

Arizona policies help solar gain momentum

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Solar jobs are coming to Arizona. Plans for the third manufacturing plant in less than a year were announced last week.

And that's on top of a new factory in Goodyear, which opened in October.

This is sunny news as Arizona works to rebuild its employment base and broaden its economy.

Solar incentives helped spur these projects. So did a less-obvious factor: the state's renewable-energy standard.

Adopted by the Arizona Corporation Commission, it requires regulated utilities to produce 15 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2025.

The goal is to diversify our power sources, reducing the risk of rate spikes and supply disruptions, while also cutting pollution. But the requirement also builds the local demand that helps make Arizona an attractive site for factories.

A Surprise plant will make the mirrors for a giant solar-thermal station near Gila Bend, which will supply Arizona Public Service. Another facility is coming to Surprise to produce steel structures for solar equipment.

Tempe-based First Solar is building its second U.S. factory in Mesa, a location spurred by the booming Southwest market.

When rival Suntech Power Holdings picked Goodyear, the factors it cited included "statewide renewable-energy policies."

The renewable-energy standard is not an unfunded mandate. Customers pay a small surcharge on their electric bills to jump-start solar and other renewable sources, which currently cost more than conventional fuels.

The investment is a wise one, increasing long-term stability in price and supply. The jobs are a bonus.

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