An electric car plugged in at a charging station in Houston.

The following text is a blog post written by Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger highlighting the need for cleaner transportation across the country, but especially in Texas.

Electric cars at the Houston Auto Show

During the last weekend in January, hundreds of thousands of people attended the Houston Auto Show to see the latest that the automakers have to offer.

While the main focus of this year’s auto show was still traditional gas-burning vehicles, attendees were able to test drive plug-in electric models like the 2019 Bolt EV, the Honda Clarity plug-in hybrid and Nissan’s LEAF. Debuting for the first time were Audi’s e-tron, BMW’s i8 electric convertible and the Hyundai Ioniq plug-in hybrid. Hyundai’s Kona EV, Jaguar’s all-electric I-PACE and the Range Rover plug-in hybrid were also on display.

These cleaner, electric, zero-emission vehicles are the future of transportation; that is, they must be if we hope to have a livable climate.

Our transportation and our climate

America’s cars, planes, trucks and other vehicles now produce more global warming pollution than any other sector of our economy. In Texas, the transportation sector accounts for 34 percent of statewide carbon emissions. Houston saw the tragic impacts of a warming climate firsthand during Hurricane Harvey.

Through warmer air and water, and rising sea levels, climate change makes hurricanes more powerful and dangerous. We can’t prevent the worst impacts of global warming—and protect a healthy, stable climate for our children and grandchildren—without cleaning up our cars.

Texans need cleaner transportation

Today, 99 percent of the cars, SUVs and pickup trucks on the road in the U.S. still burn gasoline, pumping carbon

Continued on page 3 ▶
Thanks for making it all possible

Report finds industrial mishaps spewed 63 million pounds of illegal pollution into Texas’ air

Texas industrial facilities in 2017 released more than 63 million pounds of air pollution without authorization.

That’s a 27 percent increase from the previous year, according to “Major Malfunction: Air Pollution from Industrial Malfunctions and Maintenance in Texas in 2017,” a report released by partner group Environment Texas Research & Policy Center on Jan. 30. The report found that while the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) could issue fines as high as $2.3 billion for 2017 violations, the agency fined violators only $1.2 million.

“The data show that polluters routinely violate the law, but TCEQ too often lets them off the hook,” said Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger. “We need to crack down on illegal pollution and make our air safe to breathe.”

Environment Texas called on the Legislature this session to close a loophole known as “affirmative defense” that polluters have used to escape penalties.

On Jan. 8, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center responded with a letter signed by more than two dozen climate scientists and experts from Texas universities that warns of the dangerous impacts that climate change will have on Texas and offers a briefing to the governor on climate science.

“It’s time for Gov. Abbott to put politics aside, face the facts, and get to work fighting climate change,” said Emma Pabst, clean energy associate with Environment Texas Research & Policy Center. “We urge Gov. Abbott to take these scientists up on their offer, hear them out, and then take steps to reduce Texas carbon emissions.”

On the same day, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center released a new report, “Climate Solutions from Day One: 12 Ways Governors Can Lead on Climate Now,” outlining the steps the governor can take to act on climate in Texas.

More than 10,000 people pledge to skip the straw

More than 10,000 Americans said “no” to plastic straws in February.

Feb. 22 marked the third annual national Skip the Straw Day—a day created by Michigan middle school students who were fed up with plastic pollution and its impact on wildlife and planet. Environment Texas teamed up with our national network and U.S. PIRG to mark the day by asking our members to pledge to skip the straw.

“It’s powerful to see so many people enthusiastic to protect wildlife and ditch single-use-plastics,” said Steve Blackledge, senior conservation director for our national network. “The next step! Working to make every day ‘Skip the Straw Day’ by urging legislators to support bills that will reduce plastic pollution on a much larger scale.”

That’s why we’re working to ban one of the worst forms of plastic pollution, polystyrene foam cups and containers, in Texas.

Impossible? Climate scientists tell Gov. Abbott 12 ways he can make Texas a leader on climate change

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I’m glad to have you with us as we continue to find ways to harness our country’s wealth, technology and imagination to make our state and our planet greener and healthier for all of us. In these pages you’ll find some highlights of our work together so far in 2019. Thank you for making all this work possible with your action and support.

Kimball Nelson

Electric vehicles in Texas

As the top oil-producing state in America, Texas may seem like an unlikely place to advance electric vehicles (EVs). But more EVs on the road would have a profound impact on reducing air pollution, oil usage and carbon emissions in-state. Houston is home to more than 2 million people and hosts some of the worst regional air pollution.

Incentivizing these cleaner cars will provide cleaner air for our kids. The statewide EV rebate runs out this year. Renewing and extending the rebate should be a priority of our legislators moving forward.

Consumers will also need more places to recharge their batteries to make the choice to drive an electric vehicle, so our leaders in Houston and throughout Texas should continue to invest in more EV charging infrastructure.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner is leading by example by working to convert the city’s fleet to electric vehicles. Leadership from local governments creates opportunities for immediate emission reductions, supports innovative businesses, and demonstrates the potential for EVs to the public. It is up to all of us to urge our leaders to take bold action on climate.

By Luke Metzger, Executive Director, Environment Texas

Originally posted at: environmenttexas.org

In Texas, the transportation sector accounts for 34 percent of statewide carbon emissions.

Electric cars at the Houston Auto Show

By Luke Metzger, Executive Director, Environment Texas

Originally posted at: environmenttexas.org
How our cities can play a pivotal role in saving the bees

Cities can do more to reverse bee die-offs than you might think.

A study published Jan. 14 found that parks, gardens and other public lands in cities can support a rich mix of pollinator species—more so than nearby wildlife reserves, which prioritized trees over the kinds of habitats bees need. The researchers identified two main opportunities for cities to help bees: Increasing the quantity of land available for pollinators, and keeping that land free of pesticides that are harmful to bees.

“The parks, gardens and other public lands in our cities are more important for pollinators than many people think,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s conservation program. “We need to make sure we’re not using pesticides that turn these places deadly for bees.”

We’re urging our leaders across the country to plant pollinator-friendly vegetation and to follow the lead of cities such as Austin, Texas, and states such as Connecticut and Maryland by restricting the use of pesticides that harm bees.

By keeping bee-killing pesticides away from parks, gardens and other public lands, cities can help stop bee die-offs.