

EPA: Gas mileage improves even as more trucks sold



Chris Woodyard, USA TODAY 10:22 p.m. EST December 16, 2015



(Photo: USA TODAY)

The average fuel economy for new vehicles is improving despite consumers' renewed affection for larger, heavier vehicles like pickup trucks and SUVs, the Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday.

Based on preliminary figures, 2015 model year vehicles are expected to average 24.7 miles per gallon, an improvement over 24.3 mpg in the previous model year, the EPA said in one of two reports it released. Average fuel economy is at a record high.

The reports show that the auto industry is taking advantage of incentives and trying to get ahead of stiffening fuel-economy requirements aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, says Christopher Grundler, director of the

EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality.

Reductions in greenhouse gas — CO2 emissions, which are tied directly to how much fuel an engine burns — have outperformed the standard for the third consecutive year, the report says. All automakers were in compliance in the 2012 to 2014 model years.

"The industry as a whole is beating the standards," Grundler says. "The bottom line is the program is on track to achieve the greenhouse gas reductions."

Some automakers are getting way ahead. Ford's F-150 pickup, the nation's best-selling vehicle, meets the 2019 standard in 15 of its 32 different versions, he says.

It's not just about automakers, but drivers. More are willing to buy cars with gas-saving turbochargers and eight-speed transmissions, Grundler notes.

Some environmentalists laud the progress. "To date, in spite of a growing shift away from cars, these standards have helped saved consumers \$27 billion at the pump and will continue to provide savings for vehicle owners regardless of what the gas price may be," wrote Dave Cooke, vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists about the reports.

But Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, says some automakers used loopholes to achieve their goals and that they should be doing more.

"The ink is barely dry on the Paris climate agreement and the automakers are putting U.S. compliance at risk, and with it the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming," Becker said in a statement.

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