



# earthwise

News and Ideas for UCS Members and Activists


## Court Ruling Supports Global Warming Action

In a landmark decision that may turn the tide of federal inaction on global warming, the Supreme Court ruled



in March that: a) carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping emissions qualify as “air pollutants” under the Clean Air Act; b) the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the authority to regulate such emissions from new vehicles; and, c) the EPA must reconsider its refusal to do so.

The court, by a 5-4 vote, rejected the Bush administration’s contention that the Clean Air Act does not give the EPA authority to regulate heat-trapping emissions. Instead, the majority affirmed that the EPA can regulate *any* emissions that endanger public health and welfare (in this case by contributing significantly to global warming).

The Union of Concerned Scientists joined forces with 12 states, several cities, and a number of other nonprofit organizations to bring this case before the court. We are hopeful its ruling will not only help clear the way for states such as California to implement vehicle emission regulations that have been stalled by auto industry lawsuits but will also bolster efforts to enact strong federal climate policies. 

## close to home

# How to Preserve Biodiversity

We rely on countless plant and animal species for our food, clothing, and medicine. Ironically, this biological diversity is being threatened both directly and indirectly by our own actions. Habitat alteration and global warming are the primary causes of species loss.

The first step in stemming the tide of species loss is to conserve natural resources by purchasing and using materials only as we need them. Then, we need to ensure the items we do use have a low impact on biodiversity. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.



*Loss of rain forest habitat contributes to global warming and increases the risk of extinction for many animal and plant species (some of which are important to human medicine).*

### Keep Forests Healthy

Forests provide shelter for more than half of all land-based plant and animal species, with the majority concentrated in tropical areas. In addition, many of our most important medicines, such as anti-cancer drugs and antibiotics, are derived from tropical plants. Unfortunately, tropical forests are being cleared at an alarming rate—approximately 40 football fields’ worth each minute—putting thousands of species at risk of extinction. As trees are cut down, they also release carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming (see “Fuel for Thought” below).



While forests are not cleared for timber purposes only, you can help support better forestry practices by purchasing wood products that bear the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo. This indicates the wood comes from sustainably managed forests.

### Strengthen the Food Chain

Nature has its own system for keeping plants healthy and productive. Organisms in the soil break down organic matter such as leaves into nutrients and minerals, while birds and insects eat plant pests. Many chemical pesticides, however, upset

*(continued on back page)*

## on a personal note

# Steps in the Right Direction



*Kevin Knobloch, speaking to an interfaith audience in March, calls for a united effort to combat global warming.*

Not very long ago it would have been a challenge to round up more than a handful of people to take to the streets to decry global warming. But on April 14, I had the privilege of emceeing a rally on historic Boston Common that drew hundreds of impassioned, sign-waving people of all ages—one of more than 1,400 similar events held that day as part of the national “Step It Up” campaign.

UCS has been working to slow global warming since the 1980s, but the speed and magnitude with which political and public opinion has recently shifted in a positive direction on this issue takes my breath away. Until just a couple of years ago, we had to convince reporters that global warming was worth covering and that climate scientists were worth interviewing. Now, thanks to the collective hard work of UCS and other organizations, the media have put this issue in the national spotlight and more elected officials and business leaders are paying attention.

The people demanding climate leadership have expanded well beyond scientists and environmentalists. A few weeks before the Step It Up event, I was invited to speak at the closing rally of the Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue, and from the stage I was encouraged to see many large, colorful banners carried by members of various churches and synagogues, all showing their support for climate action.

At the interfaith service before the rally, the Reverend Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches USA, told the assembled walkers, “If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.” It is so exciting to see scientists, doctors, members of labor unions, corporate CEOs, farmers, students, and artists—people from all vocations, income levels, and political leanings—working together to fulfill our responsibility to future generations by addressing global warming. I very much look forward to walking with all of them—and you—on the road ahead.


KEVIN KNOBLOCH, *president*

## UCS in the news

### *Detroit lags in clean vehicle choices*

For the fourth time in a row UCS has recognized Honda as the greenest automaker in terms of the global warming and smog-forming pollution its vehicles emit (as outlined in the report *Automaker Rankings 2007: The Environmental Performance of Car Companies*). Ford, General Motors, and DaimlerChrysler finished at the back of the pack.

Toyota finished a close second to Honda by applying emission-cutting technologies across its entire fleet. As report author Don MacKenzie explained in an April 4 CBS radio story, “Any company can build one green model, but what really counts is when a company makes its most popular models greener.”

The report was covered in several regional newspapers including the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Denver Post*, and network and local television stations picked up the story as well. In addition, Bill O’Reilly referenced the report while interviewing a General Motors representative during his April 3 telecast. 

## Simplify Your Giving

Did you know that more than 4,000 individuals support UCS by making monthly gifts automatically withdrawn from their bank accounts or charged to their credit cards? If you are not one of them, consider joining the **Partners for the Earth** program today—it makes giving easy. For more information, go to [www.ucsusa.org/pfe](http://www.ucsusa.org/pfe) or call our membership department at (800) 666-8276 x8000.

## Real Fuel Economy Gains Are Within Reach



© Stockphoto

### What's at Stake

Air quality, energy independence, and consumer choice.

### How You Can Help

Urge your senators to support S. 357, the Ten-in-Ten Fuel Economy Act.

