

## Electricity to charge electric cars is not always green

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This may seem like a no brainer to some people, but it has taken researchers from Dartmouth College to realize that an electric car is only as green as the electricity it uses to recharge itself. A report written by Stephen P. Holland, Erin T. Mansur, Nicholas Z. Muller, and Andrew J. Yates concludes that electricity from coal fired plants may actually cause more carbon dioxide pollution than the tailpipe emissions of a modern gasoline powered car.

In fact, the report goes on to say, because electricity often comes from several states away, an electric car in Indiana may actually be placing a burden on residents of Michigan if that's where its electricity comes from. That's because the majority of the electric generating plants in Michigan are coal fired. Note that news of the report comes from Michigan radio.

Looking at a map of the US shows that almost all of the upper Midwest region gets its electricity from coal. The benefits of an electric car are greatest in the West, where utilities are more likely to have cleaner, natural gas fired plants or use renewable energy sources like solar and wind.

While the findings of the study are no doubt accurate, they miss the point entirely. Let's start by looking at the organization that funded and published the report. It's the Cato Institute, whose motto, according to its website, is "Individual Liberty, Free Markets, and Peace." Let's try to decode that, shall we?

Individual Liberty: Hmm...who isn't in favor of that? That's what America is all about, right? Actually, what the Cato Institute is mostly about is freedom from intrusive government with all its silly rules and regulations — like the Clean Air Act. If you have been paying attention lately, the Obama Administration is proposing new rules that would toughen emissions standards on coal burning utilities. And where are many of those very coal burning power plants? Oh, that's right. Michigan.

Free Markets: More of the same. "Free markets" is code for letting business do whatever it wants to do. "Free markets" means international agreements like NAFTA and the new TPP that throw national sovereignty under the bus in order to give global business interests access to cheaper and cheaper labor.

What this study is really about is gutting Obama's Clean Power Initiative and deciding what will replace the \$7,500 federal tax credit for electric cars set to expire on December 31, 2016. There are lots of reasons to think that policy needs adjusting. It tends to favor the wealthy over the less well off and the full credit is really an illusion for most electric car buyers. That's because you have to owe \$7,500 in federal income taxes to get the full benefit of the credit. If your tax liability is less, you only get a portion of the credit. Any remaining balance is lost. There is no carryover to subsequent tax years.

What will replace the current policy, if anything, will be the subject of intense debate. It will depend on cooperation between elected officials in a fractious and bitterly divided Congress. It may also depend on who ends up being the next President of the United States. Remember, the next election is now less than a year away.

Figures lie and liars figure. When the numbers are politically motivated, the distortions just become that much greater. On the surface, this report seems to be reasonable and rational. But underneath, the message is that America needs less environmental regulation, not more. Some people agree with that; others do not. But whenever you see a study like this, it is important to ask yourself what the real message is.