric on the order of one or two molecules thick).

The two materials serving as interface media in the NEC Supercap are activated carbon and sulfuric acid. Activated carbon is ground to a powder and mixed with sulfuric acid. The surface area of the activated carbon is approximately 1,000 meters² per gram. The combination of this very large surface area with the very small distance between the capacitor "plates" results in a capacitance of about 200 to 400 Farads per gram of activated carbon.

One problem with these materials is that if more than 1.2 volts is applied to this junction, the aqueous sulfuric acid solution breaks down. To remedy this, the Supercap incorporates a number of small cells, each consisting of a "sandwich" of the paste separated by a porous material. Each cell is encompassed by an impermeable gasket (to hold everything together) squeezed between two electrically conductive ends. The whole system is pressurized.

Individual cells are stacked in series (end to end) and squeezed into a metal outer cover. By stacking them in series, the effective voltage of each cell is multiplied to useful proportions.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Your NEC Supercap has a capacitance of 1.0 Farads at a rated voltage of 5 VDC. It will hold a charge for about 200 hours at 20 degrees Celsius. Its leakage current is roughly 10 microamps at room temperature.

Because of the way it is constructed, the Supercap will not present a hazard if a voltage higher than that recommended is applied. At voltages above 12V, the individual cells become non-conductive as water in the sulfuric acid solution vaporizes. The Supercap will not explode like standard electrolytic capacitors; it will simply cease to work.

