Schott Expands Albuquerque Solar Plant

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - Schott Solar Inc. announced Thursday it has hired 60 employees so it can start making its photovoltaic panels around the clock.

The new hires come less than nine months after Mainz, Germany-based Schott AG opened its 200,000-square-foot Albuquerque manufacturing plant, the company's flagship facility in North America.

Gerald Fine, president and chief executive of Schott North America, said the new workers bring the company to a total staff of 350 people, a level it plans to keep for the immediate future.

"We just feel it's important that we let everybody know that we are honoring the commitments that we made to the community," Fine said in a telephone interview Thursday.

The hires nearly double the number of production technicians working for the company in New Mexico.

The photovoltaic production line, which makes the panels that capture the sun's energy and convert it to electricity, will have 160 employees and run at full capacity, seven days a week and 24 hours a day, by the end of December.

Fine said the company has customers for the photovoltaic panels in Albuquerque and Europe, but he declined to provide details.

The Albuquerque facility also makes thermal receivers for large-scale solar power plants. Mirrors focus the sun's rays onto the receivers, which warm fluid that goes to a heat exchanger to produce steam for turbines to generate electricity.

Fine said the company expects revenues from its Albuquerque facility this year to be "a few 100 million dollars."

Schott officials have said the U.S. market has a lot of potential when it comes to renewable energy consumption.

"We're seeing some slight awakening of the sleeping giant, but I would say we have a long way to go before this country embraces solar power," Fine said.

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