



Exorbitant carbon tax – government coffers win – the environment and the motorist loses

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Professional automotive repairers fear for motorists' ability to afford air conditioning repairs following the introduction of the carbon tax.

The impact of the carbon tax on the price of the only approved refrigerant for motor vehicles, R134a, will be felt by every motorist with an air conditioned vehicle.

Without maintaining an air conditioning system in peak condition, inadequate and inefficient performance will potentially result in environmentally significant and damaging emissions, the very outcome the carbon tax is supposed to address.

Australia's peak aftermarket body representing automotive workshops which service, repair and regas air conditioning systems expects the exorbitant price hike to unravel an otherwise stable industry and cause a return to the bad old days of indiscriminate refrigerant release into the atmosphere.

President of VASA (Automotive Air conditioning, Electrical and Cooling Technicians of Australasia), Adelaide workshop owner Ian Stangroome, warned that work practices could suffer as workshops struggle to explain the price increases to customers and seek cheaper alternatives to R134a which in themselves could be damaging to automotive systems. As a result, more global warming refrigerant may be released into the atmosphere after 1 July than in the previous five years following the introduction of the national refrigerant handling licensing scheme.

"The Gillard government, through its lack of understanding of refrigerant management, and its lack of consultation with industry, is trying to fix something which, quite frankly, isn't broken," said Mr Stangroome.

"The rude and arrogant manner in which government leaders have responded to questions in parliament in recent days, in regard to how the tax will be implemented and the resultant increased costs to the motoring public, shows that they are using ridicule to hide their supreme ignorance of the industry and the tax they have imposed," he added.

He said that prior to the 2005 national licensing scheme, which regulates technicians working with synthetic greenhouse gas R134a, Australia was riddled with unscrupulous, irresponsible repairers who just 'let the gas go' into the atmosphere.

"By licensing both technicians and workshops, some order was brought into the industry, making it a lot harder for those without training and licenses, or backyard operators, to purchase refrigerant. But now, with prices of refrigerant sky-rocketing, despite the assurances of government leaders, we can forecast a return to those days when the impact on the wallet far outweighed any environmental consciousness. Many vehicle owners simply won't be able to afford the repairs required.

"The government's lack of knowledge of how refrigerants work is clearly demonstrated in their claims that the carbon price will encourage the take up of alternatives with no, or much lower, global warming potencies. Like the supermarket industry, the automotive sector has no alternatives. Every mainstream carmaker in the world has designed their systems to run on R134a refrigerant and they have made it clear that warranties may be breached if car owners use any other type of refrigerant. Repair costs will increase and taxing the Australian motorist will achieve nothing," said Mr Stangroome.

"We currently have an almost perfect world's best practice system of refrigerant management with the recovery of global warming refrigerants and their proper return and destruction through the industry funded Refrigerant Reclaim Australia. This promotes cost efficient repairs of a high standard and regulated refrigerant stewardship, all of which the carbon tax will effectively dismantle," he warned.

"Whichever way you spin it, no good will result from a carbon tax on air conditioning refrigerant for the motoring public, the environment or this industry. We need to tell it how it is because the government clearly will not," added Mr Stangroome.

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