

July 2008

Will Emissions Rules Give Floridians Sticker Shock?

By Bob McClure

With gasoline prices already hovering around \$4 a gallon, the last thing Floridians need is a further hike in their automotive costs. Unfortunately, some elected officials now support a policy change that could have that effect: Many want Florida to adopt emissions standards that go beyond those embodied in current federal regulations.

That's a misstep more likely to have a negative impact on your wallet than a positive impact on Florida's environment. U.S. automakers produce vehicles that meet the current federal standards. However, automakers and their customers would face daunting additional costs if new vehicles had to be customized to meet 50 states' differing standards, whether for emissions, safety equipment, or hood ornaments.

Appropriately for a product widely sold and resold in interstate commerce, the emissions standards for vehicles are subject to the *federal* Clean Air Act, which is enforced by the *federal* Environmental Protection Agency.

These proposals for Florida to adopt its own vehicle-emissions standards are being trumpeted as a boon for the environment, but they could well prove to be a costly bane to Florida residents.

That's because enforcement of a single-state emissions policy will

inevitably impose additional risks and costs during the design, production, and distribution phases of the auto business. The risks and costs that manufacturers encounter to meet such standards would unquestionably be passed along to Florida's consumers.

Moreover, the truth is that state regulations are not needed to achieve the environmental benefits of cleaner cars; consumer preferences and market forces are already pushing automakers to lower emissions and increase fuel efficiency.

Indeed, last year more than 1.8 million hybrid-electric, ethanol-capable flex-fuel vehicles, and clean diesel vehicles were sold in the U.S. — a 15 percent increase from 2006. This year, more than 70 different models of alternative-fuel vehicles are being offered in dealers' showrooms.

These dramatic increases are not the result of executive orders or government regulations; they are a product of free markets at work. Implementation of innovations such as computerized fuel metering and on-board diagnostics continues to make today's automobiles environmentally better than ever before.

With automakers already striving to produce cleaner, more efficient vehicles at affordable prices in response to market

demands for an eco-friendly mix of products, it makes no sense for Florida to replace federal emissions standards with standards that are unique to Florida.

Such a move would fragment Florida from the cost efficiencies of the national marketplace. That is not the direction our state's leaders should be looking to drive our environment and economy if Floridians are to avoid a serious case of sticker shock.

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policy center based in Tallahassee. Now in its 21st year, JMI advocates free-market solutions based on the principles of limited government, individual liberty, and personal responsibility.

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