

Save the Environment: Drive a Gas-Powered Car

The Washington Post [recently reported](#) that California will cease to allow the sale of gasoline-powered cars in the state by 2035.

This act of government overreach comes not through a legislative act by the state's elected representatives in the House and Senate, but by decree of Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Air Resources Board with its appointed head attorney Mary Nichols, the "[queen of green.](#)"

"You deserve to have a car that doesn't give your kid asthma," Newsom said in a statement according to the *Post*. "Our cars shouldn't make wildfires worse – and create more days filled with smoky air."

Yet Newsome ignores several critical environmental policy concerns with this blithe statement. First, it is in large part (if not completely) the fault of government officials that these catastrophic wildfires to which Newsom refers are occurring. These officials demonstrate an astounding level of hubris by attempting to thwart nature. [As those wildfires stunningly remind us](#), "governments are poor stewards of the environment."

Moving along, the *Post* reports that the astounding new goal is to make sure every new passenger car sold in California is electric by 2035. Automakers will have an additional ten years to ensure medium- and heavy-duty trucks and other vehicles reach zero emissions.

Hooray! California will be a clean, smog-free patch of land and Los Angeles residents will smile as they walk through their sparkling city, rather than wheezing through dark clouds as they attempt a morning jog.

Not so fast, pump the brakes on that vehicular celebration.

As the *Post* reports, “the order does not prevent Californians from owning or selling used cars with internal combustion engines, or buying them outside the state.” The biggest accomplishment of this order might just be shipping auto sales tax money out of California and to surrounding states. Yes, coastal Californians might not want to make the trek out to Nevada or Arizona, or up to Oregon, but the more conservative, out-state residents of California likely won’t hesitate to cross the border.

If that happens, California’s automotive manufacturing industry – worth [\\$5.5 billion in 2017](#) – may dwindle. Considering that Californians [on average account for](#) 27 percent of all current U.S. unemployment claims and one-third of all welfare claims, it seems like a bad time to implement new regulations that could hinder this industry.

The move to electric cars in California may end up doing more harm than good not only to the auto industry, but to the environment as well.

To start with, 62.7 percent of the United States’ energy production still comes from fossil fuels, with natural gas and coal dominating this production. A further 19.7 percent comes from nuclear energy, with all renewable energy sources accounting for just 17.5 percent of U.S. energy production. Those cars may be electric, but they’re really just coal powered instead of gas powered.

California may end up *moving* a slight bit of energy production pollution out of the state, but they won’t be eliminating much of it. In addition, the environmental costs of battery production for electric cars is enormous, and these are largely borne by developing nations.

The battery in a Tesla Model S contains about 26 pounds of lithium, which is often extracted in water-intensive methods.

These methods have tainted water to the point where [dead fish cover the surface of rivers in Tibet, with cow and yak carcasses floating downstream](#) after dying from the poisoned drinking water. The Chilean method of lithium extraction uses 500,000 gallons of water per metric ton of lithium, resulting in the lithium industry using 65 percent of the Salar de Atacama region's water, a practice which can have severe impacts on local farmers. Sometimes this also involves the use of fossil fuels to speed up the evaporation of the water as part of extraction process, thus rendering electric cars even *more* pointless in the fight to save the environment.

One [environmentalist group in Europe](#) noted that lithium extraction uses "toxic chemicals" and that the extraction itself "inevitably harms the soil and also causes air contamination." So Newsom and other Californians might each end up owning a "car that doesn't give your kid asthma," but the kids in Chile, China, and other developing nations often end up paying a much higher price.

Nowhere is this more true than in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), [where child labor is used to extract cobalt](#), another crucial component in electric car batteries, which use several pounds of the highly in demand metal. In 2014, UNICEF estimated that roughly [40,000 children worked in cobalt mines in the DRC](#), which is the world's largest producer of cobalt. Often they worked 12 hour days for just one to two dollars a day.

California's regulatory overlords are so eager to engage in virtue signaling that they ignore the devastating environmental and human costs of electric cars. Newsom is merely outsourcing suffering. This me-first attitude blinds the regulators to the harm their policies create elsewhere in the world, a harm that also goes directly against their stated goals.

Newsom and his buddies may indeed slightly decrease the output

of greenhouse gases from Californians' cars... but at what cost?

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