

# **Economical High Performance Thermoplastic Composite Bipolar Plates**

**2006 DOE Hydrogen Program  
Merit Review**

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This presentation does not contain any proprietary  
or confidential information

**Project ID #  
FCP 38**

# Overview

## Timeline

Start – May 2005

End – March 2006 (Phase II submitted)

Phase I 100% complete

## Budget

Total project funding

- Fuel cell stack components \$32.5M
- Total H<sub>2</sub> & FC \$169.5M

Phase I funding - \$100k

## Barriers Addressed

- Bipolar plate/fuel cell cost
- Durability
  - Operating temperature range
  - Mechanical strength
  - High electrical conductivity
  - Low permeability

Bipolar Plate Targets:

\$10/kW, >59 MPa, >100 S/cm

## Partners

STTR partner: Virginia Tech

Corporate: Lockheed Martin

# Objectives

**OVERALL:** Develop materials and processes to fabricate high performance bipolar plates that meet DoE performance metrics with a cost below \$10/kW (below \$6/kW by 2010)

## Phase I (2005-2006)

- Fabricate bipolar plates using novel wet-lay materials
- Demonstrate superior performance metrics
- Preliminary process modeling for processing time/cost estimates

## Phase II (Proposed 2006-2008)

- Downselect best material compositions
- Semi-continuous bipolar plate fabrication
- Full scale bipolar plate production cost analysis
- Fuel cell device integration, including hybrid system development

# Approach

## APPROACH: Novel wet-lay composite material suitable for compression molding

Wet-lay processing facilitates material integration unlike any other process:

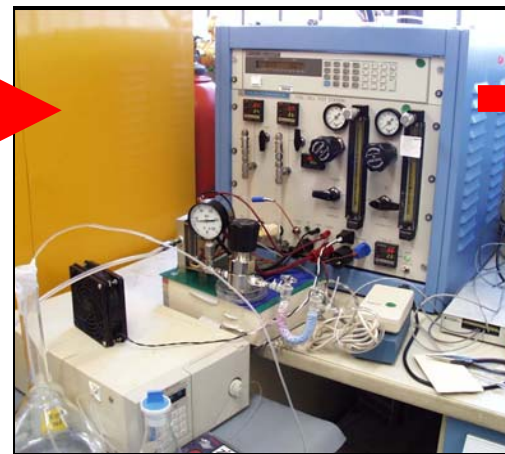
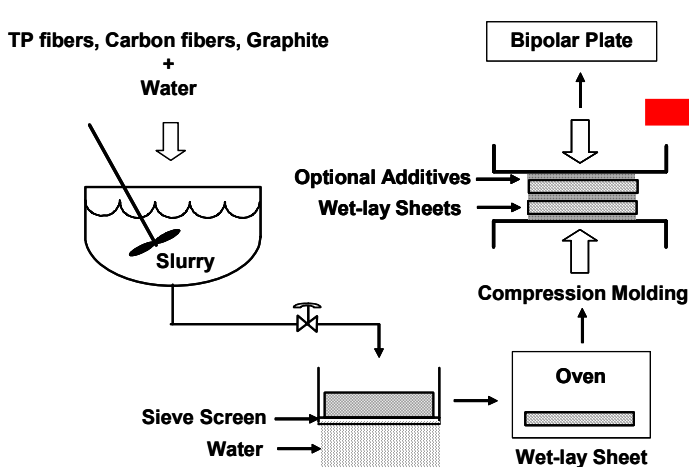
- Superior mechanical properties with high filler loading levels
- Reinforcement/matrix orientation
- Low-cost, environmentally friendly, fast processing times

### Phase I Technical Feasibility Assessment

Wet-lay material fabrication  
Multiple compositions  
Batch bipolar plate fabrication

Performance  
characterization

Process modeling  
Time/cost estimates



# Technical Accomplishments

## Phase I Results

Novel wet-lay composites and associated bipolar plate processing have shown superior performance compared to other technologies:

### [DoE targets in brackets]

- High flexural strength 96 MPa [target 59 MPa]
- High tensile strength 57 MPa [target 41 MPa]
- Low gas permeability, estimated  $\sim 10^{-8}$  cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>2</sup>\*s [ $<2 \times 10^{-6}$ ]
- High conductivity, up to 271 S/cm [ $>100$  S/cm]
- Rapidly moldable, no machining required
- Short processing times, projected  $<2$  minutes/plate (TBD Phase II) – current state of the art thermoset at 8 minutes/plate
- Low materials cost (Cost/plate area TBD Phase II)

