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Story last updated at 12:10 p.m. on September 16, 2003

Coupling energy delivery for a 'cool' solution

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Superconducting cable needs to be kept cool. Hydrogen gas and liquid hydrogen is pretty cool stuff.

And the country is taking tentative steps toward a hydrogen economy.

So: "What about delivering hydrogen and electricity in the same pipe," asks Bob Hawsey, manager of the superconductivity program at Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

As the Bush Administration emphasizes a hydrogen economy, ORNL and its sister Department of Energy labs are examining just that possibility: Coupling delivery of the two critical energies.

"The country is going to need various forms of hydrogen delivery, if we're going to make the hydrogen economy successful," said Hawsey. "We also believe we're going to need to expand the nation's grid, by adding transmission. This might be a way to do both."

Currently, superconducting cable is cooled by liquid nitrogen. But scientists hypothesize that if they can make the hydrogen gas or liquid hydrogen cold enough, their superconducting cable will hum.

"Then all of a sudden we deliver two forms of energy," said Hawsey. "If we can carry them in the same pipe, we might find an economical as well as a technical advantage."

He added, "Actually I have no idea if it makes any technological or economical sense. But that's what we and some of our partner laboratories will be studying."

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