

Number of hybrid vehicles in California triples in five years

By Phillip Reese

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With gas prices hovering near \$4 a gallon for the past several years, the appetite for hybrid vehicles in California has grown.

About 585,000 hybrid vehicles were registered in the state on the first day of 2013, according to the latest figures from the California Department of Motor Vehicles. That's up from 218,000 hybrid vehicles registered on the first day of 2008.

Put another way, the total number of hybrid vehicles in California grew by 370,000; the total number of all registered vehicles regardless of type grew by 670,000.

About one of every 50 registered vehicles in California is a hybrid.

Hybrid vehicles tend to have better fuel economy than their traditional counterparts. They also tend to have better resale value.

Hybrid drawbacks often include higher upfront and maintenance costs and lower power output.

A few years ago, hybrid vehicle options were limited to a few cars like the Toyota Prius. Today, it's possible to buy everything from a Chevrolet Silverado truck hybrid (21 combined mpg) or a Porsche Panamera hybrid (25 combined mpg).

Californians surveyed on climate change, fracking, hybrid cars

By Paul Rogers

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People in other states may be chanting "drill, baby, drill" -- but not Californians.

A new poll shows that a majority of Golden State residents oppose both new offshore oil drilling and expanding hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, to produce oil and gas. Californians also overwhelmingly support programs to expand renewable energy such as solar and wind power. And more than half say they have seriously considered buying a hybrid or an electric car.

Meanwhile, a record-high number of Californian residents -- 65 percent -- say the state should act immediately to cut greenhouse gas emissions, rather than waiting for jobs or the economy to improve, an increase of 9 percentage points from 2012.

"There's a huge consensus to do something about climate change and in support of renewable energy," said Mark Baldassare, president and CEO of the Public Policy Institute of California, the nonpartisan research foundation that conducted the poll.

The San Francisco-based institute was founded by Silicon Valley technology pioneer Bill Hewlett in 1994.

As part of its 13th annual poll on environmental and energy issues in California, the institute surveyed 2,103 residents by telephone from July 9 to July 23. The highlights:

- Asked if they support expanding offshore oil drilling, 54 percent opposed and 41 percent favored it. Among coastal residents, 57 percent opposed more drilling, while those inland were divided (49-47 percent). Oil drilling remains a partisan issue. Democrats opposed new drilling 65 percent to 30 percent, but Republicans supported it 62 percent to 36 percent, while independents opposed it 54 percent to 43 percent.
- An overwhelming 79 percent favored an increase in federal funding to develop more renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, with liberals and conservatives both on the same side. Similarly, 70 percent supported a 2011 state law signed by Gov. Jerry Brown that requires California utilities to generate 33 percent of their electricity from renewable energy sources by 2020. Support dropped to 44 percent, however, if it will result in higher electricity bills.

- Two-thirds of Californians say they usually drive alone to work, with 14 percent carpooling, 8 percent taking public transit, 7 percent walking or bicycling, and 4 percent working from home. When it comes to buying new cars, Californians have their eyes on Toyota Priuses, Chevy Volts, Nissan Leafs and other hybrids and electric vehicles. Fifty-one percent said they have seriously considered such a purchase for their next car, and 6 percent said they already own one. Eleven percent of Bay Area residents do.
- When Californians were asked about possible impacts of climate change, 63 percent said the effects of global warming have already begun. Considerably fewer (22 percent) said the effects will occur sometime in the future, and 11 percent said they will never happen. Chief among residents' concerns about climate impacts: more severe wildfires and droughts.