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Valley hosting international solar conference

Premium content from Phoenix Business Journal - by Patrick O'Grady

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One of the largest utility solar conferences in the world is heading to the Valley this fall, bringing with it potentially hundreds of international companies looking for the next big solar market.

Solarpraxis AG, a Berlin firm specializing in renewable energy engineering and conference organization, is holding its annual U.S. forum in the Valley from Nov. 30 to Dec. 1 after having it in Las Vegas the past two years.

The Valley's advances in luring solar photovoltaic companies for manufacturing made it a more appropriate setting, said **David Gaden**, project manager for Solarpraxis in North America.

"We do see more potential in Arizona," he said.

The Solarpraxis PV Power Plants USA Conference targets photovoltaic manufacturers around the globe, as well as U.S. utilities looking to meet their individual states' renewable energy standards — increasingly, through PV panels.

Gaden said many European manufacturers are interested in the U.S. market. Feed-in tariffs — which utilities pay to solar plant owners for the power they produce — in countries such as Germany and Italy are scheduled for sunset this year and next. That has left some companies in those countries searching for a larger market.

"For most of those countries, the boom will get less, so the business will get slower," Gaden said. "Even if the U.S. is small, by generic standards, it's growing very fast."

A June report published by the Solar Energy Industries Association ranked Arizona third among the states during the first quarter for solar installations, primarily photovoltaics.

The U.S. industry made up about 5.1 percent of the market in 2010. That number is expected to hit about 7 percent this year and continue growing, according to the SEIA report.

The **Greater Phoenix Economic Council** had been talking with Solarpraxis since the group's European conference last year in an effort to move the U.S. event here. GPEC sees it as a way to show off the Valley and state to more manufacturers, said **Rudy Vetter**, the group's senior vice president of international business development.

"It's a wonderful opportunity, and it can bring in a top-flight group of solar companies and executives," he said.

GPEC has seen some success in the past two years luring manufacturing and supply-chain partners here. Among the companies that have come to the Valley on the photovoltaic side are Chinese solar manufacturer **Suntech Power Holdings Co. Ltd.**; Tempe-based **First Solar Inc.**; and inverter manufacturer **Power-One Inc.**

"In so many ways, this market has been preparing for the future," Vetter said.

The Solarpraxis conference typically draws representatives from 250 to 300 companies. Among those represented last year were First Solar, **GE Energy**, **NRG Energy** and TUV Rheinland PTL, a solar testing lab in Tempe.

Workshops in the two-day seminar will focus primarily on the U.S. market, with some emphasis on what is going on in Arizona. Gaden said Arizona examples likely will be used to illustrate how the U.S. system works.

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