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Jersey presses case for hydrogen as a fuel source

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Alternative-energy researchers launched the New Jersey Hydrogen Learning Center yesterday at Rutgers University, hoping to make the state a leader in the development of renewable hydrogen as an energy source.

Jeanne Fox, president of the state Board of Public Utilities, said New Jersey has become known as the solar energy capital of the United States and it made sense for the state to do cutting-edge research with hydrogen as well.

"Hydrogen is really something for the future that we need to get to now," Fox said during the launch of the center at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

The center will link hydrogen fuel cell research at Ramapo College, The College of New Jersey, Ocean County College, the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and the Rutgers University EcoComplex.

The center will not have a permanent home, but would serve as a cooperative forum with projects and lecture opportunities at the various colleges. The researchers plan to create new classroom curricula and guides for municipal and county governments.

Though not widely in use, hydrogen energy has been touted as a cleaner alternative fuel source for a variety of uses for homes and cars. Hydrogen is readily available as one of the two elements in water by using a machine called an electrolyzer to separate the oxygen.

"Having a reliable and renewable and basically endless supply of electricity is definitely in the interest of long-term living standards, economic growth or economic stability," said Nora Lovrien, who is coordinating the new center through the New Jersey Center for Energy, Economic and Environmental Policy.

Part of the new center's role will be to draft guidelines for municipalities and counties, "to help clear up any myths or insecurities that may hinder acceptance," Lovrien said.

"It's a question of the codes catching up to the technology," said Joseph Sullivan, director of facilities for The College of New Jersey.

Sullivan said, for example, that the hydrogen fuel cell currently in use at the college cannot be declared an emergency power source because the state guidelines do not recognize fuel cells as acceptable emergency generators.

Michael Strizki of East Amwell has also struggled with misunderstandings concerning his attempts to build a solar-hydrogen system to power his home. Strizki won a state grant to build the system but has met local opposition.

The model for his project would allow storage of hydrogen he gets from a solar-powered electrolyzer in propane tanks for use in his hydrogen fuel cell during winter months when solar energy is scarce.

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