

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5812

As Passed Senate, February 6, 2024

Title: An act relating to responding to electric vehicle fires.

Brief Description: Concerning the response to electric vehicle fires.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, J., Nguyen, Lovick and McCune).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/18/24, 1/25/24 [DPS].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 2/6/24, 49-0.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Directs the Washington State Patrol to conduct a study of electric vehicle fires with a reporting date of January 1, 2025.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5812 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Lias, Chair; Lovick, Vice Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; King, Ranking Member; Cleveland, Fortunato, Hansen, Hawkins, Kauffman, Lovelett, MacEwen, Nobles, Padden, Valdez, Wilson, C. and Wilson, J..

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: In 2021 the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) completed an investigation of three electric vehicle crashes resulting in post-crash fires and one non-crash fire involving an electric vehicle. The NTSB also examined national and international standards established to maximize the safety of electric vehicles. The NTSB also reviewed

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emergency guidance documents supplied by vehicle manufacturers to mitigate the safety risks to first and second responders who deal with electric vehicle crashes and high-voltage lithium-ion battery fires.

The NTSB report identifies the following safety issues:

- inadequacy of vehicle manufacturers' emergency response guides for minimizing the risks to first and second responders posed by high-voltage lithium-ion battery fires in electric vehicles; and
- gaps in safety standards and research related to high-voltage lithium-ion batteries involved in high-speed, high-severity crashes.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: The Washington State Patrol (WSP), in consultation with the Department of Ecology, a representative of the towing and recovery industry, and local fire protection districts, must conduct a study of electric vehicle fires reviewing the following:

- impacts to the environment and proximate residential areas and health impacts to responding firefighters;
- best practices for fire response; and
- best practices regarding cleanup and disposal efforts.

By January 1, 2025, WSP must report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature their study findings and any resulting recommendations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute: PRO: Electric vehicle fires are rare, but they are different than gasoline powered vehicle fires. The state doesn't have best practices in place in how to deal with the fires and the aftermath. This study will allow us to comprehensively look at the impacts of electrical vehicle fires for 1st and 2nd responders as well as the towers. It will also allow an assessment of the types of new or additional equipment that might be needed to deal with electric vehicle fire response and related activities. The toxic issues and intense heat are both a public safety and public health challenge. We don't have a good playbook for fighting these types of fires and dealing with what is needed after the fire is put out, and training is required. The study will allow us to develop a training framework informed by the best national sources and other information. The number of electric vehicle fires is increasing due to the greater electric vehicle use and this study will allow us to get ahead of this. The funding of the study should be increased to \$400,000 to \$480,000.

OTHER: This study will allow us to make an assessment of the types of new or additional equipment that might be needed to deal with electric vehicle fire response and related activities, including that for towers. This will also include a review of the needed personal protective gear for the towers in dealing with these vehicles. After the fire is out, the tow truck driver is left to handle the aftermath and this will allow us to examine what is needed in those circumstances and dealing with the toxic issues.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jeff Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Dave Tait, Bellevue Fire Chief; Karen Grove, WA State Association of Fire Marshals; Harold Scoggins, WA Metro Fire Chiefs - Seattle Fire Chief.

OTHER: Peter Lukevich, Towing and Recovery Association of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.