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Fire could close UICC fab for year

HSINCHU, Taiwan -- After sustaining heavy smoke and water damage in last Friday's fab fire, United Integrated Circuits Corp.'s new wafer-processing plant here could be out of operation for a year, according to one of UICC's joint-venture partners.

ATI Technologies Inc. of Toronto said UICC's 8-inch wafer fab sustained "significant smoke and water damage" and it could take about one year to bring the plant back into production. UICC's new fab had begun ramping up production this past summer, using 0.35-micron technology to process 8-inch wafers.

UICC is a joint-venture foundry company owned by Taiwan's United Microelectronics Corp. (UMC) and seven North American chip companies. In addition to ATI Technologies, the foundry's owners include ESS Technology, Integrated Silicon Solution, Lattice Semiconductor, Oak Technology, Opti, and Trident Microsystems. In June, UICC officials said the fab's capacity would reach 25,000 wafers a month when fully equipped (see June 9 story).

UMC has fully insured the UICC fab, according to ATI Technologies, which added that there was no loss of life in the fire, which began around 5:50 p.m. Taipei time last Friday.

Nearly all of the North American chip companies have announced that the UICC fire and shutdown of the fab will have no impact on their businesses. Nearly all of the companies said other silicon foundries are available to make their products.

On Wednesday, UMC plans to hold a press conference in Hsinchu to discuss the damage to UICC's fab. UMC president John Hsuan told a local television station that his company plans to shift production from the damaged fab to other 8-inch wafer plants in Hsinchu (see Oct. 6 story). However, this may be difficult because UMC's entire 6- and 8-inch fab capacity is fully-booked for the remainder of this year, according to industry analysts in Taiwan.