IHS The Energy Daily Announces
The 2011 Leadership Awards

Public Policy Award

IHS The Energy Daily’s panel of judges has chosen Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, for the Public Policy Award for his achievements over 20 years of advocacy work urging federal and state action to raise U.S. motor vehicle fuel economy standards, including his central role in the development of California’s pioneering clean car program.

Starting in 1990 with the Sierra Club, Becker was consistently the environmental community’s most dogged and effective lobbyist in Congress, before the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and at the White House on the need for higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards to cut U.S. greenhouse emissions, reduce the nation’s heavy dependence on foreign oil and help consumers save through reduced fuel purchases.

Becker’s leading role was recognized by President Bill Clinton in 1994 when he named him to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Personal Motor Vehicle Greenhouse Gas Reductions, where Becker helped author the panel’s report recommending stronger CAFE standards.

When he was outgunned by U.S. automakers’ money and clout in Washington, Becker helped craft a new strategy to take advantage of the greener political climate in California, where he conceived and helped design Assemblywoman Fran Pavley’s landmark clean car law, the first state action requiring automakers to reduce vehicle emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2), the main greenhouse gas.

Becker then directed lobbying campaigns that persuaded 13 other states to adopt California’s clean car standards, as is allowed under provisions of the federal Clean Air Act giving California authority to set clean air rules that are tougher than federal standards. The widespread adoption of the California standards raised the prospect for automakers that they would have to make cleaner cars for 45 percent of the U.S. market, prompting automakers to reconsider their opposition to federal action on higher CAFE standards due to their desire for uniform nationwide standards.

At the same time, Becker worked with the International Center for Technology Assessment to petition the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate automobile CO2 emissions under the Clean Air Act. The petition ultimately led to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that EPA was required under the Clean Air Act to regulate vehicle CO2 emissions if the agency determined that those emissions endangered public health and welfare—a finding later made by the EPA.

Becker also was co-founder of the Blue-Green Alliance, which brought together labor unions—including the United Auto Workers—and environmentalists to support the Obama administration’s ultimately successful efforts to craft an agreement with the auto industry in 2011 setting CAFE and EPA emissions standards at 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

Analysts say the new CAFE and emissions standards represent the biggest step taken by any nation to date to address global warming—with projections showing it will cut U.S. CO2 emissions by 280 million metric tons by 2030—while also reducing U.S. oil use and saving U.S. consumers an estimated $80 billion in fuel purchases.