

North County Times

Hydrogen fueling station to be built at Camp Pendleton

By: CHRIS TRIBBEY - Staff Writer

February 28, 2006

OCEANSIDE ---- A Massachusetts company announced this week it will build a \$1.4 million hydrogen fueling station at Camp Pendleton, the first of its kind in North County and the first one in the nation intended to serve the hydrogen fuel needs of both the military and the public at the same time.

Clean air advocates see hydrogen fuel cell vehicles as the eventual replacement for gasoline-powered vehicles. Hydrogen fuel produces zero tailpipe emissions, can be made from renewable energy sources, such as solar power or wind, and vehicles that use hydrogen run more quietly.

Construction of the station off Interstate 5 and Harbor Drive will begin this spring, and, according to military officials, it should be complete by summer. The U.S. Navy and Ztek Corp. are sharing the costs of building the station, and Ztek President Michael Hsu said he was hopeful the state would take on a portion of the costs under the 2005 California Hydrogen Highway Network plan.

The Navy is funding its share through the Department of Defense's Environmental Technology Program.

Located at the Del Mar area of the base, the station will be limited to military use for the first six months of operation, according to Gary W. Funk, regional fleet manager for Marine Corps West Installations. Camp Pendleton is currently testing a General Motors fuel cell truck and is working on other hydrogen fuel cell vehicle agreements with automakers.

"This is good for the Marine Corps, because one day the technology could possibly migrate to the battlefield," Funk said. "Also, it shows we are doing our fair share to clean up the atmosphere."

As more hydrogen fuel cell vehicles hit the highways, commercial and public access to the fuel station will open up, Funk said, adding that the military will enhance patrols and security measures at the station when it's complete. Hsu said the fuel will be split between the public and the military 50-50 once enough civilians are using hydrogen-run vehicles. Hsu said excess hydrogen fuel generated at the station will be made available to other stations, increasing the state's travel coverage area for hydrogen-run vehicles.

"We want to suggest several regional stations on Interstate 5 between San Diego and Los Angeles," Hsu said. "We'll utilize Oceanside as a base. I think this is a very good setting."

Developing hydrogen fuel cell technology is expensive, and concept hydrogen fuel cell vehicles produced by major auto manufacturers so far have a range of around 200 miles before refueling is necessary.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's Hydrogen Highway plan calls for 50 to 100 hydrogen fueling stations between and inside major urban areas in the state by the year 2010. With the price for a hydrogen-run vehicle currently prohibitive for most of the population, and with only 16 existing hydrogen fueling stations operational in the state, transportation districts and some cities are the main customers for hydrogen fuel.

According to Megan Blake, spokeswoman with the California Fuel Cell Partnership, about 130 hydrogen fuel cell vehicles are on the road in California, including nine buses.

One of those vehicles is a Honda FCX FCV in the city of Chula Vista's car fleet. It's one of only a handful of hydrogen vehicles in San Diego County and is often the only customer at the hydrogen

fueling station in Chula Vista, according to the city's Fleet Manager Jack Dickens. Chula Vista's is the only existing station south of Los Angeles County.

"We make a trip to Torrance every month to exchange research (with Torrance's hydrogen fuel cell station)," said Dickens, adding that he'll be happy to add Camp Pendleton as a stop on his drive when the station is in operation.

"We can stop at Pendleton, LAX, Torrance, Diamond Bar, do a circle before we come back," he said.

According to Oceanside Public Works Director Peter Weiss, Oceanside has looked at adding vehicles that run on hydrogen fuel to its fleet in the past, but without a nearby fueling station, the idea was abandoned. The city may again look at adding hydrogen vehicles to its fleet once the station is operating, he said.

Contact staff writer Chris Tribbey at (760) 901-4067 or ctribbey@nctimes.com.