The most friendly of cars

Earthtalk

According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy's (ACEEE) Green Book, an annual environmental rating of the best and worst cars, Honda and Toyota models led the pack as the world's "greenest" automobiles for 2006.

Not surprisingly, top honors went to a hybrid gasoline-electric vehicle, Honda's Insight, which pairs an efficient electric motor with a gasoline engine to save gas and minimize emissions. Unfortunately, the Insight, launched in 1999, will soon be discontinued due to declining sales.

To determine a car's rankings, in addition to fuel efficiency ACEEE factors in the pollution generated by a given vehicle based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) emissions ratings.

While the Insight does not have as clean an exhaust rating as Toyota's hybrid Prius, it has slightly better highway mileage (56 versus 51 miles per gallon), making it the overall winner.

Other top green models on ACEEE's list include various versions of Honda's Civic (particularly its natural gas version) and Toyota's Corolla and Matrix. The Hyundai Accent, Kia Rio, Mazda 3, Chevrolet Cobalt and Saturn Ion also placed well.

Regarding batteries, hybrid advocates insist that the nickel-metal hydride batteries found in the Toyota Prius, Honda Insight and other hybrids contain far fewer pollutants than the lead-acid types present in traditional gas-powered cars.

Furthermore, carmakers are keen to keep such batteries out of landfills, with Toyota even offering to buy back spent hybrid batteries for $200 so it can recycle them.

According to Toyota, "Every part of the battery, from the precious metals to the plastic, plates, steel case and the wiring, is recycled." Meanwhile, Bradley Berman of the Web site, HybridCars.com, reports that Honda collects the battery and transfers it to a preferred recycler to follow their prescribed process: disassembling and sorting the materials; shredding the plastics; recovering and processing the metal; and neutralizing the alkaline material before sending it to a landfill.

Automakers are scrambling to create smaller, more efficient and less toxic batteries for hybrids and other vehicles, Berman says.

Another option for green consumers is a diesel car that runs on biodiesel, a fuel derived from renewable crops (and which works seamlessly in most diesel engines). *AutoWeek* magazine reports that a biodiesel-powered Volkswagen Jetta TDI has the best overall fuel economy of any new car on the road today under "real-world driving conditions" (which include, among other things, traffic congestion, use of air conditioning and high speeds).

In *AutoWeek*'s test-drive comparison, the Jetta TDI achieved nearly 50 miles per gallon using B20 biodiesel (two parts vegetable oil, eight parts regular diesel), edging out even Toyota's Prius, which only scored 42 mpg using gasoline.

The EPA is revising its own testing procedures for the 2007 model year to try to get more in line with real world driving conditions. As a result, fuel economies displayed on window stickers will change. Some cars, especially smaller vehicles and hybrids, will lose as much as 12 percent in their ratings.

CONTACTS

- ACEEE's Green Book Online, www.greener-cars.com
- AutoWeek Magazine's, www.autoweek.com
- Hybrid Cars, www.hybridcars.com

Linguistic freedom

Expert will talk about the right to speak in one's native tongue

By Rachel Gersh
For The New Mexican

It could be a mother prohibited from speaking to her baby in her native language. Others face jail or even death if they are overheard using a language other than the region's official tongue. Dawn Wink, a teacher, writer and specialist in linguistic human rights, points to these examples when speaking of human rights abuses from a linguistic standpoint, a theme she'll address on the global, national and regional level during a PEN New Mexico presentation on Tuesday.

"Linguistic human rights is every person on the planet's right to speak their native language whenever and wherever they like, to speak it in public without fear of reprisal, punishment or discrimination," Wink said.

For those whose native language is an "official" language such as English, German or French, it can be easy to take these rights for granted. However, Wink said, of the 6,000 to 7,000 languages spoken in the world, only a few hundred enjoy official status. People whose daily life is carried out in an unofficial language are often treated differently. In some cases, such as that of the Kurds for many years, people must be furtive to avoid being killed for speaking their native tongue. For others, the discrimination is more subtle and can vary from being looked down upon to being prohibited from using their first language in places such as schools, government agencies or the workplace.

