




earthwise

News and Ideas for UCS Members and Activists

UCS Helps Strengthen Food Labeling

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently finalized regulations that will give consumers confidence that milk and meat bearing the "Certified Organic" label have been produced in ways that actually benefit people, animals, and the environment. UCS and more than 14,000 of our activists weighed in with support for these new, stronger standards.

The existing standards required producers to provide livestock with access to pasture, but did not say for how long. This allowed livestock in CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) to receive organic certification even if they rarely set foot outdoors. Under the new rule, set to take effect in June, livestock must have year-round access to the outdoors and be on pasture a minimum of 120 days. The rule also eliminates loopholes that producers have used in the past to deny animals access to pasture.

In addition, the rule specifies the minimum amount of an animal's food that must come from pasture. UCS analysis has shown that pasture feeding is better for livestock health and less damaging to the environment, and that meat and milk from grass-fed cows can contain higher levels of good fats that may provide health benefits to humans. 

close to home

The Climate-Friendly Gardener

The 81 million U.S. homeowners with a lawn or garden know that even small shifts in weather can affect their outdoor plans. Unchecked global warming, however, could force gardeners to deal with more droughts and floods, and a profusion of pests and weeds. A new UCS publication, *The Climate-Friendly Gardener: A Guide to Combating Global Warming from the Ground Up*, shows you how to reduce the impact of climate change in your own backyard, using the following science-based tips.



Choosing manual or electric lawn tools (instead of gasoline-powered models) is just one way in which homeowners can maintain their lawns and gardens in a climate-friendly way.

Tip #1: Choose low-emission garden products and practices

Gasoline-powered garden tools are major emitters of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the primary global warming gas. The average gasoline-powered lawn mower, for example, puts 20 pounds of CO₂ in the atmosphere for every gallon of gas it burns. But emissions can also come from unexpected sources such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides; both require enormous amounts of energy to produce and transport.

Reduce your impact by using electric or push mowers, rakes, and other low- or no-emission lawn tools and replacing chemicals with compost and natural pest-control methods. Also, avoid potting mixes containing peat, since mining peat bogs destroys these ecosystems and releases large amounts of carbon stored there.

Tip #2: Don't leave garden soil naked

Stabilize, build, and add nutrients to garden soil that would otherwise remain bare in the winter by planting cover crops such as grasses, cereal grains, or legumes. Planted in the fall, they protect soil from weeds and erosion, and add carbon to the soil when they are turned under in the spring. Peas, beans, clovers, and other legumes also act as natural fertilizer by converting nitrogen from the atmosphere into forms that can be used by spring plants.

(continued on back page)

on a personal note

A Golden (State) Opportunity for Progress



California is home to one in eight Americans. It is also a critical proving ground for environmental initiatives ranging from cleaner cars to more efficient appliances and buildings. UCS has long recognized the important role California plays in setting an example for other states and the federal government to follow; by bringing our independent scientific analysis to bear on vehicle,

energy, and climate policies there, we build a foundation for their eventual adoption elsewhere.

Today, we face our biggest opportunity—and challenge—in California: Assembly Bill (AB) 32, the most comprehensive economy-wide global warming emissions reduction program in the country. UCS helped secure its passage in 2006 and has been working to ensure the state fulfills its commitment: reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. By collaborating on a first-of-its-kind low-carbon fuel standard, we helped the state take a critical step in that direction.

Unfortunately, opponents of AB 32 (oil companies, large industrial polluters, and their supporters in the legislature) are trying to derail implementation by misleading the public about its impact. They have introduced legislation to roll back the landmark law and are funding a November ballot initiative that would effectively repeal it altogether.

The fate of AB 32 could have ripple effects on climate and energy policies beyond California. Successful implementation would show state and federal policy makers that taking action to reduce emissions is good for the economy *and* the environment, increasing the chances of passing strong federal climate policy while helping to create clean-technology jobs. Failure could present federal climate legislation with an even steeper uphill battle than it already faces.

