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Duncan talks 'cold fusion' at Saturday Science

By [Janese Silvey](#)

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If a device said to create energy by fusing common materials goes on the market this year, Rob Duncan told a crowd at the University of Missouri he'll be one of the first in line.

"When they show up at Home Depot, I'm going to go out there with my credit card," said Duncan, MU's vice chancellor of research.

Italian engineer Andrea Rossi invented the Energy Catalyzer, or E-Cat, which he claims produces energy by fusing nickel with hydrogen to produce copper, a reaction he says releases excess energy. Because Rossi is trying to profit from his invention, he hasn't let other scientists review his data. That's why many have denounced it and suggested Rossi's device is a scam.

Duncan reserves judgment. After giving a talk on the "cold fusion" phenomenon at MU's Saturday Science series, he said he planned to buy two E-Cats — one to heat his home and another to take apart and figure out. After all, Duncan isn't interested in how tabletop energy could be applied — at least right now. He's more interested in the physics behind it.

A day after announcing that a clothing company founder, Sidney Kimmel, gave MU \$5.5 million to study clean energy, Duncan spent nearly two hours explaining to a general audience the possible scientific scenarios behind what he calls anomalous heat effects, once referred to as cold fusion.

MU researchers from various departments and the research reactor plan to use the funding to see whether they can not only create but also replicate excessive heat production.

"The success rate is about 20 percent, so we know the conditions must be very specific," David Robertson, an MU chemistry professor who's going to be involved in the project, said in a statement. "It's a hit-or-miss reaction, which is the reason why we're trying to understand it, and we're using every tool in the toolbox to find the answer."

Duncan has been interested in the phenomenon since CBS's "60 Minutes" asked him to serve as an outside skeptic for a 2009 episode on work being done at an Israeli lab. Duncan took the trip and concluded that something — he was careful to not conclude what — was creating heat. Some scientists still scoff; others even get emotional about it, Duncan said. To them, he says: "Get over it."

Duncan is calling for a government grant that would be awarded to researchers in the field. That way, he said, scientists are open with the findings, rather than protective of potential profits.

"It's always better if foundational science is done as a public investment," he said. "That's because you can't patent physics and what happens in physics. Once science is understood, entrepreneurs can find new ways to apply it and reduce it to practice. It's upside down right now."

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