

Study finds that electric cars are putting the brakes on pollution

By Samantha Clark Oakland Tribune
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OAKLAND -- Annual sales of electric vehicles have skyrocketed by 500 percent nationwide the past two years, according to a new report, benefiting public health and the environment.

"It's clearer we need more cleaner vehicles on the road," said Mac Farrell, global warming organizer at Environment California. "We're in the middle of a technological revolution that is helping to clean up our air and reduce our dependence on oil. It's the rise of electric vehicles. It's time for this revolution to really charge ahead."

To increase the number of vehicles with zero tailpipe emissions, 10 states require carmakers to sell electric vehicles that comply with the Zero Emission Vehicle program.

If every state adopted the program, there would be an estimated 13 million electric vehicles on the road that could prevent 18.2 million metric tons of carbon pollution each year nationally by 2025, the report showed. That is equal to saving 2 billion gallons of gasoline per year.

Today more than 220,000 electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles travel the nation's roads and highways. With policy commitments and advancement in technology for cars and clean and renewable sources of electricity, federal and state governments can realize great emission reductions, Farrell said.

"We're calling on leaders to get in the driver's seat," he said. "Future generations will thank us for it."

Oakland City Councilmember Dan Kalb said he will be working with the city to update a policy on clean vehicle purchasing. Since its policy was enacted, technology has improved.

"We need electric and battery-powered vehicles," he said. "Not just a cleaner vehicle but the cleanest vehicles."

Dr. Jyothi Marbin, a physician at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, said that reducing car emissions by turning to electric vehicles is a critical step in ensuring children's health. "Almost one in three of my patients in primary care have asthma," she said. "That's one of the highest pockets in the country."

According to the study, pollution from cars, trucks and larger vehicles causes about 53,000 early deaths annually.

Even when charged with coal-fired power, electric vehicles are cleaner than vehicles running on oil, the study found. And as sources of generating electricity improve, electric vehicles will get even cleaner.

For the study, Environment California looked at the fast growth of electric vehicles over the past three years and found that all major car manufacturers make at least one hybrid electric vehicle. According to car research company Edmunds.com, the Toyota Prius was the top-selling car in California in 2013.

The market for electric vehicles is also growing faster than the market for hybrid electric vehicles did in its early years.

"Recognizing that hybrids are now mainstream and that electric vehicle sales are doing really well is important for giving confidence to automakers, consumers and policy makers alike that this technology is here to stay and can be deployed," said Michelle Kinman, clean energy advocate at Environment California.