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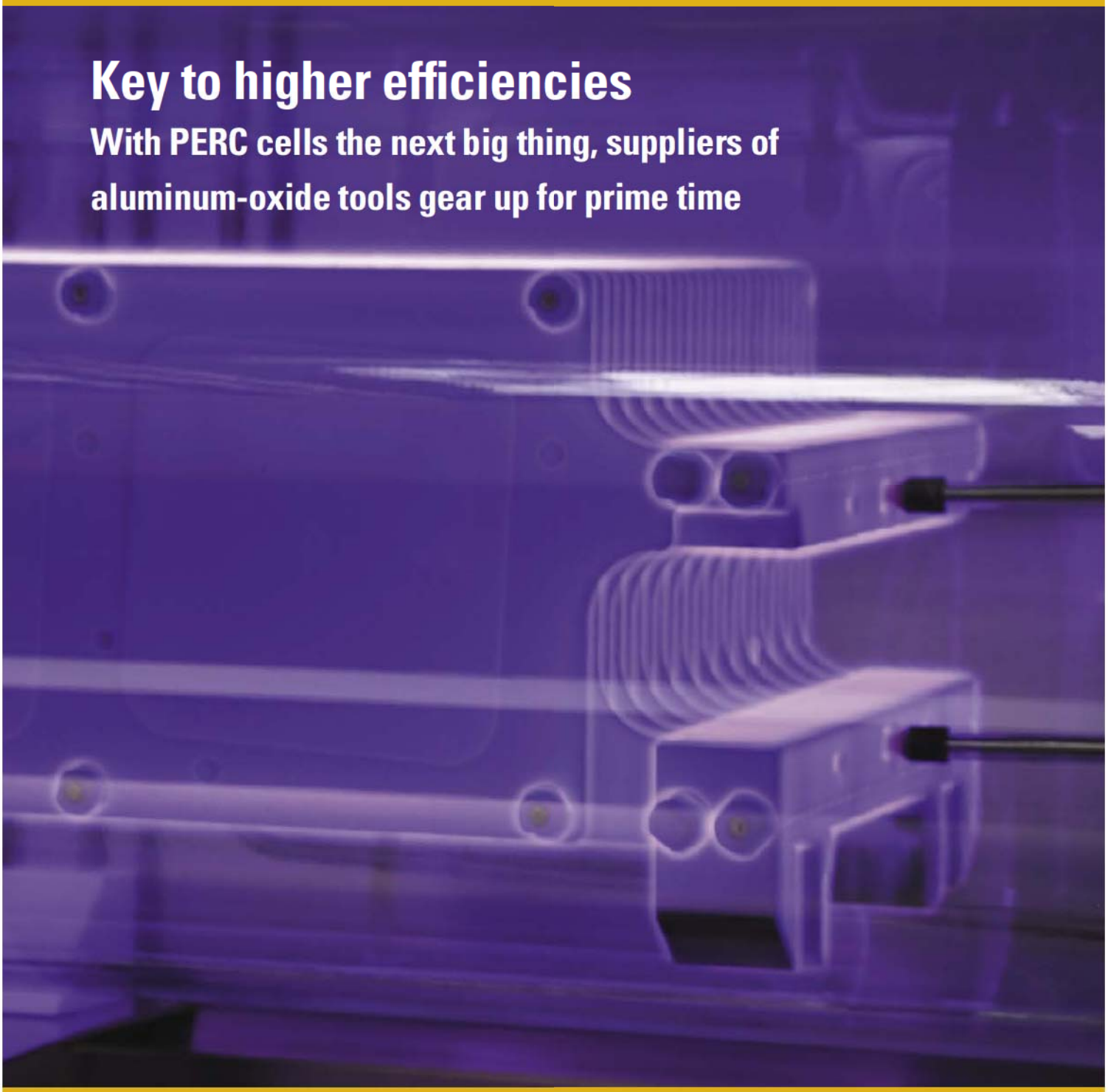

Key to higher efficiencies

With PERC cells the next big thing, suppliers of aluminum-oxide tools gear up for prime time

SiNx equipment survey
In addition to antireflection, silicon nitride tools can also apply rear passivation capping

British solar boom
UK could add 700 MW of PV parks in first quarter before support degresses in April

German PV industry
Production of wafers, cells and modules in Germany continued to slide in 2013

Module test update
January results available for yield measurements on PHOTON outdoor test site

Escalating trade dispute poses threat to US solar industry

▲ Rhone Resch, president and CEO of the US Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), writes a monthly column on solar power in the US.

