

Obama Climate Goal Riding on New Truck, Aircraft Proposals

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The Obama administration is adding crucial elements to its campaign against climate change this month with proposals to limit carbon emissions from trucks and aircraft, two of the heaviest fuel users.

Following earlier rules to boost the mileage of cars and cut use of coal to make electricity, the initiatives on tractor-trailers and [airplanes](#) are key to reaching President Barack Obama's pledge to cut emissions by 26 percent by 2025, researchers say.

It also lays the groundwork for United Nations climate negotiations set to conclude in Paris this December.

"They appear to be moving on all fronts," said Karl Hausker, who wrote a report for the World Resources Institute on how the U.S. could achieve the goal. "We're confident they can meet it. It's not easy, but it's doable."

In contrast to his first term, when he sidelined climate concerns in favor of an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy, Obama now says combating climate change is a top priority. Setting efficiency rules for automobiles and small trucks, to raise the average mileage to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, was the major effort early in his tenure. The Environmental Protection Agency's plan to curb emissions from power plants is the centerpiece of the second-term agenda.

The EPA also is preparing rules to cut methane leaks from oil and gas drilling, and switch out the use of climate-harming refrigerants.

Biggest Share

An analysis by Hausker and four colleagues shows power-plant emissions, which have fallen 15 percent from their 2005 peak, will account for the biggest share of the reductions in the next decade because of the EPA rules and state renewable standards. They said EPA's rules could be tightened further to achieve additional carbon reductions.

While that's unlikely because the final rule is scheduled to come out this summer, the changes for trucks and aircraft are meaningful, too, and don't come with the organized industry resistance that the EPA is facing on its power-plant standard.

Truck and aircraft makers have been working with the administration on how it can structure its plans.

For trucks, environmental groups are pushing Obama to set fuel-economy improvements of 40 percent from 2010, a goal they say is both technologically feasible and long overdue because tractor-trailers average 6 miles for every gallon of diesel. That change alone could cut U.S. oil use by 1.4 million barrels a day and eliminate more than twice the greenhouse gases emitted by New Jersey each year, according to the Sierra Club.

'Come Close'

"They are looking to be as stringent as they can be," said Sam Ori, executive director at the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Center. "I'm optimistic that they are going to come close" to the cuts environmental groups say are feasible.

For airplanes, the EPA on Wednesday proposed finding that carbon emissions from the industry endangers health and the environment. Along with that proposal, it issued a preliminary query about how it might make aircraft more fuel efficient. The administration said it plans to develop its rules in tandem with international negotiations on this issue.

"They want to send a signal to the rest of the world that they will do something," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign. International negotiations on aircraft emissions are scheduled to wrap up next year.

Global Emissions

The agency said U.S. planes account for 11 percent of greenhouse gases from U.S. transportation activity and 29 percent from all aircraft globally. The EPA said a final rule on aircraft isn't likely until 2018.

Critics say Obama's 26 percent pledge, made during United Nations talks on a global climate-change treaty, can't be achieved without Congress mandating larger changes to the U.S. economy. With Republican control of the House and Senate, and continued congressional criticism of the EPA's efforts, any new climate legislation is unlikely.

"I'm quite confident that they have no way to get there," said Jeff Holmstead, an EPA official in the Bush administration and now an industry lawyer at Bracewell & Giuliani in Washington. Even with new aircraft and truck rules, "I don't think it even gets us close."

Obama Successor

White House officials haven't laid out exactly how they plans to achieve the target in 2025, nearly a decade after Obama leaves office. Much of the hard work of implementing these rules will fall to his successor, who may not share his fervor for this issue -- and may oppose it altogether.

Obama is putting a focus on the UN negotiations with 190 governments that are scheduled to wrap up in Paris with an agreement on how each nation will tackle the issue in 2020 and beyond.

The U.S. promised to cut greenhouse-gas emissions 26 percent to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. U.S. emissions are already down more than 10 percent from 2005, although the independent Energy Information Administration predicts emissions will increase, not fall, in the next decade.

The majority of reductions in the EPA's power-plant rule comes from replacing coal to generate electricity with natural gas, made cheap by the fracking boom. Additional reductions must come from cutting methane leaks in those gas production and delivery systems, and using refrigerants that don't rely on hydrofluorocarbons, according to Hausker's paper.

Rules on methane and refrigerants could be issued this summer, said David Doniger, director of the climate program at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"It's the summer of climate action," he said.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-09/obama-climate-goal-riding-on-this-month-s-truck-aircraft-plans>