As I travel the country, I'm always impressed that UCS supporters understand the national implications of our work in California. I am grateful for this support as we fight to protect AB 32. Rest assured that UCS will continue to bring science to the forefront of the national climate and energy debate while we set the record straight in California. Cleaner energy and a stronger economy in California can set the stage for a safer climate for us all.

KEVIN KNOBLOCH, *president*

fast facts



New vehicle standards save oil, emissions, money

On April 1, the Obama administration finalized historic new clean car standards (for model years 2012 through 2016) that will benefit consumers and the environment in multiple ways:

- Average new-vehicle fuel economy will increase 30 percent (to 34.1 miles per gallon) by 2016—the largest such boost in decades.
- Consumers will save \$34 billion in gasoline costs in 2020 (assuming a gas price of \$2.75 per gallon).
- U.S. oil consumption will drop by about 1.2 million barrels per day by 2020—more than we currently import from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait combined.
- Heat-trapping vehicle emissions, to be regulated for the first time under national law, will be reduced by 209 million metric tons in 2020, equivalent to taking nearly 31 million of today's cars and light trucks off the road that year. 

Planning Ahead

You can ensure that a healthy environment and safer world will be part of your legacy by including the Union of Concerned Scientists in your estate plans. For more information about charitable bequests and other planned giving opportunities, contact Adam Kessler at (800) 666-8276 x8040 or akessler@ucsusa.org.

Don't Let Dealerships Derail Cleaner Cars



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What's at Stake

Cleaner cars, consumer savings, and a safe climate.

How You Can Help

Tell the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) to stop undermining efforts to bring more efficient, less polluting cars and trucks to consumers.

What's Happening

The years of hard work that UCS analysts, advocates, and activists have put into getting clean car technology off the shelf and onto our roads came to fruition on April 1 when the Obama administration announced a strong final rule for national fuel economy standards (see "Fast Facts" at left for more information). Despite the fact that many automakers support these common-sense regulations, NADA is trying to keep cleaner cars off our roads.


Last October, NADA and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce filed a lawsuit seeking to block the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from allowing states to move forward with clean car standards. That effort has expanded to include legal challenges of the EPA's finding that global warming emissions endanger public health and should be regulated under the Clean Air Act.

NADA has also lobbied on behalf of an effort by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) to strip the EPA of its right to regulate global warming emissions under the Clean Air Act (which was affirmed by a 2007 Supreme Court decision). While the new clean car standards will take effect beginning with model year 2012 vehicles, Senator Murkowski's legislation would

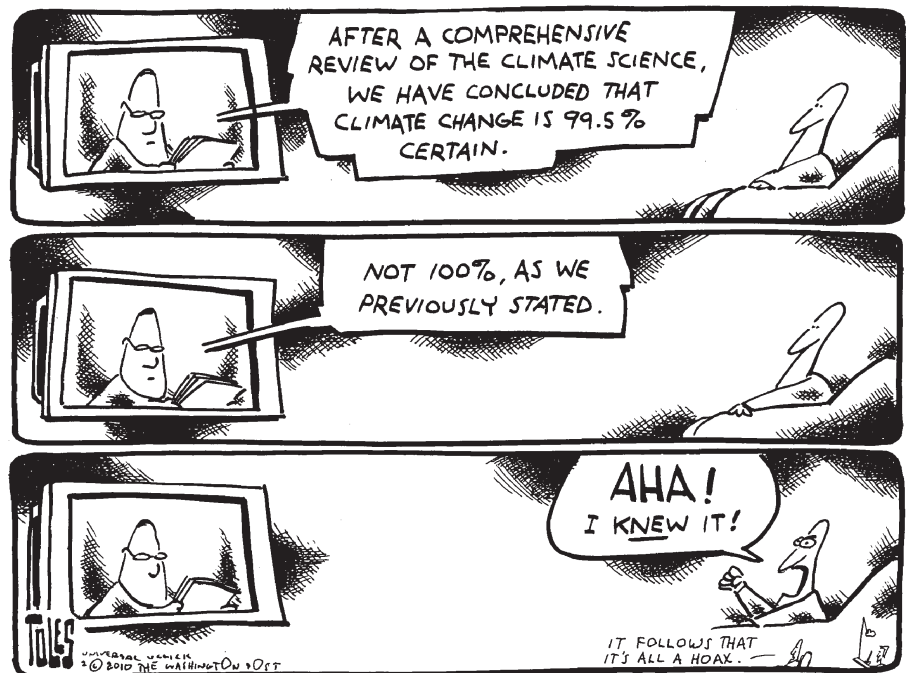
bring this progress to a halt and deal a serious blow to our future choices in cleaner cars, pickups, and SUVs—not to mention its impact on other important emissions-reduction initiatives.

