

Automakers beat fuel efficiency standards in model year 2015—EPA

...However, Dan Becker, director of the Center for Auto Safety's Safe Climate Campaign, said that EPA's figures are misleading because of numerous "loopholes" embedded in the EPA regulations that allow automakers to gain fuel economy credits for what he called "phantom" mileage gains.

Becker said that rather than cutting emissions to targeted levels, automakers are gaming the system by claiming credits for measures such as flexible fuel vehicles, which can run on gasoline or ethanol, and "passive cabin ventilation" in their vehicles.

Becker said the flexible fuel vehicle credits are meaningless because there are only a handful of fueling stations across the country that offer 100 percent ethanol, meaning most flex-fuel vehicles end up mostly burning carbon-heavy gasoline.

And passive cabin ventilation, Becker said "may mean nothing more than a dashboard sticker telling drivers to 'open the window, stupid,' rather than turning on the air conditioning."

Becker added that U.S. automakers have taken full advantage of another feature included in the rule and for which they lobbied aggressively. The rule sets different levels of fuel economy requirements that are based on a vehicle's size, with smaller vehicles required to post higher fuel efficiency than larger ones. In response to this feature, U.S. automakers have sharply boosted production of big pickup trucks, and thus face easier fuel economy targets than if they made smaller vehicles.

"Most of these gas guzzlers are built to carry cargo but often haul nothing more cumbersome than a latte from Starbucks," Becker said.

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