Founding Story

Learn how the Hydrogen Council came to be.

A First-of-Its-Kind Initiative

When the Hydrogen Council launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2017, it was the first initiative of its kind in the world – and still is.

Comprised initially of 13 leaders from the energy, transportation and manufacturing sectors, in just over five years, the Council now includes close to 150 multinational companies representing the entire hydrogen value chain.

The founding 13 members of the Hydrogen Council are Air Liquide, Alstom, Anglo American, BMW Group, Daimler, Engie, Honda, Hyundai, Kawasaki, Shell, Linde, Total and Toyota. The Council was created by these 13 well-known, global companies to help limit global warming to 2°C, in accordance with the target set by the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, and to share their vision and goals regarding the use of hydrogen as an accelerator of the energy transition. It is led by two Co-Chairs from different geographies and sectors – at creation this was represented by Air Liquide and Toyota, and today is current Cummins and Kawasaki.

“In the beginning there were 13 of us: 13 international business leaders who rallied at the World Economic Forum in January 2017,” Benoît Potier, founding co-chair of the Hydrogen Council (2017-2022) and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Air Liquide, said.

“We shared a common vision of the major role that hydrogen could play in bringing about a successful transition to a low-carbon society. This vision was not universally shared at the time. But we were determined to pursue it because we knew it was right.”

Although the Council was officially launched in January 2017, Air Liquide had in fact been working on the global initiative for longer than that. With the active support of Toyota, Air Liquide launched the Hydrogen Council in mid-2016. The initial goal was to unite the major stakeholders who think hydrogen is a global and trans-industrial solution to the energy challenge at the highest level.”

Other stakeholders, including Shell and Anglo American, were convinced to join the effort, and a ‘snowball’ effect quickly took hold. That is how the Hydrogen Council were able to make news by bringing together 13 business executives at Davos in January 2017.

Of course, hydrogen was not a new molecule for Air Liquide, which had been producing, transporting and delivering hydrogen to several industrial customers for 60 years.
Potier continued: “In light of this pioneering expertise, we were convinced that hydrogen had a key role to play in the transition to a low-carbon society. At the crossroads of several forms of energy, hydrogen was the missing piece in the energy transition puzzle. Over and above technological innovations and solutions, a new ecosystem, a hydrogen society, needed to be built.

“We knew that we could not do it alone. So, together, we created the Hydrogen Council.”

Through the Hydrogen Council, a unifying momentum to mobilize industry, investors and public decision-makers around a common goal was created.

Today, the results are there: the Hydrogen Council has become a force to be reckoned with. Its studies and reports are used as a reference by international institutions in the area of new energies. But, most importantly, its impact can be measured by the importance of hydrogen in post-Covid stimulus plans and government decarbonization strategies. Globally, 40 national hydrogen strategies have been announced, as countries set pathways to tap into hydrogen’s potential to decarbonize, ensure energy security, and spur sustainable economic growth from stranded energy resources. Hydrogen has really taken off. By 2050, it could account for up to 22% of total global energy demand.

“I believe this venture is a perfect illustration of the need for cooperation between stakeholders to meet a global challenge such as climate change. Through the Hydrogen Council, companies from a wide range of sectors – energy companies, hydrogen producers, equipment manufacturers, car manufacturers and many others – have demonstrated that they can work together towards a common goal.”

Benoit Potier

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