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Fuel standard could hit 60 MPG

By **DARREN SAMUELSON** | 10/01/10 04:34 AM EDT | Updated 10/01/10 07:59 AM EDT

The Obama administration on Friday is expected to suggest nearly doubling fuel economy goals for new cars and light trucks — possibly to more than 60 miles per gallon by 2025.

Under orders from the White House, the Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department have been working for several months on the next phase of gas mileage standards for motor vehicles built between 2017 and 2025.

Auto industry and environmental sources say the agencies will suggest rules improving fuel economy between 3 percent and 6 percent per year. Environmental groups are urging the administration to ultimately set the annual increase at 6 percent, which would force the national

fleet average beyond 60 miles per gallon in 15 years.

A 3 percent annual increase would hit around 46 mpg by 2025.

The federal government and domestic automakers signed off earlier this year on new fuel economy rules that will increase the fleet average to 35.5 miles per gallon by 2016, a roughly 5 percent increase per year.

An EPA official confirmed plans to release the rulemaking notice on Friday but declined further comment.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Center, said a 6 percent per year goal is well within reach for the auto industry given the existing rules. "This is auto mechanics, not rocket science," he said. "They know how to do this. They know how to do this in other countries."

But Charles Territo, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the industry is concerned about the added economic burdens if the regulations are too strong. "Our hope is the notice recognizes the challenges and the costs associated with increasing fuel economy," he said.

EPA and DOT are expected to formally propose the new fuel economy regulations in mid-2011 with a target to finalize them in 2012. Separate gas mileage rules for heavy-duty trucks are also expected next month.