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Schatz Center readies hydrogen fuel station

The Times-Standard

Article Launched: 02/08/2007 04:14:31 AM PST

Engineers at Humboldt State University's Schatz Energy Research Center are designing and will install a campus hydrogen fueling station to support a hydrogen-powered Toyota Prius for two years as part of California's Hydrogen Highway Program and the Schatz Center's world-renowned initiatives to foster the use of renewable energy.

HSU President Rollin Richmond will be among the operators of the Prius, which is scheduled for delivery around April 2007. It will serve as a technology test bed to demonstrate the potential benefits of hydrogen-fueled vehicles.

The state's Hydrogen Highway Network, seeded by an executive order in mid-2004, is a phased plan to build 250 hydrogen fueling stations and 20,000 hydrogen-fueled vehicles. They are intended to be the groundwork for full-scale commercialization of such technologies, aimed at diversifying California's sources of transportation energy and stimulating economic growth with environmentally-sound renewable supplies.

The Schatz Center has secured \$350,000 from Chevron Technology Ventures, a division of Chevron USA, toward equipment and materials for the hydrogen fueling station, which will be installed at a site adjoining the north end of HSU's Plant Operations yard,

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according to Schatz Center Director Peter Lehman. The station will include an electrolyzer to produce hydrogen from water, a compressor, storage tanks, and a dispenser. The Schatz Center is seeking additional partners to help fund the cost of facility design and installation.

"After many years of working on hydrogen technology projects across the country, it's wonderful to be putting our efforts into a station here on campus," Lehman said.

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"We hope this is the start of converting all our vehicles to clean, sustainable fuels and the larger effort to make HSU a green campus."

The station is expected to provide adequate fuel to operate the Prius approximately 10,000 miles a year and will have the capacity to supply two additional vehicles. The technology is modular and can be expanded as necessary in the future. It will be capable of fueling any industry standard hydrogen-powered vehicle. The Schatz Center and HSU will operate, refuel, and perform routine maintenance on the vehicle.

The Prius deployed at HSU will be converted by Quantum Technologies of Irvine from the standard gasoline-electric hybrid Toyota to a vehicle that runs on hydrogen. Quantum will replace the gasoline tank and fuel lines with high pressure hydrogen cylinders and associated hydrogen plumbing. The company also will install hydrogen fuel injectors and a turbocharger.

HSU's new hydrogen fueling station is the first step in the Schatz Center's ongoing effort to develop a hydrogen power park using renewable landfill gas from the local Cummings Road Landfill. This gas currently goes unused and is flared at the landfill.

The park project was originally conceived by a group of HSU engineering students who were mentored by Schatz Center engineers, embodying the school's emphasis on "learning by doing." The students proceeded in response to the Annual H2U Student Design Contest for colleges and universities across the globe. Sponsored by Chevron, the National Hydrogen Association, and the U.S. Department of Energy, the theme "Hydrogen Power Parks" generated interest from more than 90 universities in 20 countries.

With continuing support from Chevron, the power park design has advanced from the winning student project to a completed feasibility study and now, with this station, to installation.

"It's amazing how far we've come, from our student team's prize-winning design to a real world project," Lehman said. "Some of the team members have been instrumental in helping us get here. It's a real Cinderella story."

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