

State expands car replacement program

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The California Air Resources Board is giving low-income families in the Valley a chance to replace their old cars with cleaner vehicles.

The Plus Up program, administered by the air districts in the Valley and Los Angeles, gives families up to \$12,000 toward the purchase of a new car. It can be a gas-powered hybrid, conventional hybrid, plug-in hybrid or all-electric vehicle.

“The largest contributor of emissions in the Valley comes from gross-polluting cars and trucks,” said Heather Heinks, outreach and communications manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. “If we can get those off the road, we could see a significant reduction in pollution.”

The program is addressing an order issued by Gov. Jerry Brown to place 1.5 million zero-emission vehicles on state roadways by 2025 and to cut petroleum use from cars and trucks in half by 2030.

According to the district, families with the lowest incomes will receive more cash for their vehicle. Those who choose an all-electric vehicle will also get the most money.

The cash payments are available at three income levels. Households with incomes equal to or less than 225 percent of the federal poverty level are considered low income. For a family of four, that would equal to about \$55,000 per year in income, according to Medicaid.gov.

Moderate income is for households between 226 percent and 300 percent of the poverty level. Above-moderate income is considered for households between 301 percent and 400 percent of the level. Families of four at 400 percent would have yearly incomes of nearly \$100,000.

If a consumer wants to scrap an old car but not buy a replacement, the program will provide public transit passes worth up to \$4,500, depending on income. The district said cars must be a 1995 model or older to be eligible for the program.

Besides the cash payments, consumers may also be eligible for up to \$2,000 for a vehicle charging unit at their home.

Heinks said the goal of the program is to replace at least 600 old cars.

Heinks said the district started a small pilot program last year and has been successful, leading the Air Resources Board to contribute \$4.8 million this fiscal year to continue and expand the program. The Valley air district is estimated to receive half of the money.

There is no application required for the program. Participants will be chosen during a screening at Tune In and Tune Up emissions-testing events the district holds throughout the Valley, including at West Hills College Lemoore.

Usually the event is held a few times a year at the college. (None are scheduled through the end of August.)

“Tune In and Tune Up is a very successful event assisting residents in the Valley,” she said. “At these events, we typically see the highest-polluting vehicles, so it’s a great way for us to zero in on those so we can test them and begin that conversation.”

There’s no definitive end date for the program. Heinks said that as long as there is funding, the program will continue. She said she hopes the state will decide to provide additional funding in the future once this batch runs out.

“We’re doing absolutely everything we can to reduce vehicle emissions,” she said. “Getting these vehicles off the road is definitely the right direction to go. I think the reductions we will see will be significant.”

According to Melanie Turner, public information officer with the Air Resources Board, the board will consider increasing funding to \$20 million for the program at a meeting on Thursday, both to increase support for the two districts currently participating in the program as well as to expand it to other air districts.

“We do think this is an important pilot project that helps California move toward meeting a number of important goals, from cleaning the air to reducing greenhouse gases to ensuring all Californians benefit from those reductions,” Turner said.