



TI joins employers adding electric vehicle charging stations at worksites



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When Nemesio Cava considered leasing a Nissan Leaf last fall, his employer's plans to install electric vehicle charging stations played a major role.

"This was kind of new for me," said the Texas Instruments Inc. electrical engineer. "It kind of helped me make the decision."

TI is adding 46 electric vehicle charging stations to 12 sites in Texas, including nine at the Dallas headquarters where Cava works, thanks to a public-private partnership to spur electric car use.

TI is part of the growing workplace charging movement, a key piece of the national electric vehicle infrastructure. A growing number of companies, including GameStop Corp., General Motors, Half Price Books and the Kroger grocery chain, have installed charging stations in the Dallas area in the last few years. Some say they've seen steady use.

The semiconductor company views it as a way to continue supporting employee alternative commuting.

"We have a long line of ways to help employees find alternative commuting methods," with subsidized bus passes and van-pool programs, said Paul Westbrook, TI's sustainable development manager. "This fit."

Corporate Responsibility Magazine recently named TI one of the world's top 100 corporate citizens based on its score in seven categories, including environment and corporate principles.

TI's first four charging stations went in earlier this month at its Sherman factory, but the Dallas area won't get any until next month. Initially, only TI employees will be able to use them, but the company is considering opening some to the public.

Ron Swanson, president of the North Texas Electric Auto Association, thinks more companies will offer charging stations as use of electric cars grows.

"It appears to be driven by employees working for a company who are requesting it," Swanson said. Most people charge their cars at home, but charging stations make sense for places where you spend a lot of time — like work, he said.

Tens of thousands of electric cars cruise the road today, but that's a far cry from the Obama administration's goal of 1 million by the end of 2015.

TI estimates that 10 employees at its Dallas campus own electric vehicles (more own plug-in hybrids that can also use the stations). The company has 34,000 employees globally, including 9,400 in North Texas.

"I can't predict the future, but I can help shape it by doing things like this," TI's Westbrook said. "TI wants to be part of the infrastructure for the future."

The charging stations won't cost TI anything because San Francisco-based Ecotality Inc. and the federal government will pick up the bill. But it will cost \$1 an hour to use a TI charger, which is designed to supplement home charges.

TI's program is part of a project funded by a \$115 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy and \$115 million from Ecotality, said Dave Aasheim, Ecotality's regional manager for Texas. Each charging station costs \$5,500 to \$6,000 for the equipment and installation, he said. The TI stations will become part of Ecotality's Blink Network, with more than 300 public stations in the Dallas area and about 3,000 public stations nationwide. Last year, Blink's public charging use rose 11 percent in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Aasheim said.

"As we install these in workplaces, employees see the infrastructure and something clicks that an electric vehicle can be part of their lifestyle," he said. "It spurs more ownership."

Video game retailer GameStop saw the same employee reaction after it installed four electric charging stations at its Grapevine headquarters in June, spokeswoman Larine Nixon said.

"After they were installed, a couple of employees went out and bought electric cars," she said. "All four are used daily."

Now it's thinking of adding more.

The free charger at Half Price Books' Dallas headquarters and flagship store on Northwest Highway has been used nearly 200 times so far this year, said spokeswoman Emily Bruce. Last year, the charger was used about 300 times. Installation cost about \$10,000 in fall 2010, but ongoing costs are \$3 to \$4 per charge, she said.

Most of TI's charging stations — 43 of them — will be installed in North Texas, including factories in Plano and Richardson. The company will evaluate the program over the next year.

If TI decides to keep the charging stations, it would enter into a revenue-sharing agreement with Blink. Otherwise, it would pay Ecotality a small fee to remove them.

TI's Cava hopes they stay.

"I can kind of get away without charging at work, but having three kids, it's nice to have the car fully charged for after work," said the Plano resident. "There are things about having the charging that you can do things during the day."

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