



HSU Press release

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Hydrogen-Powered Rock 'n' Roll

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ARCATA - A lucky encounter at last spring's National Hydrogen Association meeting led to a fuel cell demonstration becoming an integral part of the 2003 Lollapalooza alternative music tour.

It began with Angi Sorensen of the Humboldt State's Schatz Energy Research Center (SERC) giving a presentation at the association's meeting about the center's educational outreach efforts. A representative of the Lollapalooza organization attended the same meeting, on the lookout for clean energy technologies that could be showcased during the two-month tour. Intrigued by photographs of SERC's Stack-in-a-Box® portable fuel cell system, he invited the center to join the tour.



Schatz fuel cell engineer Nate Coleman explains hydrogen energy technology to Lollapalooza concertgoers.

photo by Claudette Silver

Fast-forward to July. SERC engineer Nate Coleman and the Stack-in-a-Box® hit the road with Lollapalooza for a 28-city cross-country journey, beginning in Indianapolis and eventually ending up in Portland, OR. Along with many other groups, ranging from Sierra Club activists to a New York hair salon, SERC was provided with an outdoor table at each event to meet the concert going public.

Lollapalooza was established in 1991 by Perry Farrell, lead singer of this year's tour headliner band, Jane's Addiction. The tour combines entertainment with social and environmental activism, putting the drawing power of major rock acts to work to raise the consciousness of young fans. "As town criers we're very interested in promoting alternative fuel," says Farrell. "And the voice that reaches out furthest is a musical one."

Taking hydrogen out on the road turned out to be no piece of cake. Original plans called for 44-type cylinders to be carried from show to show, along with the rest of the tour equipment, in a fleet of semi trucks. However, insurance concerns on the part of the Lollapalooza organization and its trucking company could not be resolved quickly enough to make this possible. In addition, some of the concert venues were leery about allowing an unfamiliar fuel to be used in the midst of a concert crowd. SERC decided to send Coleman out on the road without hydrogen, reasoning that the tour was still a great opportunity to educate the public and show off the center's hardware.

SERC and Lollapalooza continued working behind the scenes, hoping to show off a working fuel cell for press events in at least a few venues. Their efforts paid off with high-profile presentations in Washington, D.C., Dallas, Denver, and Seattle, where Coleman took the stage with Farrell and the Stack-in-a-Box®. Coleman used the fuel cell to power a blender, while Farrell touted the coming hydrogen economy and toasted the enthusiastic crowd with a hydrogen-powered smoothie. For these special events, SERC used Federal Express's dangerous goods overnight shipping service to send lecture bottles of hydrogen directly to the concert venues.

This summer's Lollapalooza 2003 tour helped get the message about hydrogen energy out to hundreds of thousands of 15- to 25-year-old "Generation Y" youth all over America. By all accounts, the effort was a great success, and there is already talk of taking hydrogen energy out on the road again for Lollapalooza 2004.