Bridgestone investing $1.2B in SC, adding 850 jobs

SEANNA ADCOX - Associated Press - Associated Press

Bridgestone Americas Inc. announced plans Wednesday to invest more than $1 billion in two projects in Aiken County, creating more than 850 jobs by 2020.

Gov. Nikki Haley said the announcement represents the largest initial capital investment by a company in South Carolina's history.

Nashville, Tenn.-based Bridgestone Americas, a subsidiary of Japan-based Bridgestone Corp., plans to build a 1.5 million-square-foot radial tire plant in Aiken County, plus expand its existing light truck tire plant by 474,000 square feet.

The company had previously announced a smaller expansion at the light truck tire plant off Interstate 20. All told, Bridgestone will invest $1.2 billion in the projects.

About 90 percent of the new jobs are expected to be direct hires. The company contracts out its maintenance work.

"Bridgestone Americas is a world-class manufacturer and this investment will be a real game-changer," said Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt. "The company's new plant will further strengthen South Carolina's manufacturing sector."

The value of the announcement eclipses Boeing's promise in 2009 to bring $750 million to the state — previously the largest single industrial investment in state history. The aerospace company also promised 3,800 jobs with its facility in North Charleston.

Bridgestone's existing 13-year-old plant, about 15 miles from Augusta, Ga., now employs 932 people directly and contracts with 200 more.

Nearly $895 million of the total investment will be spent on the new plant, which will make tires used in mining that are considered the world's biggest. One on display at the announcement stood 12 feet tall and weighed as much as five cars. The company currently makes the tires only in Japan.

The tire maker believes it can more effectively respond to customer needs and growing global demand by adding a U.S. plant.

This "is a major strategic investment by the global Bridgestone Group to enhance its supply systems, improve its sourcing flexibility and further strengthen the Bridgestone Group's position as the global leader in the off-road radial tire segment," said Gary Garfield, CEO and president of Bridgestone Americas.

The first tire is expected to come off the line in spring 2014. The first phase, set for completion in 2015, will create more than 330 full-time and contractor jobs. When fully completed in 2020, the plant is expected to employ 550.

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Associated Press writer Jim Davenport contributed to this report.

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