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Subject OPL Update: Canada.com: "States, provinces lead the way"



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States, provinces lead the way

The Gazette

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There was a fine one-two punch in the fight to curb greenhouse gas emissions last week. Wednesday Quebec said it will adopt California's stringent auto-emission control standards, and Thursday California itself scored a major victory when a U.S. court upheld its right to impose such controls.

Americans and Canadians, among the top 10 emitters of greenhouse gases in the world, can take some comfort in knowing that state and provincial governments are taking long overdue steps to cut back on emissions. They could ... but for the fact that in both countries the federal governments are fighting these progressive steps, and apparently for the worst of reasons: Pressure from the auto industry.

It's bad enough that the automakers seem unwilling to face up to the dangers of climate change; how much worse if governments are not putting the health and safety of the people they represent before business interests.

In Bali, Quebec Environment Minister Line Beauchamp announced that the province's cabinet has authorized publication of a draft regulation that sets standards for greenhouse gas emissions for light vehicles.

Beauchamp said cutting back auto emissions is part of a six-year strategy to reduce emissions in the province by 14.6 megatonnes by 2012. This change for light vehicles could lead to a drop of 1.7 megatonnes of emissions by 2012. If such controls were imposed Canada-wide, it is estimated the savings in reduced fuel consumption would amount to \$37 billion over the next decade. Beauchamp has reassured Quebec consumers that the new standards will not lead to more expensive vehicles. Quebec environment officials have put the additional cost at \$20 a car, or less.

This week's court victory for California means that the state has the legal authority to impose mileage standards related to greenhouse gas emissions on cars and trucks. The state wants a 30-per-cent reduction in emissions by 2016. This is to be achieved by requiring cars and trucks to have a fuel-economy average of 35 miles per gallon (15 kilometres per litre) by 2020.

Under U.S. law, California requires a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to allow it to enforce such a regulation. In April, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the EPA can, in fact, issue such waivers. The court held that greenhouse gas emissions are pollution and therefore come under the U.S. Clean Air Act.

The Bush administration, however, continues to argue that only the U.S. Transportation Department has the responsibility of setting tailpipe emissions limits. In Canada, the Harper government is following the Bush White House lead, saying it would harmonize emissions standards with the U.S., not California.

In an ideal world, federal governments in Canada and the U.S. would seize on the California initiative as the right way forward. The cost to the consumer verges on negligible. The benefit to the environment huge. On this issue, unfortunately, we fall far short of the ideal.

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