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Sharp combines LCD, solar wafer production

By Christoph Hammerschmidt
MUNICH, Germany — With an investment volume of 380 billion Yen (about $3.2 billion), Sharp plans to build a 10G production for LCD panels. The company plans to use certain process steps for the production of thin film solar wafers as well.

The plant to be built in Sakai, Japan, will be the first 10G LCD panel fab and, at the same time, the world's largest thin film solar cell plant, Sharp claimed in a press release.

The production site will process substrates measuring 2,850 by 3,050 millimeters, 60 percent larger than today's largest 8G state-of-the-art LCD panel substrates. These substrates yield either six 60-inch panels or eight 50-inch panels. Capacity will be 72,000 substrates per month.

Since the first steps of the coating process are identical for solar cells and LCD panels, parts of the installation will be co-used for the production of both product groups, explained a Sharp spokesperson. Sharp earmarks a solar panel production volume of 1000 Megawatts per year.

Construction works for the site will begin in November. Production ramp-up is scheduled for March, 2010 for LCD panels as well as for solar products.

Large LCD displays are a multi-billion dollar market with strong growth. Market researcher iSuppli predicts a volume of $66 billion in 2007 with a growth rate in the range of 20 percent. While no exact figures are available for the thin film solar market, expert estimate high growth rates for this type of products as well.