

HYDROGEN GAS STATIONS ARE A GO IN JAPAN

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Oil and gas companies have announced plans to develop a commercially viable hydrogen filling station infrastructure across Japan by 2015 - the year in which Toyota has pledged to sell its first hydrogen fuel-cell powered car.

The energy companies believe they can produce hydrogen gas and distribute it through existing pipelines at a cost that's comparable to the price of petrol, and field trials will begin soon.

In another recent but not widely reported development, Toyota's European tech centre has teamed up with German gas supplier Linde AG and 'odour specialist' Symrise to produce a chemical concoction designed to give hydrogen a distinctive smell that will warn of potentially explosive leaks.

The product, currently registered as GasodorTM Hydrogen, is the first odourised Hydrogen to be compatible with the delicate catalysing components of the fuel cell plants that Toyota believes will power vehicles in the future.

Previous attempts to odourise Hydrogen have used sulphur and nitrogen-based compounds, but these have the potential to severely damage fuel cell catalysts. Symrise, a company more usually associated with chemical odours for the food industry, has created an odourising compound - designed to be added in minute quantities of 'parts per million' - that will not damage Toyota's fuel cells, or significantly reduce the performance of the gas itself, while remaining stable in a broad range of operating conditions and temperatures.

Could these developments signal the arrival of a viable alternative power source for motorists? Well don't hold your breath, but er... maybe just your nose?

