

# Schott To Close 'Flagship' Solar Plant

Susan Montoya Bryan, Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Schott Solar announced Thursday it would be closing what the company once billed as its North American flagship manufacturing plant, leaving more than 200 employees without jobs.

Schott spokesman Matthew Kraft confirmed the company's decision but declined to immediately provide details about the reasons the plant would close later this summer. He said managers spent the day informing their various shifts about the decision.

Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry alluded to the problem in a statement released Thursday evening.

"Global events and foreign trade practices outside of their control have had a devastating effect on this industry in recent years," he said. "Solar module manufacturers all over the world have had to drastically cut back on their production and close facilities."

Just this week, analysts predicted that solar equipment manufacturers would struggle for the rest of the year as panel prices continue to drop.

Prices have tumbled for the past few years as Chinese manufacturers flooded the market with cheap solar systems.

Schott's 200,000-square foot plant was the first in the world capable of producing both photovoltaic panels for homes and businesses and thermal receivers for large-scale solar power plants. The company plans to continue making thermal receivers elsewhere in the U.S., Kraft said.

The planned closure is another black eye for former Gov. Bill Richardson's administration, which had offered millions of dollars in high-wage tax credits, manufacturing investment tax credits and job training funds to attract Schott and other green tech companies. The Democrat was particularly interested in solar manufacturers, but several of the companies never got off the ground.

Elected officials believed Schott Solar, which opened its plant in Albuquerque in 2009 to much fanfare, would be able to weather the industry's slump.

A subsidiary of German-based Schott AG, the solar manufacturer invested more than \$100 million with the construction of the plant and had plans to quadruple its size and workforce over the long term with additional investments of up to \$400 million.

Berry said the city has had a good relationship with Schott and that the company

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kept officials informed about its challenges. He added that the company will be working with community groups to help employees find other jobs.

The city will review documents associated with incentives it provided to Schott. The company will likely have to pay penalties.

Officials with Bernalillo County, the state's most populous county, also voiced disappointment in Schott's announcement.

In 2009, the county approved a \$500,000 economic development grant to help Schott build and equip the two buildings that make up the sprawling plant on the southern edge of Albuquerque. An agreement between the county and Schott requires the company to pay back the incentives.

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