

Officials celebrate new Washington state BMW plant

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MOSES LAKE — German carmaker BMW and a European carbon-manufacturing company celebrated the opening Thursday, September 1, of a new plant to produce carbon fibers for the automotive industry. Drawn to the region by cheap hydropower and Washington state's renewable-energy efforts, the SGL Automotive Carbon Fibers plant could become the largest facility of its kind in the world because of strong demand for the composites. The plant is a \$100 million partnership of BMW and SGL Group, one of the world's leading manufacturers of carbon-based products.

Depending on their application, carbon fibers can be lighter, stronger and far more durable than many metals. Boeing's new 787 jetliner is mostly made out of the material, and the composites — long a force in some car-racing circuits — are increasingly being used in the commercial automotive industry. Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire lobbied hard for the plant to be built in her state, where cheap hydropower from Central Washington's Columbia River dams is drawing more high-tech companies and manufacturers to the region. "We share the same values," she said. "We share the value of clean energy for tomorrow. That's the future. That's where jobs are."

Initially, the carbon fibers manufactured in the plant will go into reinforced plastic parts for BMW's Megacity vehicle, the BMW i3, a high-tech electric car scheduled for release in late 2013. A plug-in hybrid vehicle to be released later, the BMW i8, also will utilize carbon fibers from the plant. The plant now employs about 80 people, but expansions are planned.

SGL Group received a \$2 million dollar American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the State Energy Program administered by the Washington State Department of [Commerce](#). The award supports the purchase and installation of commercially available equipment designed for increased energy efficiency. Types of equipment are ovens, furnaces, and motors as well as waste heat recovery equipment for thermal oxidizers.