

If you don't take responsibility for the environment, who will?

By Patt Morrison

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Don't you love it when the auto industry starts talking in corporate tongues? The most astonishing idiocies come out of its collective mouth: No, no, no, we couldn't possibly put in seat belts. Air bags? Who'd want to pay for air bags?

And the latest, from a representative of nine carmakers, that California's goal to cut tailpipe emissions (pending a federal green light) "will have no impact" on global warming.

How's that again?

California is the 12th-largest carbon sinner in the world, and regulating exhaust won't do anything for climate change? What are they sniffing in Detroit, their own fumes?

Besides, this is America, car dude. From our first red, white and blue breath, we're taught that one person can make a difference. Every man a king. An Army of one. Only you can prevent forest fires. If one person can make a difference, a state of 36 million can hardly do otherwise.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger isn't the only one playing the green game. This week in Sacramento, Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, is nudging through another piece of legislation, a law that Australia has already passed, one they're thinking over in Canada and on Capitol Hill: Bye-bye to the class-A incandescent light bulb and hello to the compact squiggly fluorescent.

Every time you go fluorescent (the bulbs last nearly 10 times longer than Thomas Edison's), you save more than a quarter-ton of coal and all the sulfur dioxide and acid rain and sundry gunk that comes with coal. One bulb does all that.

Already some people are crying lamp fascism. We want choice! Choice? Oh, you mean like having Tylenol and laudanum on the drugstore shelf? I'll take the one with the skull and crossbones, please.

If Philip K. Dick, the man who inspired "Blade Runner," were alive, he would be scribbling dystopian environmental novels in which every newborn child is assigned a lifetime carbon debit card - like wartime ration cards. You only get to use so much plastic, or burn so much wood or eat so much imported food (how much fossil fuel does it take to get that bottle of Euro-water to Santa Monica?) before you use up your carbon points and you're out of the game. Dick's characters wouldn't be stock traders, they'd be carbon traders, blackmailing starving Sudanese villagers online for their carbon points in exchange for rice and water.

So far, green crusading has been sweet persuasion, everyone pointing out - nicely - how you can feel virtuous and conscientious: Please don't buy wood products from rain forest rapists. Be a hero - recycle your plastic and paper. Thank you for not pouring your dreck into the ocean.

Well, nuts to that. A Dickian dystopia is bearing down on us. The government and the greenies are afraid of making you feel guilty. Not me. And a whole lot of sources back me up.

Plastic: You're not throwing away plastic bags, genius - you're throwing away oil. In energy alone, recycling a ton of plastic bags saves 11 barrels of oil. Which means that Californians, by tossing away 19 billion plastic bags last year - all of them blowing across my lane of the freeway - wasted

about 4.5 million barrels of oil. And those darling little plastic water bottles you tossed - 18 million barrels of oil to make them. What, did you think the Sparkletts fairy whisked them all away?

Paper: The lungs you ruin may be your own. A mature tree eats 13 pounds of carbon dioxide every year, so every time you don't recycle a huge stack of envelopes and junk mail and wrapping paper and newspapers, you're murdering a tree that could have saved you. You could heat your house for six months on the energy saved from recycling a ton of paper.

Aluminum cans: Too lazy to shuffle to the recycling bin? The energy you waste by throwing away a single soda can would run your TV for three hours. Throwing away an empty six-pack is like throwing away nearly a \$3.50 gallon of gasoline. We Americans toss away enough aluminum cans in a year to rebuild every commercial airliner in America. Good work, cola-for-brains.

Et ceteras:

You throw away three pounds of trash every day; two pounds of that could be recycled, unless you like the idea of living next to Landfill World.

You're adding 10 percent or 20 percent to your electric bill and sucking coal and oil by keeping energy vampires plugged in: phone chargers, TVs and printers.

Pour away a gallon of motor oil instead of recycling it, and you're dumping enough energy to dry your hair for 216 days or to watch 60 Super Bowls.

We've come to the end of this guilt trip; thanks for ride-sharing.

What the auto companies - and too many of the rest of us - never seem to understand is that we've got to get ahead of the game and set our own terms before someone sets them for us.

If we don't ... well, keep this in mind: The body of a 175-pound man can yield a little more than four gallons of fuel oil.