This bias against some languages is due in part to what Wink describes as the hierarchy of languages. "Globally, there are high-status and low-status languages. It depends on the area and what historically has happened there."

The United States, for example, is an international superpower where people live geographically isolated from other countries.

This isolation contributes to the national tendency to consider English a universal language. "For most of the world, being bilingual or trilingual is a given, and that hasn't been the case in the United States," Wink said.

She said the result is a lack of understanding of the diversity of languages, and that can create injustices. American Indians who weren't allowed to speak to their children in their native dialects and Hispanic students who were prohibited from speaking Spanish in school are just some of the examples of these injustices in the United States.

Courtesy photo

Writer Dawn Wink.

The language and culture connection

In spite of all this, some cultures are able to retain their native language. Wink attributes this tenacity to the deep connection between language and culture.

The use of Spanish in New Mexico, both by Hispanics who have lived in the area for generations and by newer immigrants, shows the strength of those ties.

Speaking Spanish "brings up for both groups a real pride in their own heritage and language," Wink said. "It's maintaining that heritage and richness of culture."

However, many advocate integrating into the dominant culture by abandoning one's native language and adopting the official language. Wink, an instructor in the teacher-certification program at Santa Fe Community College, disagrees with this approach. She said linguistic studies show that the level of mastery of a person's first language is the best indicator of success in acquiring a second language. "People who know how to read and write in their first language do better in their second language," she said.

In the United States, there is a great deal of emphasis on the ability to speak English in order to be successful, and immigrants feel pressure to learn the language like never before, said Wink, whose grandparents came to this country as German immigrants and worked in agriculture. In spite of not speaking English, there were enough economic opportunities for them that they were able to learn the official language little by little. "That's no longer possible because of the completely changed nature of our (economic) reality. (The acculturation) that used to take several generations, now people expect in one year."

Promoting the use of English with other languages is different than demands for exclusive use of English, said Nancy Fay, vice president of PEN New Mexico and organizer of Wink's presentation. "Giving access to English is different from requiring people to turn their back on a language that they have been living inside."

The debate generated by official-language exclusivity and bilingual education is heated precisely because language and power go hand in hand, Wink said. In the past, she said, "the first thing colonizers did was prohibit the use of the native language, because inherently in language, there's power."

In general, members of the dominant language group don't concede how much power language contains, added Wink. But fear of losing control over that power is exactly what creates social injustices through the abuse of linguistic human rights. "When groups are discriminated against (because of their language), that's all about the hierarchy of language."

IF YOU GO...

What: A talk on language and human rights at the monthly PEN New Mexico meeting. PEN is an organization dedicated to preserving freedom of expression for writers.

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Where: 1315 Luana St., off Cerrillos Road.

How much: Free for PEN members, $2 for the public.

Information: 988-5185 or edit@thema.us

Foto de cortesía

John D'Antonio en el Río Grande.

Agua: La falta de recursos y la política dificultan su manejo

AGUA, viene de la página C-1

La formación del ingeniero

A sus 49 años, unas cuantas canas resaltan en la oscura cabellera de D' Antonio. Su silueta delgada lo delata como una persona con metabolismo activo. Aunque es ingeniero, habla con términos simples para darse a entender, pero sabe expresarse bien con los legisladores, los consumidores de agua y la prensa.

Fuera del trabajo, le encanta jugar béisbol y golf. Nick, el menor de sus tres hijos y quien todavía vive en casa, y su esposa, Cassandra, se emocionan con las posibilidades de poder viajar cuando él deje de trabajar en el manejo del agua. D'Antonio nació y fue criado en Albuquerque. Se graduó de Del Norte High School y nunca contemplaba la idea de tener una carrera tan involucrada con este vital líquido.

"Yo no era más que un chico de la zona alta del noreste. Tuve familiares que trabajaban en ranchos; pero pocos en trabajo agrícola realmente. Mi familia fue muy conservadora con nuestro uso del agua, tal vez porque éramos muchos. Cuando yo era adolescente no me interesaba mucho el tema del agua como le interesaría a un pescador o granjero."

