

Tuesday, April 6, 2010

State hits brakes on 'cool-car' regulation

Sometimes we are spared the unintended consequences of government meddling. The California Air Resources Board, which plans to dictate massive changes to the economy, realized before it was too late how foolish its plans were to reduce motorists' carbon footprints by requiring reflective glaze on vehicle windows.

The so-called "cool-car" rules would have required a glaze to block sunlight and heat. The air board's thinking was based on the idea that less sunshine entering vehicles would require less air conditioning. Voila! Smaller carbon footprints.

Unfortunately, the air board suffers from the deficiency of all centralized, top-down rule-makers. It doesn't foresee unintended consequences.

Police pointed out that blocking infrared rays with sprayed-on microscopic metal particles also would interfere with monitoring of paroled felons' electronic ankle bracelets. Wireless phone companies said the glaze would degrade cell phone signals, including 911 calls. The windshield glaze also could make it difficult for toll road operators to recognize electronic systems permitting traffic to pass quickly through toll booths. How many other adverse effects there are is anyone's guess. That's because no small cadre of "experts" can know everything.

But that didn't deter the air board last June from adopting its intrusive rule. State bureaucrats were finalizing the regulations last week when the board's executive officer finally caught on.

"Stakeholders raised several new issues involving performance of electronic devices as they may affect public safety," said board executive officer James N. Goldstene. "After listening to this input and accounting for the legal deadline to finalize the rule, we are announcing that the AB 32 'cool-cars' rule-making will cease."

Mr. Goldstene referred to Assembly Bill 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act, adopted in 2006 with its host of unintended – and intended – adverse consequences to the economy. AB32 is California's mother of all regulations. It would punish high-energy users to force them to adopt so-called "green" alternatives, oblivious to real-life consequences.

Critics charge that AB32's heavy regulations would cost billions of dollars in lost business, and as many as 1 million lost jobs. Unfortunately, the ideologically driven air board is pushing ahead plans to impose the law's centralized, top-down diktats.

The cool-car regulation was a microcosm of the larger law, which calls for scores of similarly intended regulations drafted by government bureaucrats. The regulations are based on an assumption that greenhouse gas emissions push global temperatures harmfully higher to the detriment of civilization.

However, real life conflicts with global warming theory. For 15 years greenhouse gas emissions have risen dramatically but global temperatures at best haven't increased. According to some, temperatures have declined. What is certain is that cool car regulations and others like them have adverse economic effects, many of them unintended and unforeseen.

Nevertheless an air board spokesman said the agency still intends to pursue "a performance-based approach" to force auto makers to meet a government-determined standards for lowering vehicle interior temperatures.

These people never learn.