# Comparison of NanoSonic/Virginia Tech Bipolar Plates to Other Technologies

<p><b>Carbon composite</b></p> <p>chemical vapor infusion expensive processing</p>	<p><b>POCO graphite</b></p> <p>poor mechanical properties high machining costs subject to corrosion</p>	<p><b>Vinyl Ester</b></p> <p>require endplates, cannot handle clamping pressures current state-of-the-art ~8 minutes to fabricate plate</p>
<p><b>Ticona LCP</b></p> <p>no reported properties LCP materials are generally brittle &gt;85% filled = questionable mechanical properties</p>	<p><b>NanoSonic/VT Thermoplastic Composite</b></p> <p><u><i>advantages</i></u>  <b>high mechanical strength</b>  <b>no endplates required .. can be directly clamped</b>  <b>lightweight</b>  <b>no machining required</b>  <b>inexpensive manufacturing method</b>  <b>&lt; 5 minutes per plate, with potential for ~1-2 minutes</b>  <b>high chemical &amp; corrosion resistance</b></p>	

# Comparison of NanoSonic/Virginia Tech Bipolar Plates to Other Technologies

## Polymer matrix composite bipolar plate comparisons

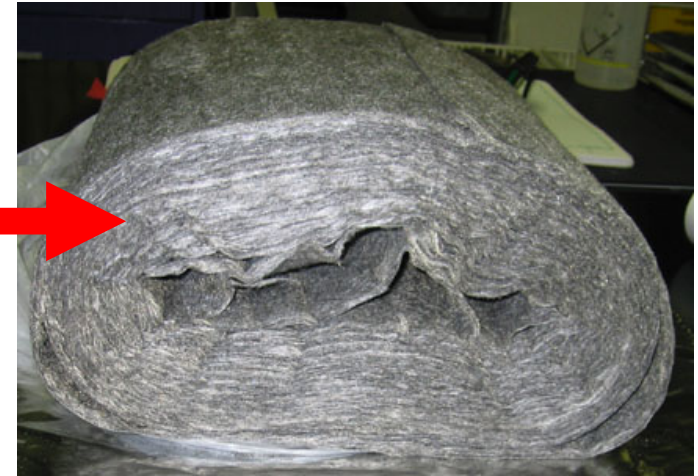
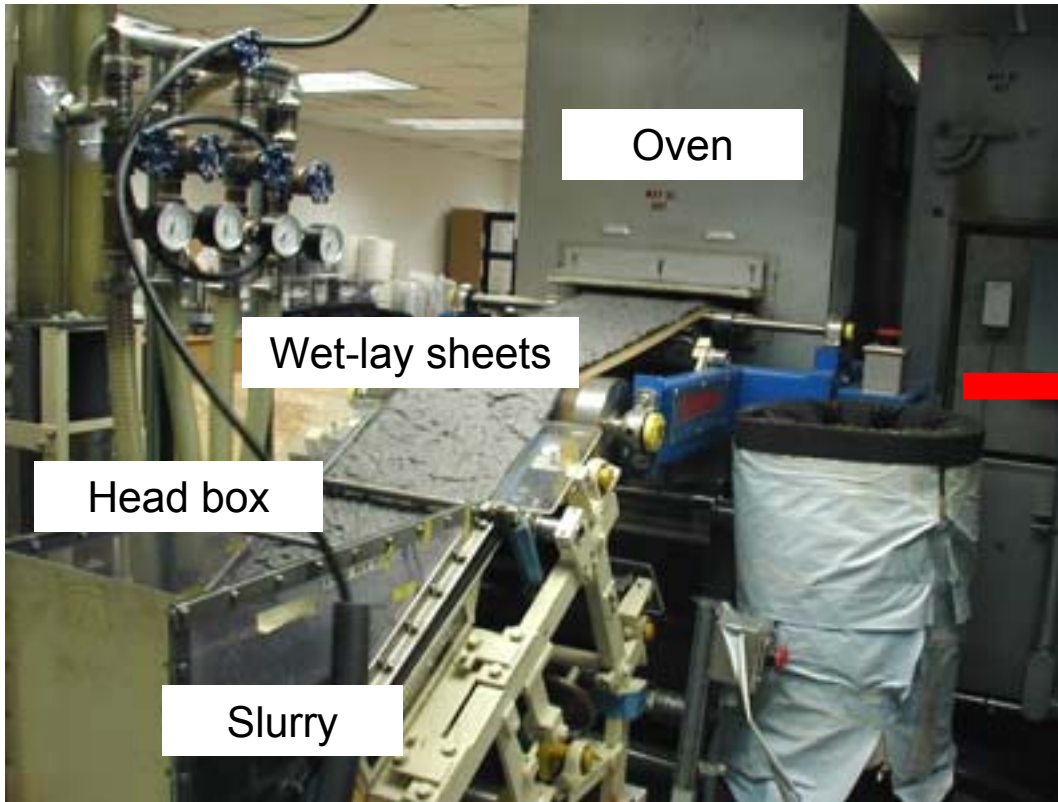
Manufacturer	Polymer	% Graphite + Fibers	Conductivity (S/cm)		Mechanical Strength		
			In-plane	Through-plane	Tensile (MPa)	Flexural (MPa)	Impact (ft-lb/in)
GE	PVDF	74	119			36.2	
GE	PVDF	64 + 16 CF	109			42.7	
LANL	Vinyl Ester	68	60		23.4	29.6	
Premix	Vinyl Ester	68	85		24.1	28.2	
BMC	Vinyl Ester	69	30		26.2	37.9	
Commercial			105		19.3	20.7	
BMC 940	Vinyl Ester		100	50	30.3	40.0	
Plug Power	Vinyl Ester	68	55	20	26.2	40.0	0.30
DuPont				25-33	25.1	53.1	0.14
SGL			100	20		40.0	
H <sub>2</sub> Economy			67			29.4	
Virginia Tech	PET	65 + 7 GF	230	18-25	36.5	53.0	
This work(VT)	PPS	70 + 6 CF	271	19	57.5	95.8	1.56

