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LVVWD dedicates hydrogen refueling station

Facility uses solar power to generate, store clean-burning hydrogen

LAS VEGAS (April 12) – Reflecting an ongoing commitment to utilize renewable energy into its fleet operations, the Las Vegas Valley Water District (LVVWD), in partnership with the UNLV Research Foundation, today dedicated a unique pilot hydrogen refueling station that operates almost completely on solar power.

Funded in large part through a grant from the United States Department of Energy (DOE), the project is one of the first systems of its kind in the United States, said LVVWD Deputy General Manager Richard Wimmer.

“This project is just one example of the Water District’s commitment to becoming a leader in incorporating sustainable practices into all aspects of its operations,” Wimmer said during the dedication ceremony. “Our goal is to become a 100-percent alternative-fueled fleet by 2015.” Alternative-fuel vehicles, including gas/electric hybrids and those utilizing compressed natural gas (CNG) and biodiesel, currently comprise 77 percent of the Water District’s fleet.

Using power collected by solar panels that follow the sun’s path across the sky, the facility’s generators use electrolysis to extract hydrogen from water, which is stored and used as fuel. Hydrogen is colorless, odorless and releases no damaging by-products. It has no carbons, unlike other fuels that produce harmful emissions.

The first two vehicles in the hydrogen fleet are a Polaris Ranger internal combustion utility vehicle that has been converted to hydrogen fuel, and a Taylor-Dunn converted electric truck that runs on a hydrogen fuel cell.

The LVVWD will use hydrogen-powered vehicles that have been retrofitted to run on hydrogen primarily at the Springs Preserve, scheduled to open in June. This will allow residents and visitors to witness first-hand the use of clean, alternative fuels, demonstrating that it is possible to integrate alternatives to fossil fuels—the technologies are within reach.

Wimmer said the LVVWD is planning to add a hydrogen-powered pickup truck to its fleet by the end of the year. Plans call for the addition of a hydrogen-dedicated car next year. The refueling facility also will function as a laboratory for the Research Foundation and UNLV researchers in order to further refine and enhance hydrogen fuel technology.

Alternative fuels help the LVVWD serve its customers as efficiently as possible while underscoring its commitment to sustainability, Wimmer said.

“It is also an example of how innovative solutions to environmental problems like climate change require collaborative partnerships between the public and private sector,” he added.

The project involves 13 public and private entities. Future collaborations will emerge with the LVVWD’s ability now to provide an alternative fueling location for the City of Las Vegas to fuel its hydrogen vehicles.

The DOE funded the bulk of the project’s construction costs through a grant to the UNLV Research Foundation. Other partners include Nevada Power Co., which provided electrical upgrades for the station along with incentives that partially fund the solar array.

The project is part of a multi-faceted research project that received \$12 million in research and development funding from the Department of Energy. An additional \$4 million was contributed in matching funds. Other components of the project include a hydrogen safety workshop; a hydrogen road-mapping exercise for Nevada; research into the production of hydrogen using photoelectric chemistry; and improvements on membrane and electrolyzer performance and efficiency.

The Las Vegas Valley Water District provides water service to more than 330,000 homes and businesses in the Las Vegas Valley.