Solar Cell Array Design Handbook

The Principles and Technology of
Photovoltaic Energy Conversion

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The Principles and Technology of
Photovoltaic Energy Conversion

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Preface

Solar cells and solar cell arrays—photovoltaic converters of solar energy into electric energy—are a reality. In a time period of two decades, solar cell arrays have grown in size from less than 1 watt to hundreds of kilowatts of electrical output in terrestrial applications and to over 10 kilowatts of output in space. New designs are on the drawing boards and in development laboratories all over the world for terrestrial and space arrays having hundreds and thousands of kilowatts of electric power output. Solar cell efficiency has increased from just a feeble response to sunlight to nearly 20%, surpassing the luminous efficiency of the incandescent light bulb on the way. Solar cell array costs are decreasing rapidly, making photovoltaic electric energy affordable and competitive today in remote areas.

In the same two-decade time span, the solar cell array design effort has matured from a spirited pioneering effort into a sophisticated, sys-

tematized, computer-aided process. While it has not been possible to adequately define or improve, or otherwise influence the creative design activity, all other aspects of the design process have been formalized and, for good reason, subjected to documentation, control, and verification.

As the 1970's draw to a close, we find ourselves engulfed by flurrying activities in photovoltaics. While we stand at the threshold of an unprecedented economical exploitation of this particular solar energy conversion technology, we should also realize that all the "easy" inventions have perhaps been made already. From here on, the going can be expected to get tougher. It is hoped that this book will be helpful to those who are going to keep on working for the benefit to all of use who consume energy.

Hans S. Rauschenbach

Purpose and Scope of this Handbook

This handbook intends to disseminate as much current and practical information relating to photovoltaic energy conversion technology for earth and space applications as practical. The emphasis is on the presentation of many different concepts and detailed techniques for several reasons:

- To introduce non-technical persons to the subject
- To aid students of the subject and younger workers in this field in mastering it
- To help specialists already working in the field to get their jobs done more effectively
- To inspire the creativity of advanced designers
- To document those concepts, data, and information that are of interest today but are not readily available in the open literature
- To define the entire field of solar cell array design and its multidisciplinary nature.

This handbook is written on several levels,

ranging from the illustrative and introductory to the detailed technical. Most of the text should be understandable to advanced high school students and senior technicians. Few sections, if any, are expected to pose difficulties for college graduates or practicing engineers.

The mathematical treatment has been held simple. Differential and integral equations are used sparingly, but are included to permit computer programming. Most mathematical problems can be handled with today's scientific pocket calculators.

This handbook recounts some of the more important historical events that led to today's advanced solar cell array technology and includes sufficient references for locating more detailed accounts. Subjects that are treated elsewhere and readily available, such as general structural design, heat transfer and thermodynamics, civil engineering, and electrical wiring codes and practices, are not included here. Rather, only the special considerations for solar cell arrays are treated.

LEGAL NOTICE

This handbook attempts to document the knowledge, data, and information which may be of current significance to solar cell array design. However, it is emphasized that there exists a large number of patents which relate to all aspects of solar cell array design, fabrication, and

testing, including solar cells, other materials, processes, components, arrangements, and designs. Some of these patents have been described herein, but many more have not been referred to. The description in this handbook of any component, process, apparatus, material,

design, composition, or any other feature of any article may fall within a claim of an existing patent. It is not the intent of any of the authors, editors, and publishers of and contributors to this handbook—nor is it the intent of any of the sponsoring or performing organizations involved in the preparation of this or the original handbook—to induce anyone to infringe upon any existing patent. It is the responsibility of the prospective user of any of the information, material, data, and descriptions herein to determine whether such usage constitutes infringement or noninfringement of any patent or otherwise legally protected or proprietary right.

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SAFETY NOTICE

Solar cell assemblies, modules, panels, or arrays are sources of electric power and may, under certain circumstances, constitute a potential hazard. Even under conditions of low ambient lighting, a sufficient number of solar cells connected in series may produce voltages and currents that may cause electrocution. Appropriate safety procedures for handling and installing such assemblies must be used and followed (see also the entries under Safety in the Index).

A larger array, when exposed to bright sunlight and short-circuited with a conductor having inadequate cross-section, may start a fire.

