

Ohio governor, manufacturing czars visit Eaton success story; Silfex Corp. produces silicon components used worldwide to build electronic products.

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EATON - Gov. Ted Strickland and leaders of a manufacturing trade organization got a first-hand look Monday, Oct. 19, at the production operation of a company that is a major exporter of silicon components used in memory elements of cell phones, smartphones and computer drives.

Association for Manufacturing Excellence officials traveled from their annual conference in Covington, Ky., to tour the Silfex Corp. plant with Strickland.

It was the Eaton plant's second high-level exposure in recent months. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke visited in June.

Mike Snell, general manager of Silfex, which also operates a plant near Shanghai, China, said more than 90 percent of the Eaton plant's silicon production is exported to Asian countries for eventual use in electronic products. Key customers include Sam-sung and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co.

"You are producing, here in this facility, what the world needs," the governor said during a brief speech to plant employees and elected officials from Preble County.

Silfex typifies the high-tech, advanced manufacturing that Ohio wants to encourage as part of its future economy, Strickland said.

"Not what you'd expect to find next to the county fairgrounds," Snell quipped during an earlier welcome to the visitors.

The company has about 220 employees.

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It began as a family-owned business more than 25 years ago. The Bullen family sold it in 2006 to a major customer, Lam Research Corp., of Fremont, Calif., a supplier of wafer fabrication equipment and services for the semiconductor industry, Snell said.

Lam has invested about \$300 million to buy Silfex, upgrade the plant and purchase raw materials, he said.

Silfex operates as an independent division because it sells to Lam's competitors as well as Lam. Although the parent company is publicly traded, the Silfex division doesn't publicly report its revenues as a unit, Snell said.

Dayton Power and Light Co. plans to build another electric power substation in Preble County for startup by summer 2010.

That will help Silfex, which has lobbied for the additional substation, by improving the reliability of power, Snell said.

Power outages have cost Silfex an average of \$2 million annually in recent years by interrupting the plant's silicon production process, he said.

The author of this piece is John Nolan Staff Writer