

# Electric cars and the coal that runs them

By Michael Birnbaum, Washington Post

ROTTERDAM – In this traffic-packed Dutch city, electric cars jostle for space at charging stations. The oldest exhaust-spewing vehicles will soon be banned from the city center. Thanks to generous tax incentives, the share of electric vehicles has grown faster in the Netherlands than in nearly any other country in the world.

But behind the green growth is a filthy secret: In a nation famous for its windmills, electricity is coming from a far dirtier source. Three new coal-fired power plants, including two here on the Rotterdam harbor, are supplying much of the power to fuel the Netherlands' electric-car boom.

As the world tries to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and combat climate change, policymakers have pinned hopes on electric cars, whose range and convenience are quickly improving. Alongside the boom has come a surging demand for power to charge the vehicles, which can consume as much electricity in a single charge as the average refrigerator does in a month and a half.

The global shift to electric cars has a clear climate benefit in regions that get most of their power from clean sources, such as California or Norway. But in areas supplied by dirtier power, like China, India and even the Netherlands, which is on track to miss ambitious emissions targets set for 2020, the electric-car jump has slimmer payoffs. In some cases, it could even worsen the overall climate impact of driving, experts say.

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