



SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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South Coast AQMD Grants Cal State LA \$150,000 for Advanced Battery Competition *Supporting the Next Generation of Engineers and Clean Energy Leaders*

DIAMOND BAR – On December 6th, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) Governing Board approved a \$150,000 sponsorship to California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA) in partnership with Cerritos College to support their efforts in the Battery Workforce Challenge (BWC)—a national program to train future electric vehicle (EV) battery engineers and technicians. Both colleges are the only competitors selected from the South Coast Air Basin.

Presented by the U.S. Department of Energy and Stellantis and managed by Argonne National Laboratory, the BWC is a three-year collegiate competition where teams design, build, test, and integrate advanced EV battery pack for a Stellantis Ram ProMaster electric vehicle. Students gain hands-on experience in cutting-edge battery technology, preparing them for careers in the clean energy sector. Teams must also follow industry milestones focused on battery design, simulation, control development, testing, vehicle integration, and demonstration.

“This program is more than a competition, it’s a launchpad for future engineers and innovators,” said Wayne Nastri, South Coast AQMD’s Executive Officer. “This program aligns perfectly with our vision of a cleaner, more sustainable future.”

The design and development of advanced batteries form a key component to electrify the transportation sector. The deployment of EVs within the South Coast region will create a demand for a domestic EV battery workforce. Engineering a battery pack is challenging and takes years and requires variety of skill sets. Students participating in this competition will be educated and trained to become skilled engineers advancing battery technology.

Cal State LA is one of 12 universities from North America selected for the challenge that has assembled the [Charging Eagles](#), a team of 66 engineering students. During the first year, the team designed an 62-kWh battery pack to meet rigorous performance and safety standards. In years two and three, they’ll test and integrate the battery pack into the Ram ProMaster and compete against other schools on key performance measures.

“This generous award from South Coast AQMD is a transformative opportunity for our team, allowing us to hire additional student researchers, purchase critical components for the competition, and cover travel expenses so more students can participate,” said Isabel Builes, Cal State LA Student Project Manager. “With this support, we can dedicate more time to advancing our project and enhancing students’ hands-on experience in sustainable battery technology.”

“We are confident that our mission to train the next generation of vehicle electrification engineers aligns perfectly with the South Coast AQMD’s goal of enabling clean transportation projects with a qualified workforce,” said Dr. David Blekman, Cal State LA’s Technical Director of the Hydrogen Research and Fueling Facility and the Charging Eagles team’s co-advisor. “This effort builds on the support previously extended to the EcoCAR3 project from 2014-2018, which was also honored by the South Coast AQMD with the 30th Annual Clean Air Awards.”

South Coast AQMD’s sponsorship will fund critical hardware, software, and travel expenses, helping the team excel in this competition. It also supports Cal State LA’s efforts to develop a diverse, skilled workforce ready to meet the growing demand for clean energy solutions.

South Coast AQMD’s sponsorship establishes a public-private partnership to help support the workforce demand for a domestic electric vehicle battery design and development. The team at Cal State LA has secured over \$500,000 in funding from competition sponsors, including the Sikand Center for Sustainable and Intelligent Infrastructure (Sikand SITI Center) and its faculty in the College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology (ECST).

South Coast AQMD is the regulatory agency responsible for improving air quality for large areas of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, including the Coachella Valley. For news, air quality alerts, event updates and more, please visit us at www.aqmd.gov, download our award-winning app, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [X](#) (formerly known as Twitter) and [Instagram](#).

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