

VW's 'dieselgate' puts spotlight on electric cars in Germany

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German Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks recently complained the billions of euros VW could potentially face in fines "could have been used to finance an entire electric car programme"

The pollution-cheating scandal that has engulfed auto giant Volkswagen is turning up the heat on the German government to make more determined headway in its self-declared "electromobility" goals, analysts say.

The "bitter irony" of the scam that has rocked the automobile sector around the world and plunged the once-respected carmaker into a major crisis, is that the billions of euros VW could potentially face in fines "could have been used to finance an entire electric car programme," complained Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks recently.

Over the past six years, Berlin has put up 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) for research into an electric car, the minister pointed out. And her ministry is looking into a series of measures to promote the electric car, such as tax incentives and purchase subsidies.

Her colleague at the Economy Ministry, Sigmar Gabriel, has said he was ready to support financial incentives, without specifying what form they should take.

And he is in favour of introducing quotas for [electric vehicles](#) in the car fleets of public authorities, with the aim of boosting demand.

Such ideas are enthusiastically welcomed by VDIK, the association of international motor vehicle manufacturers, which is calling for a purchase discount of "at least 5,000 euros" per electric car during a still undefined "transition period."

In 2009, the German government formulated a goal to have around one million electric cars on the road by 2020. And it restated that target earlier this year.

But the goal is looking increasingly ephemeral and at the half-way point, the concrete numbers are woefully short of target, with a meagre 19,000 vehicles on the roads in Germany in September 2015.

The government's goal "is quite simply not achievable," said Stefan Bratzel, director of the Center of Automotive Research in Bergisch

Gladbach.

There was "a lot of euphoria, but no vision for a feasible economic model" for the electric car in Germany, he complained.

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