

TO: Senator Theresa Manzella, Chair, Transportation Interim Committee

FROM: Chris Dorrington, Director, DEQ 

DATE: February 27, 2024

SUBJECT: Junk Vehicle Program—Electric vehicle costs

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) would like to provide follow-up information in response to a question from Rep. Denley Loge at the January 29, 2024 meeting of the Transportation Interim Committee (TIC). Rep. Loge asked about the difference in cost to pick up an electric vehicle through a Junk Vehicle program versus the cost of picking up a conventional vehicle.

For context, DEQ manages the Motor Vehicle Recycling and Disposal Program (MVRDP), which operates from a percentage of vehicle registration fees collected from across the state. With this funding, the MVRDP provides yearly grants to counties in proportion to the number of light passenger vehicles registered in each county. Counties run “Junk Vehicle” programs with the MVRDP funding to deal with complaints regarding junk vehicles within their county and to operate a county junk vehicle “graveyard.” These yards are used to temporarily store vehicles that are turned over from private citizens. The county coordinates to haul the vehicles free of charge and store them in these yards. Once enough cars are accumulated in a yard, a contract is put out for bid to have the cars crushed and recycled. Any revenue from these crushing contracts goes back into the MVRDP.

There would be no cost difference for a junk vehicle program to pick up an electric vehicle versus an internal combustion engine vehicle. However, county junk vehicle yards are not equipped to manage electric vehicle disposal and recycling due to the specialized handling, storage and shipping procedures that must be followed to prevent injury or fire.

To help ensure the safe recycling and disposal of electric vehicles and hybrids, DEQ is developing updated guidance to all county junk vehicle programs in Montana that will reflect battery management requirements and best practices, and to ensure coordination with the private sector, as appropriate, in the disposal of these vehicles. DEQ plans to share the guidance in the coming months and can provide that information to the TIC.

High-volume battery recycling businesses and after-market applications for used batteries also are emerging, however there are currently no facilities in Montana that can recycle batteries from electric vehicles. At this time all battery components from electric vehicles and other sources (e.g., cell phones, laptops, etc.) must be shipped out of state to processing facilities that can handle this waste stream.

Please let us know if you have questions or would like additional information.