

May 13, 1970

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

The automobile is the major source of air pollution in America. This threat to our nation's health could be eliminated overnight by equipping automobiles with catalytic mufflers. No extensive research is necessary; these mufflers have been known for years. They are safe, effective, and not very expensive.

But leaded gasoline neutralizes the muffler. And most of the high-powered, high-speed, high cost and highly unsafe cars rolling off the assembly lines in Detroit these days require leaded gasoline. For this reason and this reason alone, mufflers which could eliminate 60% of the country's air pollution are not being used.

The federal government could help to end this absurdity by using its power as a consumer. I urge you to direct all federal departments and agencies to purchase only automobiles equipped with catalytic mufflers and lower powered engines designed to run on lead-free gasoline.

Some automobiles now on the road - including, undoubtedly, some owned by the federal government - could function effectively with lead-free gasoline. I urge you to equip all these automobiles with catalytic mufflers and to order all departments and agencies to use only lead-free gasoline in these automobiles.

Lead additives in gasoline are deadly. They not only destroy the catalytic muffler, but also escape into the atmosphere through auto exhaust. Lead particles in auto fumes are among the most offensive components of the smog that hovers ominously over our major cities, and their long-range ecological effects could be devastating.

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If governments on all levels take the step I have proposed, the impact will be immediate and dramatic. The auto industry will have to design and produce more cars capable of running on lead-free gas. The oil industry will have to make lead-free gas more widely available. Commercial and private consumers will then be in a position to follow the government's example.

My proposal does not require the expenditure of significant federal funds. It does not require legislation. With the stroke of a pen, you could reduce air pollution and contribute to its ultimate elimination.

If America converts to lower powered engines capable of using lead-free gasoline, its air will be purer, its highways will be safer, and its consumption of irreplaceable oil reserves will be lower. My proposal would reduce pollution while promoting conservation and safety. I urge you to implement it immediately.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Theodore C. Sorensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Theodore C. Sorensen