Driving Home to a Clean Energy Future

Energy Savers Blog

Working here at the Department of Energy, I hear a lot about the latest efforts to design and build vehicles for a more energy-efficient future. The clean energy innovations in vehicle technologies that DOE and its partners are advancing will help American families save money at the pump—or even allow them to quit the gas pump altogether. Today, I want to highlight a few of the recent developments that will encourage drivers to be smarter consumers, help industry leaders make the cars and trucks we drive more energy efficient, and allow us to spend less of our hard-earned cash on fuel in the future.

[Gasoline vehicle label]
[1]

[Electric vehicle label]
[2]

[Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle label]
[3]

New car shoppers will soon have more information at their fingertips about the fuel

economy of the cars they're considering buying. On May 25, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) unveiled [4] new fuel economy labels [5] for vehicles. The newest versions provide more comprehensive fuel efficiency information, including estimated annual fuel costs, savings, as well as information on each vehicle's environmental impact. Starting with model year 2013, the fuel economy labels will be required on all new passenger cars and trucks, both for conventional gas-powered and next-generation cars such as plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles. Automakers may also voluntarily adopt the new labels earlier for model year 2012 vehicles. For the first time, the labels will provide an estimate of how much fuel or electricity it takes to drive 100 miles. They will also provide ways to compare energy use and cost between new-technology cars that use electricity and conventional gas-powered cars.

DOE is also working to improve the efficiency of its own fleet of vehicles and those of major commercial partners. On May 24, President Obama issued a memo [6] directing federal government agencies to lead by example in fuel efficiency and innovative vehicle technologies. In putting the guidance to work, agencies will begin purchasing 100% alternative fuel vehicles for their fleets by 2015. They will also look to reduce fleet size if necessary, and will work to achieve a 30% decrease in petroleum use. DOE is helping to lead the way on this initiative [7] by expanding its use of hybrids while reducing its fleet overall, and is also working closely with the private sector to transition commercial fleets to alternative, fuel-efficient technologies. Additionally, as part of the National Clean Fleets Partnership [8] the Administration launched in April, DOE is helping companies to reduce diesel and gasoline use in their fleets by incorporating electric vehicles, alternative fuels, and fuel-saving measures into their daily operations.

To add to these efforts, significant strides have been made toward boosting the availability of electric vehicles and their infrastructure. In mid-May, DOE announced [9] that more than 1,800 electric vehicle (EV) chargers have been installed under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, better known as the 2009 stimulus package. To me, this milestone shows that the U.S. has already made considerable progress toward meeting President Obama's goal of putting 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2015. Since 2009, DOE has invested more than $5 billion to accelerate the growth of the U.S. EV and advanced battery manufacturing industry. These investments include the world's largest electric vehicle demonstration project, which will result in the deployment of more than 13,000 grid-connected vehicles and 22,000 charging points in residential, commercial, and public locations nationwide by December 2013. More than ever, electric vehicles show promise as one of the keys to our clean energy future.

In a related effort, DOE's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) recently joined up with Google Inc. and various industry leaders to provide EV drivers with consistent, up-to-date information about the EV charging stations in communities nationwide. Drawing on Google Maps, this new collaboration will coordinate an online network of all U.S. charging stations and will serve as the primary data source for GPS and mapping services tracking electric vehicle charging locations. More information is available on the Alternative Fuels and Advanced Vehicles Data Center [10] (AFDC).

Over the coming months and years, as Americans continue to see the energy-saving advantages of innovative vehicle technologies rolling off U.S. manufacturing lines, we'll all have the opportunity to drive home to a clean energy future.

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