

BOOST OF SOLAR ENERGY ATASCADERO FIRM AIDS JAPAN RELIEF

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Solar Power's generators will help meet water, power needs in quake-affected areas

Some communities in Japan hard hit by the earthquake and tsunami will get a boost of solar energy from Atascadero thanks to a local company's work in the relief effort. Mobile Solar has assembled six solar-power generators for an undisclosed California client to send overseas.

While the Atascadero firm is operating under a nondisclosure agreement, company owner Travis Semmes said the client bought the six units at just less than \$20,000 each to help rebuild neighborhoods in northeastern Japan impacted by last month's earthquake and tsunami. The project is designed to "meet immediate freshwater and power needs and to assist in long-term reconstruction efforts," Semmes said.

Two units already sent to Japan should be in use this week, he added. The company placed finishing touches on the remaining four units Monday, readying them to be shipped this week. Water purification systems, freshwater storage tanks and construction site power tools will then be installed on the units in Sacramento before they're delivered to Japan.

"Each unit will show up as a turnkey package, ready to assist people and communities in need," Semmes said. Mobile Solar's client may also order a second phase of work, Semmes said, which would include setting up "one or more micro-grid(s) for residential communities." The units are designed to take the place of a large gas, diesel or propane power generator. Each contains a portable solar-electric trailer with five main components: solar array, charge controllers, battery bank, inverter system and a trailer.

"These units capture power from sun, store it and then make it available when needed," Semmes said. As a donation to the current relief effort, Mobile Solar upgraded its solar panel used on the six units. Mobile Solar, founded in 2006, has four employees and additional subcontractors. The firm takes in between \$500,000 to \$1 million in gross annual revenue, Semmes said, with roughly \$750,000 in gross revenue expected this year. The company declined to disclose its annual profits.

Semmes' interest in solar was piqued while he was working at his father's construction company, Semmes & Co. in Atascadero.

In 2005, he built a solar trailer to replace one of the construction company's "noisy, stinky gas generators that plagued our job sites," he said. Afterward, he discovered a growing market for the units and formed Mobile Solar Power.

The company name was shortened to Mobile Solar this year.



The firm is currently in talks to send units to Haiti to support inflatable hospital tents, Semmes said. That deal is still in the works. Other clients have included individuals, military contractors, university researchers, communication companies, federal agencies, and oil and gas explorers, Semmes said.

-- Written by Tonya Strickland