

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Building the Electric Highway

As we consider how to better align our activities with the planet's ways and our true best interests, one of the more vital but challenging questions is how we can avoid the harm caused by our petroleum-powered vehicles.

The negative impacts of our gas cars and trucks include: smog; acid rain; health problems such as asthma and cancer; greenhouse gases (GHG) that trap in too much heat and disrupt the world's weather systems; and damage to people and the planet from oil's extraction and transport.

Using gas also make us vulnerable to rising gas prices. These can occur when limited oil supplies lead us to drill in places difficult physically and politically. But we need to address that without sacrificing health or ecosystems!

A key part of the solution is for us all to reduce our petroleum use, at both the individual and community levels. (See www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl3j.html.)

An Electric Opportunity

However, a more long-term solution is for us to avoid using fossil fuel in our vehicles at all. But it's been challenging to find an easy replacement fuel.

That's where electric vehicles (EVs) come in, including plug-in hybrids. These cars and trucks can avoid emissions and access more eco-friendly electric energy as it's implemented.

Thankfully, EVs are finally becoming more available to consumers. You can even rent them — to support the technology, assess them for possible purchase, and impress your eco-friends!

However, the EV strategy does need a network of public charging stations, so that folks can "refuel" at work, or while traveling, visiting a

winery, staying at a hotel, parked at the airport, etc.

Thus it's been exciting to see various folks helping to "jump start" EVs by installing this key infrastructure.

Sonoma County's "Electric Trail"

Valuable work in this arena has been happening locally. For instance, the County of Sonoma recently announced plans to install up to 100 EV charging stations, for use by county vehicles and the public. Funding comes from state and federal grants, plus local governments. The intention, says Supervisor Shirlee Zane, is to help "build our economy, maintain our quality of life, and protect our environment."

The City of Santa Rosa is also installing charging stations, funded by a federal grant and available to the public for \$1 an hour. And free stations are available at businesses such as the Santa Rosa Plaza and Coddington mall.

Because of actions like these, our county has earned recognition as the Bay Area's most EV-ready community!

Building out our EV charging infrastructure offers us multiple benefits, including: helping us achieve our county's GHG reduction targets, supporting the EV industry and its jobs, improving our health and quality of life, and helping lower people's vehicle operating costs.

Plus it helps position us as an eco-tourism destination by serving EV drivers. Ah, that sweet spot where both our ecosystems and economy flourish!

"Low carbon" eco-transportation options might even be key to the survival of our tourism industry and economy, if price increases make gas-powered travel just too expensive for most folks.

California Is Supporting EVs

Governor Jerry Brown also recently announced that the state will have \$100 million to fund over 10,000 EV charging stations, including in the Bay Area. This money is from a \$120 million settlement with NRG Energy, to resolve claims from the energy crisis ten years ago. (The remaining \$20 million will go towards reducing rates for utility customers.)

Brown has also signed an executive order setting specific targets for reducing our car-generated air pollution, with the goal that by 2050 virtually every vehicle on our roads will be emission-free.

It makes me so happy to see people tangibly acting for a better world. I encourage everyone to help support and create success stories like these.

Celebrating EcoGirl's Fifth Anniversary

On another note, I'm now celebrating five years writing this Ask EcoGirl column. Woo hoo! I invite you to peruse past columns at www.AskEcoGirl.info, and connect with my ongoing eco-info and actions at www.facebook.com/AskEcoGirl. See my other projects and services at www.patriciadines.info. And, for more about the stories mentioned here, see www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl6a.html.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of *The Organic Guides*, and Editor and Lead Writer for *The Next STEP* newsletter. Email your questions about going green to EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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