

Ford to open electric car patents to competitors

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(Photo: Wieck)

Ford Motor Co., following a similar move by Tesla Motors Inc. last year, said Thursday it will open its electric vehicle patents to competitors to help accelerate the development of those types of cars.

Among the hundreds of patents now available to any interested automakers include technology on electric vehicle braking systems and battery charging. Ford also said Thursday it will hire 200 electrified vehicle engineers this year, and that the team would move into a newly dedicated Ford Engineering Laboratories facility in Dearborn.

“The way to provide the best technology is through constant development and progress,” Kevin Layden, director of Ford’s electrification programs, said in a statement. “By sharing our research with other companies, we will accelerate the growth of electrified vehicle technology and deliver even better products to customers.”

In total, Ford has more than 650 electrified vehicle patents and approximately 1,000 pending patent applications on electrified vehicle technologies, the automaker said. Last year, Ford filed more than 400 patents dedicated to electrified vehicle technologies, accounting for more than 20 percent of the total patents Ford filed in 2014.

Ford offers six hybrid or fully electrified vehicles: The Ford Focus Electric; Ford Fusion Hybrid; Ford Fusion Energi plug-in hybrid; Ford C-MAX Hybrid; Ford C-MAX Energi plug-in hybrid; and Lincoln MKZ Hybrid.

Ford said interested parties can access the patents for a fee through AutoHarvest, a Detroit-based nonprofit that connects manufacturing-related inventors with investors, partners and advisers.

Last June, Tesla’s CEO Elon Musk opened Tesla’s patents to help expand the adoption of electric vehicles.

In a blog post, Musk said, “If we clear a path to the creation of compelling electric vehicles, but then lay intellectual property landmines behind us to inhibit others, we are acting in a manner contrary to that goal.”

At the time, Ford didn’t comment directly on whether or not it had made inquiries into Tesla’s technology, but said it was open to working with other automakers.

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