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# Fuel Economy: Small Decline in 2011 and a Probable Climb in 2012, E.P.A. Says

By **Jim Motavalli** March 15, 2013 6:36 pm

An Environmental Protection Agency report issued on Friday offers a mixed picture of fleetwide fuel economy in the United States. It documents a minor decline in the 2011 model year to 22.4 miles per gallon, but projects “significant gains” to 23.8 m.p.g. for 2012, a 1.4 m.p.g. improvement over one year. The report said that the 2012 numbers, if confirmed, “would be all-time records and amongst the largest annual improvements since 1975.”

The fuel economy and emissions numbers for 2012 are preliminary, and based on sales estimates provided to the agency by automakers. The actual fuel economy decline from the 2010 to 2011 model years was just 0.2 mpg, the E.P.A. said. Also in 2011, fleetwide average carbon dioxide emissions for personal vehicles increased to 398 grams per mile, up from 394 grams per mile in 2010. Carbon emissions are expected to decline to 374 grams per mile in 2012, based on projections.

The E.P.A. said that one factor leading to the fuel economy decline in 2011 was the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency in Japan, which interrupted the flow of both new cars and parts to the American market. According to the report, the E.P.A. estimates that fleetwide fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions in model year 2011 would have been the same or “slightly better” than 2010 if Japanese manufacturers had not been constrained. Under those assumptions, the projected 2012 fuel economy improvement would also be “somewhat smaller.”

Some critics seized on the 2011 fuel economy decline, not the projected increase for 2012. Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, said in an e-mailed statement: “After improving for six years, average gas mileage of all cars

and trucks sold here faltered in 2011. We went into reverse because General Motors and Chrysler failed to improve fuel mileage. That had an impact when sales of more efficient Toyota and Honda vehicles dropped due to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.”

The E.P.A. report says that 2011 Toyota and Honda production fell by more than 500,000 vehicles compared to 2010. “Yet in 2011 those two automakers still delivered vehicles that averaged 3.4 m.p.g. better than those of General Motors, the U.S. sales leader,” Mr. Becker said. According to the report, G.M.’s overall 2011 fuel economy was 20.7 m.p.g., and that of Honda and Toyota both 24.1 m.p.g.

The industry sees an overall positive picture. Gloria Bergquist, a vice president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which represents 12 carmakers, said in a telephone interview: “All of our members are working very hard to improve fuel economy, and the good news is that it’s continuing to increase. We have challenging new fuel economy standards we need to meet. There’s no technology left on the shelf — it’s already on dealership lots.”

The report says that the widespread adoption of new technologies is helping improve fuel economy. These include variable valve timing, gasoline direct injection, the use of turbochargers and superchargers, and cylinder deactivation. Direct injection, the report said, has grown from “essentially zero” in model year 2007 to a projected 24 percent of the market in model year 2012.

David Friedman, deputy director of the Clean Vehicles Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, sees both sides. “Today’s report shows the great strides automakers have made to deliver a better kind of car for the American people in 2012,” he said in a statement. “But it also shows just how far they have to go. The decline of average fuel economy in model year 2011 highlights how much consumers had relied upon only a few automakers for many fuel-efficient vehicles.”

The E.P.A. said that consumers have twice as many diesel and hybrid choices as they did five years ago. The number of available cars with 30 m.p.g. combined or higher grew sixfold in the same period, the agency said.

