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## MONTANA SEMICONDUCTOR FIRM LAYS OFF 280

Kalispell, Montana's Semitool has laid off about 280 people. Some 200 will be let go from plants in Kalispell and Libby. The remaining 80 jobs will be cut from the ranks of sales and service in other states and countries. The high-tech company has struggled for months, as customer orders have fallen off sharply amid a global economic meltdown. Demand has fallen for machines that run on microprocessor chips. At the heart of those chips are semiconductors, and Semitool makes the machines that make semiconductors. In November, the company laid off 100 Montana workers, or 13% of its statewide work force. In December, Semitool management announced a three-week forced shutdown. As of today, 38% of the original Montana work force has now been laid off. Following Thursday's cutbacks, the company will employ about 550 in Montana, and another 320 worldwide. The job losses will be felt especially keenly in the Flathead Valley, where other large employers have reduced their labor force dramatically. Columbia Falls Aluminum last week announced a complete shutdown, and Plum Creek Timber laid off another 145 today.

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