Se graduó de la Universidad de Nuevo México con una licenciatura en ingeniería civil. "Recibí muy buenas ofertas después de graduarme para trabajar como ingeniero estructural pero los mejores puestos eran fuera del estado y yo quería quedarme en

Nuevo México", explica. "El primer día después de mi graduación ingresé para trabajar con en el equipo de ingenieros del ejército de EE. UU., cuando cumplí 22 años."

Pasó 15 años con la agencia federal, diseñando sistemas de control de inundaciones y diques, solucionaba problemas de sedimentación, manejaba proyectos y así aprendió a gestionar proyectos y supervisar equipos grandes de personal.

La agencia llegó al punto de necesitar a alguien para administrar el programa de acequias, el cual ayuda en reconstruir y renovar sistemas de irrigación viejos y desbaratados, y el se presentó como voluntario cuando nadie más lo quería hacer, explica D'Antonio.

Ésa fue su introducción a la oficina de ingeniero estatal y el mundo de evasión perpetua con la política de las acequias.

"Es un programa complejo, con pocos recursos y mucho trabajo que hacer," dice D'Antonio del programa manejado por muchos gerentes del gobierno estatal y el gobierno federal.

Hace ocho años, lo empleó el ingeniero estatal, Tom Turney, quien fue el primer ingeniero en supervisar el distrito de Albuquerque para luego pasar a la nueva división de Distribución de Agua. D'Antonio ha trabajado con gobernadores de ambos partidos políticos. Ha trabajado en el Blue Ribbon Task Force con asuntos de agua desde 1998, bajo la administración del gobernador republicano anterior, Gary Jonson, y ahora bajo la del demócrata Bill Richardson, quien le que trabajara como secretario del Departamento del Medioambiente en sus últimos cinco meses de su término en el 2001.

"Esto me expuso a los asuntos de calidad de agua y otros temas del departamento," dice D'Antonio. "Estudiaba todas las noches. Me sentía como si yo estuviera pasando por exámenes finales de la universidad . . . fue como beber de una manguera de los bomberos. Fue demasiado."

Richardson le pidió a D'Antonio que ocupara el puesto de ingeniero estatal en el 2002. Ahora maneja un equipo de 334 personas y un presupuesto de 49 millones de dólares. Un colega de D'Antonio, Estevan López, fue empleado para trabajar como el sub ingeniero y comisario de los arroyos interestatales. López y D'Antonio trabajan juntos para asegurar que Nuevo México cumpla el acuerdo de mandar agua del Río Grande y el Río Pecos al estado vecino de Texas. "Pienso que ha sido un buen enlace para el mantenimiento efectivo de agua en el estado", dice D'Antonio.

Más gente y menos agua

Mantener el balance de agua en el Río Grande y tratar con todas las necesidades generales resulta ser una pesadilla. Además, la sequía no está ayudando. "La creciente demanda del público combinada con la falta de decisiones legales son asuntos difíciles que tenemos que enfrentar," explica D'Antonio.

Proteger los derechos de los usuarios del agua más antiguos -como granjeroses, por ley, su prioridad. Bajo el sistema pasado de aplicación, en tiempos de sequía él tenía el derecho de cortarles el agua a los dueños de títulos de agua más nuevos, tales como municipios.

"Pienso que la mayoría de la gente no entendía bien el pasado sistema de aplicación. No comprenden que el agua del oeste se maneja por uso previo y, si nos encontramos con una situación donde el agua escasea, su agua puede ser y será cortada legalmente. Ellos pueden quedarse sin agua."

D'Antonio quiere evitar esta circunstancia y se esfuerza para que todos los que se benefician del agua, la compartan durante tiempos secos. Tomar decisiones drásticas es la medida draconiana de la administración de prioridades, indica D'Antonio.

"El diálogo es la alternativa al manejo y mantenimiento del agua con acuerdos de colaboración y agua compartida", dice. "La gente percibe que siempre habrá agua, pero esto simplemente no es cierto."

Traducción por Jeff Abbott