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## Man protests Ford's plan to destroy his electric truck

By Thuy-Doan Le -- Bee Staff Writer

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David Bernikoff-Raboy's license plate says "PLUGINGO." He wants to keep plugging in his electric-powered Ford Ranger pickup truck, but Ford Motor Co. says it's a no-go.

It's the end of his lease and the company wants the vehicle back to scrap it.

Bernikoff-Raboy, who uses the truck for commuting and hauling supplies to his Catheys Valley ranch in Mariposa County, said he does not want to give up his zero-emissions truck, which uses no oil or gasoline.

"It's a travesty for Ford to want to crush a perfectly working vehicle," he said.

So, for the past few days, Bernikoff-Raboy can be found camping out at the Downtown Ford dealership on 16th Street in Sacramento.

With the help of the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network and Global Exchange, a human rights group, Bernikoff-Raboy and a handful of supporters have been staging a protest at the site to force Ford Motor to allow these vehicles to be purchased rather than turned into scrap.

Although none of the electric vehicles was purchased or leased from the Sacramento Ford dealership, the site was chosen for its visibility, said Sarah Connolly, zero emissions campaigner with the Rainforest Action Network.

Solar panels are providing energy to the small group's clutch of supplies, including a laptop, television, a crockpot and cell phones. The around-the-clock protest began Friday.

Ray Enos, owner of Downtown Ford, had no comment on Monday. Because of the

federal holiday, a Ford spokesperson could not be reached.

"I think we've moved on from electric vehicles and our focus is more on hybrids," Ford spokesman Oscar Suris told the Associated Press last week. "Just look at the customer reaction. They're much more popular than the electric vehicle."

Bernikoff-Raboy said Ford regularly discontinues certain models, but most are not slated for destruction, as are the electric vehicles.

"Why can't they sell the vehicle to me?" he said.

Although Bernikoff-Raboy's lease with the company ended in April 2004, he has continued paying \$490 a month for the Ford.

Last January, a Ford credit company sent a letter to Bernikoff-Raboy, a software developer/rancher, stating that he could "make arrangements to purchase the leased vehicle."

He wrote back to say he would like to purchase the vehicle but was sent a letter in November by Ford Credit Commercial Lending stating there was no possibility for the company to extend the lease or for him to buy the truck.

"The EV Ranger has been discontinued and Ford Credit recommends you consider the Ford Escape Hybrid as an alternative," the Nov. 18 letter said. It also said that if Bernikoff-Raboy did not return the truck, the company "may repossess the vehicle."

"I was extremely angry because I felt that they had lied to me," said Bernikoff-Raboy.

At the protest location Monday, Carlton Fode and Rita Reis of Elk Grove stopped by to visit and peek under the hood of Bernikoff-Raboy's truck.

Reis said that when she first read in an environmental newsletter that Ford was destroying fuel-efficient vehicles, she wondered why.

"Obviously, we need more economically healthy vehicles," she said.

Another Ford Ranger, leased by William Korthof, 26, of Pomona, also is parked at the protest site.

Korthof, who owns a solar installation company in Southern California, said he would be back in Sacramento this week to continue the effort.

His three-year lease ended in December 2003 and, like Bernikoff-Raboy, he continued to make payments. He said he was threatened with repossession, but the company continued to take his payments. Finally, he was offered a refund of \$3,400, roughly the amount he paid past his lease, but Korthof refused. He simply wants to keep the truck and buy it from Ford.

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