November 18, 1988

Professor Steven E. Jones
Department of Physics and
Astronomy
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

Dear Steve:

Your review of the Pons/Fleischmann proposal, "The Behavior of Electrochemically Compressed Hydrogen and Deuterium," has been forwarded to the authors for a rebuttal. Their response is enclosed. In the correspondence, you are being referred to as Reviewer #1.

It will help us in deciding whether or not to support the proposal if you could provide us with your comments on the rebuttal. Do you believe, based on the totality of the arguments offered in the proposal and in the rebuttal, the proposed project should be supported?

Your response, by return mail if possible, will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ryszard Gajewski, Director
Division of Advanced Energy Projects
Office of Basic Energy Sciences, ER-16

Enclosures

REVIEWER #1

REVIEW OF PROPOSAL: "The Behavior of Electrochemically Compressed Hydrogen and Deuterium", by S. Pons and M. Fleischmann

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSAL

1) Statements such as "the resulting calculated pressure is on the order of the measured rise in chemical potential, approximately 10^{27} atmospheres" (page 2) demand support: where are the calculations? In general, theoretical calculations are strikingly absent in the proposal.

2) The authors tantalizingly claim an "increase in the background radiation count in the lab" (page 6) during an experiment, suggesting the occurrence of nuclear fusion. What kind of radiation was observed? How was the radiation detected? Was the radiation consistent in type and energy with p-d or d-d fusion? These points should appropriately be addressed to permit evaluation of the merits of the proposal.

3) The proposed work includes "radiation measurements" (page 10). Unfortunately, the method of making these measurements is not discussed although it is central to the investigation, since detecting neutrons and/or gamma radiation of the proper energy would be a clean signature for fusion reactions.

4) If significant radiation is anticipated in the research, safety measures must certainly be elaborated.

5) If a paucity of theoretical justification and information on radiation is a weakness in the proposal, certainly the electrochemical/calorimetric approach is amply defined and explained. The researchers appear to be well-qualified in this area.

6) "We believe that the results we have obtained so far are a strong indication of a progressive increase in the fusion of D nuclei in the Pd-lattice with increasing chemical potential (= compression). While there are alternative explanations of the excess heating effects, their possibility does not seem to be very likely." (p. 6) Please, what are the other explanations and why are they unlikely?

7) "The experiments will take longer than our previous experiments in view of the greater thickness of the rods compared to the sheet electrodes. It will take approximately 12 months to charge a 2cm diameter rod to saturation with deuterium." (p. 7) Could not the time required be drastically reduced by heating the rod in a pressurized deuterium environment?

8) Since no references are cited, one wonders if a thorough

literature has been done. In particular, publications by C. Van Siclen and S. E. Jones (J. Phys. G, 12 (1986) 213-221) and by B. A. Mamyrin and I. N. Tolstikhin (Developments in Geochemistry 3: Helium Isotopes in Nature, New York: Elsevier, 1984) could be relevant.

In conclusion, I find the proposed research to be very intriguing and consistent with the direction of the Advanced Energy Projects Division. The personnel are evidently well-qualified and competent in electrochemical techniques. However, the proposal has a number of weak areas as delineated above that should perhaps be addressed.

Reply to Reviewer #1:

We will reply to the reviewer using the numbering of his paragraphs.

(1) The statement on page 2 of our proposal was merely intended to illustrate that IF the expression (particle density x temperature x volume x lifetime) applies to our system and if the chemical potential of the dissolved D in the lattice is converted into an equivalent pressure, then it is not unreasonable to expect significant fusion processes to take place.

The reviewer should note that the processes at the surface of the Pd electrode are

$$D_2O + e \rightleftharpoons D_{ads} + OD^- \qquad (A)$$

$$D_{ads} + D_2O + e \rightarrow D_2 + OD^- \text{ (slow)} \qquad (B)$$

Because of the slowness of reaction step (B) the chemical potential of the adsorbed D is raised by the electrode potential difference at the interface and,as the adsorbed D is in equilibrium with D in the lattice

$$D_{ads} \rightleftharpoons Pd/D \qquad (C)$$

the chemical potential of the dissolved D is in turn raised to the value corresponding to the applied overpotential. If one wanted to raise the chemical potential by increasing the pressure of D_2 (and if step (B) could be made to go to equilibrium) then one would require a pressure given by

$$RT/2F \ln [P_{D2}] = 0.8 \text{ Volt}$$

i.e., about 10^{27} atmospheres. Such a pressure clearly cannot be achieved on earth but it is a simple matter to raise the chemical potential of D in the lattice by applying an appropriate potential to the electrode. This is the substance of our proposal.

(2) An increase of (beta + gamma) radiation was detected in the vicinity of the experiment. The measurement was made with a Mini-Monitor 442 sandwich GM-scintillation type counter. The background count in the laboratory, and in adjacent laboratories measured with this meter had remained at 175 counts per minute prior to the last day of experimentation when the rate rose to 256 counts per minute near the Dewar. The rate at remote parts of the lab and in the adjacent labs remained normal. To our knowledge, no radioactive materials had been brought into the lab. This increase must presumably be attributed to the reactions of thermal neutrons with components of the Dewar. This is a complication which we would clearly have wanted to avoid! Please also see reply to (3).

