

The price of 'safety'

Environmentally or financially, gas guzzling autos carry a cost



Kristen Tuinstra, a recent graduate of the master's program in the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, is editor of *EJ*.

The irony of a statement someone said the other day still continues to make me chuckle a bit. While walking out to the parking lot, an acquaintance said that she drove a Ford Expedition because she felt safer. "I know they're not good for the environment, but I just don't feel safe in a smaller vehicle." I didn't tell her that if the Expedition were $\frac{1}{2}$ " wider, she'd need a special permit to drive it.

Stepping into my "less safe" Saturn, I thought about how ironic her loon plate was on that giant polluting machine.

But was my car that much better for the environment, as, according to my acquaintance, mine would be compared to hers?

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Chicagoans pay as much as \$1.75 per gallon of gas. At about 15 gallons per week, that can be as much as \$1,350 per year spent on gasoline alone — which doesn't include special trips or vacations. Then, on top of that, another \$7,000 per year on auto insurance, \$3,600 on car maintenance/dooly-bobs for the car/road taxes, and at least \$6,000 on parking — depending on whether you have to rent a space. That's a grand total of \$17,950 per year to have a vehicle in Chicago, and about the cost of a nice two-year-old car. If someone keeps a car for seven years, that's a whopping \$125,650.

It costs about \$20 per week to ride Chicago's "El" — and that's unlimited use. That's about \$1,000 per year for transportation around the city. Over seven years, compared to the car-owner, the "El" rider saves \$118,650.

That's it. I'm selling my car and moving to a city with decent mass transportation.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our road-hog issue on mass trans-

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portation is jam-packed with features on history, diesel and transportation issues in other countries. **Corbin Sullivan**, a first-year environmental journalism master's student originally from Marshfield, Wis., takes us back to the days of horse-drawn buses in Detroit and through the next one hundred years into the solo-driver frenzy the city is today. In his photo essay, Sullivan reflects on a vacation kayaking down the river in the wilderness — but he never got away from trains or highways.

The pros and cons of diesel are weighed in the feature written by **Alex Nixon**, a first-year environmental journalism master's student originally from York, Pa. Nixon explains how air and gas is compressed in a gasoline engine compared to a diesel engine. Nixon uses sources such as an environmentalist and DaimlerChrysler to back up his story.

We touch on two international countries' mass transportation issues in a pair of articles written by **Jim Detjen** and **Susana Guzman**. A second-year master's student, Guzman, who is Mexican, writes about the primary mode of transportation in Mexico: the microbus. It is the size of a van, holding about 20 passengers. Detjen tells about the primary mode of transportation in China: the bicycle. However, both of these countries are turning frighteningly American-like — more and more cars are being driven, thus increasing emissions in these countries.

Brian McKenna delves into Dr. Devra Lee Davis' feelings about environmental epidemiology and her new book, *When Smoke Ran Like Water*, a 2002 National Book Award

finalist for Nonfiction. She recalls the deaths that occurred one day in the late 1940s in her hometown, Denora, Pa., which were thought to have been caused by thick smog. She didn't hear about it until she was in college in Pittsburgh; no one talked about the environmental health tragedy.

In an article on the Aral Sea, **Eric Freedman**, who traveled there in the winter of 2002 during a visit to Uzbekistan on a Fulbright Fellowship, wrote about the "graveyard of ships" that has become the sea. Sadly, the Aral has become a vast desert and Freedman explains how it got that way. Walking through the graveyard with a former sailor who sailed the sea, Freedman listens to the sailor talk about the way the sea used to be.

Emily Friedman, a journalism senior, writes about the effect a new mall has had on the environment and what the potential impacts to local businesses could be. The neighbors of the upscale mall have been up-in-arms about its new neighbor since the announcement a couple years ago. The mall means an increase in traffic and a reduction in property value.

As always, we invite feedback on *EJ*. Having this information helps us know our readers better. We want to hear suggestions for improvement, possible department inclusions, story ideas and whether you'd be interested in contributing an article or two. Our hope is that *EJ* will continue to grow into a magazine devoted to environmental studies, professors and students, journalists and journalism teachers.