



FUEL CELL TODAY

Opening doors to fuel cell commercialisation

Interview with Catherine Dunwoody, Executive Director of the California Fuel Cell Partnership

Kerry-Ann Adamson, Fuel Cell Today – November 2005

Since the recent article on the California Fuel Cell Partnership (CFCP) I have been able to visit the group myself, and gain a first-hand glance into this state-of-the-art facility. Apart from the tour, which is highly recommended, I had a chance to have a chat with Catherine Dunwoody, the Executive Director, and proverbial Founding Mother, of the Partnership. The rest of this article is based on the conversation that took place during the beautiful sunny California day.

One of the areas of interest that often crops up when we talk about the Partnership is will they / won't they extend the remit to cover other forms of fuel cell, especially stationary. After all the name Californian Fuel Cell Partnership does not preclude any form other forms of fuel cell....

The core activities of the group are transportation, specifically buses and light duty vehicles. There are no plans to extend the remit of the group to cover stationary applications. There is another organisation formed in California to cover this area, the California Stationary Fuel Cell Collaborative, and coordination between the two groups is a critical factor. The fact that the name does not include the word transport is more a quirk of history than a deeper implication of the group's aims and objectives.

As Lisa highlighted in her article on the group the current phase of activity is due to run until 2007. Are there any concerns that efforts will cease after that, or is the Partnership already planning for its third term?

There has never been any real question, or issue, raised as to the possibility of ending the group's activities in 2007. The CaFCP is currently in the planning phase for

the next five year, 2008 – 2013, period. The questions on the table focus on where CaFCP can add value during this period and the planning issues that arises from this.

One of the main selling points for the Partnership is that it is a neutral organisation that has managed to create a system to prevent the leakage of proprietary information. How is this achieved?

The Partnership is an organisation where all the stakeholders, the energy companies, car companies etc all sit around the same table. This trust, that the Partnership operates under, has been created through all staff working on-site having a respect for information and each others activities. This respect for each others work is something that has enabled the partnership to perform, and continue to grow, over the last eight years.

The Partnership has been very successful in terms of its outreach. It has created a seed base of activity in California and draws together key players. Due to this - is there a potential to replicate, this organisation and its business plan to other areas of the world where fuel cell activity is also starting to take off?

California is in a unique situation in terms of a number of issues, such as regulatory and economic ones. These attributes mean that there is no option to use a “cookie cutter” approach to duplicating the partnerships model in other places. Of course the partnership communicates closely with other organisations around the world, and it is easy to under-estimate the amount of collaborative work that is being undertaken. One of the real challenges though is finding the right person to talk to, as each of the groups, projects or organisations is run on a different plan and a different structure.

When the facility was being designed to house the Partnership was the possibility of using a large stationary unit to provide the power looked into?

Yes, very much so. UTC is one of the partner organisations and there was a lot of feasibility work done into using one of its 250kW unit. At the time though the barriers to using the unit were deemed too high. These barriers included issues such as not being able to get the right size, problems with the utilities concerning feeding electricity back into the grid and economics. This does not to rule out this changing in the future if the situation alters.

What have been the most challenging aspect of the Partnership? Or is this challenge still at some point in the future?

Challenges are on-going and centre on making sure there is no reinvention of the wheel. To do this there is a need to integrate all the different programmes, such as CUTE, Hydrogen Highway, etc to ensure that the maximum benefit can be gained from these programmes. A lot of coordination work needs to be undertaken. But good things are happening.

The week after I spoke with Catherine she accepted, on behalf of Alan Lloyd, the Fuel Cell Seminar Lifetime Achievement Award. During her speech she once again communicated effectively the need, and rewards, of having all the stakeholders talking the same language over a common goal – *bringing fuel cells into the marketplace.*

About the Author

Kerry-Ann is the Editor of Fuel Cell Today. Her interests in fuel cells cover a wide range of areas included distributed generation, marine, and of course transport. She can be contacted at kerry-ann.adamson@fuelcelltoday.com