

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
A Metroland community newspaper
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Price of gasoline could put commuters out of work

Re: Consumer backlash coming, economist warns, Aug. 13.

When talking with a co-worker about the rising gasoline prices, I jokingly said if one were to look at the cost per litre as compared to the cost of other commodities per litre, the price really didn't seem so exorbitant.

Imagine my surprise when I saw a similar perspective in your newspaper. However, I believe your reporter missed other points.

It is the rate of consumption that makes the price of gasoline so hard to bear. Beer and wine are luxury items and, by most, not consumed on a regular basis. Therefore, the high price per litre is not such a shock.

I agree the price for filtered water is outlandish, but not when events like the Walkerton disaster are taken into consideration. I feel my health is worth the cost of household filtration devices at the very least.

I don't mind paying \$1.75 per litre of milk, as I know some of that money supports our local dairy farmers and their families.

Also, knowing that feed and care of the cattle, and collection, storage, pasteurization and packaging of the milk are included in the cost, it seems reasonable I pay more for milk from the store.

Compared to a litre of milk, which lasts me several days, a litre of gasoline doesn't get me to the grocery store to buy the milk.

Another point the reporter missed is that all of the other commodities offer a price-break for volume purchasing.

When I buy that litre of conditioner for my hair, it costs less than buying four eight-ounce bottles of the same conditioner. I have never had a gas station offer me a discount if I fill my tank, rather than only filling it a quarter of the way.

I travel 60 kilometres to and from work each day. My shifts are irregular and the transit service does not offer a direct route from Stouffville to my job in Pickering.

Car-pooling is improbable and transit impossible. I cannot picture myself pedalling to work, in the dead of a Canadian winter, on a bicycle.

I have no choice but to pay the going rate for gasoline, if I want to keep my job. Soon it will cost me more to go to work than I earn by working for a day.

With housing prices also in the stratosphere, I cannot afford to move closer to work either. If I end up having to quit my job because I cannot afford to commute, do you think the government will smile and hand me a nice unemployment cheque?

JANET YUILL
STOUFFVILLE



More research needed on environmental chemical exposure

Most of us are pretty strict about what we put in our bodies.

Some people eat only organic meats and produce. Others are vegetarians.

Many people don't use harsh chemicals in their homes or pesticides in their gardens because they don't relish being exposed to potentially hazardous substances.

Unfortunately, in many cases, we aren't given a choice.

Whether we like it or not, the blood of every human being on the planet contains trace elements of industrial chemicals — most of which weren't even invented a century ago.

Some of these chemicals have been well studied and we are aware of the risks associated with them. But for many others, we simply don't know what the long-term effects are or at what levels they become a hazard.

We are exposed to these chemicals every day in a variety of ways. Some are airborne and we breathe them into our lungs. Others are found in our water

supplies. Some are in our soils. And others are in the food we eat and products we buy.

Most of them are byproducts of the way goods are made or how they break down after they are produced.

A recent report from the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at human exposure to these chemicals.

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Using data from urine and blood samples, the report examined the amounts of 148 chemicals in the U.S. population from 2001 to 2002. The goal is to track exposure to these chemicals over time and try to determine risk levels for various segments of the population.

As the report points out, just because these chemicals are in our blood does not necessarily



David Suzuki

mean they are harmful to us. However, many of the chemicals, such as lead and mercury, are known to be dangerous, while for many others, there is just insufficient information. The fact they find their way into our bodies at all is cause for some concern.

Fortunately, there is some good news in the report.

In the early 1990s, 4.4 per cent of children tested had elevated levels of lead (a neurotoxin) in their blood. By 2002, that number dropped to 1.6 per cent.

Levels of certain pesticides, like aldrin and dieldrin, have also dropped to low or undetectable levels.

These results show how effective strong environmental legislation can be.

Efforts to reduce lead in our environment, such as by banning it as gasoline additive, took many years to achieve because of industry opposition, but have been very successful in reducing our exposure to this toxin.

Pesticides like aldrin and dieldrin have also been phased out and, as a result, are also disappearing from our blood.

But there are new chemicals coming on the market practically every day.

The CDC found widespread exposure to pyrethroid pesticides, which have been poorly studied in terms of human health, and phthalates, which are common in plastics and have been linked to reproductive abnormalities.

One of the groups most vulnerable to exposure to industrial chemicals is children.

Children are not just small adults. Their bodies and brains are developing rapidly. They metabolize things differently. They play on grass and in the

dirt. They chew on things and get into everything.

In the U.S., there's a great new initiative called the National Children's Study, which will examine the effect of environmental influences on children from before birth to the age of 21.

The study will follow 100,000 children in the U.S. as they grow to find out how chemical exposure, genetics, physical surroundings and a number of other factors affect development.

Right now, there are no Canadian children taking part in the study, but it is not too late for the federal government to fund a Canadian component and take part in this vital research.

We all deserve a choice over what we put into our bodies. An ever-expanding list of pervasive chemicals in our environment takes away that choice.

We need to take it back.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

LETTERS POLICY

The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. Submissions must be less than 400 words and include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and edit for clarity and space.

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Stouffville Sun-Tribune

A York Region Newspaper Group community newspaper. The Sun-Tribune, published every Thursday and Saturday, is a member of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Torstar Corporation. Metroland is comprised of 70 community publications across Ontario. The York Region Newspaper Group includes The Liberal, serving Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Vaughan Citizen, The Economist & Sun (Markham), The Era-Banner (Newmarket/Aurora), Stouffville Sun-Tribune, Georgina Advocate, York Region Business Times, North of the City, yorkregion.com and York Region Printing.