

China's Solar EnerTech claims joint venture for silicon production

January, 2007: While its stated three-year goal of becoming the world's leading cell producer sounds like unrealistic public-relations posturing, Chinese PV start-up Solar EnerTech could be headed in the right direction – but only if claims made by the Shanghai-based company prove reliable.

Solar EnerTech, which says that it began module production at the end of November at its partially completed factory, plans to start monocrystalline cell production in the first quarter on a 25 MW line, followed at the end of the year by polysilicon production through a joint venture, complete with ingot growing and wafer sawing.

The production of the 170 W modules began just six months after its president, Leo Shi Young, bought a controlling interest in a struggling Canada-based alarm and security systems company to get it publicly listed and raised \$1 million toward building a 3,900 m² factory in Shanghai (see PI 6/2006, p. 93). On Dec. 7, Solar EnerTech announced it had raised an additional \$5.6 million, half of which will be used for completion of the factory and half for the acquisition and installation of equipment.

April Zhong, Solar EnerTech executive vice president at the company's California distribution office in Menlo Park, says the company expected to produce 5 MW of modules by the end of 2006. Plans call for increasing both cell and module capacity to 60 MW by the end of the year, hitting 50 MW of cell production and 60 MW of modules in 2007. Zhong, who declined to give Solar EnerTech's current source of wafers and cells, says the company hopes to start using wafers from a planned Inner Mongolian solar-grade silicon joint venture in the fourth quarter. She confirms that EnerTech has a memorandum of understanding for a 15-percent stake with WuHai-based metallurgical-grade silicon producer Jinyu Silicon Co., which will use subsidies from the municipal government, another stakeholder, to build a new factory for the solar-grade silicon. Zhong claims the silicon will be purified using fluidized bed reactors (FBR). The majority stakeholder is Pais Industries Group, which says it will use »its advanced technology« to supply Solar EnerTech with 1,200 tons of solar-grade ingots for three years – 200 tons in the first, 400 in the second, and 600 in the third.

But the expertise of Pais, a Puerto Rico-based peace organization that, according to Zhong, »believes that developing renewable energy is the ultimate solution for world peace,« has been difficult to confirm. While a June 28 EnerTech press release claimed John White, Pais president, had owned and operated the Midwestern Steel Corporation for 20 years in California, an Internet search turned up no information on the company. Zhong could not provide any details on Pais' experience in silicon or PV production, except to say that the company has »top-tier engineers from the US for design and implementation.«

William P.Hirshman

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