Note: Process modifications have resulted in through-plane conductivities up to 209 S/cm on NanoSonic/VT materials



# Technical Accomplishments

## Wet-lay Composite Continuous Fabrication



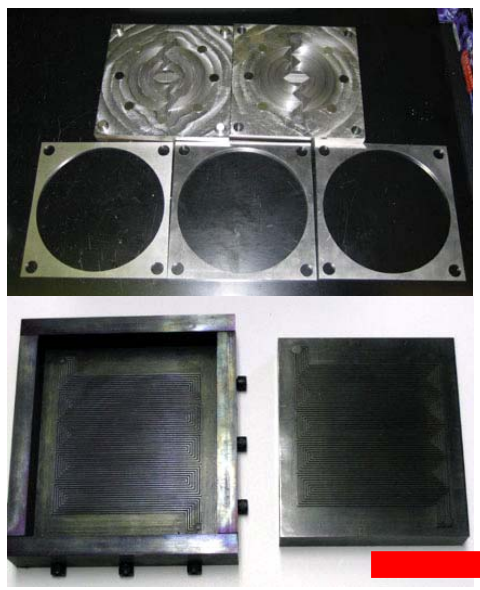
Demonstrated continuous manufacturing capability of wet-lay composites  
Polyphenylenesulfide, polyethylene terephthalate, polyvinylidene fluoride



# Technical Accomplishments

## Batch Bipolar/Monopolar Plate Fabrication

Specially designed molds  
Plus wet-lay materials



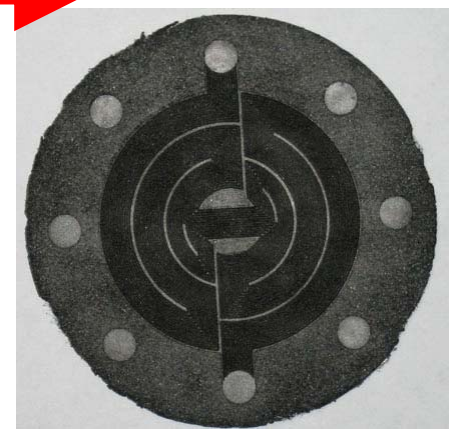
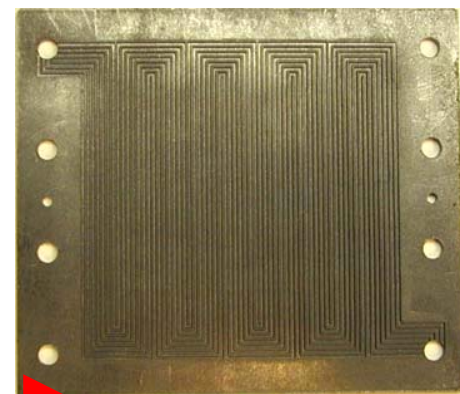
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Compression mold (stamping)  
Well-defined heat/cool cycle