### What's Happening

American drivers want and deserve cleaner, more fuel-efficient automobiles, but the average fuel economy of the U.S. vehicle fleet has remained stagnant for decades—despite steady advances in vehicle technology. Now, a renewed interest in fuel economy on Capitol Hill represents a tremendous opportunity to pass strong national standards that will have many benefits: reducing oil dependence, saving consumers money at the pump, reducing global warming pollution, improving highway safety, and protecting U.S. auto industry jobs.


With those goals in mind, a bipartisan group of senators introduced the Ten-in-Ten Fuel Economy Act in January. As written, this bill would increase the average fuel economy of our cars, pickups, minivans, and SUVs approximately 10 miles per gallon over 10 years (to 35 miles per gallon by 2019).

Automakers already have proven technologies that can meet this standard, maintain the size and acceleration of today's vehicles, and improve vehicle safety. These technologies would add about \$1,100 to the price of an average vehicle in 2019, but that investment would be recovered in less than three years of driving (assuming a gasoline cost of two dollars per gallon). Over the remaining life

of the vehicle, the owner would save an additional \$2,500 in gasoline costs.

By 2025, when the majority of vehicles on the road would meet the bill's stronger standards, the United States could save as much oil each year as we currently import from the Persian Gulf. These standards would also reduce annual global warming emissions by 358 million metric tons (carbon dioxide-equivalent) in 2025—the same as taking more than 50 million of today's cars and trucks off the road.

### What You Can Do

A Senate subcommittee approved a significantly weakened version of S. 357 on May 8. Ask your senators to support this bill only as originally written to ensure its benefits are realized. Send an email from the online UCS Action Network at [www.ucsaction.org](http://www.ucsaction.org) or call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your senators' offices. 

### drawing conclusions



## How to Preserve Biodiversity (continued from front page)


this balance by killing both pests and beneficial soil organisms. What's worse, they can be toxic to birds, insects, and other "pollinators" that are key to crop fertilization. Similarly, heavy use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers—the norm at most large-scale, industrialized farms—pollutes waterways and threatens aquatic life.

Buying organic and locally grown food can avoid these problems. Organic farmers grow crops without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers and employ practices that build rather than deplete soil nutrients. Small local growers, even if not certified organic, are usually more eco-friendly than large industrial farms. Shipping produce shorter distances also translates into reduced energy use and less need for pesticides that prevent decay during transit.

You can also support biodiversity when dining out. Get in the habit of asking servers where food comes from and requesting organic items. Several seafood guides (including the Monterey Bay Aquarium's online guide at [www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org)) can help you avoid depleted fish species.

### Fuel for Thought

Powering our homes, businesses, and vehicles may seem unrelated to biodiversity, but the global warming that results from burning fossil fuels is one of the greatest dangers to species worldwide. Plant and animal species are often uniquely adapted to their regional climates; as a result, warmer temperatures, rising seas, and changes in precipitation will greatly alter—or even destroy—many natural habitats.

Driving a fuel-efficient vehicle, conserving electricity in your home, and purchasing "green power" from your utility are important steps you can take to reduce your contribution to global warming. For more information on consumer choice and biodiversity, visit the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation website at <http://cbc.amnh.org>. 




## dialogue

*Do food products from cloned animals pose a risk to human health?*

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has announced plans to lift a moratorium on the sale of meat and milk products from cloned animals. Although UCS is not aware of any evidence currently demonstrating that such products pose food safety hazards, we are not satisfied with the methodology of the scientific studies assembled by the FDA to address this concern. Most importantly, the studies were simply those that happened to be available in the existing literature or volunteered by companies rather than research conducted in accordance with FDA-determined specifications for comparative safety studies.

Food safety is only one of many concerns associated with cloning. Cloning accelerates the trend toward more uniformity and less genetic diversity among food animals, making populations more vulnerable to catastrophic losses from disease, climate change, and terrorism. In addition, cloning techniques used today continue to exhibit stubbornly high failure rates (often 90 percent or above) that translate into deformities and premature death for large numbers of both clones and surrogate mothers.

Finally, the FDA has indicated that it will not require cloned meat and dairy products to be labeled as such. UCS believes consumers should have the right to choose which foods they will eat and to use their purchasing power to influence the ways in which food is produced. The FDA's current unwillingness to require labels deprives consumers of that right.

To learn more about this issue, visit the UCS website at [www.ucsusa.org/food\\_and\\_environment](http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_environment). 

### UCS on the web

**A cleaner car for every family.** UCS has designed a blueprint for a safe, affordable minivan called the Vanguard that reduces global warming emissions using existing technologies and fuels. To learn more about the Vanguard's climate-friendly features—which automakers could be applying to all vehicles today—visit the UCS website at [www.ucsusa.org/UCSVanguard](http://www.ucsusa.org/UCSVanguard).

## earthwise

A quarterly publication of the Union of Concerned Scientists.  
© 2007 Union of Concerned Scientists.  
Articles from *Earthwise*, duly acknowledged, may be reprinted free of charge.

**Bryan Wadsworth**, Senior Editor  
**Heather Tuttle**, Assistant Editor  
**Catalano Design**, design and production

Printed on recycled paper with 100% post-consumer content



The Union of Concerned Scientists is a nonprofit partnership of scientists and citizens combining rigorous scientific analysis, innovative policy development, and effective citizen advocacy to achieve practical environmental solutions.

**National Headquarters**  
Two Brattle Square  
Cambridge, MA 02238-9105



a member of Earth Share