



Ken Newton,
CEO. VASA

Under the Sothern Cross

The fight of our lives

VASA and its counterparts in other refrigerant sectors are fighting a rearguard action against the Australian government, which has just announced that it intends to add a carbon price (read tax) based on the global warming potential of each refrigerant imported. This would place an additional per-kilo cost – estimated to be at least \$32, and maybe as high as \$60 – on R-134a.

The move, which adds another crazy dimension to an already hugely unpopular government tax, has the potential to leave Australia's orderly

refrigerant stewardship scheme in tatters.

If the tax plan goes ahead, and prime minister Julia Gillard (already the country's most unpopular leader ever) seems hell-bent on pushing it through as part of her sustainable future agenda, the "carbon price" is likely to unravel the award winning Refrigerant Australia recovery and safe destruction program which has been hailed as the best in the world.

Australia's mono-refrigerant policy, which has enabled all professional workshops in Australia and New Zealand to stave off massive contamination of air conditioning systems will also be under threat as high prices for R-134a push motorists and workshops towards cheaper, and nastier alternatives.

VASA has responded to the news by calling on its members to lobby the independents who helped the Labor Party form the present government after the rout of the last general election.

One member, Rob Oakshott, whose workshop is in the electorate of an independent member of parliament, is demanding a meeting and some answers from his MP in these terms:

"We are the good guys. Over the past 20 years we have phased out CFCs and started product stewardship for refrigerants so we now have a world leading program. It took the government 10 years to catch up and make it mandatory, with our encouragement.

"It was much the same for licensing. We started a voluntary program to improve performance and reduce emissions, then a few years later the government made it mandatory, again with our encouragement. Do you know it is illegal to emit refrigerants?

"But none of that seems to matter now. You and the government are

hitting us with a massive tax just because you can, or to have some sort of one-size-fits-all scheme.

"Well, refrigerants aren't the same as carbon dioxide and other emissions. They are specifically designed and manufactured for a purpose, and you can't just replace them with something else.

"The price of refrigerants is going to skyrocket. Will that make me do things differently? How? It is already illegal to emit. I already recover, recycle and return contaminated refrigerant. I can't use anything else because there are no safe alternatives. I can't install a different system because all the world's major car manufacturers use HFC-134a systems." said the member's letter.

VASA members have yet to see any benefit in the government's move to add a carbon price to refrigerants. The proposed tax would make every kilogram of refrigerant coming into Australia an environmental pollutant. It's an easy way to impose a tax in this country because all refrigerant is imported.

VASA founder Mark Mitchell is predicting that this will be the biggest fight VASA will face in its lifetime. "If this goes ahead, the vehicle aftermarket industry involved in air conditioning repair and maintenance can expect significant upheavals in the otherwise stable mono-refrigerant market. Contamination of refrigerant could be endemic as some repairers, pushed by their customers, resort to cheaper alternatives.

"Refrigerants Australia estimates a 22 kg container of R-134a will increase in price by \$704," added Mr Mitchell. ❄

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