

Clean car trade-in program launches with Capitol truck demolition

By Alexei Koseff

Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 28, 2015

Before driving off in a new plug-in hybrid, Jose Mendoza watched with mixed feelings as his old pickup truck was crushed Wednesday morning on the west lawn of the Capitol.

“You never want to get rid of those old cars that helped you through the hard times,” he said. “I didn’t realize it was going to get emotional.”

Mendoza, a father of six from Stockton, is the first participant in a new California Air Resources Board program that aims to put clean cars in the hands of families in the poorest, most polluted parts of the state. Individuals in disadvantaged census tracts who make up to four times the federal poverty level will be able to trade in their pre-1994 models and receive as much as \$12,000 toward the cost of a new or used fuel-efficient vehicle.

A \$4.8 million pilot, expected to replace about 600 cars, is currently rolling out in the San Joaquin Valley and South Coast air districts. The Air Resources Board plans to expand the program, which is funded by cap-and-trade auction revenue, by about 10 times next year.

It’s an evolution of previous car trade-in programs, ensuring that the clunkers taken off the road are replaced by cleaner alternatives. About 80 percent of pollution in California comes from only 25 percent of vehicles, Air Resources Board Chair Mary Nichols noted.

“This really is a visionary program,” she said. “By going after the most polluting, oldest vehicles, we’re doing something that benefits the entire community, as well as the people who are involved in this effort.”

State Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León, who conceived the program as part of his plan to put a quarter of cap-and-trade revenue toward projects in low-income communities, held Mendoza’s 7-year-old daughter Faith in his arms as he led a countdown to the demolition.

Tackling climate change and pollution will require the involvement of the Central Valley and other parts of the state that often get overlooked, he said. “All Californians deserve clean air.”

Mendoza is particularly excited that he will be able to put the savings from lower fuel costs toward his remaining payments on the 2013 Toyota Prius. His old truck netted Mendoza about \$9,000, more than a third of the car’s price.

“Nothing extra is going to come out of my pocket,” he said.

Going clean

By Alex Breitler

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Here’s one advantage to being “disadvantaged”: Millions of dollars have been set aside to help San Joaquin Valley communities dispose of older, polluting vehicles in favor of newer, cleaner ones.

The pilot program, launched by state officials on Wednesday, awards the largest incentives to the poorest residents in the most polluted neighborhoods — up to \$12,000 to help a family upgrade to a fully electric vehicle, in the most generous case.

However, even those who make up to four times the federal poverty level are eligible for smaller discounts. For example, a family of four with an income up to \$97,000 per year could receive \$7,000 off a plug-in hybrid car or \$8,000 off a fully electric vehicle, according to the California Air Resources Board.

California has offered incentives to retire smog-spewing cars for years. The new program sweetens the deal.

The additional money comes from fees paid by polluters under the state’s cap-and-trade program. That includes both businesses and everyday drivers, who are paying more at the pump to fund this and other pollution-reduction programs.

"We know that about 80 percent of the pollution that is experienced in our state today comes from about 25 percent of the vehicles on the road," said Mary Nichols, chair of the state Air Resources Board. "By going after the most polluting vehicles, we're doing something that benefits the entire community."

To kick off the program, state officials and legislators put on a show outside the state Capitol on Wednesday. They crushed a gas-guzzling 1984 pickup owned by Jose and Lorena Mendoza of Stockton, then handed them the keys to a two-year-old plug-in hybrid that gets 50 miles to the gallon.

"I hope people in the Valley and everywhere will try to understand that this is a lot better," said Jose Mendoza, a landscaper and father to six daughters. "As soon as they see how many miles this car gets, if they're smart, they'll take it."

Here's how the program will work:

Air quality officials hold informal smog-check events up and down the San Joaquin Valley each year. In fact, one of these "Tune In and Tune Up" events will take place Saturday at the San Joaquin County fairgrounds.

The primary purpose is to help drivers repair their cars so they can pass smog.

But with the new program in place, organizers at Tune In and Tune Up also will be looking for owners who want to ditch their old beaters cars altogether and upgrade to newer models.

The \$2.4 million that the state is providing to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District isn't in place quite yet, so no one will be able to make final arrangements for a new car at Saturday's event. But Tune In and Tune Up is typically held several times a year here, and at the very least residents can get more information if they show up on Saturday.

Organizers also intend to have a number of electric vehicles and hybrids available for test drives, as owners wait for their old cars to be checked for smog.

Ultimately, the money could pay for up to 300 vehicle upgrades in the Valley, and another 300 upgrades in the South Coast area, which faces its own pollution challenge.

Large swaths of the Valley, including much of Stockton, have been formally designated as "disadvantaged," opening the door to the larger incentives unveiled Wednesday. Twenty-three of the 30 most disadvantaged communities are in the Valley, said Tom Jordan, a policy advisor with the Valley air district.

"This is one of those programs that helps with air pollution and helps people who are struggling a little bit financially," Jordan said.

For more details call the Valley air district at (559) 230-6000.

Old truck gets crushed in California's battle against climate change

By Chris Megerian

LA Times, Thursday, May 28, 2015

In a heavy metal display of its effort to get dirty cars off the road, state officials crushed a 31-year-old pickup truck outside the Capitol on Wednesday morning.

The Stockton family that turned in the truck left the event with a 2-year-old Toyota Prius, courtesy of a state program that provides rebates to help low-income families buy cleaner cars.

The \$4.8-million program, one piece of a broader effort to battle climate change and improve air quality in California, is funded with cap-and-trade revenue and could put 600 cleaner cars on the road. More funding could be approved by the Air Resources Board this summer.

State officials said the majority of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions come from a relatively small number of older cars, and those vehicles are often owned by residents who can't afford new ones.

So with this program, they're trying to make clean cars available to Californians from poorer communities that often have larger problems with air quality. The Prius purchased by the Stockton family cost \$22,500, which was mitigated by \$9,500 in rebates and \$12,000 in low-interest financing.

"Tackling climate change ... requires policies that touch all of California's communities," said Senate leader Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), who worked on legislation to support the program.

"Rebates are not just for those who drive Teslas," he added.