

Eco-Tip of the Week for 6-25-17

Incentives for Plug in Cars Extend to Used Cars: Considering the Lesson of Source Reduction

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A new incentive program available from Southern California Edison provides a payment of \$450 to owners of new or used plug-in cars. It covers both all-electric cars (such as the Chevy Bolt) as well as cars running on electric power before transitioning to a gas engine (such as the Chevy Volt).

Previous rebates, such as the California Rebate, are applicable to only new cars (with fewer than 7,500 miles on the odometer at the time of purchase or lease) and have other restrictions (such as an income cap for recipients). To obtain this new SCE incentive, you must be the first, second, or third owner, and you must provide a scan of your car registration. You must also be a customer of SCE and provide your customer number (from your bill).

Some used electric vehicles are inexpensive, so if this incentive is helping you consider buying the used electric vehicle you always wanted for environmental reasons but could not afford for economic reasons, you may be wondering about whether it is actually better environmentally to just keep an old gas car running.

The environmental value of keeping an old car or appliance running is summarized in the term “embodied energy.” That term describes the energy it takes to make a product, counted as if the energy were part of product. If you replace the product, you “lose” the energy invested in its manufacture and require new energy to be expended for manufacture of a new product. It is a legitimate concern, like an environmental version of the business calculation to determine return on investment.

The answer to the puzzle of embodied energy and return on energy investment depends on factors such as the type of car you would keep running, which plug-in car you would buy, and how much you drive. However, Gil Friend, Palo Alto’s Sustainability Officer and a widely respected environmental scientist, speculated about the issue in a recent edition of GreenBiz. Using assumptions about average driving and average vehicles, he concluded embodied energy is usually “paid back” in about 20 months of driving, so consideration of embodied energy is not a reason to further postpone purchase of a plug-in vehicle.

On the net:

<https://cleanvehiclerebate.org/eng/eligibility-guidelines>