

Reckless Driving

Cars, Bikes and Global Warming

Driving the planet crazy

When it comes to negative environmental impact, car use is perhaps the single most destructive action by North Americans. The main reason is that vehicle emissions contribute substantially to global warming. With scientists now predicting as much as a 10 degree warming of the earth by 2100, there is certainly reason to be alarmed. The planet is sounding a warning: 100 of the 150 glaciers in Glacier National Park are already gone. Severe storms and other violent weather patterns have increased in frequency and impact. Yet few alarm bells seem to be sounding in the human community, especially in terms of our auto use. Indeed, miles per gallon of the U.S. vehicle fleet have dropped to 1980 levels due to increased usage of sport utility vehicles and light trucks. We're taking more trips by car than ever before, and the number cars in the U.S. has risen at six times the rate of population growth in the past 30 years.

Baby, you can drive my car...

- < There are 500 million cars in the world. 215 million of these are in the United States.
- < In the U.S., there are 750 motor vehicles for every 1000 citizens, compared to 270/1000 in Europe and 7/1000 in India.
- < Per capita miles driven per year in the U.S.: 9,000 miles. Together in this country, we drive 2 trillion miles annually.
- < The average American makes 4.5 trips by car per day, up 25 percent since 1990
- < 25 percent of all trips outside the home in the U.S. are less than a mile in length—we use the car for 75 percent of these.
- < The typical suburban mom spends 66 minutes a day driving.
- < There are 4 million miles of roads in the U.S., covering 1 percent of our land mass while affecting 20 percent of wildlife habitat. Roads and parking lots cover 61 million square miles of land in the U.S.
- < U.S. oil consumption is the main reason we spend \$6 billion a year maintaining a Persian Gulf military presence—and want to drill in our own pristine wilderness areas.

Turning up the heat

- < Cars produce 20 percent of the global warming gas carbon dioxide. Every gallon of gasoline burned puts 20 pounds of CO₂ into the atmosphere. Concentrations of CO₂ in the earth's atmosphere have risen from 270 ppm to 365 ppm over the past 150 years. In that time period, global mean temperature has risen about 1.1 degree F.
- < With 4.5 percent of the earth's population, the U.S. consumes 43 percent of the gasoline. All told, the U.S. consumes 8 billion barrels of oil annually. (Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would recover only 3.1 billion gallons over 50 years.)
- < The manufacture of cars is responsible for 10 percent of all global materials consumption.

The beauty of biking

- < When compared to an automobile's energy consumption, a bike rider gets 1000 miles per gallon of gasoline.
- < Every mile we don't drive keeps one pound of CO₂ out of the atmosphere.
- < With 60 percent of Americans overweight, riding a bike could be just as good for our waist as for our waste.
- < Riding a bike also allows one to spot, pick-up, and recycle aluminum cans from the roadside. The energy savings from one aluminum can equals one mile of driving a car.
- < Biking allows for a more direct experience of one's immediate environment, leading to a closer connection to the beauty and struggles of God's earth. Biking also spares .0001 squirrels—and other creatures—per mile (our guesstimate of rate of animals run over per mile when driving a car).

Or just walk

- < Walking somewhere is nearly an act of radical discipleship in our car-centered world.

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