Any solar cell assembly, even in low ambient light, when accidentally short-circuited, may cause a spark that is capable of igniting explosive atmospheres, such as may be found in solvent cleaning operations.

Acknowledgments

This handbook is a completely revised, updated, and expanded issue of an earlier, space technology oriented document published in October 1976 and now available as NASA CR-149365 [N77-14193 (Vol. 1) and N77-14194 (Vol. 2)]: *Solar Cell Array Design Handbook*, from the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia 22151.

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Credit goes also to the literally thousands of workers who, over the years, have created the large body of photovoltaic knowledge and technology from which this author has drawn, and to the institutions of higher learning, private industry, and government which contributed to it in some indispensable way. Since a book of this nature cannot name them all, and naming of only a few would be highly inequitable, names of individuals and organizations have been deleted entirely, except where essential, from the text. Those included in the references were not selected according to the significance of their work, but rather to provide the researcher with leads for a greater in-depth pursuit of a particular topic.

Contents

Preface / v
Purpose and Scope of This Handbook / vii
Legal Notice / vii
Safety Notice / viii
Acknowledgments / ix

PART I SOLAR CELL ARRAYS 1

1 Array Systems 3

Array Concepts / 3

- 1-1. Arrays and Batteries / 3
- 1-2. Arrays, Panels, Parts, and Components / 3
- 1-3. Array Types / 3
- 1-4. The Array as Part of the Power System / 4
- 1-5. The Array as a System / 6
- 1-6. Hybrid Systems / 6

Historical Developments / 6

- 1-7. History of Terrestrial Arrays / 6
- 1-8. History of Space Arrays / 8
- 1-9. The Future of Solar Cell Arrays / 12

Array Applications / 15

- 1-10. Terrestrial Applications / 15
- 1-11. Space Applications / 15
- 1-12. Power from Space / 15

Array Systems Performance / 16

- 1-13. Array Ratings / 16
- 1-14. Terrestrial Flat-Plate Arrays / 18
- 1-15. Terrestrial Concentrator Arrays / 20
- 1-16. Space Flat-Plate Arrays / 20

- 1-17. Spinning Space Arrays / 21
- 1-18. Space Concentrator Arrays / 22
- 1-19. Space Array Orbital Performance / 22

2 Array Analysis 30

Analytical Concepts / 30

- 2-1. The Role of Analysis / 30
- 2-2. Atoms and Electrons / 30
- 2-3. Electric Charge / 31
- 2-4. Conductors / 31
- 2-5. Insulators / 32
- 2-6. Current / 32
- 2-7. Electric Field / 33
- 2-8. Potential and Voltage / 34
- 2-9. Electrical Circuits / 34
- 2-10. Sources and Generators / 35
- 2-11. Current Flow Convection / 35
- 2-12. Resistance and Resistors / 36
- 2-13. Ohm's Law / 37
- 2-14. Power / 38
- 2-15. Energy / 38
- 2-16. Capacitance and Capacitors / 38
- 2-17. Magnetism / 39
- 2-18. Inductance and Inductors / 40
- 2-19. AC and DC Current / 40
- 2-20. Impedance / 40

Circuit Analysis / 41

- 2-21. Circuit Modelling / 41
- 2-22. Circuit Simplifications / 43
- 2-23. Circuit Responses / 45
- 2-24. Circuit Equations / 45
- 2-25. Operating Points / 47

Semiconductors and Solar Cell Models /	48
2-26. Quantum Mechanics /	48
2-27. Semiconductor Materials /	50
2-28. Semiconductor Junctions /	50
2-29. Solar Cell Operation /	51
2-30. Solar Cell Equation /	52
2-31. Solar Cell DC Model /	55
2-32. Distributed Parameter Solar Cell Model /	56
2-33. Analytical Models for Computer Work /	56
2-34. Non-Analytical Computer Models /	59
2-35. Selecting the Proper Model /	60
2-36. Solar Cell AC Model /	60
2-37. Solar Cells in Parallel and Series /	64
2-38. Illuminated Arrays /	65
2-39. Partially Shadowed Cells in Parallel /	67
2-40. Partially Shadowed Cells in Series /	68
2-41. Solar Cell Strings with Shunt Diodes /	69
2-42. Shadowing Factors /	72
2-43. Nonilluminated Array Models /	74
2-44. Blocking Diode Models /	74
2-45. Reverse-Biased Solar Cells /	74
2-46. Power Dissipation in Reverse-Biased Solar Cells /	76
Array Performance Prediction /	77
2-47. Array Output Analysis /	77
2-48. Sequence of Shifting I - V Curves /	80
2-49. Calculation of Angle of Incidence /	81
2-50. Calculation of Effective Solar Intensity /	82
2-51. Calculation of Cell and Array I - V Curves /	82
Shadow Analysis /	84
2-52. Shadows /	84
Thermal Analysis /	89
2-53. Heat Flow and Temperature /	89
2-54. Heat Transfer by Conduction /	92
2-55. Heat Transfer by Convection /	93
2-56. Heat Transfer by Radiation /	94
2-57. Electrical Heat Transfer Analogy /	96

