

Cars and Global Warming: Stalled on Pollution

Autos are a Major Source of Global Pollution

Automobiles (cars and light trucks) emit 20 percent of the United State's global warming pollution. Because the U.S. is world's largest global warming polluter, U.S. automobiles account for a significant chunk of the world's heat-trapping pollution — about 5 percent.

Autos are Becoming More Pollutive

Each year, more hybrid cars are manufactured, engineering develops, and gas prices continue to rise. *Yet, the surprising fact is that each year since 1988, new car models have become even more pollutive than the models that came before them.*

In fact, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from U.S. cars and light trucks jumped 25 percent from 1990 to 2003. Both total emissions and average emissions per vehicle continue to rise, even over the last five years.

Auto Makers Block Progress on Emissions

In February 2005, large automakers successfully sued the state of California and prevented implementation of the state's clean cars law.

To a large extent, the lobbying efforts of automakers in recent decades have prevented improvements in cutting overall emissions from the auto sector.

In addition to circumventing current emissions laws, automakers now classify nearly all of their new and trendy designs as light trucks, a strategy to avoid higher fuel efficiency standards. Since 1988, the market share of light trucks has climbed from 30 percent to a 51 percent. Light trucks on average emit 39 percent more carbon per mile than passenger cars in 2003.

Automakers are also increasing marketing of super-autos (such as the three-quarter and one-ton pickups and a growing number of the largest SUVs, such as the Hummer H2 and the Ford Excursion) and the public is responding. The sale of heavier vehicles—which are not tracked as stringently by federal agencies and which are allowed to emit higher carbon burdens—is increasing.

The Big Six Automakers

#1 GENERAL MOTORS

General Motors and Ford have the **biggest carbon burden among automakers**. GM's vehicles sold in 2003 emit 6.4 million tons of carbon annually, and its carbon pollution rate was 6.3% higher than in 1990.

#2 FORD

Ford's performance was second worst, with its average CO₂ emissions rate rising 7.7% since 1990, reaching a carbon burden of 5 million tons. (**Ford would have to sell over 650,000 cars like the Escape Hybrid** just to compensate for the increase in the company's new fleet-average CO₂ emissions rate.)

#3 DAIMLERCHRYSLER

DaimlerChrysler's CO₂ emissions rate went up by 6.8 percent over the same period, reaching a carbon burden of 3 million tons in 2003. **Trucks comprised 74%** of DaimlerChrysler's model year 2003 light vehicle sales.

#4 TOYOTA

Even as it pioneered hybrid-electric cars, Toyota's product strategies were still damaging overall, with its new fleet-average CO₂ emissions rates rising 2.9% over the period, reaching a carbon burden of 2.3 million tons in 2003. (To compensate for its 2.9% increase in fleet-average CO₂ emissions rate, **Toyota would have to sell 150,000 hybrids** — 8% of its sales.)

#5 HONDA

Despite its fleet of hybrid-electric cars, **Honda's** 2003 new fleet-average CO₂ emissions rates rose 5.7% from its 1990 level — driven by its growing truck share of the market — even though its emissions rate is still the lowest among the Big Six. Honda's carbon burden reached 1.7 million tons in 2003. (To compensate for its increased CO₂ emissions rate, **Honda would have to sell over 300,000 hybrids** — 22% of its 2003 sales.)

#6 NISSAN

Nissan's new fleet-average CO₂ emissions rates rose 8.4% between 1990 and 2003 — **the biggest increase among the "Big Six."** In 2003, its carbon burden reached 1 million tons.



Signs of Hope

- Many auto firms that denied global warming now profess a desire to help solve the problem. In 1998, major automakers made voluntary agreements with the European Union to cut their fleet-average CO2 emissions rates.
- The World Business Council for Sustainable Development's Mobility 2030 report was endorsed by the Big Six automakers of the U.S. market. The report recommended a goal of limiting emissions to sustainable levels.
- Automakers have started reporting CO2 emissions from their factory operations and the emissions rates of their fleets.
- Automakers now also regularly publicize new technologies and other activities promising emissions reductions.

We must . . . encourage and support the “ecological conversion” which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator’s “steward”, but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss.

Pope John Paul II, speech on Jan. 17, 2001

Reflection Questions

1. Consider the quote above. In what way do humans act as “autonomous despots” toward the environment? In what ways does the auto industry act in this way?
2. Reflect on the Catholic Social Teaching concept of stewardship. How might practice of stewardship of creation change the way we, and industry leaders, act?
3. How can you work to change attitudes and behaviors by these “autonomous despot” to attitudes and behaviors of “stewardship”?

A Prayer for Sustainability

As we breathe
 the very air which sustains us,
 We remember your love, God,
 which compels us.
 Fill us with
 the spirit to seek understanding.
 Empty us of
 apathy, selfishness and fear.
 Fill us with
 compassion and generosity.
 Empty us of
 all pessimism and hesitation.
 Breathe into us
 solidarity with all who suffer
 and the future generations who will suffer
 because of our current environmental irresponsibility.
 Breathe us into action
 building your sustainable Kingdom.
 Amen.



Encourage Automakers to Aim for Greater Fuel Efficiency

At the Environmental Defense Fund website (go to: http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/carbon_burden_cars?), you can electronically ask major automakers to support policies that reduce global warming pollution and to work toward greater fuel efficiency in the vehicles they produce.

Or, use the addresses below to send the letter on the following page to ask important auto companies to make their policies and vehicle development more environmentally sustainable.

**Mr. Richard Wagoner Jr, CEO,
General Motors
300 Renaissance Center
P.O. Box 300
Detroit, MI 48265-3000**

**Mr. Yokitoshi Funo, CEO,
Toyota USA
9 W. 57th St.
Suite 4900
New York, NY 10019**

**Mr. Bill Clay Ford, CEO,
Ford Motor Company
One American Rd.
P.O. Box 1899
Dearborn, MI 48126**

**Mr. Dieter Zetsche, CEO,
DaimlerChrysler
1000 Chrysler Drive
Auburn Hills, MI 48326-2766**

**Mr. James O'Sullivan, CEO,
Mazda North America
P.O. Box 19734
Irvine, CA 92623-9734**

**Mr. Dan Booth, CFO,
Mitsubishi Motors
6400 Katella Ave.
Cypress, CA 90630-0064**

**Mr. Peter Schwarzenbauer, CEO,
Porsche North America
980 Hammond Drive
Suite 1000
Atlanta, GA 30328**

**Mr. Tom Purves, CEO,
BMW North America
300 Chestnut Ridge Rd.
Woodcliff Lake, NJ 07677**

**Mr. Gerd Klauss, CEO,
Volkswagen North America
3800 Hamlin Rd.
Auburn Hills, MI 48326**

**Mr. Koichi Kondo, CEO,
American Honda Motor Company
2573 Rosebud
Redding, CA 96002**



Sample Letter to Automakers

Use the letter below or a letter of your own with the addresses on the previous page to help automakers become better stewards of the earth.

Dear Sir,

I am very concerned about the growing damage to the environment caused by global warming. Unfortunately, the pollution that your auto products add to the atmosphere is increasing each year and increasing global warming, despite the development of new technology and high gas prices.

I agree wholeheartedly with the U.S. Catholic Bishops who, in 2001, called for reduced automobile emissions and stated: "Affluent nations such as our own have to acknowledge the impact of voracious consumerism."

I ask you to stop blocking state and national efforts to control global warming through limiting the pollution that causes it, and to support a national cap on greenhouse gases. My Catholic values call me to be a "steward of the earth", not a voracious consumer, and I encourage you to take on the role of steward as well.

Thank you.

