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The Oregon Clean Cars Program: Bringing global warming solutions, clean air, and energy independence to Southern Oregon

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Summary

Southern Oregon's roads are seeing more traffic every year. Between 1991 and 2003, the number of vehicle-miles traveled on Southern Oregon's roads increased nearly 14%. In Josephine County, traffic increased nearly 24%. Unfortunately, more cars on the roads also means more global warming pollution that threatens precious Oregon resources. Scientists have already measured a 50% decline in snowpack in the Cascades and if no action is taken, global warming pollution from cars and trucks will be 30% higher than 1990 levels by 2020. More cars also means more air pollution, bad news for the Rogue Valley and its long-running struggle with air quality problems. More cars also means more money spent at the pump and more dependence on foreign oil.

The good news for Oregon is that the Clean Cars program proposed by the Department of Environmental Quality will help solve all of these problems. Under the program, new cars and trucks, starting with model year 2009, will emit 30% less global warming pollution, cutting total global warming pollution from the vehicle fleet by between 12% and 18% by 2020. New cars and trucks will emit between 12% and 38% lower levels of a range of health-threatening air pollution. And new cars and trucks will go farther on a gallon of gas, reducing our oil dependence and saving Oregonians money at the pump. By 2016, Oregonians will see annual net savings of \$8.2 million because of the Clean Cars program, a figure that rises to \$40 million annually once car loans are paid off.

Automakers have argued that these benefits can only come at the expense of reduced choice for consumers and dramatic increases in the price of a car. But this is simply not true. The Clean Cars program carefully avoids making any type of vehicle unavailable. The program will actually result in increased sales of hybrids and other advanced-technology cars and will increase consumer choice. And gas savings will more than compensate for the slight increase in the price of a car so that it will be cheaper for Oregonians to operate a car than it is today.

Oregon should continue its legacy of environmental leadership by enacting the Clean Cars program. The Clean Cars program will make Oregon a national leader in curbing global warming and will give Rogue Valley residents additional help in curbing health-threatening air pollution.

More Cars, More Pollution, More Dependent on Oil

Southern Oregon's roads are seeing more traffic every year. Between 1991 and 2003, the number of vehicle-miles traveled on Southern Oregon's roads increased nearly 14%. In

Josephine County, traffic increased nearly 24%.¹ Because auto manufacturers have failed to curb the pollution that causes global warming, and because the federal government has refused to increase gas mileage standards as technology has developed, having more cars on our roads means more global warming. It also means more health-threatening air pollution. And it means residents of Southern Oregon are paying more for gasoline and are more dependent on an increasingly unstable energy supply.

Global warming & Southern Oregon

Global warming is already affecting Oregon, and presents a serious threat to the natural resources and economy of Southern Oregon. Scientists have measured a 50% decline in spring snowpack in the Cascades, which reduces river flows. Less water in the rivers will likely further escalate tension between the needs of salmon migration and farm irrigation in watersheds like the Klamath River Basin. Reduced snowpack and river flow could also affect the area's recreational and tourism industries. Global warming could also mean increased risk of wildfire and insect infestation in our forested lands.

If policymakers do not act, by 2020, global warming pollution from cars and trucks in Oregon will be 31% higher than in 1990.

Curbing global warming

The good news is that the Clean Cars program can significantly cut global warming pollution. The global warming pollution limits in the program require new cars and trucks to use existing technology to cut emission 22% below current levels in model year 2012 and 30% in model year 2016. By 2020, these new cars and trucks on the roads will have cut total pollution from Oregon's vehicle fleet by between 12%² and 18%³ below projected levels.

Skeptics may claim it is futile for a state as small as Oregon to attempt to curb global warming pollution. However, Oregon's leadership, and that of other states acting to curb global warming pollution, can have significant impacts. The 10 states that have adopted the Clean Cars program to date, including Oregon, will cut global warming pollution from cars and trucks by 64 million metric tons per year in 2020, which is more than the national emissions of 140 countries and equivalent to the global warming pollution produced by 17 coal-fired power plants.

Air Pollution in the Rogue Valley and across Oregon

More cars also cause more air pollution. Residents of the Rogue Valley are all too familiar with the health-threatening air pollution that plagues the area. In the early 1990's the Medford-Ashland area had high levels of particulate matter in the air that violated the Clean Air Act and threatened resident's health. The Medford-Ashland Air Quality Maintenance Area has reduced particulate pollution to levels mandated by the Clean Air act and in 2004 they submitted their plan for meeting and maintaining compliance with the Clean Air Act to the EPA.⁴

¹ State of Oregon Department of Transportation, Traffic Counting Program, *Oregon Vehicle Miles Traveled*, downloaded from <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TDATA/tsm/vmtpage.shtml> February 19, 2006.

