

BAD EPA Science Costs You Big - Again!

Dirtier air, unnecessarily high gas prices, and rigged tests. If this sounds like a horror story -- it is! And, it's being brought to you by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In 1999, EPA issued regulations, known in EPA jargon as the "Tier II rules," mandating lower levels of ground-level ozone, or smog, by reducing the amount of sulfur in gasoline. Low-sulfur gasoline was seen by EPA as a way of attacking smog by cutting nationwide vehicular emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO_x).

Reducing smog, particularly in crowded urban areas, is a worthy goal, but only if the measures taken to that end actually accomplish what they are set out to do. But by misjudging the nature of smog, and by playing it fast and loose with the research and testing supporting its actions, EPA is degrading the air quality in cities across the nation.

Unlike other pollutants, ozone is not directly emitted into the atmosphere, but is created through a complex series of reactions involving NO_x and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of sunlight on warm, calm days. EPA simplistically characterizes NO_x as a precursor of ozone, and thus implies that all NO_x reduction always yield ozone reductions. But as Joel Schwartz of the American Enterprise Institute points out, "under the right conditions - conditions that now exist in many American cities - reducing NO_x can actually make ozone worse."

In fact, the National Academy of Sciences has concluded that "NO_x reductions can have either a beneficial or detrimental effect on ozone concentrations, depending on the locations and the emissions rates of VOC and NO_x sources in a region." What's more, when EPA promulgated its scheme to reduce NO_x emissions, the agency's own analysts concluded the rule would increase ozone in many areas of the country.

According to research cited by the American Enterprise Institute's Schwartz, the places most likely to see worsening air quality courtesy of EPA are New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, southern California, and the San Francisco Bay area. Indeed, recent reductions in NO_x in Denver have already led to a re-emergence of ozone as a problem in that Rocky Mountain city.

Rather than changing course in the light of mounting scientific evidence that it's headed in the wrong direction, EPA insists on forcing its ill-begotten scheme on the rest of the country. The agency even cooked the books to create the appearance that it knows what its doing. To make its case for a national smog initiative, EPA carried out

tests on vehicles at its lab in Ann Arbor, Mich. For an air quality rule that will cover tens of millions of vehicles throughout the country, EPA ran tests on a grand total of four vehicles - an SUV, a pickup truck and two minivans, but gave the SUV (a Ford Explorer) 2/3's the weight of the test. In other words, the test results for the SUV (that incidentally was also modified by EPA) was the entire basis for which the EPA justified a national rule.

An assessment of EPA's testing procedures performed by Southwest Research Institute of San Antonio, Tx., considered the world's premier engine and emissions testing laboratory, was highly critical of the agency. The lab concluded that the "methodology used by EPA was faulty," and that the data it produced were "not objective and were made in a way to present a predetermined conclusion."

Adding insult to injury, EPA's flawed tests were not entered into the record until it was too late for public comment on them.

None of this was necessary. EPA ignored other viable, less costly solutions, which could have easily improved the nation's air quality. For example, it has long been recognized that a relatively small percentage of vehicles, mostly older, poorly maintained cars and trucks, account for most of the vehicular sources of air pollution. Remote sensing technologies exist that can easily identify these vehicles. A far more sensible way to reduce smog from vehicular emissions is to require owners to make necessary repairs, and to provide them with incentives to scrap their clunkers for newer, cleaner cars. EPA also ignored viable alternative fuel solutions that would have solved the problem without adding a penny to the cost of gasoline.

But why would EPA use common sense?

Meanwhile, Americans can expect to dig deeper to pay for EPA's new low-sulfur gas, with estimates ranging between 20 cents and 50 cents per gallon at the pump, and these unnecessary extra costs will only increase in the days ahead.

Fed up with EPA's shenanigans, the National Alternative Fuels Association in "NAFA v EPA" is dragging EPA, kicking and screaming, into federal court in Washington, D.C., with a date set for Feb. 14.