



## **Abound Solar: At 'Top of the List' for US Loan Guarantee**

By Siobhan Hughes  
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WASHINGTON -(Dow Jones)- Abound Solar, a startup that hopes to challenge the leading U.S. maker of thin-film solar panels, may be close to winning a federal loan guarantee for hundreds of millions of dollars.

"From repeated conversations, we've been told we're at the top of the list," said Mark Chen, director of marketing for Abound, in an interview on Thursday. "They could still say 'no' at any point and we don't have anything in hand, but we're hopeful." The company has cleared two rounds of reviews and is "essentially just waiting to get the offer."

Abound makes thin-film solar panels, which are cheaper than conventional panels but which convert sunlight into power less efficiently. It operates one factory and hopes to build another that it estimates will employ 1,100 people directly. The company says its thin-film solar panel is standard but that the efficiencies in its manufacturing process set it apart and will allow it to make panels more cheaply than similar products made by First Solar Inc (FSLR).

"We think we can do better than the industry leader," Chen said.

A First Solar spokeswoman acknowledged an email from Dow Jones Newswires but didn't immediately respond to questions. The Arizona solar-panel maker also has applied for a federal loan guarantee, though it won't disclose the size of its request. As of January, First Solar had cleared a first round of reviews. The company, a star within the world of solar power, last year was added to the Standard & Poor's 500 Index.

If the U.S. Department of Energy awards a loan guarantee to Abound Solar, it would mark at least the third award to a solar company and underscore the Obama administration's commitment to the industry. An award would also reflect an administration that is willing to place bets on a range of technologies. Solyndra Inc., which won a \$535 million loan guarantee last year, makes a different type of solar panel. BrightSource last month was awarded a \$1.4 billion loan guarantee to build three power plants that use solar thermal power, which concentrate sunlight onto mirrors or other receivers and convert the sunlight into electricity.

The idea for bringing greater efficiencies to solar-panel manufacturing came to W.S. Sampath, a Colorado State University professor who helped create Abound, after he toured an Anheuser-Busch can-making facility.

"The equipment that makes those cans, produces them incredibly quickly-- faster than the eye can see--and each can is produced for pennies," Chen said. "He thought if only he could come up with a similar production process ..."

Abound says its costs are currently higher than First Solar's, mainly because its small size prevents it from taking advantage of economies of scale.

"Once we grow to be of similar size, we should be in a similar cost position," Chen said.

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