

MONEY

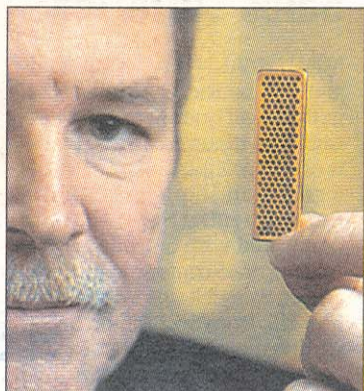


We're going mobile

Students and young urbanites are at the forefront of a continuing trend to unplug the home-phone line and use wireless carriers.

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U.S. investment will have 'major impact' on B.C. fuel-cell firm



Tekion's Neil Huff shows off company's mini fuel-cell prototype.

BY JIM JAMIESON
BUSINESS REPORTER

A looming crunch in conventional battery technology has spurred electronics giant Motorola to invest in a Burnaby micro-fuel-cell developer.

Neil Huff, president and chief executive of Tekion, wouldn't disclose the size of the Motorola investment, but said it will have a major impact on the company — which has grown from four to 65 employees in 2½ years.

"It gives us credibility," he said. "It helps us focus on some of the areas

we need to that will allow us to get a product [to market] by 2007."

Tekion, which was founded in March of 2003, is developing a miniature power pack that can fit inside and power mobile-electronic devices such as cellphones, two-way radios, entertainment devices, satellite phones and notebook computers.

Called the Formira power pack, the tiny device uses a pure form of formic acid as a fuel and is combined with a lithium-ion battery.

The technology's power range is milliwatts to 50 watts and energy range of 10 to 100 watt-hours.

The technology is licensed from the University of Illinois, where it was developed by the company's chief technology officer, U.S. operations, Dr. Richard Masel.

Rocky Daehler, director of Motorola Ventures, said conventional battery capacity has become a significant challenge in the mobile-electronics field as devices offer more features and consumers want smaller packages.

"If you look at all the applications being packed into mobile devices, some of them are quite power hungry," he said. "Other trends are a desire to make them smaller, so

you've got to come up with a way to power them."

Daehler said the power density of the Tekion system and the fact formic acid is non-flammable made the product attractive to Motorola.

He wouldn't say in which product Formira would debut, although it's unlikely to be a cellphone.

Huff said the technology allows for a fuel cell that can be powered by a replaceable or refillable cartridge.

When the first product launches in 2007, he said it will be slightly more expensive than conventional batteries.

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