Solar startup teams up with battery maker

Reuters

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - U.S. solar startup Suniva Inc said on Thursday it would partner with the U.S. unit of Japanese battery company GS Yuasa Corp to develop solar-powered energy storage systems.

Financial details of the agreement were not disclosed.

Under the deal, Suniva and GS Battery Inc would build renewable energy systems integrating solar power panels and battery storage at various sites in the United States.

The move seeks to solve a challenge faced by the emerging renewable energy sector: how to store electricity generated by wind and solar so that the clean power is available and reliable when the wind is not blowing or sun is not shining.

"One thing that will make solar for many applications much more reliable and available is having that storage capacity," said Suniva's Chief Marketing Officer Bryan Ashley.

Ashley added that the solar panels could prove to charge batteries faster and better than the electrical grid. Instead of the alternating current from the grid, solar panels provide a direct electrical current straight to a battery, so that there is no loss of power in the change of currents, he said.

CAPACITY EXPANSION

Norcross, Georgia-based Suniva makes high-efficiency solar cells and modules, competing with modules made by U.S.-based SunPower Corp and Japan's Sanyo Electric Co Ltd, or Suntech Power Holdings Co Ltd's high-efficiency Pluto panels. Its customers include Germany's Solon SE and India's Titan Energy Systems Ltd.

Last year, the company raised $75 million in a financing round led by private equity firm Warburg Pincus LLC to expand its manufacturing capacity to 100 megawatts.

In the spring, the company will increase that capacity to 175 MW and it plans to open a second plant in 2011 with an annual capacity of 400 MW to 500 MW, Ashley said.

For that second plant, the company expects to hire about 20 people, adding to its workforce of over 150 people; it is waiting for a loan guarantee from the U.S. Department of Energy to help fund the expected $250 million investment.

For the first project with GS Battery, Suniva would build a 30 kilowatt solar array at the battery company's headquarters in Roswell, Georgia. The system would have

3,000 amp hours of storage and use nano-carbon, lead-acid batteries.

The company said the projects would focus on commercial and industrial markets and potentially the residential market. The size of the projects would range from as large as 30 kilowatts to as small as 3 kilowatts.

(Reporting by Laura Isensee, editing by Leslie Gevirtz and Gerald E. McCormick)

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