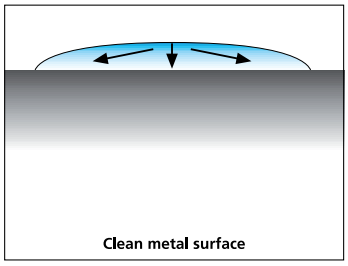
Effect of surface energy on bonding properties

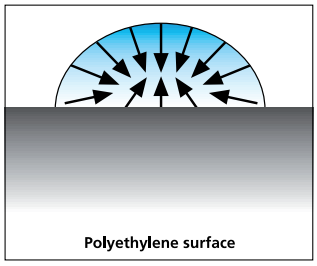
The surface energy (also known as surface tension) is an important factor in the selection of the right adhesive. Because of their chemical formulation, all surfaces have their own polarity and surface tension. The cause of surface tensions is the tendency of liquids to reduce their surface as far as possible, thus to form drops. When a surface which is to be marked (substrate) is wetted with an adhesive, in addition to the adhesive formulation and the surface quality (material, roughness, dampness etc.) the surface energy is also a decisive factor in the maximum attainable bonding force of the adhesive.

As a basic rule, it can be noted that the surface energy of the adhesive must be less than the surface energy of the material to be bonded (substrate). The adhesive should completely wet the substrate and not form any drops.



Flat drops

- High surface energy
- Good wetting
- Good bonding properties



Rounded drops

- Low surface energy
- Poor wetting
- Weak bonding properties

The material combination is the decisive factor

An acrylate-based adhesive is polar and therefore has a relatively high surface energy. Acrylate-based adhesives achieve optimum final bonding on polar substrates (e.g. glass or metals) with a high surface energy.

More critical is the application of labels using acrylate-based adhesives on materials with low surface energy (apolar substrates) such as, for example, silicone, polyethylene and polypropylene. The surface tensions of an acrylate-based adhesive can be reduced for particular applications by the addition of specific additives. However, this step brings with it some drawbacks, for example, a free-flowing adhesive and thus a limited life and storage ability of the labels.

The lower bonding force of low-energy surfaces must therefore be taken into account of when considering the end use.

For optimum marking using acrylate-based adhesive labels, HellermannTyton uses an improved adhesive formulation, which is co-ordinated to the most common materials in industry. In most cases it is possible to guarantee very good application of these labels. In borderline cases, a modified adhesive formulation may be necessary.

Talk to us, we'll be delighted to advise you.

Surface energies of different materials

Material	Surface energy [mN/m]*
Polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE)	18
Silicon (Si)	24
Polyvinyl fluoride (PVF)	25
Natural rubber (CR)	25
Polypropylene (PP)	29
Polyethylene (PE)	35
Polymethyl methacrylate, Acryl (PMMA)	36
Epoxy (EP)	36
Polyoxymethylene, Acetal (POM)	36
Polystyrene (PS)	38
Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)	39
Vinylidene chloride (VC)	40
Polyester (PET)	41
Polyimide (PI)	41
Polyarylsulfone (PAS)	41
Phenolic resin	42
Polyurethane (PUR)	43
Polyamide 6 (PA 6)	43
Polycarbonate (PC)	46
Lead (Pb)	450
Aluminium (Al)	840
Copper (Cu)	1100
Chromium (Cr)	2400
Iron (Fe)	2550

* The values stated are non-binding reference values and for guidance purposes only.

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