Oerlikon Solar works to pull down PV costs in 2014

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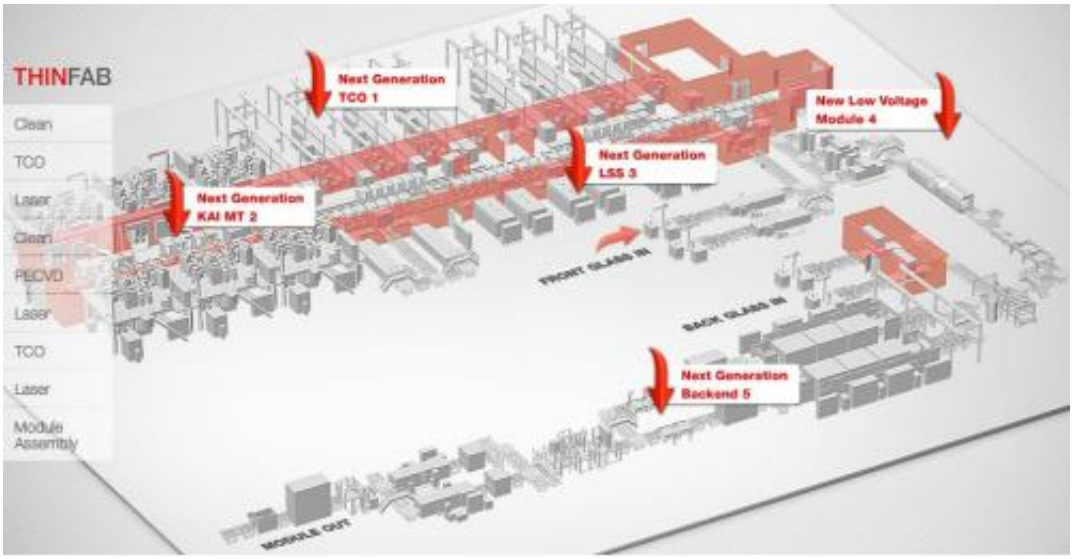

(PhysOrg.com) -- Switzerland-based Oerlikon Solar, kingpins in thin film silicon solar module equipment, has announced that it has reached a milestone in reducing the cost of production for its thin-film silicon photovoltaic panels. Oerlikon Solar describes its business as one that designs and manufactures equipment and turnkey manufacturing lines for the mass production of environmentally sustainable thin film silicon solar modules. The company said it is to realize a module manufacturing cost of 0.35 euro ($0.47) per watt in 2014.

The significance of this announcement is seen by observers as an industry marker that (1) PV generation might turn out to be cheaply priced in 2014 and (2) that the energy industry is going to see some recalibrations of price points not seen before.

The Oerlikon Solar company said the price advantage being announced, however, is not a given if certain conditions are not met. The manufacturing cost of 0.35 euro per watt will be possible, according to the company, only if production takes place in some regions in China where labor costs are low and where production lines are in full operation.

Oerlikon Solar, which is headquartered in Trubbach, Switzerland, does business in 13 locations worldwide. The company's key mission has been to achieve cost reductions, and the company forged key partnerships to make that happen.

Oerlikon Solar has teamed up with two major players in photovoltaics, Air Liquide, gas suppliers, and Linde Electronics. Air Liquide is in the business of gases for industry, health and the environment. The company produces air gases (oxygen, nitrogen, argon, rare gases) and other gases including hydrogen. Linde Electronics supplies gases, chemicals and technologies to solar cell manufacturers.

The two partners will support Oerlikon's lines ("Thinfab") with infrastructure and customer supply-chain requirements. The three are aligned to a strategy to bring costs down. One approving body will be the EU-funded PEPPER project, which focuses on thin film silicon solar research.

PEPPER's stated goal similarly is to see decreased costs of thin film silicon PV modules within the next three years.

Project supporters emphasize photovoltaics as an emerging power source carrying significant environmental and economic benefits. PV systems are touted as safe, reliable, having a constantly decreasing payback time, and potentially able to create thousands of jobs. At the same time, its weakness at present is easily acknowledged: It continues to be a more expensive approach than grid-supplied electricity produced from conventional sources.

More information: www.oerlikon.com/solar/thinfab/