

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Report raises the stink on gassy cars

BY KIP KEEN

Cars, trucks, jets...just what is the price of gas? Harmful nitrous oxides, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and carbon dioxide result from the combustion of Texas gold — oil that is. Spewing from car exhaust pipes, these gases tax both the health of humans and the environment. Nitrous oxides and VOCs do so by creating ground level ozone, which leads to respiratory diseases, while carbon dioxide makes up 99 percent of the greenhouse gases emitted from transportation.

Environment and Transport

Canada broached the issue of cars, trucks and jets, in a study entitled "Sustainable Transportation." It stresses the importance of being aware of transportation emissions, as they are "responsible for up to 20 percent of the emissions from human activities that are resulting in climate change." They also reiterate Natural Resource Department figures on nitrous oxide emissions caused by vehicles, as being close to 60 percent of the total output, and say that "present transportation trends and practices are a major barrier to sustainability."

According to the study more than 800 million cars are on the road

worldwide. This figure is expected to skyrocket as developing countries, especially those nations in the Asia-Pacific region, progress economically.

On the issue of past growth they state that, between 1980 and 1993, carbon dioxide emissions from cars increased by 30 percent in non-Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Although in Canada they only increased by two percent, they remark that this is largely due to lower emission levels during the eighties. In fact, fuel consumption in Canada went up 12 percent in the four years prior to 1995.

Over the next 30 years they expect that the weight of oil used by "heavy duty" vehicles in OECD countries will double, reaching 350 million megatons, and triple to around 600 million megatons in non-OECD member countries. And although in OECD countries they predict no increase in the amount of oil consumed by "light" vehicles

because of better fuel efficiency; such consumption will more than double in non-OECD countries to 600 million megatons by 2030.

They also say that "personal and corporate commitments are required if sustainability is to be achieved in transportation and other activities", partially due to Canada's decentralized system governing the transportation sector. This unfortunately makes nationwide policy decisions difficult to pursue, and according to the report most previous improvements in air quality "have been secured more through the use of regulatory instruments rather than economic ones," such as was the case when unleaded gasoline was introduced.

Just as Natural Resources Canada stated in its Energy Outlook 2000 that the stabilization of emissions would require "major structural and lifestyle changes," this report also states that the solving of emission problems, "notably those concerning carbon dioxide," would "require substantial reductions in

transport activity."

However, current air pollution talks between Canada and the U.S do not include carbon dioxide on the agenda.

The study concludes that the "the Government of Canada believes that sustainable transportation is not only possible, but is absolutely essential, and is committed to its attainment." It also claims to support "the Sustainable Transportation Principles discussed at the Vancouver OECD conference in March 1996." These principles include a long list of suggested solutions including; moving away from fossil fuels, investing in technical innovations, nurturing a "partnership with developing countries," expanding Public Transportation Systems, limiting urban sprawl, giving incentives to cleaner technologies, providing easier access for bicyclers and pedestrians. There is even mention of an initiative to "reduce demand [for automobile trips] by moving origins and destinations closer together."

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ASK

GREEN GIRL

Dear Greengirl,

I am interested in learning more about the planets and the stars. Can you help me?

Well dear reader, your timing couldn't be more perfect. There is one show left in the planetarium at the Dunn building next Tuesday evening and it's free! In a canvas dome tent astronomy professor Walter Zukauskas takes you on an intimate trip, with music reminiscence of Star Wars, through the galaxy. Using one of the oldest planetarium projectors in existence, Zukauskas enthusiastically discusses the different kinds of constellations and explains their significance. "It's stuff that you can see with your own eyes," he says about the show, "if you go into your backyard you can see these stars yourself."

While some stars patterns seem to stretch three stars into a drawing as elaborate as the Last Supper, they do serve the purpose of locating them in the sky and perhaps if you use your imagination you too can see Orion sipping on a coke. Learning more about our solar system makes us more aware of how precious our planet is and how lucky we are to be on it. Good luck catching the show.



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— ITP LABS, D'AVRAY HALL, UNB, FREDERICTON.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2000 7:00 PM

— HILTON HOTEL, DOWNTOWN SAINT JOHN.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2000 7:00 PM

— ITP LABS, D'AVRAY HALL, UNB, FREDERICTON.

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