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Austin, utilities launch campaign for plug-in hybrid vehicles

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Declaring the country's economy, environmental health and national security at risk, a coalition of cities led by the public power community of Austin, Texas, has launched a nationwide campaign to urge automakers to accelerate development of plug-in hybrid vehicles. The campaign is backed by 140 public power utilities; the cities of Austin, Baltimore, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle; and national policy organizations, including APPA, the Edison Electric Institute and the Alliance to Save Energy.

"Today marks the beginning of an unprecedented national grass roots campaign," said Austin Mayor Will Wynn, at a press conference yesterday at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The United States' overdependence on foreign oil is a problem that is contributing to global warming, smog in cities and rapidly rising fuel prices, Wynn said. Escalating fuel prices, in turn, are "driving up the price of all goods," he said.

"Americans understand the problem and will do something about it," Wynn said. "We are telling the automakers, 'If you build plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, Americans will buy them.'"

Cars could be charged up at night

Plug-ins could be recharged at night, using off-peak electricity, by plugging them into a standard wall socket. The cost would be the equivalent of 75 cents a gallon at prevailing electric rates, the coalition said.

"Even drawing from our existing power plants, plug-in vehicles have the potential to cut a vehicle's petroleum consumption by three-fourths or more, can operate at as little as one-fourth the fuel cost, and reduce greenhouse gases by two-thirds," said Kateri Callahan, president of the Alliance to Save Energy.

In Austin, 11,000 citizens have signed petitions calling on automakers to produce plug-ins, and the city has collected 600 orders for the plug-in hybrids, or PHEVs, from government and business, Mayor Wynn said. The city has set aside \$1 million in rebates and incentives for these vehicles, which would combine today's new gas-electric hybrid technology with larger batteries that could provide an all-electric operating range of 25 to 35 miles or more.

Frank Gaffney, president of the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., and a former deputy assistant

secretary of defense for the Reagan administration, called on President Bush to mention the PHEV initiative in his upcoming State of the Union speech and to make it a priority of his administration. "Virtually every place we get oil from is either unstable or downright hostile to us," Gaffney said, noting that U.S. sources of imported oil include Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria and Venezuela.

Woolsey: oil money is used to spread hatred

"Saudi Arabia, through Wahabists, teaches a form of Islam that is hostile to Shiites, Sunnis, Americans, democracy, women and music," James Woolsey, a former director of the CIA, said at yesterday's press conference. "We have met the enemy, and he is us. If you want to know who is paying for hate to be taught in those madrasas in Pakistan, the next time you pull up to the pump, look in the mirror," said Woolsey, who is now a vice president at the consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton.

Charging a plug-in car's battery each night would cost less than \$1 at current rates, the coalition said. A PHEV with a range of 40 miles in the all-electric mode could be used for more than 60% of the total annual miles traveled by the average American driver, the coalition said. More information is available from www.pluginpartners.org.



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