

Energy startup to bring electric battery factory to W.Va.

March 17 2022, by Leah Willingham

The energy startup SPARKZ said Thursday it plans to build an electric battery factory in West Virginia in 2022 that will employ at least 350 people.

The company will partner with the United Mine Workers of America to recruit and train dislocated miners to be the factory's first production workers.

"We need good, union jobs in the coalfields no matter what industry they are in," said UMWA International Secretary-Treasurer Brian Sanson. "This is a start toward putting the tens of thousands of already-dislocated coal miners to work in decent jobs in the communities where they live."

SPARKZ Founder and CEO Sanjiv Malhotra said the batteries produced at the factory will be 100% cobalt-free batteries, an effort to bring down the cost of U.S. lithium-ion battery production. The Democratic Republic of Congo has historically been the top producer of cobalt worldwide, with most mines controlled by Chinese companies.

Malhotra said the operation will be a boon to U.S. efforts to counter China's dominance of the electric battery market. The factory is also a major step for West Virginia as the state transitions from its roots in coal production to the "new [energy](#) economy," he said.

"America's clean energy future will reach its potential when we innovate and manufacture the next generation of [energy storage](#) domestically,"

Malhotra, a former U.S. Department of Energy executive, said in a news release.

SPARKZ is in the final stages of site selection in West Virginia for the factory, but the precise location of the plant has not been determined. The company, founded in 2019, said it will be announcing customer partnerships in the coming months. Its first markets will likely be in material handling vehicles, like forklifts, agricultural equipment and energy storage.

Malhotra said he plans to make the official announcement about the factory Friday during a visit in Charleston with U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Mulhern Granholm and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Sanson of the United Mine Workers of America also planned to attend.

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