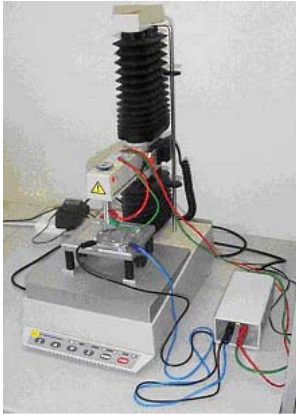
Molded bipolar plate  
High feature resolution



# Technical Accomplishments

## Mechanical Strength Evaluation

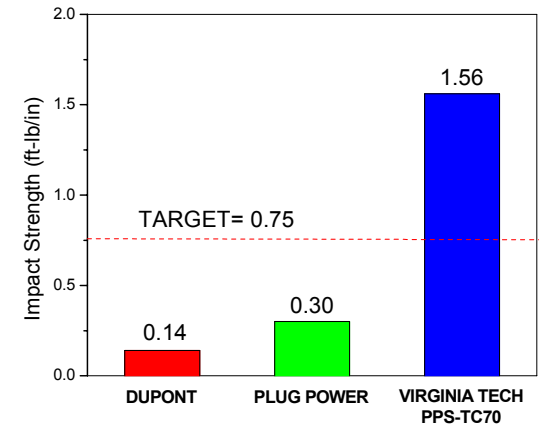
### Flexural and Tensile Strength



Strength (MPa)		Modulus (GPa)		Maximum Strain (%)	
Average	Std Deviation	Average	Std Deviation	Average	Std Deviation
95.84	4.24	12.65	0.35	0.8	0.1

Tensile Strength : 57.5 MPa

### Impact Strength

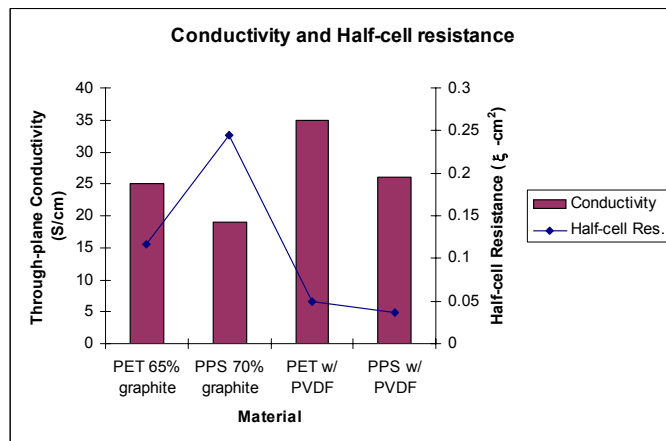
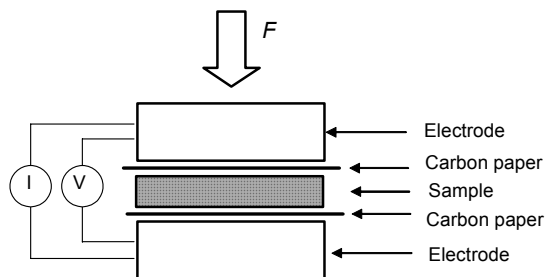


**Mechanical strength far exceeds DoE targets**

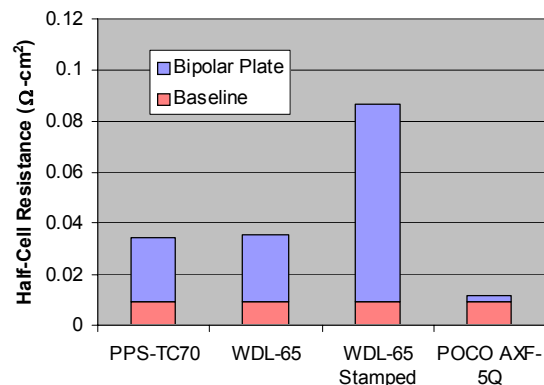
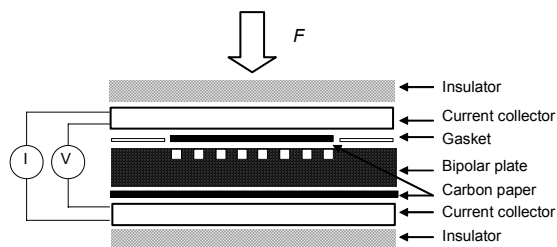
# Technical Accomplishments

