

Electric battery maker to locate factory in northern WVa

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The energy startup SPARKZ said Tuesday it will locate an electric battery factory in northern West Virginia.

The batteries will be built at a 482,000-square-foot (4.5-hectare) plant in Taylor County off U.S. Route 50 near Bridgeport, the company said in a statement. The plant, which eventually will employ 350 workers, originally was a glass factory that ceased operations in 2009.

The plant will produce 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.

In March the Livermore, California-based company [announced intentions](#) to build the plant. An agreement with the United Mine Workers union was announced in May to recruit and train dislocated miners to be the factory's first production workers. West Virginia has lost thousands of jobs in mining and other resource extraction industries in recent years.

The company, which was founded in 2019, has said its first markets will likely be in material-handling vehicles such as forklifts, agricultural equipment and energy storage. It added that batteries for the automotive market, which require a process of certification, will be in the near future of the plant.

A recruitment drive has started for the first group of employees, who then will prepare for additional worker training and manufacturing as production begins, the statement said.

"SPARKZ is excited to bring its patriotic power company to West Virginia and begin hiring coalfield families starting today. This is the perfect location to begin re-engineering the battery supply chain to end China's dominance in [energy storage](#)," founder and CEO Sanjiv Malhotra said in the statement.

Earlier this year, U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm announced [\\$3.1 billion in funding](#) to U.S. companies that make and recycle [lithium-ion batteries](#).

"Engaging our strong and capable workforce here in West Virginia to manufacture batteries domestically is a critical to our [energy independence](#) and stability," U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia said. "The Sparkz facility will create 350 good-paying, long-term jobs, and I look forward to seeing this initiative grow. We will continue to work closely together to bring battery manufacturing here to the United States so we don't have to rely on foreign supply chains for our energy needs."

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