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Photonics Booming in Canada

SAN JOSE, Calif., Feb. 5, 2009 -- The photonics industry is booming in Canada, which just might give new meaning to the phrase "northern lights."

The nation has 370 photonics companies that employ 20,000 people, and the industry generates \$4.5 billion in Canadian revenue each year, according to an industry report released at Photonics West 2009 by the Canadian Photonics Consortium (CPC). Eighty-five percent of that revenue comes from exports, including 50 percent to the US.

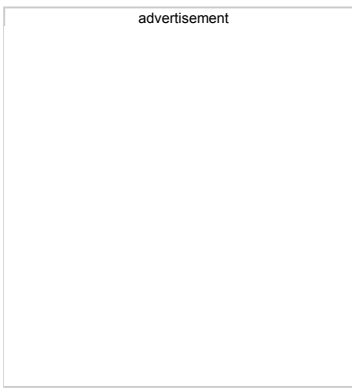
Clusters in the provinces of Québec and Ontario have shown healthy growth potential with a strong startup base and the migration of small and medium enterprises into larger entities. In terms of research and development, the nation's photonics organizations and universities have excelled – contributing the world's first solid-state laser range finder, the TEA CO2 laser and laser marking, fiber Bragg grating, charge-couples devices (CCDs), open-heart surgery using an excimer laser, photodynamic drug therapy for cancer treatment, commercial 10 Gb/s optical transport and the first lidar system on the surface of Mars – but R&D efforts have not yet been fully converted into economic activity.

The report included recommendations for growing an even bigger, more successful photonics industry in Canada. The recommendations included working with photonics users to maximize solutions needed by Canadian industries as well as potential export opportunities; setting up information gateways to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among users and producers; improving education and awareness, to allow better-trained engineers and technicians to enter the industry and to offer the general public a favorable view of photonics; establishing programs using alternative models for financing and managing technology transfer, to increase commercialization of Canadian technologies; focusing R&D on strategic sectors and even starting up a photonics strategy group to guide investment on key sectors; and catalyzing the formation of clusters in Western Canada.

Forty-one of Canada's photonics companies exhibited at Photonics West 2009, as did representatives from the Canadian Photonics Fabrication Centre (CPFC), a \$150 million technology-commercialization partnership between the National Research Council Canada (NRC) and the Province of Ontario located at the NRC's Ottawa campus. CPFC has played a pivotal role in expanding Canada's optical technology base from telecommunications into promising new sectors including security, healthcare, energy and consumer electronic products.

"CPFC is an example of Canada investing early in technology infrastructure that is providing huge economic benefits," said Mike Darch, Executive Director, Global Marketing, OCRI, whose organization was instrumental in bringing the centre to Ottawa in 2002. "Companies from as far away as Silicon Valley have established operations in Canada to be close to CPFC's commercialization engine."

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