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Supreme Court Census

Source: Vehicle fuel efficiency standard going up

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Under the changes, which are slightly less stringent than those proposed by the Bush administration, new passenger cars will need to meet 30.2 mpg for the 2011 model year and pickups, sport-utility vehicles, and minivans will need to reach 24.1 mpg, an administration official told The Associated Press on Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak in advance of an announcement expected Friday.

The fuel efficiency rules are the first step in meeting a 2007 energy law that will require carmakers to meet at least 35 mpg by 2020, a 40% increase over the current standard of about 25 mpg.

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Passenger car requirements have remained unchanged at 27.5 mpg since 1985, drawing complaints from environmental groups that the government has been slow to push automakers to produce more fuel-efficient vehicles.

During his campaign, President Barack Obama said he would support a 4% annual increase in the standards so the fleet of new cars and trucks would reach 40 mpg by 2022.

The Bush administration had proposed regulations last year that would have raised the standards to a combined 27.8 mpg in 2011, requiring passenger cars to meet 31.2 mpg and light trucks to hit 25 mpg that year. The plan would have cost the auto industry nearly \$50 billion.

The Obama administration has said it only had two months to produce the 2011 rules, which are required by April 1 to give car companies enough time to plan their vehicle lineup.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, a project of the Center for Auto Safety, said the 2011 standard would require the administration "to make up for it in the following years. The good news is that they're promising that they will."

Transportation officials are working with the Environmental Protection Agency on a more comprehensive set of fuel efficiency rules expected later this year for vehicles through the 2015 model year.

Future standards will need to be squared with a pending ruling on a request from California to reverse a Bush-era decision that prevents the state from setting its own limits on greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

Thirteen other states and the District of Columbia want to adopt California's standards, which would cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30% in new cars and trucks by 2016.

Obama asked the EPA to reconsider its March 2008 ruling denying California the right to control heat-trapping gases from vehicle exhaust. A decision on the request is expected in weeks.

A 2007 Supreme Court decision said the EPA had the authority to control greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles using the Clean Air Act.

Auto industry officials want a single, national standard and contend that multiple regulations will burden the industry struggling during the economic downturn.

Dave McCurdy, chief executive of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said he hoped the administration "can find ways to bridge state and federal concerns and move all stakeholders towards an aggressive national fuel economy/greenhouse gas emissions program administered by the federal government."

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