

# What's Happening

IN CALIFORNIA ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

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## THE AIR RESOURCES BOARD SETS NEW STANDARDS

California always has led the nation's fight against air pollution. Now there are 26 million motor vehicles on the roads, so the California Air Resources Board (ARB) is pushing companies to make cleaner cars. In January it set new standards. They are the toughest in the U.S.

The ARB protects public health by reducing air pollutants.

Since it began in 1967 it has caused big changes. For example, California was the first state to ban leaded gasoline. It also led the nation in requiring cars to have catalytic converters and get smog checks.

This recent vote by the ARB makes history too. It creates the toughest standards in U.S. history. California already has strict standards. A new car in California now emits 98 percent less pollution out its tailpipe than in 1980s. Even so, over half of the state's smog comes from gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles.

The Board's new standards do three things. First, they require a reduction in emissions that cause smog. Automakers will have to reduce them by another 75 percent by the year 2025. Second, they call for 34 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide. Third, 15 percent of new cars will have to produce zero emissions.

The selection of "clean" cars that people can buy is growing. According to the ARB, ten years ago there were only about a half dozen low-emis-

sions or zero-emissions cars for sale. Now almost every automaker either offers one or will soon. Two dozen of them will come on the market in 2012.

California has pushed automakers to make vehicles that do not pollute at all. These are called Zero Emissions Vehicles. They

include electric vehicles, plug-in vehicles and vehicles that get power from hydrogen fuel cells. Once they were just a dream, but now there are 10,000 of them on the roads. By 2025 there will be 1.4 million.

In recent years Californians have had good reasons to buy clean cars. The first one, of course, is that they help the environment. Another is that they reduce the amount of oil that the U.S. has to buy from other countries. The State also has encouraged people to buy clean cars. It lets them drive in carpool lanes on the freeway, even if they are alone. The government also has given people cash rebates or lower taxes.

Californians drive more than 800 million miles every day. Not surprisingly, motor vehicles are California's largest cause of air pollution. These new standards from the Air Resources Board will not only help the Golden State. As in the past, they will lead to stronger laws in other states too.



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## BIOGRAPHY

### MARY NICHOLS

#### CHAIRMAN, CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD

Mary Nichols grew up in New York. For a long time she wanted to become a writer. She never thought about protecting the environment in California. That is not how her life unfolded though. Today she is the chairman of the California Air Resources Board.

Reading and writing were early interests. As a girl, Mary went to the library regularly. Each time she took out as many books as the rules allowed. Her interest carried into high school, where English was her favorite subject. She wrote poetry and started a literary magazine for young writers.

Languages interested Mary too. In and out of school she took classes in Spanish, Latin, German, Greek and Russian. When she attended Cornell University, she earned her degree in Russian Literature. During those years she also wrote for the university's newspaper. However, one summer provided a life-changing experience.

The 1960s were a time of change for Blacks in the U.S. In the summer of 1964 Mary went to Tennessee to register Black voters. She and other young people went directly to Black Americans. If they were willing to register, she and the others helped them do it. It was scary, and plenty of them received threats and faced attacks. That summer convinced Mary that she should work for the good of society.

Ms. Nichols returned to New York and finished her studies. She helped to write a book about that eventful summer. After graduation she worked for two years, then went to law school. In 1971 she and her husband moved to California.

There she became one of the first lawyers in the U.S. to fight for clean air. Not long after that the governor of California appointed her to the Air Resources Board.

As chairman of the ARB, she is gone from home a lot. She lives in Southern California but works in Sacramento. She also speaks to organizations and on college campuses all around the state. Through her, people learn about what the ARB does for Californians. They also learn how other states and countries look to California for leadership.

Sometimes Chairman Nichols goes outside California too. She has been to the automakers' factories in Detroit. She also has been to global conferences in places like Japan, Denmark and Indonesia. People there pay close attention to the standards for clean air that California sets.

Mary Nichols enjoys movies, opera and cooking. She especially enjoys spending time with her young granddaughter. Those things all bring richness to her personal life. They add to the satisfaction she gets at work as leader of one of the world's most important environmental groups.



*"California is a hero at global environmental conferences."*

# *Background Information*

The ARB deals with more than just auto emissions. It oversees 35 local and regional air pollution control districts. The districts regulate pollution from industry and develop local plans that lead to healthy air quality.

California can set higher standards than the U.S. government's because the state had its own pollution laws before the Clean Air Act went into effect in 1970.

Californians' vehicles burn more than 37 million gallons of gasoline every day.

By 2025 the ARB wants one in seven new cars sold in California to be Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEV's).

The new average in miles per gallon for new cars in California in 2025 will reach 54 mpg.

The ARB predicts that its standards will cause the cost of cars to go up. Advanced "clean" technologies will add \$1,900 to the price of a new car in 2025, but owners will save \$6,000 in fuel because of the standards.

Now the Air Resources Board considers about 50 car models to be clean.

Vehicles that run on electricity do not emit pollutants themselves, but the power plants that create electricity do cause pollution. The same is true for hydrogen-powered vehicles.

In November the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation proposed new standards for fuel efficiency. They call for 40.1 mpg in model year 2021, and 49.6 mpg in 2025. These would cut oil consumption by four billion barrels and cut two billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over the lifetimes of those vehicles.

American automakers support the new federal standards. When they got loans from the U.S. government in 2009, it was with the understanding that they would no longer file lawsuits against new standards as they had in the past.

In 1990 the ARB required that 2 percent of new cars be ZEV's by 1998. Then it raised those numbers to 5 percent by 2001 and 10 percent by 2003. Car dealers are against the new standard of 15 percent because they are not sure how many ZEV's they will be able to sell.

In 1967 California created the ARB by combining the Bureau of Air Sanitation and the Motor Vehicle Pollution Control Board.

## **Topics for Discussion and Writing**

### *Pre-reading:*

- Tell how electric cars get their power and how hybrid cars work.

### *Comprehension:*

- What has the Air Resources Board done to improve air quality?

### *Beyond the Text:*

- Why does it cost more for automakers to create new models with new technology?
- Compare new cars with older ones you still see on the roads.
- Identify some things that can individuals do to reduce pollution.

## **Vocabulary**

*Article-specific:* resources; board; pollution; catalytic converter; strict; to emit; tailpipe; diesel; greenhouse gas; rebate

*High-use:* standard; vehicle; to reduce; to ban; to require; fuel; environment; to encourage

## **Sources**

*Los Angeles Daily News* January 28, 2012

*Los Angeles Times* January 28, 2012

KQED TV "This Week in Northern California"  
January 27, 2012

California Air Resources Board [www.arb.ca.gov](http://www.arb.ca.gov)

California Environmental Protection Agency  
[www.calepa.ca.gov](http://www.calepa.ca.gov)

## **CA Curricular Standards (4–12)**

### **English - Language Arts**

*Reading* 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

*Writing* 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

### **ELD—Intermediate and Advanced**

Reading Vocabulary Development / Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking

### **History-Social Science**

4.4; 4.5; 11.5; 11.11; 12.7