What You Can Do

Tell NADA that you're not buying its lemon of a lawsuit. American drivers want cleaner cars and a safer climate, not more lobbyists and lawsuits—and the customer is always right. You can contact your state NADA representative from the online UCS Action Center at www.ucsusa.org/action, or mail your letter to:

David Regan
Vice President of Legislative Affairs
National Automobile Dealers
Association
412 First Street SE
Washington, DC 20003 

drawing conclusions



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The Climate-Friendly Gardener *(continued from front page)*

Tip #3: Plant trees and shrubs


Because of their size and long life span, trees and large shrubs remove more heat-trapping CO₂ from the atmosphere than other plants. As an added bonus, well-placed trees offer summer shade and protection from winter winds, reducing emissions associated with home heating and air conditioning.

Tip #4: Recycle yard and food waste

Organic waste decomposing in oxygen-poor landfills generates methane, a heat-trapping gas 23 times more potent than CO₂. By contrast, composting this waste in the presence of oxygen minimizes methane production. Composting also produces a nutrient-rich soil amendment that reduces the need for synthetic fertilizer while helping soil store more carbon.

Tip #5: Make your grass “greener”

Grass, like any green plant, absorbs carbon from the atmosphere, but some studies suggest that this climate benefit may be undercut by heat-trapping nitrous oxide emissions related to fertilizer use and generous watering. While there is no scientific consensus yet on the climate impact of lawns, you can make yours as climate-friendly as possible by choosing drought-tolerant species, mowing to a height of three inches or higher (which promotes deep roots), watering during the coolest part of the day (to minimize evaporation), and leaving grass clippings on your lawn (which returns nutrients and additional carbon to the soil and decreases the need for additional fertilizer).


Gardening practices alone won't solve global warming—reducing emissions from agricultural land, parks, and other green spaces can have a much bigger impact—but cultivating a climate-friendly garden or lawn is a step in the right direction. To learn more or download the full guide, visit the UCS website at www.ucsusa.org/gardenguide. 



dialogue

How can a consumer know which hybrid vehicle delivers the best benefits?

The environmental performance of hybrids varies from model to model depending on which fuel-saving and emissions-reducing technologies automakers have chosen to embrace. Hybrids provide the greatest benefit to the consumer when they combine three distinct features: **idle-off**, which turns the gasoline engine off when stopped; **regenerative braking**, which charges the battery using some of the kinetic energy typically lost through the brakes; and **power assist and engine downsizing**, which combines a smaller, more efficient gasoline engine with an electric motor that helps propel the vehicle. “Full” hybrids go a step further with **electric-only drive** at low speeds.

Some automakers do not use these technologies to their full potential, short-changing consumers on fuel economy and emissions. However, technology is not the sole factor to consider when assessing hybrid performance; the UCS Hybrid Scorecard (online at HybridCenter.org) can help you find the best hybrid for your unique needs and budget by rating each model on fuel economy, emissions, and overall “hybrid value” (a measure that suggests whether a given model gives you a good environmental bang for your buck). We also consider the impact of what we call “forced features”: pricey extras included as standard equipment on a hybrid model but not its base-model conventional counterpart. These extras—totaling as much as \$17,000—can make an otherwise affordable vehicle prohibitively expensive for many consumers. 

UCS on the web

The current state of scientific integrity. President Obama pledged to end political interference in science. How has his administration fulfilled this promise, and how has it come up short? Read our online progress report at www.ucsusa.org/integrityprogressreport to find out what has been done to restore scientific integrity to federal policy making—and what remains to be done.

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