



Ken Newton,
CEO, VASA

Under the Southern Cross

A government smells money in climate change

I'll deny I ever said this, but I'm getting the feeling that this whole global warming thing is another Y2K bug. Remember that one?

The world was supposed to grind to a halt at midnight when the calendar clicked over to the year 2000. Squillions of dollars were wasted on fixes that didn't need fixing. The world media really conned us.

One could be excused for thinking that, once again, greed is what's driving the global warming agenda. The waters of the world may indeed rise, but for the money and time being wasted by governments devising nefarious schemes to extract yet more money from the citizens, we could have bought a lot of sandbags.

Now before you all reach for your keyboards to put me in my place, I suggest you exercise a little caution. I'm an environmentalist at heart, believe me. Maybe the world is getting a little warmer. Maybe some icecaps are turning to slush. Maybe the sea is reclaiming some south sea islands. All

I'm saying is that it might be a natural cycle. I think my theory is as good as anybody else's.

What's concerning many of us down here is not so much the rising waters, but the rising intransigence of Kevin Rudd's climate change office, which is threatening to whack our industry with massive price increases of refrigerants like R-134a and thereby cause a ripple effect which could well undo all the good refrigerant stewardship programs for which Australia is justifiably famous.

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Mr. Rudd and his economists want to throw all that out the window by forcing a carbon permit tax on the refriger-



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ant industry. Figures are vague still, but some industry pundits are tipping a ten-fold rise in the price of R-134a. Carbon permits are supposed to help clean up the planet, but most cynical Australians (and that's most of us) see them as yet another money-raising venture with few good environmental outcomes.

VASA is very concerned that if the Government pushes its scheme, it will change the whole dynamic of refrigerant purchase, repair and servicing methods both at the consumer and the workshop levels.

"It will push the repair industry towards cheaper alternatives and that could mean a resurgence of interest in hydrocarbon refrigerants," says VASA director Mark Mitchell. "This would run counter to VASA's consistent promotion of best practice and adherence to OEM standards in the choice of refrigerant," he added.

A dramatic rise in the price of refrigerant could also be the death knell for old cars. Most Australians keep their cars for ten years or more.

VASA argues that pushing old cars off the road is not a good

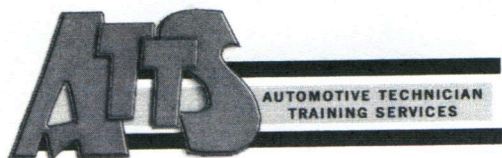
environmental idea. Even some of the environmentalists will confirm that it is better to preserve the fleet, rather than succumb to the crush-and-replace mentality of car disposal.

Anything that makes it more difficult for the responsible motoring public to service their cars and maintain them properly will be opposed by VASA and the workshops of Australia.

In many instances, the current cost of repairing an A/C system has the potential to end an otherwise good car's life. Our sector relies on servicing vehicles aged three years and older and any government intervention to reduce this minimum is not welcome.

So far, the government's carbon tax has been blocked at the Senate level by the opposition parties. In the meantime, VASA and its mates are trying to get the economists to understand that a permit scheme covering refrigerant is not required and that we can manage a far better environmental outcome without their help.

Remember a few issues back when our PM Kevin Rudd was spending too much time overseas and I asked you to find him and put him on a plane back to Australia? I'm sorry I said that now. Next time, you can keep him. ☼



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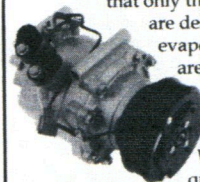
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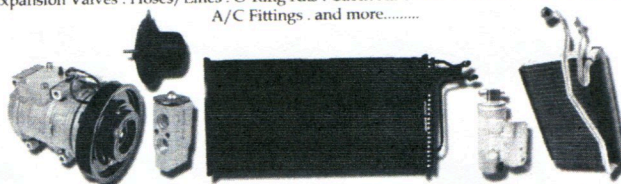
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