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Record Growth in Photovoltaic Capacity and Momentum Builds for Concentrating Solar Power

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James Russell | Jun 03, 2010

An estimated 7,300 megawatts (MW) of new solar photovoltaic (PV) power capacity was installed in 2009—20 percent more than was added in 2008.¹ With this record addition, global installed PV capacity surpassed 21,000 megawatts, producing enough power to satisfy the annual electricity use of about 5.5 million households.² In addition, 127 MW of solar thermal electric power plants came online in 2009, bringing the total operating capacity of such plants to 613 MW.³⁴ Solar energy harnessed by PV and thermal electric plants now meets about 1 percent of electricity demand in Germany and more than 2 percent of demand in Spain.

Europe continues to be the center of global PV demand, installing 5,280 MW in 2009, equal to 72 percent of the global total.⁵ (See Figure 1.) Germany alone was responsible for more than half of global PV installation, with a total of 3,800 MW installed.⁶ Much of this record capacity increase was completed only in December, as solar developers rushed to complete projects before Germany's feed-in tariff was reduced by 10 percent in January 2010.⁷ Installations by the previous record holder, Spain, plummeted from 2,700 MW in 2008 to about 70 MW in 2009.⁸ This decline came as no surprise, however, as Spanish policymakers sharply reduced the solar feed-in-tariff and introduced a new project approval process to control costs and project quality.⁹

Italy was the second largest market for PV, with 580 MW installed.¹⁰ Japan took third place with 480 MW installed, spurred on by a new obligation for utilities to purchase surplus PV electricity.¹¹ The United States was the fourth largest market, with about 470 MW installed, and the Czech Republic was fifth, with 410 MW installed.¹²

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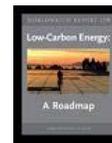
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