

ABQ firm a finalist in DOE solar competition

BY KEVIN ROBINSON-AVILA / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER
Wednesday, June 19th, 2019 at 2:05pm



MSI courtesy file photo

Management Sciences Inc. intern Michael Spach, holds a solar connector in his left hand while looking at a computer model of the company's Solar Guardian hazard detector.

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Albuquerque engineering firm Management Sciences Inc. is headed to the final round of the U.S. Department of Energy's \$3 million American-Made Solar Prize competition.

MSI is one of 10 companies selected as finalists among 20 firms that competed this month at the DOE's second-round pitch event in Boston. The company was previously selected from among 150 competition applicants to advance to the second round, where it won \$100,000 in cash and \$37,500 in technical assistance from DOE labs to further develop the novel monitoring system it created to prevent fires in solar panels.

MSI already won \$50,000 in the first-round selection that sent it to Boston. Now, it will compete for one of two \$500,000 cash prizes and \$75,000 more in technical assistance at the Solar Prize finale, which takes place in September at the annual Solar Power International conference in Salt Lake City.

“Boston was an amazing experience,” said MSI Project Manager Kenny Blemel. “Ours is still early-stage technology, but all the work we’ve been doing on it since the competition started has really paid off.”

The DOE sponsors the national competition to help companies speed new solar technologies to market.

MSI used its cash winnings and technical assistance from the first round for extensive customer validation efforts for its product, called the Solar Guardian. That included consulting and mentoring from five companies and organizations in the renewable energy industry.

“It’s helped us build awareness and advance our product,” Blemel said.

The technology uses tiny detectors imbedded in connectors on solar panels to monitor for dangerous temperature levels that can cause fires. It automatically shuts connectors down when a hazard occurs.

Unlike other systems, which disconnect the entire solar electricity system, the Solar Guardian isolates the problem panels in a hazard, allowing the system overall to continue functioning.

MSI is working with solar manufacturers to incorporate the detectors into system production.

Debbie Brodt-Giles, Solar Prize administrator for DOE’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory, said participants like MSI have shown clear progress in advancing their products during the first two “Ready!” and “Set!” rounds of competition, preparing them for the final “Go!” stage in Salt Lake City.

“Winning the Ready! and Set! contests of the Solar Prize really speaks to Management Sciences Inc.’s innovative solution and their plans for making a viable business based on their technology,” Brodt-Giles said in an email to the Journal.