

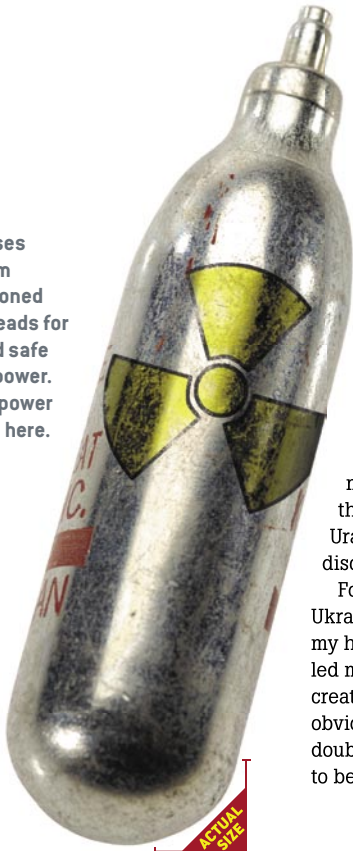
EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Solving the Gadget Power Crisis, One Nuke at a Time



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Uranitech uses material from decommissioned Soviet warheads for cheap — and safe — portable power. A prototype power cell is shown here.



Nothing gets me more riled than when I'm sitting on the subway and halfway through Ashlee Simpson's *Autobiography* my CD player craps out because it's out of juice.

Battery life has been a veritable kidney stone in the excretory system of mobile electronics since the dawn of the industry, and the flow of innovations in this area seems to have all but stopped. Experts predict only modest gains in battery efficiency — maybe 3 percent to 5 percent per year — for the next decade. Meanwhile, notebooks, cell phones, and other gadgets continue to suck down more and more power, leaving us with less time before we have to scamper back to a power outlet.

Fuel cells show some promise (see our November 2004 issue), but frankly I'm not sold. My biggest question isn't whether they're ever going to work reliably, it's how I'm going to get methanol into those little containers. What, am I going to pack a jug of methanol and a tiny funnel in my bag every time I take a trip?

At the Consumer Electronics Show this year, I had the great fortune to meet with a company that, in my opinion, has the answer to the great gadget power crisis. The company is called Uranitech (at least for now — it's in stealth mode), and we met in an out-of-the-way room at the Circus Circus in Vegas, where Uranitech's execs assured me we could discuss their innovation in private.

Founder Gregori Aypayok, a stout Ukrainian with a thick beard, shook my hand, offered me a cold Popov, and led me to the coffee table, where his creation was resting under a sheet he'd obviously stripped from the nearby double bed. With a flourish that led me to believe he'd practiced this before

my arrival, Aypayok whisked the sheet away from the table to reveal ... an IBM ThinkPad, whirring away with a PowerPoint slide on its LCD.

I shrugged. What's the big deal? "This computer has been running nonstop for 48 hours, Mr. Null. Now you are more impressed, *da?*"

I told him to prove it. Aypayok told me he couldn't let the computer out of his sight, but he shut it down and flipped it over to show me his secret. The underside of the ThinkPad was a mess of bolts and jagged welds, and he stabbed at a single Phillips screw to get at his prize. Inside lay a silver capsule, no bigger than a lipstick, where the traditional battery used to be. Emblazoned on its side: The universal symbol for radiation. It was warm to the touch.

In the coming weeks I'd learn that Aypayok wasn't fooling around. Portable nuclear power was not only real, it was — and is — the solution to all of our problems. I was as skeptical as you must be right now, but Aypayok soothed all of my worries, and not just with that third shot of cheap vodka. Radiation is contained by lining the capsules in lead, so don't worry about leaving your notebook in your lap for a full 12-hour session. Depleted shells can go in regular trash: They're actually good for the soil and encourage the growth of new species of plant life.

The regulators are even looking ahead on this one, as U.S. Senate Bill 0401 would allow consumers to carry as many as three capsules on any commercial flight. Airlines love it, too, as they could get rid of all of that wiring they're currently using for notebook power adapters in seats.

Portable nukes mean we all win. Does this technology excite you as much as it excites me? Drop me a line at null@mobilepcmag.com with your thoughts! ☺