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EEA report: electric cars better for climate and air

The EEA report “Electric vehicles from life cycle and circular economy perspectives” reviews current evidence on electric cars’ impacts on climate change, air quality, noise and ecosystems, compared with conventional cars. It confirms that the greenhouse gas emissions of electric vehicles, with the current EU energy mix and over the entire vehicle life cycle, are about 17-30 % lower than the emissions of petrol and diesel cars. As the carbon intensity of the EU energy mix is projected to decrease, the life-cycle emissions of a typical electric vehicle could be cut by at least 73 % by 2050.

For local air quality, electric vehicles also offer clear benefits. However, even electric vehicles emit particulate matter from road, tyre and break wear. Shifting to electric vehicles could also reduce noise pollution, especially in cities where speeds are generally low and traffic often stands still.

The result of the comparison is less favorable for electric cars when looking at the current impacts of their production on ecosystems and the toxicity of the materials involved. These impacts are mostly due to the extraction and processing of copper, nickel and critical raw materials. The report suggests that these impacts could be minimized through a circular economy approach.

The EEA has also published a new briefing on the environmental and climate impacts of transport. According to the briefing, the sector’s greenhouse gas emissions have been increasing in the EU since 2014. Preliminary estimates for 2017 put EU transport emissions at 28 % above the 1990 levels, indicating that the sector is currently not on track to meet its long-term climate goals. Transport also continues to be a significant source of air pollution, especially of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide, and the main source of environmental noise in Europe.

Source: EEA <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/eea-report-confirms-electric-cars>