

Wacker: Bigger investment, more jobs

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Staff photo by Tim Barber/Chattanooga Times Free Press...

Wacker Chemical announced Thursday that it would be upping its investment in Bradley County by almost \$500 million and creating about 150 more jobs than originally planned.

"This is very positive economic news and another sign the local economy is breaking out of its slump," said Bradley Mayor D. Gary Davis.

The reason for additional investment -- now \$1.45 billion instead of \$1 billion -- is to allow the company to bump up its output, said Gary Farlow, president and CEO of the

Cleveland-Bradley Chamber of Commerce. The plant will produce polycrystalline silicon, an element used to create solar panels.

The extra production means the company will need more employees than the 500 to 600 originally planned.

In a Thursday news release, Wacker said it hopes to put out 15,000 metric tons a year of the material. Farlow said the original announcement was 10,000 metric tons.

"This large investment is instrumental in strengthening our position as one of the world's leading suppliers of hyperpure polysilicon for the solar industry," CEO Rudolf Staudigl said in the release.

The increased investment was coupled with an announcement for the beginning of the plant's development stage, Farlow said.

"It's great news for us because it means they're actually starting construction," he said. "A lot of people have been kind of wondering when that was going to happen."

Dan Howell, assistant to Davis, said no official groundbreaking has been set for the plant off Interstate 75 at exit 33, but it's expected soon.

Howell said already there has been some prep work at the site.

Wacker announced in February 2009 that it would be coming to Bradley County.

The company said it chose the county because of, among other things, its transportation access and support from business partners and authorities in Tennessee, according to Thursday's release.