2-58. Terrestrial Array Operating Temperatures /	98
Reliability /	98
2-59. Reliability and Failure Rates /	98
2-60. Failure Modes and Effects /	99
2-61. Reliability Models /	101
Orbital Analysis /	102
2-62. Spacecraft Motion in Orbit /	102
2-63. Simplified Orbit Theory /	102
2-64. Altitude in Elliptic Orbits /	104
2-65. Location in Space /	104
2-66. Illumination of the Orbit Plane /	106
2-67. The Sun Angle /	107
2-68. Solar Eclipses /	108

3 Array Design 111

Design Concepts /	111
3-1. The Design Process /	111
3-2. Design Phases /	111
3-3. Design Personnel /	112
3-4. Uncertainties and Risks /	112
3-5. Design Optimization /	112
3-6. Design Requirements, Criteria and Interfaces /	113
3-7. Policy Constraints /	115
3-8. Design Review /	116
3-9. Producibility and Cost /	117
3-10. Human Engineering /	117
Photovoltaic System Design /	117
3-11. Load Profile Development /	117
3-12. Illumination Profile Development /	119
3-13. Preliminary Array Sizing—Area Method /	123
3-14. Preliminary Array Sizing—Cell Efficiency Method /	123
3-15. Preliminary Array Sizing—Cell Power Method /	124
Detailed Array Design /	124
3-16. Detailed Array Sizing /	124
3-17. Space Array Configuration Selection /	126
3-18. Number of Required Solar Cells /	126
3-19. Array Layout /	129
3-20. Array Wiring /	130
3-21. Hot Spot Design Considerations /	131

- 3-22. Designing for Reliability / 132
- 3-23. High Voltage Design / 132
- Thermal Design / 132
 - 3-24. Temperature Control in Space / 132
 - 3-25. Temperature Control on Earth / 133
 - 3-26. Decreasing Absorptance / 134
 - 3-27. Increasing Emittance / 134
 - 3-28. Increasing Convection / 135
 - 3-29. Improving the Geometry / 135
 - 3-30. Minimizing Eclipse Exit Temperatures / 136
- Radiation Shielding Design / 136
 - 3-31. Solar Cell Radiation Shielding / 136
 - 3-32. Damage-Equivalent Fluence in Orbit / 137
 - 3-33. Shielding Thickness Determination / 137
 - 3-34. Procedure for 1-MeV Fluence Analysis / 140
 - 3-35. Shielding Against Low Energy Protons / 142
 - 3-36. Absorbed Dose in Cover and Adhesive / 144
- Electromagnetic Design / 145
 - 3-37. Electrostatic Shielding / 145
 - 3-38. Magnetic Cleanliness / 146
 - 3-39. Minimizing Magnetic Moments / 147
 - 3-40. Electrostatic Charging Control / 149

PART II ARRAY BUILDING BLOCKS

4 Solar Cells 155

- Photovoltaics / 155
 - 4-1. Solar Cell Devices / 155
 - 4-2. Direct Energy Conversion / 155
 - 4-3. Discovery of the Photovoltaic Effect / 156
 - 4-4. History of Contemporary Silicon Cells / 156
 - 4-5. History of Non-Silicon Cells / 159
- Solar Cell Types / 160
 - 4-6. Solar Cell Classification / 160

