

Saint-Gobain to build a second plant to produce high-efficiency photovoltaic modules in Germany

I-Micronews

This new plant will be Avancis' second German facility manufacturing thin-film CIGS (Copper - Indium - Gallium - Selenide) photovoltaic panels. It will be built close to the first Avancis industrial site. The new Avancis plant will have a production output of 100 MWp/year, capable of supplying year after year the electricity needs for cities of 15,000 inhabitants.

AVANCIS commissioned its first plant in Torgau in October 2008 and currently employs 150 people at this site alone. A further 50-strong team in the fields of research and development and plant planning is based in Munich. Next to the existing plant, the new building will be constructed on a 25,000 m² site in the first quarter of 2012. This plant will be used to produce the company's third product generation of solar modules, a further product development based on the already well-established PowerMax® module series.

The innovative technology based on depositing a coating of CIGS on a glass substrate offers a way to avoid traditional crystalline silicon and achieve higher conversion efficiencies than other thin-film technologies (above 12% industrially and up to 20% in the laboratory). It is also efficient at lower light levels, and offers competitive advantages in terms of manufacturing costs. In addition, its aesthetic style is particularly appealing. This technology requires leading-edge expertise when it comes to coating and thermally-treating glass material, two core-competency processes for Saint-Gobain, the world's leading coated glass specialist for the building and automotive industries.

"This project marks a new milestone in Saint-Gobain's commitment to the renewable energy sector. With this plant, Saint-Gobain will boost the industrial development of Avancis and help it become a major reference in the field of high-efficiency thin-film PV modules" explains **Jean-Pierre Floris**, President of the Innovative Materials Sector and Senior-Vice President of Saint-Gobain. This is an extremely promising technology which combines the low production costs associated with all thin-film based techniques, with efficiencies approaching the higher levels achieved using polycrystalline silicon cells. Whilst being well-adapted for solar fields, the Avancis modules are particularly recommended for roof installation, being simple to mount, stylish and reliable.

PV solar energy has grown at a fast pace, riding on public policy support, though it should soon be developing independently from the latter, considering its intrinsic competitiveness. The nominal power installed today at a global scale is around 10 GW, and this market is expected to grow 20 to 30 % annually between now and 2020. With this investment, Saint-Gobain, world leader in habitat, is taking its share in the soaring solar market and positioning itself as an innovation-driven player.

Background

Located in 64 countries with over 190,000 employees, Saint-Gobain, the world leader in the habitat and construction markets, designs, manufactures and distributes building materials, providing innovative solutions to meet growing demand in emerging and mature countries, for energy efficiency and for environmental protection. Saint-Gobain Solar combines all Saint-Gobain businesses in the solar sector. Present over the whole value chain, the Saint-Gobain Solar strategy hinges on three independent activities:

- the manufacturing and sale of high-performance mirrors designed for solar thermal plant operators and high-tech components for PV modules (special glass, high-performance plastics...).
- the production, through its Avancis company, of thin-film PV modules based on CIGS technology (Copper, Indium, Gallium, Selenide), designed for distributors, system integrators and power plant operators.
- the design and marketing, through Saint-Gobain Solar Systems, of PV solutions for residential homes, office buildings, industrial and farm installations.

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