

Now you can really drive clean

Until now, the Toyota Prius was hailed as the most fuel-efficient, environmentally friendly passenger vehicle available.

In December 2010, that changed.

Drivers who have waited patiently for transportation that allows them to drive emission-free and begin to help the U.S. move away from dependence on foreign oil are now able to step up from driving a hybrid to a plug-in hybrid, or even all the way to the first, practical, fully-electric passenger vehicle.

It was the introduction of GM's EV1, a two-passenger, fully electric vehicle, available (for lease only) to a small number of Americans 20 years ago that gave us a taste of what emission-free driving could be. Ever since, environmentally-conscious Americans have hungered for a car that they could just plug in and not worry about emissions.

That day has arrived. Finally, on the market are the Chevrolet Volt and the Nissan Leaf. As with all choices, there are pluses and minuses, options to weigh, and personal preferences to ponder.

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the features of each:

Features	Toyota Prius	Chevy Volt	Nissan Leaf
Fuel/Technology	Hybrid Electric	Plug-in Hybrid Electric	Battery Electric
Price	\$23,810 base price	\$40,000	\$32,780
Incentives	None for 2011	\$7,500 fed tax credit & \$5,000 rebate in CA	\$7,500 fed tax credit & \$5,000 rebate in CA
Fuel efficiency	51 MPG	60 MPG	Not applicable
Range	Not applicable	First 35 miles on battery power only	100 miles on a single charge Battery power only
Global Warming Score	10 - Cleanest	Not available	10 - Cleanest
Smog Rating	9 out of 10	6 out of 10	10 - Cleanest
Emission Standard	AT PZEV (<i>Advanced Technology, partial zero emissions vehicle</i>)	AT PZEV	ZEV (Zero emissions vehicle)
Seating	5 passengers	4 passengers	5 passengers
Top speed	Not available	100 MPH	90 MPH

Toyota plans to offer the plug-in Prius in 2012.

For more information and comparisons of these vehicles, go to www.driveclean.ca.gov.



Air Quality Flag Program educates Valley students

Hundreds of Valley schools are now participating in the Air Quality Flag Program, and more are signing up every day!

Through the program, students in all eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley air basin are learning about how air quality affects them and understanding the difference between good and poor air quality.

County asthma coalitions and the American Lung Association in California have been working closely with the Air District since 2005 to distribute flags, train school staff and educate children about air quality issues and what the colors of the flags mean.

“The flags are a valuable tool for educating students, their parents and teachers about air quality issues, and also helps schools protect kids from unhealthy levels of pollution,” said Jaime Holt, Chief Communications officer for the Air District.

Holt also said that schools have been very responsive to the flag program, using it as a gauge for keeping children indoors when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

Flag colors correspond to the Air Quality Index, a chart that indicates air quality levels and helps residents and schools determine if outdoor activities should be planned or postponed. Green indicates that air quality is good. Yellow indicates that air quality is moderate. Orange indicates that air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as young children, the elderly and people with a respiratory illness such as asthma. Red is unhealthy for the general public.

Participating schools are provided with guidelines and suggestions for indoor activities on days when air quality may not be healthy for children to spend a lot of time playing or exercising outdoors.

The chart at right shows how many schools in each county now participate.

County	# of schools flying the flag
San Joaquin	43
Stanislaus	200
Merced	110
Madera	31
Fresno	183
Kings	30
Tulare	86
Kern, Valley portion	87

In recent months, the Air District has developed a more health-protective tool to accompany the Flag Program. The Real Time Air Quality Advisory Network (RAAN) gives teachers, parents and coaches more flexibility in scheduling outdoor activities by providing access to real time air quality information and signing up to receive alerts when air quality changes from one color to another. See: www.valleyair.org/programs/RAAN/raanlanding.htm to learn more about the RAAN Program.