



ENERGY NEWS

of the Southeast Florida Chapter of the Association of Energy Engineers

October 1999 • Volume 12 • Number 8

Hydrogen Seat for Florida Clean Fuel Board

by Robert Farmer, © 1999

Last month I wrote about the new *Florida Clean Fuel Act* and the need for a hydrogen seat on its advisory board. On September 30th, the Clean Fuel Florida Advisory Board held its inaugural meeting in Orlando, and at this meeting a hydrogen seat was created.

DCA Secretary Steven Seibert, chair for the meeting, opened by suggesting to the members that "we need to build a consensus in this group that alternative fuels need to be made a higher priority". Based on the ensuing range of views, there is no doubt about the difficulty that lies ahead in making recommendations to the legislature. But this is the start on the road to clean and sustainable fuels that Florida needs, and Secretary Seibert is to be complimented for conducting an excellent kick-off meeting.

One of the orders of business was to elect the advisory board's chair, and on a recommendation from the floor it was decided to elect a public agency representative, Steve Somerville, Director of Broward County Department of Planning and Environmental Protection.

It was toward the end of the meeting that Secretary Seibert informed the members that there was interest to add a hydrogen seat to the advisory board and that DCA supported this initiative. There were no comments from the floor and a

seat for hydrogen was established.

The creation of this advisory board promises much, but as noted, it will be a very difficult process. Just a few years ago, electric vehicles were seen by many as a possible alternative to the gasoline automobile. However, with the coming of hybrid-electric cars, electric-only is now considered important for niche applications such as local transit. A great example of this is the ElectroWave shuttle on Miami Beach. For mass transit, with its greater distances, the future may also evolve into hybrid-electric buses where microturbine range extenders, such as those made by Elliott Systems in Stuart, will make up for all-electric limitations.

Meanwhile CNG and propane have their own markets with differing degrees of acceptability based on available fueling infrastructure. Gulfstream has filed with FERC this week to build Florida's second natural gas pipeline and promises to change the market dynamics considerably. Ethanol and biodiesel have also emerged as viable alternative fuels, and even today can be delivered in South Florida by mobile fueling trucks in lieu of permanent fueling infrastructure. Meanwhile gasoline, prodded by the EPA, continues to get cleaner but more tenuous for supply with each passing day. A footnote here is that Earth's 6 billionth resident, and next energy consumer, came into being October 12th.

But, at the end-of-day, it is the emergence of fuel cells for both transportation and building electricity applications that promises to deliver an energy future inconceivable just a few years ago. Hydrogen is the fuel of fuel cells but there are many pathways a hydrogen future can take, with not all of them desirable or sustainable. That's why it was important for hydrogen to have a voice on the Florida Clean Fuel Advisory Board. •



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A Florida resident since 1984, Robert was a member of the Energy Advisory Committee of Governor Chiles' Commission for a Sustainable South Florida.

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