

Giant Solar company Q-Cells invests in new Swiss technology.

The German company Q-Cells AG, the second biggest manufacturer of solar cells in the world, has signed an agreement to invest € 7 million into the Swiss company VHF-Technologies SA (Flexcell) to industrialise Flexcell's new photovoltaic technology. As a result of this investment new job opportunities will be created in Yverdon-les-Bains Switzerland, where Flexcell is based.

Q-Cells AG, a German company based in Thalheim, is the second biggest manufacturer of mono- and poly-crystalline silicon solar cells in the world, with an annual production capacity of 280 MWp. In addition to the expansion of their core business, Q-Cells AG is currently developing new business opportunities in the sector of thin-film photovoltaic technologies. Consequently, Q-Cells selected Flexcell as one of the best investment opportunities in the field of flexible thin-film technologies.

A successful technology transfer

Starting in February 2000 Flexcell developed a plasma process invented at the Institute for Micro Technology (IMT) at the University of Neuchâtel, which allows the deposition of amorphous silicon on rolls of flexible plastic film. One of the advantages of these flexible solar cells produced by Flexcell is that they are not dependant on the supply of mono- and poly-crystalline silicon, the raw material used in the production of crystalline silicon solar cells. In the long term these flexible solar modules could be produced at a very competitive price and be integrated in any roofing component e.g. corrugated tiles.

Today Flexcell is the only European company that commercialises flexible solar cells. It has already realised various projects e.g. the integration of flexible solar cells on the roof of the Ice-rink in Yverdon and there is a lot of demand for its rollable solar chargers for mobile electronics, e.g. cell phones.

A first for Europe

Q-Cells' investment in Flexcell of €7m over the next year will enable the realisation of an industrial production line in Yverdon with an annual production capacity of 2 MW - a first for flexible thin-film photovoltaics in Europe. This investment is key for the growth of the Swiss start-up. As an immediate consequence the current team of some 15 people will be reinforced with the creation of at least 5 new jobs. The increase in the production capacity will enable the company to respond to initial demands for roof integrated solutions for the building integrated photovoltaic (BIPV) market.

Terms of the contract and future developments

Q-Cells has the option to increase its stake in Flexcell to 51% on the condition that a factory with multiple lines of 2MW be build.