

## **New environmental report supports proposed restrictions on car emissions**

### **Proposed law would tighten car pollutants regulations**

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A report released on April 1 said passing the Illinois Clean Car Act, pending legislation that would create lower car emission standards, would benefit residents' health and the state's environment.

According to "Breathing Free in Illinois: Reducing Air Pollution and Improving Health Through Cleaner Cars," a report released on April 1 by the Environmental Law and Policy Center, an environmental advocacy group, technology exists to create cars that produce lower emissions and pollutants that affect the environment and health. By creating a policy that enforces these technologies, pollution in Illinois would be reduced by 21 percent by 2030, when all vehicles would meet the higher standards, according to the report.

In Illinois, Rep. Karen May (D-Highwood) has sponsored the Illinois Clear Car Act, a bill modeled after the California low emissions standards. If passed, the law would go into effect in 2012.

If the law were enacted, Illinois residents would save \$3 billion in gas by 2020—a statistic that was calculated at \$3 a gallon, but gas prices are much higher now, May said.

May said this is an important act because it would benefit the health of Illinois residents, the environment and the economy.

The legislation has a "wrap-up period" by which the auto manufactures would have to provide and sell cleaner cars in Illinois over the next 10 to 12 years, said Howard Lerner, executive director of the Environmental Law and Policy Center. Existing cars wouldn't need to be retrofitted; instead new cars on the market would be more fuel efficient and produce fewer emissions, Lerner said.

"In effect, the fleet of cars that would be sold 10 years or so from now would be cleaner," Lerner said.

Lerner called for Illinois to adopt stricter emission laws, similar to those of California and 12 other states, during a phone press conference releasing the report.

“Passing clean car legislation in Illinois ... is an investment to our children’s health, safety and ability to breathe better,” Lerner said. “Thirteen other states have already acted, and now it is time for Illinois to step up and pass clean car legislation.”

The study found that various health-related issues, such as premature death, hospitalization for respiratory illness, missed days of school for children and other respiratory symptoms, would subside if clean car legislation were to be implemented, said Jonathan Levy, associate professor at the Harvard School of Public Health and a consultant for the report.

“The key aspect of what we found is that with this single policy measure, the public health burden of the emissions for cars can be reduced on the order of 10 percent [in Illinois],” Levy said. “This is an important measure that can be taken to start to alleviate some of the burden ... [because the number of] vehicles have been increasing and will increase over time.”

If the clean car legislation passed, deaths caused by pollutants like volatile organic compounds (VOCs) would decrease by 7 percent, according to the report. Cancer deaths related to air toxins would decrease by 8 percent.

Another health issue related to air pollution is asthma.

Chicago, along with New York City, leads the country in asthma prevalence, said Molly Martin, practicing pediatrician and assistant professor of pediatrics in the Department of Preventative Medicine at Rush University Medical Center, 1653 W. Congress Parkway.

Illinois has one of the highest death rates from asthma with about 259 people dying per year, according to the report.

“Any measure that could improve the quality of life for these children and allow them to engage in more activities and lead a more normal life are crucial,” Martin said.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently tightened ozone health standards after recognizing that even low amounts are dangerous, although the EPA didn’t lower the standard as much as its experts had suggested, said Brian Urbaszewski, director of Environmental Health Programs for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

“We have an ongoing ozone problem ... we’re going to need to do more to reduce the pollution from automobiles that contribute to this regional problem,” Urbaszewski said.

Nevertheless, even cars on the road now could be “cleaner” if they were tuned-up, Lerner said.

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