

More . . . CHARGING CHALLENGES

Ever been ICed?

By Lanny Hartmann

Ever been ICed? That's when somebody with an Internal Combustion Engine vehicle ignores a sign that says "Reserved for Electric Vehicles" and blocks access to a charging station. It's a common and frustrating problem. There are a number of factors that contribute to ICEing. One is poor placement of the charging station. Often they are situated near the closest parking spaces and human nature, being what it is, people are tempted to park there. Another factor is poor signage. Can we even blame ICE drivers from parking in a spot that has a sign that isn't clear or no sign at all? And what about the risk of a penalty and enforcement? Even if the spot is clearly marked with the international No Parking symbol "Except for Electric Vehicle Charging," some people won't care because they know they can get away with it. Sometimes the only solution is to ask the property manager to place orange cones in front of the charging stations to keep them open.

One part of a long-term solution is advocating for legislation to penalize the people who block charging stations. It's probably more effective to warn someone that the police are giving tickets for that (you are doing them a favor!) than to get into a discussion about how it's like parking in front of our fuel pump. In Montgomery County Maryland, just outside of Washington, DC, such a law was recently passed and it will soon be illegal to ICE a charging station there.

Maryland has 3,038 plug-in vehicles and Montgomery County has the most with 852 according to the state Motor Vehicle Administration. Some charging stations in the county are almost always ICed at certain times. High visibility ICEing reinforces the wrong message to other ICE drivers, that it's OK to park there.

It's a message that must be stopped if we expect to have open access to the public resources that are for the benefit of plug-in vehicle drivers.

In Maryland, several bills have been proposed in the state legislature in the past few sessions. Each of those bills have failed to get out of committee. One reason is that the Maryland Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Council, an advisory panel to the General Assembly, recommends that "action on this issue at the state level be deferred until local governments and/or market forces have had more opportunity to address it in ways appropriate to different situations."

A sponsor of one of those failed bills, State Delegate Eric Leudtke, saw that it was a tough sell in Annapolis. He brought the proposal to a local council member. That councilman, Hans Riemer, introduced Montgomery County Bill 32-13 to prohibit blocking a charging station with a non plug-in vehicle. This



was finally a chance for something to address the ICEing problem. It would only apply in one jurisdiction, but it was a start.

We can curse and complain all we want at an empty gas guzzler standing between us and a J-1772 connector and it won't do much good. This was a chance to look into the eyes of the

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decision makers who could actually do something to help EV drivers. I wasn't going to miss that chance!

On the appointed day for public comment, I found my way to the council chamber and testified with a story about an ICEing situation that had happened to me the day before. I was a little surprised to be the only EV driver there but I guess one is enough. When I finished my brief statement and turned to leave, the sponsoring council member rushed over to thank me and to ask for my input on a few items related to the bill. He said that having public support

makes a big difference when they are deciding on issues.

A few weeks later, the bill passed with a unanimous vote. The new law will go into effect June 11, 2014. Now I'm working to convince lawmakers in a neighboring county to draft similar

legislation. Having laws like this won't completely solve the problem of ICEing, but it can be a part of the overall solution. Next time you feel like shouting at a tailpipe at an ICED charging station, consider using that energy to write your local or state lawmaker. The more of us they hear from, the faster they will act.

