Technical Information

Enclosure EMI/RFI Shielding

The requirements and standards for enclosure electromagnetic compatibility are continually increasing with the proliferation of electronics for industrial process control, information processing, and communication equipment. In the United States the Federal Communications Commission establishes the requirements and regulates the amount of electromagnetic interference, (EMI). Since January 1, 1996 the European Union (EU) has enforced legislation, Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) Directive 89/336/EEC, which regulates the amount of EMI and Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) that products can emit or must repel to function acceptably.

While the enclosure itself is not covered by these requirements, once the electronic equipment is installed within the enclosure, the package must comply with applicable EMI/RFI directives. Shielding and electromagnetic compatibility are highly specialized with their own terminology. The following definitions will help to specify EMI/RFI compatibility and select enclosures if the acronyms and technology are unfamiliar:

Attenuation A measure of the ability to contain or repel EMI/RFI energy. It can also be called shielding effectiveness and is usually expressed in decibels (dB).

Decibel (dB) Unit to express the effectiveness of a material or system in reducing electromagnetic interference. If a shielded enclosure reduces the EMI by 30 dB, the power of the interfering wave will be reduced by a factor of 1000 in passing through the enclosure. If the EMI reduction is 40 dB, the power is reduced by a factor of 10,000. The equation for calculating attenuation in decibels is $dB = 10 \log_{10} (P1/P2)$ where P1 = power of the interference wave before it passes through the enclosure, P2 = power of the wave after it has been reduced (attenuated) by the enclosure.

Electromagnetic Emission Electrical energy radiated into the environment intentionally by an antenna or incidentally by an electronic component or power equipment during a switching operation.

Electromagnetic Field Invisible fields which surround energized conductors such as wires and antennas. A field has both electric and magnetic components.

Electromagnetic Immunity The capability of an electronic component or electrical equipment to perform its intended function in the presence of external electromagnetic fields.

EMI (ElectroMagnetic Interference) Randomly radiated electrical energy which can emanate from high voltage equipment or power lines, welding equipment, switches, relays, spark plugs, or any device that generates an electric spark or corona. The random voltages or currents generated by these sources are coupled to electronic systems with undesirable results. EMI waves are not well ordered, vary widely in intensity, and cause interference over a wide frequency range. The sun is a natural generator of EMI.

EMC (ElectroMagnetic Compatibility) The ability of electronic equipment to perform its intended function in the presence of EMI and RFI disturbances without affecting proper operation.

EMP (ElectroMagnetic Pulse) Interference caused by a large and sudden electrical discharge such as lightning. EMP is short in duration but can radiate intense power. Like EMI, EMP is not well ordered and causes interference over a wide range of frequencies.

Ohms per Square A measurement unit for electrical continuity of the metal coating applied internally to non-metallic enclosures for EMI/RFI shielding. Although the coating thickness influences shielding to some extent, the electrical continuity is much more important. The conductive coating on Robroy Enclosures typically measures less than 2 ohms per square. The surface resistance (or conductivity) measurement is without units because the surface area does not influence the reading, i.e., measurements taken on a large sheet of conductive material will yield the same result over 1sq in, 1 sq. ft, 1 sq. yd., or 1 sq. meter.

RFI (Radio Frequency Interference) Interference caused by radio waves which emanate from commercial radio and television stations, amateur radio broadcasts, radar, microwave ovens, etc. Radio waves are usually well defined in terms of amplitude and frequency.

Military specification, MIL-STD-285, is used to test the shielding effectiveness of Robroy Enclosures. The procedure involves placing a transmitting antenna within the enclosure and a receiving antenna outside the enclosure. Measurements are then made alternately with the enclosure door/cover open and closed. The difference between the open and closed measurements expressed in dB is the shielding effectiveness. Measurements are usually made at 10 frequency points ranging from 0.01 to 1000 MHz.

Depending on the enclosure design and frequency of the EMI/RFI, the attenuation of a standard AttaBox non-metallic enclosure without modification will vary between 0 and 20 dB.

Robroy Enclosures interior surfaces can be coated with a highly conductive copper coating that provides excellent EMI/RFI shielding. The coating has been tested by an independent test laboratory and provides an average attenuation of 60 dB over the frequency range from 0.01 to 10000 MHz.

The coating description and properties are provided in the following table:

COATING DESCRIPTION AND PROPERTIES	
Shielding Material	Copper
Frequency Range	1-1000MHz
Sheet Resistance	< 2.5 Ohm/Square
Attenuation	>75dB