(3) The main methods to be used will be as follows: (a) detection of any tritium generated by the reactions and correlation of the rate of generation of tritium with the excess energy production. Samples will be withdrawn and analyzed using scintillation counting equipment. (b) Detection of thermal neutrons and use of energy discriminative gamma-ray analysis. The reviewer should note that under the conditions of our experiment neutrons will be rapidly thermalized in the palladium rod (indeed the experiment was designed with this in view for safety reasons) so that it is not possible to correlate the energy of any neutrons produced with any particular nuclear reaction. Our strategy therefore will be to detect thermalized neutrons and in particular the gamma radiation generated by the reaction of these neutrons with species present in the Dewar (the electrodes, electrolyte and components of the borosilicate glass).

To be more specific, we will initially use the simplest possible means to search for thermalized neutrons. For example, we may compare results for potassium deuteroxide electrolyte with those for potassium borate using photographic plates as a detection medium. Gamma rays will be detected using sodium iodide crystals for low resolution measurements; if necessary we will use intrinsic germanium detectors.

(4) The reviewer should note that this is why we terminated our experiments. If this project is funded, then one of our first objectives will be the quantification of any radiation produced and all appropriate steps to contain and shield the experiment will be taken. The Department is well equipped with radiation-safe laboratories and various forms of radiation counting equipment. Samples will be monitored daily with scintillation counters, and the apparatus with Geiger-Müller counters. In the case of obvious generation of radiation, we plan to reassemble the experiment in laboratories containing equipment suitable for discriminating the energies of gamma rays and equipment for detection of thermalized neutrons (see also reply to (3) above). We are thoroughly familiar with the rules and regulations of our University Radiation Safety committee, and have discussed with them their requirements for radiation experiments in our laboratories. The reviewer will wish to know that we have informed the Vice President for Research at this University (a well-known physicist) of our plans.

The reviewer will wish to note that if we are correct in assigning the excess energy to a fusion process, then the source would be classified as one of low energy. We intend to keep the experiments in this category. Thus if we get a marked increase in the excess energy with change of the system parameters (overpotential), bath temperature, rod dimensions, poisoning conditions) then we will scale down the experiment appropriately (thinner and shorter rods).

See also last paragraph of our reply to question (7).

(6) The main alternative explanations for excess enthalpy generation are:

(i) generation of D_2 at voids in the lattice (see also comments by reviewer #5). However, if this explanation applies, the excess energy generated during 331 hours of polarization at the highest current density would have required formation of D_2 bubbles at a higher rate than that corresponding to the applied current, i.e., there would have been a loss of dissolved D. Such a loss is inconsistent with the observation of the generation of a constant excess enthalpy during three successive periods of 75, 155, and 101 hours.

Moreover, at least 0.5 cm^3 of bubbles at 2000 atmospheres (the tensile strength of Pd) would have been formed which would almost certainly have disintegrated our sample of Pd. The structural integrity of the sample was preserved and, indeed, it is well known that electrochemical equivalents of Pd diffusion tubes can be used indefinitely. The easiest way to discount this possibility of bubble formation is to increase the experiment times. However, we do have it in mind to search for any D_2 or, more likely, He bubbles.

(ii) Participation of the reduction of O_2 and/or ionization of D_2 i.e. a shift off the Joule heating term towards the upper bound. However, our experiments showed that the Joule heating exactly balanced the Newton's law cooling at low current densities (where the effects of any O_2 reduction on D_2 ionization should have been at a maximum) while the excess enthalpy increased with the current density. Such behavior (as well as the other points we have set out in the application) is not consistent with the participation of O_2 reduction/D_2 ionization.

The reviewer may also like to know that in an earlier series of experiments periodic catalytic contamination of the Pd surface led to loss of dissolved D which was associated with cooling not heating presumably because of the cessation of the fusion process.

(7) We have considered doing this but unfortunately it would not reduce the experiment time. The important point is that the high chemical potential of dissolved D is established by diffusion so that one cannot "beat" the diffusional relaxation time.

We have also considered an electrochemical variant of the reviewer's suggestion, namely, the electrochemical saturation of Pd by polarization at a high temperature and subsequent cooling. As the dissolution of D in Pd is endothermic, this would produce even higher chemical potentials of the dissolved D! We do not wish to do this in our initial experimental experiments as the expulsion of excess D from the lattice on subsequent cooling would lead to spurious excess enthalpy generation (but see our comment above). The reviewer may wish to note that if we can prove that the concept works, then we intend to saturate rods at high temperature and to try to find suitable diffusion barriers. This would in effect produce Pd-D "hot rods".

The considerations set out in the above paragraph are also important to the safety of this project which has been referred to by some of the other reviewers.

As the dissolution of deuterium is endothermic, a marked rise in temperature of the rods will lower the chemical potential of the deuterium and will therefore self limit any fusion process.

(8) We have not yet read these references, but have ordered them and will do so as soon as possible. We would welcome any other useful references the reviewer may be able to supply. We have read similar documents and have not found information pertinent to this work.