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Sharp ramps thin-film solar output

Sharp Corp. says it has achieved mass production levels of 2nd-generation thin-film solar cells at its plant in Katsuragi, Nara Prefecture, to 160,000 kw/year, about 22% of its total overall production capacity (crystalline and thin-film) of 710,000 kw/year. The project encompassed roughly a ¥22B (US ~\$208M) investment.

The new cells, based on larger 1x1.4m glass substrates (~2.7x bigger than conventional ones), offer 9% module conversion and 128W power output, while using just 1% of the silicon vs. more widely used crystalline silicon solar cells.

First customers will be large-scale plants in Europe, though Sharp reportedly is eyeing a new production base there in its fiscal 2010 (ending March 2011). The company aims to boost annual production capacity to 1GW by the end of that year, toward an eventual cap of 6GW. A new ¥72B (\$682M) thin-film solar cell plant in Sakai is slated to become operational in fiscal 2009, with an annual capacity of 480MW.

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