Obama regulates tailpipe greenhouse gas

The White House issues sweeping new national rules that will improve auto fuel efficiency nearly 40 percent by 2016.





If this Toyota Corolla can get stellar mileage, can't every American car? (Credit: Flickr)

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A new day is dawning for automotive fuel economy—in the name of regulating greenhouse gas emissions. The Obama Administration announced May 19 tough new standards for carmakers to meet by 2016: 30 mpg for trucks and 39 mpg for cars. Why go after fuel economy when the target is climate emissions? There is virtually no other way to reduce tailpipe greenhouse gas.

There's a long history to this, but here's the condensed version. California has the unique right to set its own emissions standards. The state's regulations are much stronger than the federal standards, and so and 13 other, mostly coastal states (plus the District of Columbia) follow them. In 2002, California passed tailpipe climate legislation, but the Bush Administration blocked it. The EPA had until June 30 to grant the state a waiver to enact its law, but this federal move supercedes that. California's Air Resources Board says the state will retain its right to create its own new standards in 2016, when the federal program ends.

The Obama Administration claims that, over its life, these new rules will reduce oil consumption by 1.8 billion barrels and cut greenhouse gas emissions by 900 million metric tons.

Environmentalists are ecstatic, because this will mean a nearly 40 percent improvement in fuel economy. According to the Sierra Club's Carl Pope, "President Obama is putting the pedal to the floor when it comes to slashing our dependence on oil and confronting global warming. Last month the administration closed the books on the Bush era of climate denial once and for all by acknowledging the threat of global warming, and now today they moving forward with a plan that will give new life to the American auto industry and ensure that the next generation of clean, efficient autos will be made right here in the U.S.A."

Dan Becker of the Safe Climate Campaign praised the Obama action as "the single biggest step we've taken to curb global warming."

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, an industry group representing 11 carmakers, praised the new regulations, announced at a White House Rose Garden ceremony. "The President has succeeded in bringing three regulatory bodies, 15 states, a dozen automakers and many environmental groups to the table," said Dave McCurdy, the group's CEO. Among the green groups attending the event were the League of Conservation Voters, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund and the Union of Concerned Scientists--not welcome White House visitors during the Bush years.

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