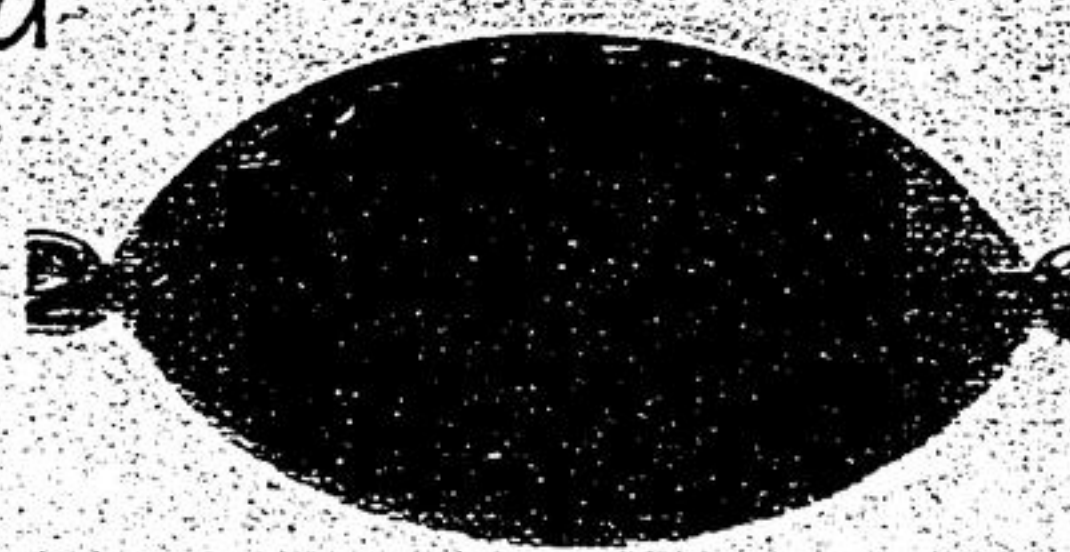


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# Gas guzzler fee won't change habits: dealers

BY ROY GREEN  
Staff Writer

Putting a fee on gas-guzzling vehicles would be ineffective unless the penalty is especially severe, according to one York Region car dealer.

Even if Ottawa goes ahead with a plan to impose a fee on the purchase of new sport utility vehicles and other large autos, it won't hurt sales, Michael Goldberg, sales manager of Town and Country BMW in Markham, said.

"If it means (a penalty of) \$400 or \$500 on an SUV, most people won't care," Mr. Goldberg said. "What's \$500 on a car worth \$60,000 to \$80,000? SUV sales have been going up and up, even as gas prices go up."

"If they're going to do something like double the GST ... that may change someone's mind."

Mr. Goldberg was responding to a proposal in last week's federal budget that a "feebate" be put on purchases of fuel-inefficient vehicles while offering rebates to people who buy smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles.

The federal government has set a goal of reducing vehicle emissions by 25 per cent by 2010 under the Kyoto Accord on climate change.

But Herta Collins says the surtax wouldn't stop her from buying another Ford Excursion. She need the SUV to take her three children to minor hockey, soccer and figure skating, she said.

"As far as causing more pollution, most of the people I know with SUVs have children," Ms Collins said. "So you get one parent with an SUV that can cart three carloads of kids around and you just eliminated three cars off the road."

Mike Magarelli of Seven View Chrysler in Maple points out there is already a

'If someone is driving an eight-year-old pick-up, which isn't anywhere near as fuel-efficient as a new vehicle, he's more likely to hang on to it rather than pay a penalty.'

Huw Williams  
Canadian Automobile  
Dealers Association

gas-consumption tax on some vehicles.

"The guys who are buying SUVs are already paying a premium. A further tax is crazy," he said.

Penalizing drivers could be worse for the environment, agreed Huw Williams of the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association.

"If someone is driving an eight-year-old pick-up, which isn't anywhere near as fuel-efficient as a new vehicle, he's more likely to hang on to it rather than pay a penalty," Mr. Williams said.

"Taxes to control consumer behaviour don't work. Most people are unaware we've had to pay a tax on cars with air conditioning; the original idea was to get people not to buy air conditioning. When was the last time you purchased a car without air conditioning?" Mr. Williams said.

The proposal is only a suggestion forwarded to the National Roundtable on the Environment for discussion, said Richmond Hill Liberal MP Bryon Wilfert, parliamentary secretary to Environment Minister Stephane Dion.

"We're asking them to look at it from specific areas — environmental effect, fiscal impact, economic efficiency and fairness and simplicity," Mr. Wilfert said.

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