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Living on Earth - interview for PBS - broadcast nationally

LOBET: A world away from the construction site, at a laboratory in Palo Alto, is one of the newest players on the solar scene. NanoSolar's low-slung headquarters is reminiscent of a late 1990s tech startup: colored beanbag chairs in a hip meeting room. People who aren't getting enough sleep.

ROSCHEISEN: We work seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

SAGER: You see quite a lot of pizza out in the hallway.

LOBET: This is a Silicon Valley startup. But instead of a web site, NanoSolar's chemists have developed a liquid they hope will shift solar's problematic economics. CEO Martin Roscheisen and President Brian Sager.

ROSCHEISEN: It's a new type of product really. It doesn't look like the traditional solar cells which are quite heavy, they weigh 40 pounds quite often. The new types of products, the thin film cells we're talking about, they are very lightweight, they're flexible. They're effectively solar electric foils.

SAGER: In our system, we have a solution of a chemical, a pigment that absorbs the light is a specific wavelength which we can code and print, and the printing is essentially a roll-to-roll process like a newspaper roll.

LOBET: NanoSolar and several other startups -- Konarka, Miasole, Nanosys -- say they have secret recipes: semiconductor material suspended in liquid that can be deposited onto thin sheets and then applied to building materials. Brian Sager lets me peer through a lab window.

SAGER: And the tubes you see directly in front of you, those different kinds of colors, those test tubes represent our special sauce. So that's the pigment that absorbs the light differentially, which allows us