

Hydrogen supply to be standardized in Japan

By fiscal 2002, Japan intends to have a standardized hydrogen intake system for vehicles powered by fuel cells. At present, manufacturers supply hydrogen generated through a variety of methods. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry plans to stipulate a single format, thereby boosting competition among automakers and streamline the development of a suitable infrastructure by fiscal 2005. Japanese and foreign carmakers would be invited to submit data on the performance of their prototypes over the next two years. The government will then adopt the most effective means of vehicle hydrogen supply – based on fuel economy, durability and fuel costs.

Around the year 2002, two prototype hydrogen refuelling stations will be inaugurated in Osaka and Shikoku island. The Osaka station will supply hydrogen storage alloys produced on-site from natural gas, while the Shikoku unit will employ electrolysis to produce the alloys. The government is presently using alloy-based technology due to regulatory constraints on the use of liquid hydrogen, although alloys will not necessarily be chosen. It is permitting several options to be tested in parallel, in order to eventually identify the best fuel and fuel intake system.

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