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Will unlicensed EV chargers be shut down?

BY ARIS RIZA NOOR BAHARIN

When news of an electric vehicle (EV) catching fire at an unlicensed charging station in Johor Bahru broke in mid-January, questions were raised as to whether unlicensed EV public chargers should be shut down.

The problem is that most public EV chargers in Malaysia are still unlicensed, and the Energy Commission's (ST) deadline for charging points to be licensed by March 2023 has come and gone.

According to the ST's website (as at Feb 2), only 223 charging points are licensed. This is out of the 2,020 public EV charging stations currently available, based on the Malaysia EV Charging Network dashboard.

According to news reports, the ST cited inaccurate data and incomplete submissions as some of the challenges leading to the delay. An additional requirement was included in December last year, which further lengthened the time needed for charge point operators (CPO) to comply.

From the CPOs' perspective, the application time is long and the preparation of documents is time-consuming. Clearly, more communication and collaboration are needed to ensure that the public EV charging points in Malaysia are safe for use.

"[The] EV charger [uses] high-power electrical equipment, so the design and installation of the electric circuit needs to comply with proper standards," says Lee Yuen How, managing director of

EV Connection Sdn Bhd, a CPO and owner of the JomCharge EV Charging Network.

Correct electrical wiring and protection devices are needed at charging stations to prevent the risk of fire due to overload or electric shock. These are some of the requirements in the ST's EV Charging System (EVCS) licence application.

"We have seen cases where the EV users engaged a non-competent installer that used the wrong wire gauge," says Lee, noting that such malpractice has led to burning of cables and tripping of the power supply at a customer's premises.

Other safety requirements include isolation switches, fire safety blankets and fire extinguishers at all charging sites.

The new requirement by the ST in December was for each charging point to have its own Tenaga Nasional Bhd electricity meter to ensure that the right amount of power is going through it. This meant that many of the CPOs have to reapply for the EVCS licence.

Chua Seng Teong, managing director of chargeEV — a brand under Yinson GreenTech — shares how his team is now going through their 400 charging points across Malaysia to meet this new requirement. It is a time-consuming task



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as the team of engineers must install a meter at each site, which are in different states.

This adds to the backlog of applications. Lee says the entire licensing process takes around three to four months.

Fortunately, the ST has given a two-year grace period for existing EV chargers to continue operating while they comply with the new requirements, according to Lee.

ESG has reached out to the ST to confirm this information, but it had not replied by press time.

CHALLENGES AND ROADBLOCKS

As more regulations are put in place to ensure the safety of EV users, CPOs face mounting challenges to operate legally.

Chua says the process to apply for a licence is not particularly difficult, but it is time-consuming. Lee and Jason Wong, director of JusEV Charging Network Sdn Bhd, another CPO agree.

Lee explains that seven sets of documents are required for the application process. "Based on our experience, the time required for review and approval of the documents submitted can be quite lengthy, which could take up to three months."

The three months do not include the processing time it takes for the ST to approve the licence, which used to take about 60 days.

"What's really challenging for us is that there is no centralisation [of the process], so it's really like a full-time job of running around, shuffling papers," says Chua, adding that a more streamlined process is needed. "If you want to meet the goal of having 10,000 [EV charging points] that the minister has said, then all this backlog [will be] a challenge."

One of the challenges CPOs face in getting the right documentation is with the site plan, which is a map of the area where the CPO wants to install the charging station. For example, this could be a detailed map of a parking lot in a mall or condominium.

"Quite frequently [with older buildings], the site owner doesn't have a proper site plan or the document is not updated, so the site plan needs to be drafted from scratch," says Lee.

Another challenge is the cost of licensing. Many CPOs are start-ups that might not have enough resources. Chua observes that it takes years before CPOs can enjoy significant profits. With the new requirement to install a meter for each charging point, the cost of licensing goes up.

WORKING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

The good news is that all the interviewees expressed their appreciation of the ST for its transparency and openness to work with CPOs. They say the ST holds regular meetings with all the parties involved.

For example, Wong says there was a meeting in January when the ST reduced the levels of authority required for licence approval and reduced the number of days to receive approval from 60 days to 30 days. The ST also engaged with Tenaga to iron out issues related to the meter application.

Another important party in this conversation is the site owner, with whom Lee hopes to raise more awareness. "Some building owners do not understand [how charging points work]. They think that by tapping at [any power socket], we are able to do it. They don't understand that we need to have a certain supply capacity."

If these site owners are educated, they would be able to prepare the necessary documents and the process of licensing could speed up significantly.

In the future, Lee hopes to see licensing applications moving towards self-declaration and self-regulation, where official documents are still submitted to the authorities, but CPOs have their own professional engineers to ensure that their charging points follow the ST's requirements. ■

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CHARGEV

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Top left: Chart on the different types of EV charging points and which one is eligible to apply for a licence

Bottom left: A pair of licensed EV Connection Sdn Bhd charging points at X Park Sunway Serene