

Eric Smalley [Guest Blogger](#)

## **Cold Fusion Gets a Little Respect**

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The study of low-energy nuclear reactions, a.k.a. cold fusion, is coming in from the cold. At least the intrepid band of scientists pursuing cold fusion research are finding that, 20 years after the Pons-Fleischmann debacle, their niche is moving from the fringes of respectable science to a more comfortable position closer to the mainstream.

Few scientists, including cold fusion researchers, argue that low-energy nuclear reaction experiments to date prove fusion is happening. But the intriguing results, whatever is causing them, are no longer being dismissed out of hand as bad science. This week also marks a milestone for the field, timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the press conference that launched cold fusion onto the world stage.

The American Chemical Society, which bills itself as the world's largest scientific society, is holding its national meeting in Salt Lake City this week, and 30 papers at the meeting are about low-energy nuclear reactions. Several of the papers provide strong evidence for the nuclear nature of the reactions (see [Studies advance "cold fusion"](#)). The papers are part of the meeting's four-day New Energy Technology symposium. The ACS has presented low-energy nuclear reaction papers in recent meetings, but the scale of this year's symposium is an important sign of respect for the field.

It's unfortunate that it's taken 20 years. The reaction against cold fusion was so severe that the valid scientific questions raised by the early cold fusion work became radioactive, and few scientists were willing to risk their careers exploring them. This created a Catch-22. Scientists, peer-reviewed journals and funding agencies demanded a lot of evidence before they would consider cold fusion research but there were few researchers generating evidence.

There's a lot of lost time to make up, and it will be all the more tragic if it turns out that low-energy nuclear reactions can be harnessed to generate clean energy. Perhaps the ACS' acceptance of cold fusion research will lead to more work being done. We need a lot more basic research before we can figure out whether and how to make use of whatever's going on.

In particular, I'd like to see more physicists jump in to help tackle the theoretical questions. We'll know cold fusion research has arrived when a major physics conference has a low-energy nuclear reactions track.

*Eric Smalley is the editor of [Energy Research News](#). He has written about technology since 1987 and has freelanced for many publications including *Discover*, *Scientific American*, *Wired News* and *The Boston Globe* on topics ranging from quantum cryptography to global warming.*

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