

Our view: Good for California, not necessarily for Minnesota

Cleaner-running cars, trucks and SUVs mean cleaner air, less global warming, and a few bucks saved at the gas pump.

By: **News Tribune** , Duluth News Tribune



Photo by Bob King / bking@duluthnews.com

Cleaner-running cars, trucks and SUVs mean cleaner air, less global warming, and a few bucks saved at the gas pump.

Hard to argue with that.

But that cheer that went up last week was another matter. It came from environmentalists and others eager for Minnesota to pass legislation requiring cleaner car exhaust. They were thrilled by President Obama's announcement allowing individual states to

regulate the waste that spews from tailpipes.

During his campaign, Obama said he wanted to reduce dependence on foreign oil and wanted the U.S. to be a global leader in the war on warming. If those still are goals of his administration, toughening federal emissions standards for all states, rather than approving standards one-by-one and state-by-state, would have seemed a more logical route.

Especially since most states have been hesitant to embrace standards. Only 14 have. The other 72 percent are like Minnesota, which last year rejected requirements developed in California. The same proposal is back in St. Paul this session, calling for a timeline more aggressive than the fed's.

And perhaps too aggressive for Minnesota.

California is a state that sells more cars than trucks. Minnesotans drive more trucks and SUVs, often out of necessity. How many days this snowy winter has it been difficult, if not impossible, to climb Duluth's steep hillsides without a 4-by-4?

If emissions requirements go into effect at California speed, fewer big vehicles could be available at affordable prices. Manufacturers could be forced to ramp down production while supply-and-demand would jack up prices.

California developed its aggressive emissions standards because it was being choked by urban smog and widespread air-quality issues. Such problems aren't as severe across the Upper Midwest. States in the Heartland have to wonder whether it makes sense to take on West Coast standards.

Minnesota's ethanol industry, after investing hundreds of millions of dollars, has wondered. That's because California has done little to encourage flex-fuel vehicles or the use of biodiesel.

If the goal in all of this is to encourage Detroit to produce more environmentally friendly vehicles, consumer demand can prove far more effective than any emissions standard.

And it already is.

This month's North American International Auto Show in Detroit featured an unprecedented number of fuel-efficient models.

As Monique Sullivan of Environment Minnesota observed in an article at MinnPost.com, "The Big [Three] seem to be realizing that the vehicles Americans want to buy are the clean vehicles. ...Some of the strongest growth in auto-industry numbers over the past several years has been in clean cars and trucks."

Just as it should be — in Minnesota or California.