## Electrical Conductivity/Resistivity Performance

### Through-plane conductivity



### Half-cell resistance



- In plane conductivity 271 S/cm far exceeds DoE target (100 S/cm)

- Modified processing has resulted in through plane cond. of 209 S/cm

# Technical Accomplishments

## Permeability Estimates

### Van Krevelen Permeability Analysis

$$P=DS$$

$$D = D_o \exp\left(\frac{-E_D}{R_g T}\right)$$

$$\log D_o = \frac{E_D * 10^{-3}}{R_g} - 5.0$$

$$10^{-3} \frac{E_D}{R_g} = \left(\frac{\sigma_x}{\sigma_{N_2}}\right)^2 \left[ 7.5 - 2.5 * 10^{-4} (T_g - 298)^2 \right]$$

$$S = S_o \exp\left(\frac{-\Delta H_s}{R_g T}\right)$$

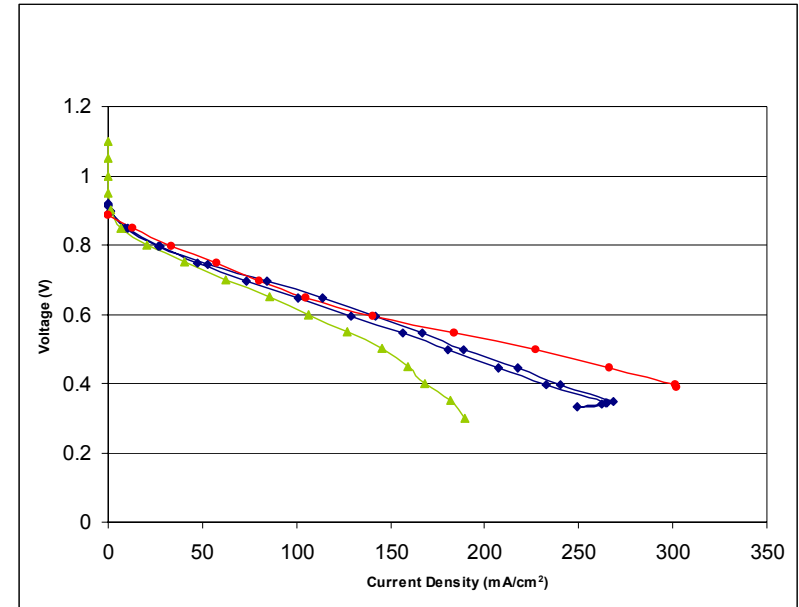
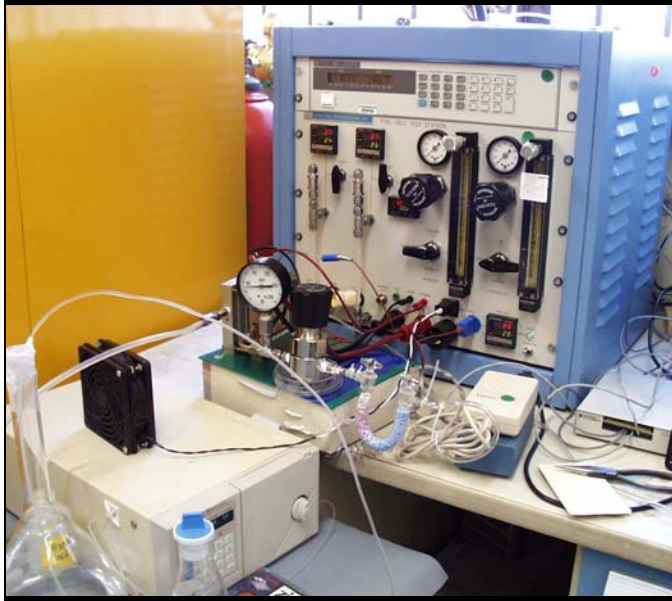
$$\log S_o = -6.65 - 0.005 \frac{\epsilon}{k}$$

$$10^{-3} \frac{\Delta H_s}{R_g} = 0.5 - 0.01 \frac{\epsilon}{k}$$

For H<sub>2</sub> @ 3atm, 80°C, P ≈ 1.2-2.5x10<sup>-8</sup> cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>2</sup>\*s  
**Far exceeding DoE target of 2x10<sup>-6</sup> cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>2</sup>\*s**

