



Cold fusion is back: Scientists report evidence

Cold fusion can be a low cost, abundant and environment friendly source of energy that can contribute towards solving mankind's energy problems. However, its existence has been questioned. Scientists now report evidence suggesting its existence..

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SCIENTISTS AT the US Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center (SPAWAR) in San Diego, California, reported scientific evidence supporting the existence of cold fusion at a meeting of the American Chemical Society at Salt Lake City in Utah, United States, on Monday (March 23, 2009).

The scientists claim visual evidence of emission of neutrons from a Low Energy Nuclear Reaction (LERN) device, suggesting that nuclear reactions are happening.

Till now, mankind could harness nuclear energy only through nuclear fission. The nuclear reactors of today are powered by the process of fission in which energy is released when radioactive nuclei like Uranium are bombarded with neutrons resulting in the splitting of the nuclei of the Uranium atoms.

Nuclear fusion is a process in which massive amounts of energy are produced when the nuclei of two atoms collide. The sun produces its energy through this process. According to conventional understanding and experience, this process can happen only under high temperatures.

So far, nuclear fusion has been replicated on earth only in thermonuclear explosions, in which a fission device provided the high amount of energy needed to cause fusion. Manufacturing a commercial scale fusion power reactor that can provide vast amounts of electricity is a technological and financial challenge that has not been overcome.

The main problem is successful production and control of the high temperature necessary for nuclear fusion. The International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor (ITER) project is spending billions of dollars towards this end, and the first nuclear fusion power reactor is not expected before 2018.

Cold fusion, on the other hand, is nuclear fusion that supposedly happens at low temperatures. Cold fusion research is aptly called Low Energy Nuclear Reaction (LENR) studies.

The existence of cold fusion was claimed for the first time in 1989 when two scientists Martin Fleischmann, a British chemist, and Stanley Pons, an American electrochemist, reported heat production in an electrolytic experiment involving Palladium and heavy water (water molecules containing an extra neutron.) "It is inconceivable that this could be due to anything but nuclear processes," they announced.

Tremendous hopes were raised of a low cost, abundant and environment friendly source of energy that can contribute a great deal towards solving mankind's energy problems.

Unfortunately, it was very difficult to replicate what the two scientists 'discovered' in their lab. The result? Cold fusion became scientific myth. Moreover, the phenomenon was not in keeping with existing physical laws. That contributed to its retreat from mainstream scientific efforts in the field of nuclear fusion.

However, there remained a small portion of the scientific community that doggedly continued to investigate. The present discovery is a culmination of the continued efforts of these scientists.

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