

CASE STUDY

Resolving Controversial Environmental Issues

- While reading the following passage, evaluate the link between each reason and the conclusion. Does each reason logically lead to the conclusion? Why or why not?
- Authors sometimes provide evidence for their reasons. Evidence may be in the form of statistics, case studies, personal testimonials, research studies, personal observations, or analogies. Identify any evidence offered in support of the reasons in the following editorial. Are there any problems with that evidence? For example, if statistics are given, can you interpret those statistics? In addition, what does it mean if the author provides no evidence for a reason?

Equal Rights Among Autos

When asked about criteria for buying an automobile, most people will list style, color, and price. However, few people add "low-polluter" to their list of criteria for choosing a vehicle. In fact, those vehicles that are most popular are the highest polluters. Minivans, sport utility vehicles (SUVs), and light-duty pickup trucks produce higher levels of NO_x and other smog-causing gases than cars do. This higher amount of pollution occurs because these vehicles are not subject to the same strict emission standards as ordinary cars.

However, on November 5, 1998, the State Air Resources Board in California leveled the inequality between cars and SUVs by issuing more stringent emission standards that will also apply to minivans, SUVs, and light-duty trucks. SUVs currently produce one and a half to two and a half times more pollution than other vehicles. The EPA should pay attention to this valuable model as it develops new federal standards for cars, light-duty trucks, minivans, and SUVs.

Because one of every two new vehicles purchased is an SUV, air quality could truly suffer if emission standards are not tightened for these popular vehicles. As long as the EPA follows California's lead and sets higher emission standards for all vehicles, air quality should remain the same. California's standards require manufacturers to cut emissions so that gas-powered automobiles are almost as clean as electric automobiles.

Of course, manufacturers and business groups have protested loudly against the new regulations. They claim that some models will simply not be able to meet the new standards. Although the industry has protested previous environmental regulations (e.g., fuel-economy standards), it has been wrong about compliance with those regulations. California officials believe that it will cost about \$107 per vehicle to achieve the new emission standards—a small price for clean air.

The EPA should certainly follow California's lead. Air quality will be improved by higher emission standards for minivans, SUVs, and other similar vehicles.

As a student in an environmental law class, it is likely that you will be asked to apply your critical thinking skills to any argument you encounter, especially arguments with which you disagree. Perhaps you agree with the conclusion, but the author does not provide good reasons to lead you to that conclusion. You need to be able to identify good reasons for your conclusions.

For the rest of this book, you should automatically identify the reasons presented in each editorial. You will not be asked to identify the arguments following each editorial. You are expected to identify the reasons and then answer the critical thinking questions.