As many feared, the US Commerce Department has launched new antidumping and countervailing duty investigations of crystalline silicon PV products imported from China and Taiwan. What happens next could decide the future of America's solar energy industry.

The action by Commerce stems from a recent decision by SolarWorld Industries America to file new petitions against imports of Chinese and Taiwanese solar products, even though most of the US solar industry opposes SolarWorld's actions.

When this conflict first started in October 2011, we expressed our support for a rules-based trading system and recognized that trade investigations »provide a legitimate, transparent mechanism for resolving trade disputes and determining what – if any – unfair trade practices have occurred.« This remains true today.

But what we've learned since October 2011 is that conflict within one segment of the solar industry ripples across the entire solar supply chain. Indeed, in response to the 2011 US investigations, China initiated its own trade investigations against US polysilicon manufacturers. As a result, US polysilicon companies have mothballed facilities and laid off countless American workers. These new investigations now threaten even more US solar manufacturers, many of whom rely upon a global supply chain for a wide variety of solar materials, inputs and finished goods.

There are more than 1,200 US solar manufacturers operating at facilities across 47 states, employing nearly 30,000 American workers. These companies, many of whom are small businesses, produce hundreds of different products and operate within a complex global supply chain. There are an additional 90,000 Americans employed by US solar service providers, including developers, engineers, installers, etc. The continued success of all these American companies is directly tied to a growing US solar market.

Moreover, the recent phenomenal growth in the deployment of solar power in the US has greatly benefited from the tremendous drop in the price of solar. Anything that raises the cost of solar, like this pending trade case, would reduce overall demand for solar products and hurt solar energy's price competitiveness vis a vis other energy sources like natural gas and wind.

There are also real US-China trade competitiveness issues that have to be addressed. US solar manufacturing and technology will be important to future US economic competitiveness. As global competition in this industry intensifies, SEIA will continue to support open markets based on free and fair trade principles. But we also know that trade litigation such as that proposed by SolarWorld is a blunt instrument and, alone, incapable of resolving this growing conflict given the industry's complex global supply chain. Negotiations have to play a central role.

Fortunately, we have a solution. SEIA has offered a settlement proposal that would directly benefit SolarWorld and other US solar cell and module manufacturers, address unresolved competiveness issues and help ensure the continued growth of the broader US solar manufacturing base and the US solar industry overall. We implore all parties to come to the negotiating table, adopt SEIA's proposal as the basis of negotiations and end this divisive conflict. The future of solar depends on it. ● rr

The power plants are being installed on 3,230 acres and are using the company's SunPowerOasis power plant technology, which couples optimized 1.5 MW power blocks with energy management tools. Both projects also rely on SunPower's T0 trackers. In addition to constructing the projects, SunPower will provide operations and maintenance services for the plants once they are complete.

Hawaii

Hawaii added 129 MW of PV capacity in 2013. A total of 17,609 PV installations representing 129 MW of installed PV capacity were connected to the Hawaiian Electric Co. Inc. (HECO), Maui Electric Co. Ltd. (MECO) and Hawaii Electric Light Co. Inc. (HELCO) grids in 2013, according to new figures from HECO. This represents 39 percent year-on-year growth. Together HECO, MECO and HELCO – all owned by electricity supplier Hawaiian Electric Industries Inc. – supply electricity to roughly 95 percent of the Hawaiian population.

As of Dec. 31, 2013, the grids of these three electric companies hosted a total of 40,159 PV systems with a total capacity of 300 MW. Of those installations, 96 percent take advantage of net energy metering, a program that began in 2001 to encourage the adoption of rooftop solar. With net energy metering, customers with rooftop PV receive full retail credit for electricity they generate and send to the grid.

HECO now has 221 MW of PV power on its grid, HELCO has 38 MW and MECO 41 MW. Residential PV systems account for the majority of PV capacity installed in the state.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire adopts new net-metering scheme. The New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission has adopted a new interim net-metering scheme for renewable energy systems up to 1 MW. The new scheme, which came into force on Jan. 2, 2014, enables net-metered renewable energy facilities, known as hosts, to share the proceeds from surplus electricity generation with other electric utility account holders, known as group members. The scheme was introduced by the New Hampshire government in July under Senate Bill 98.

New York

New York proposes $1 billion boost for solar and a new 3 GW solar program. The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) has filed a petition with the New York Public Service Commission asking the Commission to authorize $1 billion of new funding for solar initiatives and for per-