

Spark innovation

How John Kansas' push to cure cancer may have discovered alternate fuel

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Charles Murkowski placed a test tube filled with ordinary salt water into John Kansas' external radio-wave generator.

He then blasted the salt water with 200 watts' worth of directed radio waves, not quite enough electricity to light three 75-watt light bulbs.

Within seconds, a blue flame erupted from the top of the test tube. It then turned bright white like a blowtorch's flame and burned for several minutes at about 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

"I've done this countless times and it still amazes me," said Murkowski, general manager of Industrial Sales and Manufacturing, the Mill creek company that builds Kansas' generators. "Here we are paying \$3 a gallon for gas, and this is a device that seems to turn salt water into an alternative fuel."

Kansas, a retired radio and television broadcaster and engineer, didn't create his radio-wave generator to burn salt water. He designed it to cure cancer.

Now the same machine appears to convert salt water into fuel.

"It was all a fluke," said Kansas, 74. "We were showing the device to a foreign official last October. He saw condensation while we demonstrated it and suggested using it to desalinate salt water."

The ramifications could be enormous. If Kansas can reproduce the effect on large quantities of salt water, it could be used as an alternative fuel.

Cars could run on engines powered by salt water instead of gasoline. Hydroelectric plants could be built along almost any shoreline.

"It doesn't have to be ocean salt water," Kansas said. "It burns just as well when we add salt to tap water."

Early tests didn't work. But when Murkowski accidentally bumped the test tube while it was being blasted with radio waves, he saw sparks inside the tube.

After several months of fine-tuning, Kansas and Murkowski were able to ignite the salt water on a consistent basis.

"The key was filling the test tube to the brim and then adding a couple more drops," Kansas said.

An Allegheny College chemistry professor said that she couldn't imagine that bombarding salt water with radio waves would generate that kind of heat.

"There doesn't seem to be enough energy in radio waves to break the chemical bonds and cause that kind of reaction," said Alice Decker, Ph.D., chairwoman of Allegheny's Chemistry Department. "I have never heard of such a thing."

Kansas will unveil his generator's new capabilities today at a news conference but he gave the Erie Times-News a sneak peek last week.

"We discovered that if you use a piece of paper towel as a wick, it lights every single time and you can start it and stop it at will by turning the radio waves on and off," Kansas said as he watched a test tube of salt water burn at a lab at Industrial Sales and Manufacturing.

"And look, the paper itself doesn't burn," Kansas added. "Well, it burns but the paper is not consumed."

Kansas has demonstrated his generator's new use to a handful of people, including U.S. Rep. Phil English of Erie, and Ed Apsua, general manager of Akron Paint and Varnish, a northeastern Ohio-based company that helps Kansas with lab testing.

Apsua said that he is familiar with scientific research, having helped design tires for the space shuttle when he worked at B.F. Goodrich in the 1980s.

"But when I saw this, it was the most amazing thing I ever saw and I've been around for a lot of stuff," he said.

"It's so unique and off the wall. ... It's just amazing that you can do this with radio waves, something that is all around us," he said.

Kansas said that he hasn't decided whether to share his invention's new use with government or private business, though he would rather try to get a federal grant to develop it.

"I'm afraid that if I join up with some big energy company, they will say it doesn't work and shelve it, even if it does work," Kansas said.

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