

WHO'S BEHIND THE FREON BAN?

It used to help keep us cool in the scorching summer months. It was cheap, safe, easy-to-handle. It was universally hailed as environmentally friendly. The product was FREON, but now it is effectively banned by federal law, thanks to a coalition of green activists and corporate moguls, backed by a nutty media campaign.

It is illegal to manufacture Freon in the U.S. Heavy taxes are applied to existing stocks, which are available only to 'qualified' air-conditioning mechanics. Do-it-yourselfers can no longer get small cans for routing 'top offs' at auto parts stores. You can get it through the underground economy, but you and the supplier are taking a risk.

Those who attempt to circumvent the ban face criminal prosecution by a Justice Department task force, as a Miami company, Refrigeration USA, recently discovered. Federal agents issued a 164-count indictment against them for importing contraband Freon South America and failing to pay \$22 million in excise taxes.

If they are found guilty, the individuals charged face lengthy jail terms and the loss of their business. Government officials have repeatedly stated they will "zealously pursue" anyone who attempts to obtain illicit Freon, with the same fervor directed at cocaine smugglers.

Local shops are already being monitored by the EPA for evidence of non-compliance. Any shop that obtains or uses contraband Freon (i.e. Freon that has been produced 'underground' without paying the exorbitant federal taxes) can expect to on the receiving end of huge fines and the possible seizure of their facilities.

In a 'zero-tolerance campaign' to keep illegal refrigerants out, the Customs Service stops smugglers at the border, seizing the contraband, and making arrests. As the smugglers get more clever in their techniques, Customs has had to use increasingly aggressive tactics and more thorough searches. Yet somehow it still comes across.

Is all this necessary? Not at all. The Freon bait-and-switch ranks among the most adroitly engineered, seamlessly huckstered con jobs ever perpetrated. It will cost the American economy billions and inconvenience millions of motorists, whose pre 1992 model cars and trucks use the compound as a refrigerant in their conditioning systems.

It's all courtesy of a specious 'environmental' campaign waged by the green dullards, and secretly back by the chemical giant E.I. DuPont de Nemours. You see, DuPont once owned the patents to Freon (or R12, as it is commercially known), the only refrigerant used by the auto industry since the first AC systems were installed in the 1950s.

But with the patents on Freon running out in 1992, DuPont faced the prospect of losing millions annually as competitors entered the Freon market, in the U.S. and abroad.. About this time, we began to hear hysterical shrieks about an 'ozone hole' and the 'dangers' of the man-made chloroflourocarbons (CFCs) like Freon.

The argument, in it's essentials, held the leakage of Freon from automobile air conditioners and other sources was allowing chlorine molecules to escape and make their way into the upper atmosphere where they would deplete the ozone layer, creating a 'hole'. The hole allowed ultraviolet light to reach the earth unfiltered, causing skin cancer and other ailments.

To the dismay of reputable chemists, atmospheric scientists and lay people with any knowledge of CFCs, the theory was accepted uncritically by the media, which peddled it in alarming tones. Reports of blinded Patagonian sheep and other horrors became the stuff of nightly news segments. Calls for action were everywhere.

Shortly thereafter, a U.N. Treaty (the Montreal Protocol) was signed that called for the gradual phase-out of all CFC-based refrigerants. It was quickly followed up early in the Bush administration by an accelerated timetable for the phase-out, to the cheers of radical environmentalists - and quiet nods of approval by corporate Americans.

Lost in the self-congratulatory din were the voices of critics, who tried to point out that the total volume of CFC leakage from automobile Acs was environmentally inconsequential and irrelevant. The chlorine molecule is heavier than air. When released into the atmosphere it sinks immediately to ground level, where it remains. Chlorine molecules from CFC refrigerants cannot harm the ozone layer because they cannot get there. This fact was universally ignored by the scientifically illiterate media. Also ignored was the fact that the man-made sources of chlorine are minuscule compared with the natural level. The evaporation of sea water, the eruption of volcanoes all produce in a moment more than the total production of all man-made chlorine since the dawn of the industrial revolution. For example, the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines, hurled more chlorine into the upper atmosphere than if all the Freon in every automobile AC system ever built was deliberately vented into the air.

As a result of the ban, minor service that cost less than \$50 just a few years ago can now cost several hundred dollars. In the event of a system failure, owners of the pre-1992 cars and trucks face repair bills that may exceed the worth of the car.

The replacement refrigerant (HFC-134a) is incompatible with the old systems. This had forced repair shops to acquire two sets of recharging equipment -one for the Freon system, one for the new systems....at tremendous cost that is then rolled over into the service fees charge to customers.

The practical effect of the ban on Freon has been the evisceration of pre-1992 car and truck resale values. Most knowledgeable used car buyers realize they may not be able to afford the AC repair bills, if the AC can be serviced at all. In many areas, a non-air conditioned car is next to useless for the person who must use it as transportation to the office. The icing on the cake? The new refrigerant is demonstrably less environmentally friendly than the old one. HFC-134a is a less efficient refrigerant. It takes a larger compressor to create the same cooling effect. This means higher fuel consumption and greater quantities of carbon dioxide emissions (a 'greenhouse gas'). But environmental groups don't seem to be concerned about that.

HFC-134a is also caustic to humans. It presents health risks to air-conditioning technicians that were not present with Freon. It is inherently less efficient as a refrigerant than Freon. The larger compressors required to create the same level of cooling, cannot be made to fit within the confines of today's cramped engine bays.

DuPont isn't worried about all that. The company owns exclusive rights to HFC-134a, - the only refrigerant authorized for use in new car AC systems. Its captive market restored, the corporate conglomerate can look forward to years of profits and no competition in it's HFC-134a sales - to a public being tricked by the most egregiously unscientific nonsense imaginable, and looted by the federal government once again.

(Publisher's Note: And guess who scared the Senate into passing the ban on Freon? It was.....then Senator Al Gore. AND he did it with a lot of misinformation and unsubstantiated garbage.)-----via PNEWS

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