- 4-7. Classification According to Application / 160
- 4-8. Classification According to Materials / 161
- 4-9. Classification According to Construction / 163
- 4-10. Classification According to Optical Features / 164
- 4-11. Contemporary Silicon Solar Cell Types for Space Use / 165
- 4-12. Contemporary Silicon Solar Cells for Terrestrial Use / 165
- Electrical Characteristics / 167
 - 4-13. Solar Cell Polarity / 167
 - 4-14. Current-Voltage Characteristics / 167
 - 4-15. Series Resistance / 168
 - 4-16. Shunt Resistance / 170
 - 4-17. Energy Conversion Efficiency / 170
 - 4-18. Curve and Fill Factors / 171
 - 4-19. Effects of Solar Intensity / 172
 - 4-20. Reversible Effects of Temperature / 173
 - 4-21. Temperature Coefficients / 173
 - 4-22. Irreversible Temperature Effects / 178
 - 4-23. High-Intensity, High-Temperature Operation / 178
 - 4-24. Low-Intensity, Low-Temperature Operation / 179
 - 4-25. Reverse Characteristics / 179
- Optical Characteristics / 180
 - 4-26. Effects of Optical Characteristics on Cell Efficiency / 180
 - 4-27. Spectral Response Defined / 181
 - 4-28. Spectral Response of Solar Cells / 183
- Mechanical Characteristics / 184
 - 4-29. Solar Cell Sizes and Shapes / 184
 - 4-30. Cell Thicknesses / 185
 - 4-31. Active Area / 186
- Contacts / 187
 - 4-32. Solar Cell Contact Types / 187
 - 4-33. Contact Configurations / 188
 - 4-34. Contact Strength / 189
- Radiation Effects / 190
 - 4-35. Solar Cell Radiation Damage / 190

4-36. Damage-Equivalent 1-MeV Fluence / 192	
4-37. Effects of Base Resistivity / 193	
4-38. Low-Energy Proton Damage / 193	
4-39. Radiation Damage Annealing and Output Instabilities / 195	
Practical Considerations / 196	
4-40. Glassed Cell Output / 196	
4-41. Distribution of Parameters / 196	
4-42. Handling Precautions / 196	
4-43. Storage / 196	
4-44. Solar Cell Space Flight Experiments / 196	
4-45. Laboratory Test Data for Space Cells / 209	
4-46. Radiation Test Data for Space Cells / 224	
5 Optical Elements 242	
Functions of Optical Elements / 242	
5-1. Flat-Plat Optics / 242	
5-2. Concentrator Optics / 242	
5-3. Historical Developments / 243	
Optical Energy Transfer / 245	
5-4. The Optical System / 245	
5-5. The Air (or Space)-To-Cover Interface / 247	
5-6. The Cover-To-Cell Interface / 248	
5-7. Glassing Factors / 249	
5-8. Angle-of-Incidence Effects / 249	
5-9. Thermal Control / 250	
Covers for Space Applications / 252	
5-10. Classification of Covers and Coatings / 252	
5-11. Cover Materials / 252	
5-12. Coatings and Filters / 255	
5-13. Mechanical Characteristics / 255	
5-14. Conductive Coatings / 257	
5-15. Cover Adhesives / 258	
5-16. Integral Organic Covers / 259	
Windows for Terrestrial Applications / 259	
5-17. Window Construction / 259	
5-18. Window Requirements / 262	
5-19. Window Materials / 263	
Sunlight Concentrators / 264	
5-20. Principles of Sunlight Concentration / 264	
5-21. Concentrator Types / 264	

