University partners with China to help it develop electric vehicle fleet

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The University of California, Davis, will partner with China to speed adoption of plug-in electric and fuel-cell electric vehicles, the school said yesterday.

UC Davis signed a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, with the China Automotive Technology and Research Center (CATARC), the agency that regulates many activities of the auto industry in China. The agreement aims to help China develop policies and strategies to grow the share of zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs.

China is the world's largest new-car market, making goals of the partnership significant, said Anthony Eggert, executive director of the Policy Institute for Energy, Environment and the Economy at UC Davis.

"China has one of the fastest-growing vehicle markets in the world," Eggert said. "They are very committed to both growing the industry ... but recognizing that there are environmental impacts" and wanting to act on that issue.

"If we care about climate change, then it really is incumbent on us to work with China," Eggert said.

The five-year MOU launches the China-U.S. ZEV Policy Lab. The agreement takes place not long after the Chinese government has announced measures to fight smog and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In July, the central government mandated that within two years, electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids or fuel-cell cars will account for 30 percent of state car purchases (Greenwire, July 12). The Chinese government also recently unveiled new incentives for electric car purchases, UC Davis said.

China will also study Calif. ZEV rules

The partnership in the MOU developed out of years of the school talking with Chinese officials about clean cars, Eggert said. There are shared goals on energy and on combating climate change, he said.

UC Davis will be sharing information it has gathered from work looking at advanced vehicle technologies, especially as it relates to plug-in electric and hydrogen fuel-cell cars, Eggert said. The school has worked for years with U.S. automakers, teaching students how to convert internal-combustion engine cars into prototype plug-ins.

The school will also pass along its research findings on strategies likely to influence the market, and on vehicle production and fuel production. As well, UC Davis will share results of its investigations into what drives consumer purchase decisions. The partnership plans to conduct market surveys in China.

In addition, the China-U.S. ZEV Policy Lab will inform Chinese government officials about rules in California on ZEVs, UC Davis said. California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) has a goal of putting 1.5 million of the cars on state roads by 2025. The state has financial rebates and other incentives, including the ability for single-occupant
vehicles to use carpool lanes. California additionally is considering new enticements (see related story). In addition, there is the state's climate law, A.B. 32, which put in place a number of policies supporting use of renewable power sources.

"We have been working with China on air and climate issues under a unique MOU signed by Gov. Jerry Brown and NDRC Vice Chairman Xie Zhenhua," California Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said in a statement. "We commend China for its commitment to further reduce emissions by greatly expanding the purchase of battery electric and fuel cell powered vehicles."

ARB and the Chinese government agency National Development and Reform Commission will co-chair the new entity's advisory board. Automotive and energy companies will also be invited to participate.

Primary UC Davis partners are the Institute of Transportation Studies and the UC Davis Policy Institute for Energy, Environment and the Economy.