



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:
Examining the Risk: The Dangers of EV Fires for First Responders

February 29, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Obernolte and Ranking Member Foushee, for leading this hearing today. Electric vehicles make up an increasing share of the cars on the road. This is great news –reducing emissions from the transportation sector is crucial in our fight against climate change. And as with any emerging technology, we need to make sure we understand and adapt to the unique challenges that arise from its widespread adoption. This does not mean EVs are any more dangerous than gas-powered vehicles – we simply don't have data to suggest that. But the data and research on EVs must increase along with the market for them. Over many decades, we've developed best practices to extinguish internal combustion engine fires as safely and quickly as possible. Now, we need to give that level of attention and support to research into electric vehicles, and specifically into the lithium-ion batteries that power them.

A 2020 safety report published by the National Transportation Safety Board noted that fires arising from the lithium-ion batteries in electric vehicles can “present special challenges” for firefighters and first responders, along with “risks that differ” from the risks presented by fires in traditional vehicles. In the years since that report was published, EV sales have ballooned, from 300,000 in 2020 to 1.3 million in 2023. However, the data available on EV fires hasn't increased proportionally. Fire departments across the country – many staffed by volunteers – lack the resources to track the EV fires they extinguish. The data that is available doesn't indicate EVs are any more dangerous than internal combustion engines, but as we know on the Science Committee, we can't meaningfully address new risks without the data to underpin our research questions.

I'm happy to join my colleagues in welcoming our witnesses today, who will help us understand these questions from two important angles. As electric vehicles become increasingly popular, practical, and affordable, their lithium-ion batteries must evolve to improve the safety of riders and first responders. We need to support research into safety mechanisms that can be incorporated into the battery itself, so re-ignition is less of a risk. We need to develop technology that provides insight into the health of lithium-ion batteries, to detect damaged batteries after a crash and keep them off the road and out of waste facilities before they ignite.

In the meantime, we need to ensure that first responders are prepared to address the risks present when current-generation lithium-ion batteries catch fire.

Is the personal protective equipment used by firefighters still safe after it's been exposed to battery fumes? How can we ensure our first responders have easy access to safety information that differs

from manufacturer to manufacturer? So long as we lack industry-wide standards and science to anchor them, responses to EV fires will be hampered, placing first responders and consumers at risk.

I look forward to hearing expert perspectives on how the Science Committee can help to close the research gaps related to EV fires. Support of a zero-emissions future requires a clear-eyed look at the new challenges introduced by emerging clean technologies. Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.