6 Electrical Elements 268	
Solar Cell Interconnectors / 268	
6-1. Interconnector Terminology / 268	
6-2. Interconnector Types / 269	
6-3. Solar Cell Interconnector Design Requirements / 269	
6-4. Solar Cell and Interconnector Failure Modes / 270	
6-5. Historical Developments of Solar Cell Interconnectors / 271	
6-6. Soldered or Welded Joints? / 273	
The Interconnector Design Problem / 274	
6-7. Interconnector Material Selection / 274	
6-8. Interconnector Electrical Design / 275	
6-9. Minimizing Thermomechanical Stress / 276	
6-10. Thermomechanical Stress in Rigid Joints / 276	
6-11. Stresses in Joints Due to External Forces / 279	
6-12. Changes in Intercell Gap Width / 282	
6-13. Loop Deformation / 283	
6-14. Stresses in Interconnector Expansion Loops / 283	
6-15. Stress-free Interconnector Loops / 286	
6-16. Stresses in Imbedded Interconnectors and Conductors / 287	
6-17. Practical Interconnector Design Considerations / 287	
6-18. Stresses in Flexible Bonded Layers / 290	
Interconnector Fatigue / 292	
6-19. Static and Dynamic Material Stress / 292	
6-20. Stress and Strain Loading / 293	
6-21. Fatigue of Materials / 294	
6-22. Fatigue Life of Interconnectors / 296	
Diodes / 297	
6-23. Diode Applications / 297	
6-24. Blocking Diodes for Energy Conservation / 297	
6-25. Blocking Diodes for Fault Isolation / 298	

6-26. Blocking Diode Characteristics / 299	Deployment Mechanisms / 346
6-27. Shunt Diode Use / 300	7-18. Deployable Booms / 346
6-28. Shunt Diode Characteristics / 300	7-19. Spring/Actuator Deployment Concepts / 351
6-29. Zener Diodes / 302	Orientation Drives / 359
Wiring and Cabling / 303	7-20. Orientation Mechanisms / 359
6-30. Wires and Cables / 303	7-21. Stepping Drive Example / 360
6-31. Methods of Wiring / 303	7-22. Continuous Drive Example / 361
6-32. Wiring for Terrestrial Arrays / 306	
6-33. Wiring for Space Arrays / 306	PART III SUPPORT DATA 366
6-34. Wire Insulation Properties / 306	8 Fabrication and Test 367
6-35. Current Carrying Capability / 307	8-1. Soldering / 367
Terminals and Connectors / 307	8-2. Welding / 369
6-36. Wire Terminations / 307	8-3. Thermocompression Joining / 371
6-37. Connectors and Terminals for Space Arrays / 308	8-4. Ultrasonic Joining / 371
6-38. Connectors and Terminals for Terrestrial Use / 309	8-5. Electrical Degradation Due to Joining / 372
6-39. Termination Design Practices / 309	8-6. Adhesive Bonding / 372
7 Mechanical Elements 312	Assembly Process Control / 373
Array Mechanical Characteristics / 312	8-7. Metal Joining Control / 373
7-1. Array Design Options / 312	8-8. Nondestructive Testing (NDT) / 373
7-2. Array Mechanical Elements / 313	8-9. Adhesive Bonding Control / 375
Terrestrial Flat Plate Arrays / 314	8-10. Visual Inspection / 375
7-3. Flat Plate Modules / 314	8-11. Workmanship Criteria / 375
7-4. Open Frame Supports / 317	Photovoltaic Testing / 376
7-5. Roof Supports / 319	8-12. History of Solar Cell- Testing / 376
7-6. Flat Plate Orientation Mechanisms / 321	8-13. Standard Solar Cells / 379
Terrestrial Concentrator Arrays / 322	8-14. Light Sources For Solar Cell- Testing / 382
7-7. Linear Concentrator Modules / 322	8-15. Solar Simulators / 383
7-8. Axial Concentrator Modules / 325	8-16. Solar Cell Output Measurements / 387
7-9. Mirror Field Systems / 327	8-17. Array Output Measurements / 388
Space Arrays / 327	8-18. Standard Test Conditions / 388
7-10. Space Array Overview / 327	8-19. Effects of Lead and Contact Resistances / 389
7-11. Rigid Honeycomb Panels / 330	8-20. Three Types of Solar Cell <i>I-V</i> Curves / 389
7-12. Honeycomb Panels With Stiffeners / 332	8-21. Measurement of Solar Cell Series Resistance / 390
7-13. Flexible Substrates With Rigid Frames / 336	8-22. Dark Forward-Testing / 391
7-14. Flexible Fold-Up Blankets / 337	8-23. Insulation Resistance and Voltage Breakdown / 393
7-15. Flexible Roll-Up Blankets / 339	Thermo-optical Measurements / 394
7-16. Hybrid Arrays / 342	8-24. Measurement of Spectral Distribu- tion and Spectral Response / 394
7-17. Other Developments / 343	

