

GM breaks ground on China hi-tech car lab

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US automaker General Motors' president and managing director for China operations, Kevin Wale, gives a press conference in June. GM has broken ground in Shanghai on a research facility that will develop electric cars, lightweight materials and alternative fuel technology for China and the world.

US auto giant General Motors broke ground in Shanghai on Monday on a research facility that will develop electric cars, lightweight materials and alternative fuel technology for China and the world.

The 250,000-dollar facility, which is due to be completed by the end of 2011, will house a 300-plus team of designers, engineers, researchers and technicians, GM [China](#) President Kevin Wale told a news conference.

"Clearly the growth of China as the most important growth market in the world means that we're going to be putting more of our resources in advanced technology and research here," Wale said.

GM is the market leader in China, which overtook the United States for the first time last year to become the world's biggest [auto market](#).

The US automaker and its joint venture partners expect to sell more than two million cars in the country this year after selling a record 1.83 million in 2009.

Reflecting China's importance to GM, the company has located its international headquarters to Shanghai, where it has a joint venture with Chinese automaker SAIC.

GM's China Advanced Technical Center will include nine research labs and 62 test labs for work on new propulsion systems, petroleum alternatives, electrification systems and new engines and battery cells, the company said.

"We are trying to be at the forefront of learning," Wale said. "We are testing new ideas, testing new design frontiers and trying to find applications that can continue to help us lead in technological development."

In the coming years, GM will aim to "recruit some of the best brains in China's academic system" to develop vehicles and technologies that will be used in the companies vehicles sold in China and overseas.

"On every new product we're looking at, the China voice is getting stronger and stronger. There's more and more understanding of their needs and more and more interest in applying that," Wale said.

Cars with smaller engines and plusher interiors, such the Buick Lacrosse, show how Chinese consumer tastes are influencing GM globally, Wale said.

"It's just a logical extension of the success of the China market and our success over here," he said.

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