

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Speaking Effectively for the Earth

Dear EcoGirl: Help! I have an uncle who thinks that President Obama's recent action to increase car MPG is stupid and unsafe. What websites would you recommend I forward to him, to educate him about the actuality of global warming and how vehicle emissions contribute to it? Thanks! *Signed, Frustrated*

Dear Frustrated: Thanks for your great question. Yes, it's been exciting to see President Obama act to increase vehicle fuel efficiency, including these new car and light truck standards, which are being phased in over the next 14 years.

An easy link to send your uncle is **this article from the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)** (www.switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/plehner/gas_mileage_gains_move_the_cou.html). It discusses the many benefits of these standards, which include: saving car owners money, reducing our eco-impacts, cutting our dependency on foreign oil, trimming petroleum's health harm, helping our car industry be more globally competitive, and creating jobs for the future. I was also impressed that the President shaped these rules in collaboration with the major car companies, environmental groups, the United Auto Workers, state and federal officials, and others.

Also check out **the Skeptical Science website and free app** (www.skepticalscience.com). It gives quick rebuttals to common assertions made by climate change skeptics/deniers. Click on each answer to get the supporting information. This is an easy tool to help us demonstrate the fact-based reality of human-caused climate disruption.

Tips for Discussing Eco-Issues

I thought I'd also share with you my general suggestions for having effective personal conversations on eco-topics such as this.

1) Treat the other person with respect. It's easy for folks of all persuasions to be invalidating or attack people who have different viewpoints. However, I think we're more effective when we can set a calm logical tone, and see if the other person will meet us there. It's also helpful to listen to their viewpoint, offer useful facts, acknowledge what we don't know, try to address their concerns, and look for common ground.

2) Link your topic to what the other person already cares about. For example, is he concerned about his health? Does he have children? Does he want them to be healthy? What kind of world does he want to leave them?

3) I usually discuss the multiple negative impacts of our fossil fuel use, not just climate change. That's because some people are very closed about the climate change topic, and it isn't the only reason to reduce our petroleum use.

Thus, you can also talk about the known health harm from auto emissions (including increased childhood asthma); oil leaks and spills during extraction (the BP crisis was just one dramatic example); air and water pollution during petroleum refining, transportation, and use; and the supply and price risks of depending on other countries for oil. I think the combination of these arguments is more compelling and harder to dismiss. (For more on these, see www.pollutionissues.com/Na-Ph/Petroleum.html and www.nrdc.org/health/kids/ocar/chap4.asp.)

4) Invest an appropriate amount of effort. I generally will discuss eco-issues when people engage with me sincerely. However, if someone is committed to an anti-environmental position, and doesn't want a fact-based logical conversation, then talking with them might not be the

best use of my time. If it's important to persuade them, I might consider other means. Otherwise, I'd rather spend my energy where it can be more useful.

5) Make sure that you read articles critically yourself, to avoid being duped by misinformation. The article your uncle referenced made a seemingly persuasive case against the new MPG standards. However, upon deeper examination, its logic fails seriously. But most people won't see that, because they read quickly and accept information on face value. This makes them vulnerable to manipulation.

I strongly suggest reading Dr. Cynthia Boaz's "14 Propaganda Techniques Fox 'News' Uses to Brainwash Americans." (www.straight.com/article-401945/vancouver/dr-cynthia-boaz-14-propaganda-techniques-fox-news-uses-brainwash-americans) The article your uncle forwarded used a number of these methods. The more conscious we are of these manipulation techniques, the less likely that they'll work on us.

I hope that these ideas help you effectively share the great news that we all can help create an eco-sane future!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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Published in the Sonoma County Gazette, September 2011.

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