# Technical Accomplishments

## Fuel Cell Test Station, Polarization Curves



Polyphenylenesulfide based plates developed here performed comparably to POCO graphite plates

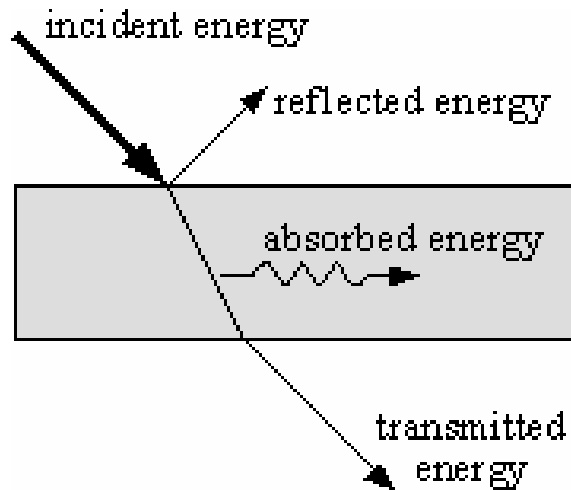
# Technical Accomplishments

## Cost/Process Model Development

Bipolar plate cost primarily dictated by processing time  
Heating/cooling cycle of the stamping process

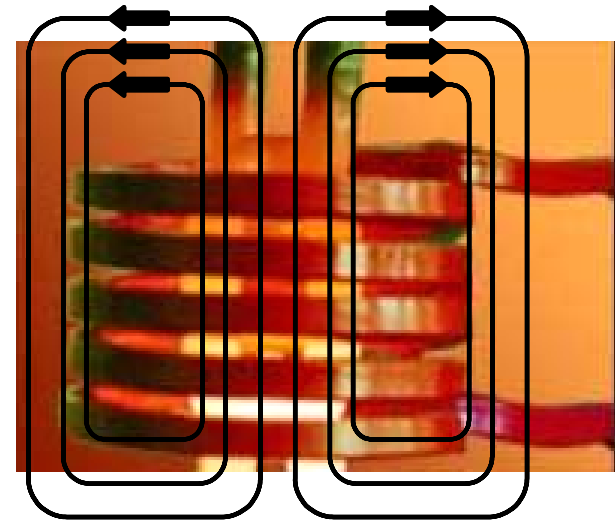
Two heating mechanisms modeled during Phase I for continuous mfg.

### Radiation Heating



47 second heating cycled  
Total estimated process time <2 min.

### Induction Heating



10 second heating time for 7 kW heater  
Total estimated process time 30-60 s



# Future Work

## Phase II Work Plan (FY06 - FY08)

- Downselect most appropriate material composition
  - Investigate PVDF/PPS skin/core bipolar plates
- Semi-continuous bipolar plate fabrication
  - Experimentally compare radiation and induction heating to Phase I model estimates
  - Cost analysis
- Fuel cell integration
  - Performance comparison to current “baseline” bipolar plates
  - Hybrid fuel cell system development
  - Test platform integration, both in-house and with corporate collaborators, to practically evaluate:
    - Durability
    - Weight savings
    - Performance



# Project Summary

**Relevance:** Identification of low cost, high-performance bipolar plate materials and fabrication processes.

**Approach:** Compression molding, or stamping, of wet-lay thermoplastic composite material mats.

**Technical Progress and Accomplishments:** Proposed bipolar plate technology has exceeded DoE performance requirements, and requires significantly lower estimated processing energy and time compared to current state-of-the-art, corresponding to significantly reduced total cost.

**Collaborations:** NanoSonic and Virginia Tech have teamed to develop the technology. NanoSonic has active collaboration with Lockheed Martin and other Fortune 500 collaborators for design input, platform insertion, marketing, and commercialization.

**Proposed Future Work:** Continuous bipolar plate manufacturing for cost analysis. Fuel cell integration for performance characterization compared to “baseline” and current state-of-the-art bipolar plate technologies.