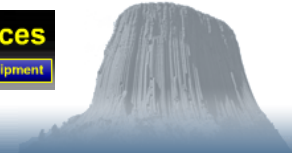



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UW conference addresses hydrogen energy

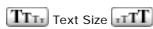
By PHIL WHITE
 Star-Tribune correspondent

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Monday, July 21, 2008 2:06 AM MDT

LARAMIE - The director of the federal government's key energy technology laboratory, along with experts from as far away as Israel and India, will be at the University of Wyoming for a conference on hydrogen energy development beginning Tuesday.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal will give the keynote address at 8:20 a.m. Wednesday and Carl Bauer, Director of the National Energy Technology Laboratory headquartered in Pittsburgh, will discuss "transitions to hydrogen" at 1:20 p.m. The conference begins Tuesday afternoon with a free seminar on hydrogen, incident training by West Virginia University officials, a U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation roundtable and a workshop on product development.

Nearly 100 people have registered for what will be Wyoming's first hydrogen conference, according to David Haberman, President of the Mountain States Hydrogen Business Council, which is organizing the event at the new UW Conference Center. Much of the cost of the conference is being covered by the UW School of Energy Resources, Haberman said.

"The current or status quo energy approaches are becoming less and less stable," Haberman said. "The idea that we can control our own energy systems using hydrogen is an alluring concept. Engineers, economists, economic development people, environmentalists and even the more traditional energy players are all embracing what hydrogen might be able to do."

Haberman, an advisor to Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson during the Clinton years, said one of the attractions of hydrogen is that water vapor is the only by-product of its combustion. Another is that it is a safe fuel, he said. "It has been treated as a combustible chemical and carries a kind of pall over it that needs to be swept away. Hydrogen is terrifically better in terms of public health and environmental consequences than gasoline or other current fuels. Hands down hydrogen is safer."

Where coal-powered electric plants are generating off-peak electrons, Haberman said, that energy could be used to "split water" and produce hydrogen that "could be used for transportation right now. It would have immediate economic benefit."



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He said hydrogen could play an important role in coal-based economies such as West Virginia and Wyoming "by complementing their existing energy systems. We have to get away from single-system dependency."

UW School of Energy Resources director Mark Northam said Thursday that generating hydrogen from fossil fuels is nothing new because every oil refinery is either buying, making or selling hydrogen as part of the gasoline refining process and hydrogen is also used in the manufacturing of fertilizers. The UW conference, he said, will take an in-depth look at the idea of extracting hydrogen to use as a fuel.

Northam said developing hydrogen technologies will be good for the state regardless of where they are implemented.

"If we move toward a hydrogen-based economy, it is feasible to extract hydrogen from coal," Northam said. "We want to separate hydrogen and carbon before the combustion, which is extremely complicated. Catalysts need to be developed, along with a whole infrastructure for handling hydrogen."

Wyoming is an ideal place to extract hydrogen from coal because coal and disposal sites for the carbon dioxide produced by the process are nearby.

"Right now we're disposing of carbon as CO₂ in mature oil fields, resulting in enhanced recovery of oil. The next phase will be disposal of CO₂ in saline aquifers which contain water too salty for us to use. There are lots of saline aquifers in Wyoming," Northam said.

The selection of Wyoming as the site for the conference emerged from a conversation between Freudenthal and Bauer, according to Jessica Frint who is coordinating the event for the School of Energy Resources. The Mountain States Council's conference web site says Freudenthal is "a visionary leader in energy planning for the future."

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