² Jeremiah Baumann and Elizabeth Ridlington, *Cars and Global Warming: How The Clean Cars Program Curbs Global Warming Pollution in Oregon*, Oregon State Public Interest Research Group Foundation, October 2005.

³ State of Oregon, *Governor's Vehicle Emissions Workgroup Report*, 2005.

⁴ State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division, *State Implementation Plan for Particulate Matter (PM-10) in the Medford-Ashland Air Quality Maintenance Area: A Plan for Meeting and Maintaining the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for PM-10*, December 10, 2004.

Airborne toxic chemicals released by cars and trucks pose a significant health threat to Oregonians statewide. These include such chemicals as benzene, a known carcinogen, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde, both probably carcinogens. In 1996 (the most recent year for which comprehensive data are available) residents of every Oregon county were exposed to levels of at least 6 different pollutants that exceeded the federal health based standards for concentration of air toxics. Pollution from mobile sources (including cars, trucks and off-road equipment) was the largest source of the added cancer risk.⁵

Protecting Health, Cutting Pollution

Fortunately, the Clean Cars program will make substantial cuts in health-threatening air pollution. New cars and trucks will provide, on average, a 30% cut in nitrogen oxide emissions and a 12-21% cut in volatile organic compounds emitted, both compounds that contribute to smog formation. They will also emit 15% less carbon monoxide and between 22 and 38% less toxic air pollution.⁶ Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management, an association of clean air agencies, has estimated that the program will cut hydrocarbons, which contribute to the formation of particulate matter, by 15%.

Oil dependence means paying at the pump

The nation's reliance on oil to power our vehicles leaves us vulnerable to rising prices, price spikes and supply disruptions, such as those that occurred in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The negative economic effects of our oil dependence are substantial. Oregonians consume approximately 4.2 million gallons of gasoline daily.⁷ Because Oregon has no oil production or gasoline refining capacity in state, every gallon of gas represents dollars sent to companies outside of Oregon, hurting Oregon's economy and leaving less money in the hands its consumers and businesses.

Saving Oil, Saving Money

Automakers are likely to comply with the global warming standards in the Clean Cars program by improving gas mileage. That means reduced operation costs for Oregon's drivers. Gas savings from the Clean Cars program are expected to result in \$8.2 million in annual net savings in 2016. After loans for the new cars and trucks are paid off, annual net savings will total more than \$40 million.⁸

Increasing Vehicle Choice, Cutting Consumer Costs

Automakers and some auto dealers have argued that improving vehicle emissions standards will decrease consumers' choice in the marketplace. However, the opposite is true. The global warming standards were actually designed to ensure that every vehicle manufacturer and type of vehicle would be able to comply. Furthermore, the program does not apply to the largest pickup trucks and includes an exemption for work vehicles, so farms or other businesses that require certain types of vehicles will not be affected. In fact, the Clean Cars program requires car

⁵ U.S. Public Interest Research Group Education Fund, *Dangers of Diesel: How Diesel Soot and Other Air Toxics Increase Americans' Risk of Cancer*, October 2002. Based on data from EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment.

⁶ State of Oregon, *Governor's Vehicle Emissions Workgroup Report*, 2005.

⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Petroleum Profile: Oregon*, August 2005

⁸ Jeremiah Baumann and Elizabeth Ridlington, *Cars and Global Warming: How The Clean Cars Program Curbs Global Warming Pollution in Oregon*, Oregon State Public Interest Research Group Foundation, October 2005.

companies to make more hybrids and other advanced-technology cars available, so vehicle choice will increase.

Automakers have further argued that the Clean Cars program will impose a burdensome cost increase on Oregon's consumers. This argument is misleading at best. It is worth noting that, on average, automakers' estimates of the cost of past air quality regulations have been, on average, nearly nine times higher than true costs turned out to be.⁹ They estimate the cost at \$3,000 per vehicle. California's air quality agency has estimated that the true costs are likely closer to \$1,000. As noted above, these costs will be more than off-set by gas savings, and because the vast majority of Oregonians finance their cars, they will find it cheaper to own a car in the first month they own a new car. In fact, automakers' studies estimate that car owners will save roughly 1,000 gallons of gas over the life of a car. Assuming gas prices reach \$3/gallon by 2016, cost savings will more than compensate even for the automakers likely-inflated cost estimates.

⁹ Northeast States for a Clean Air Future, Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Light-Duty Motor Vehicles, Table 3-3, pg. 3-4, September 2004.