

PATH's Odyssey in Finding Itself

By Robert Mauro, General Manager, PATH

A recurring question about PATH is of what value is it? And, in particular, what is its value to its Association members? I have considered this question from a number of perspectives which range from what the traditional role of an association is to that of an international association of associations. Neither of these approaches captures PATH. PATH has been on an odyssey to define itself. It has had, and needed, the luxury of doing this. PATH is finding its role in shifting circumstances far different than those envisioned when founded. The role has been reached through trial and error.

PATH had to come to a place where it presented a perspective that was not dominated by any one of its member countries in terms of its outlook. If a national hydrogen association were to present an international perspective it would be an international perspective from the standpoint of that country's hydrogen members heavily influenced by its governmental hydrogen policy. PATH had to escape that tendency and represent its members fairly and identify and address its member common needs. Originally we thought those needs were international standards related and expected to base much of our activity in that area. A PATH member moved us away from that emphasis and as the field became more politicized it became clear that international standards must be approached carefully if at all. PATH also believed that it could find a role in presenting common policy positions of the U.S., Canada and Japan. Common policies did not emerge because of the different priorities and resources of three countries. What an analysis of the energy situation of these countries showed was that the technologies needed to carry out their energy policies were the same. PATH also believed that it had a role in helping emerging hydrogen associations develop. It quickly learned that by and large these are academic, financially weak organizations which require financial aid more than outside support. Furthermore, governments in countries with emerging hydrogen associations were not interested because industry was not interested.

So what is PATH's role as it emerges from its journey? PATH's members have very different energy futures, but the commonality is that they all depend on hydrogen technology development. PATH activities are based on the premise that no country can go it alone and develop a hydrogen economy, and that, at a fundamental level, there is an international need for knowledge that is going unaddressed. Therefore PATH has three activities that it wishes to undertake to develop and disseminate knowledge about hydrogen in order to advance technology development. It can not do all of these alone but PATH will facilitate and catalyze these efforts.

The first activity is to revise the "Sourcebook for Hydrogen Applications" with an expansion to capture the Japanese experience; update the U.S. and Canadian experiences; and include other countries with growing hydrogen activities.

The second activity is to for PATH members to develop materials on hydrogen and fuel cell topics on a CD that can be incorporated into existing curriculum or used as background to develop a hydrogen and fuel cell curriculum.

The final activity is to work with research institutes in each member country to develop an exchange program for researchers from developing countries in order to expand hydrogen knowledge and create an international network of expertise. These researchers will work at the PATH member institutes for a period of time, and then take their projects back to their home countries for completion.

PATH continues to refine its understanding of its members' energy policies in order to identify other activities of value to members. In particular it is reassessing its potential role in international standards from a regional perspective which would include the U.S., Canada

and Japan. Given the volume of trade among these countries, PATH may be vehicle to stimulate discussion on regional standards issues.

Finally PATH is interested in assisting but not managing demonstration activities. Its interest is in having components from various countries be compatible and interchangeable. PATH may have a role in implementing this for a demonstration project with China for the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Issues related to incompatibility may provide PATH with the opportunity to facilitate interface protocols that allow "plug and play".

PATH is working to expand its membership, and has invited Argentina, China and Mexico to be observers for one year.

PATH has found its place in the sun and now it is gathering the resources to play its role in building our hydrogen energy future.