

ENVIRONMENT

Obama To Announce Auto Pollution Plan

Listen · 3:51

Queue

Download

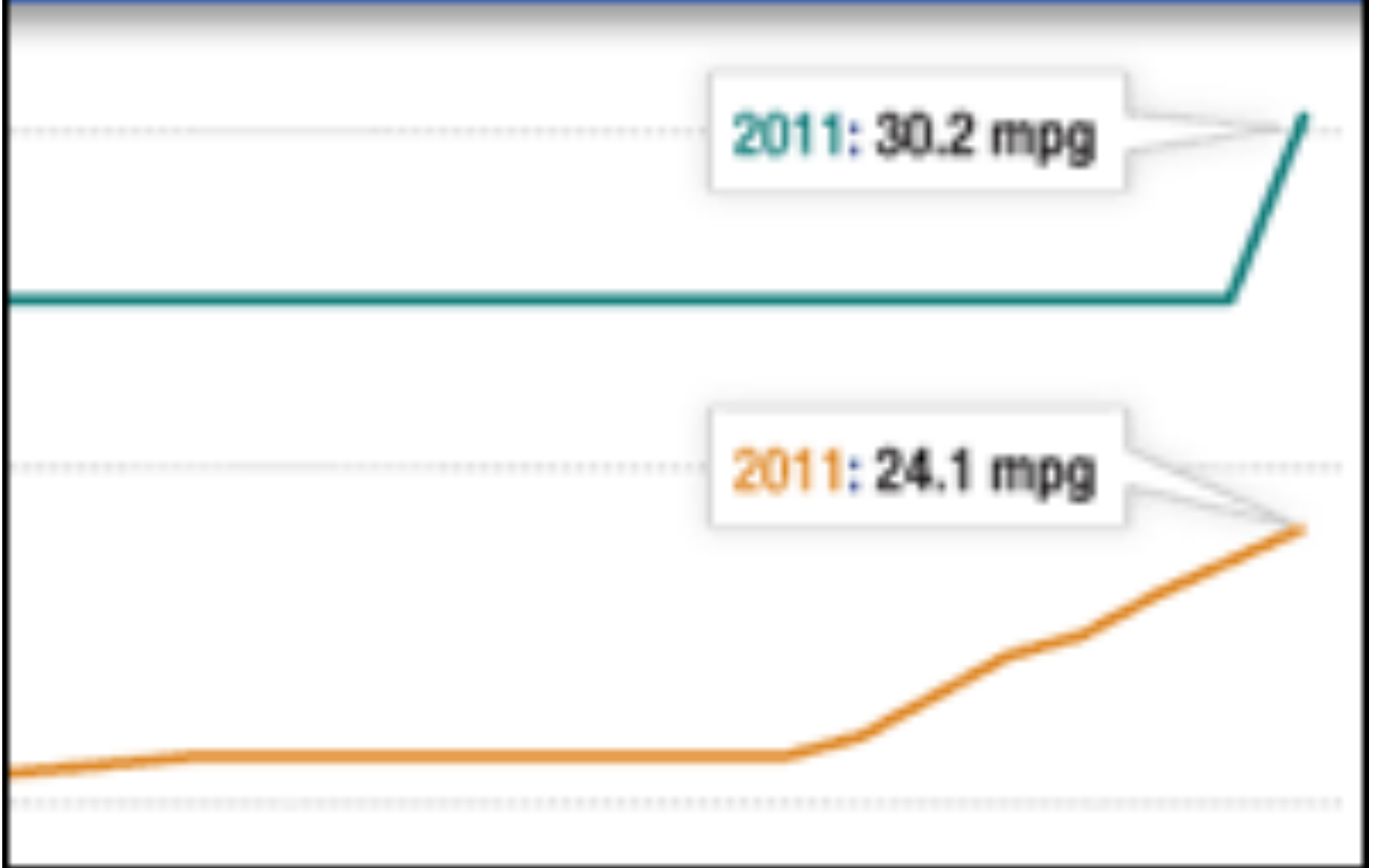
Transcript

May 19, 2009 · 6:00 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition

ELIZABETH SHOGREN

Chart »



Track Fuel Economy Standards

President Obama on Tuesday is expected to announce the first national vehicle

standard designed to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions. The stricter proposal could end years of bitter wrangling between the auto industry and California.

The proposed standards would cut greenhouse gas emissions from new cars and light trucks 30 percent by 2016 by making vehicles go farther on a gallon of gas.

The average fuel economy target for all vehicles will be more than 35 miles per gallon, said Dave McCurdy, president of the Alliance for Automobile Manufacturers. Cars would have to get 39 mpg, trucks 30 mpg. Those new targets would come four years earlier than under current law.

The Obama administration confirmed the requirements but wouldn't speak on the record.

The fuel efficiency goals are on par with a plan that California adopted several years ago and more than a dozen other states have copied. The auto industry has been fighting those standards in court for several years. And the federal government still has not given the states the approval they need to go ahead.

The Obama administration brought the disputing parties together. And after weeks of negotiations, they reached a compromise.

"California will accept the national approach as consistent with their standard so that we don't have a patchwork of different rules and regulations," McCurdy said.

And if everything goes as planned, the auto industry will drop its lawsuits against California and the other states.

It may not be easy for the U.S. auto industry to meet the new standards. It's struggling with its bleakest economic situation in its history. But McCurdy said the automakers are ready to build more diesels, hybrids and plug-in electric vehicles.

"It's an opportunity for a fresh approach," McCurdy said. "As the industry is coming through a major transformation, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and

reduce our dependence on foreign sources of oil."

Environmentalists are delighted because it means all cars sold across the nation will use less gasoline and pollute less.

"This is the biggest single step we can take to curb global warming," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign.

"It is the first major effort by the United States to deal with the thing that we do that is most out of whack with the rest of the world, which is run giant behemoths on the road that guzzle gas and pollute the atmosphere," Becker added.

California gets credit for doggedly pushing the auto industry to change, said David Friedman of the environmental group the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"We probably wouldn't even be talking about global warming standards for cars if it weren't for California's landmark 2002 bill requiring standards for cars and trucks," Friedman said.

California did, however, have to compromise. The federal standards ramp up more slowly than the state had wanted.

"In return," said Aaron McLearn, a spokesman for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, "we get a national standard in 2016 that will meet our standards, and we'll partner with the federal government to have a national standard that will be a far more powerful effect on our environment than if we were going at it alone."

California still wants the Environmental Protection Agency to grant it permission to enforce its own greenhouse gas standards until the federal plan kicks in. There's no decision on that yet.

Related NPR Stories