8-25. Determination of Solar Absorptance / 394	9-22. Vandalism / 427
8-26. Determination of Hemispherical Emittance / 394	Handling and Transportation / 427
8-27. Measurement of Spectral Reflectance / 395	9-23. Handling and Assembly / 427
8-28. Measurement of Total Reflectance / 396	9-24. Vibration and Acoustic Noise in Transportation / 428
Environmental Testing / 396	9-25. Mechanical Shock in Transportation / 428
8-29. Particle Radiation Testing / 396	9-26. Storage / 428
8-30. Ultraviolet Radiation-Testing / 397	9-27. Pressure/Altitude in Transportation / 428
8-31. Far Ultraviolet Testing / 398	Launch and Flight of Space Arrays / 428
8-32. Combined Environments-Testing / 398	9-28. Dynamic Forces During Launch and Flight / 428
8-33. Temperature Cycling-Testing / 402	9-29. Acceleration / 429
Significance of Test Data / 403	9-30. Shock (Mechanical) / 429
8-34. Errors / 403	9-31. Vibration / 430
8-35. Uncertainties / 403	9-32. Acoustic Field / 433
8-36. Uncertainties in Inspection / 404	The Space Environment / 433
8-37. Significance of Sample Size / 405	9-33. The Solar System / 433
9 Environments and Their Effects 408	9-34. The Space Vacuum / 435
9-1. The Solar Cell Array Environment / 408	9-35. Meteoroids / 437
Solar Energy / 408	9-36. Deposits / 438
9-2. The Sun / 408	9-37. Gravity in Space / 438
9-3. The Solar Constant / 408	9-38. Time in Space / 438
9-4. Albedo / 410	9-39. Magnetic Fields / 439
9-5. Solar Radiation Pressure / 410	9-40. Temperature in Space / 440
9-6. Terrestrial Sunshine / 412	9-41. Solar Cell Arrays in Orbit / 441
9-7. Ultraviolet Radiation / 415	9-42. Solar Eclipses / 441
Terrestrial Environments / 416	The Radiation Environment in Space / 443
9-8. Temperature-Terrestrial / 416	9-43. Radiation Terms / 443
9-9. Humidity / 420	9-44. Space Radiation and its Effects / 446
9-10. Precipitation / 421	9-45. Radiation in Interplanetary Space / 448
9-11. Wind / 421	9-46. Solar Flares / 448
9-12. Sand, Dust, Dirt / 422	9-47. Radiation Near Earth / 453
9-13. Earthquakes / 422	9-48. Radiation At Synchronous Altitude / 456
9-14. Gravity / 423	9-49. Geomagnetic Substorms / 457
9-15. The Atmosphere / 423	10 Material Properties 460
9-16. Atmospheric Electricity / 424	10-1. Where to Find the Data / 460
9-17. Corrosion / 424	10-2. Material Properties and the Designer / 460
9-18. Ozone / 426	General Characteristics / 460
9-19. Fungi and Bacteria / 426	10-3. Characteristics of Metals / 460
9-20. Salt Spray / 427	10-4. Characteristics of Non-metals / 463
9-21. Biotic Elements / 427	

10-5. Density, Mass and Weight / 466	10-15. Specific Heat and Heat Conductance / 490
10-6. Centroids, Moments of Inertia and Radii of Gyration / 466	Electromagnetic Properties / 491
Mechanical Properties / 467	10-16. Electrical Properties of Conductors / 491
10-7. Stress, Strain, and Strength / 467	10-17. Electrical Properties of Dielectrics / 492
10-8. Stiffness and Bending Stress / 473	10-18. Magnetic Properties / 495
10-9. Mechanical Properties as Function of Temperature / 474	10-19. Thermal Emittance / 498
10-10. Elongation and Reduction in Area / 475	Appendices
10-11. Fatigue Life / 476	Appendix A Mathematics / 503
10-12. Mechanical Properties of Elastomers / 476	Appendix B Insulance Tables / 507
10-13. Outgassing and Weight Loss / 477	Appendix C Physical Constants / 522
Thermal Properties / 478	Appendix D Conversion Factors and Formulas / 527
10-14. Thermal Expansion / 478	Appendix E 1 MeV Fluence Tables / 534
	Index / 539

Solar Cell Array Design Handbook

The Principles and Technology of
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