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“As written, the standard is the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming and cut oil use,” Becker continued. “What’s behind the minuscule fuel efficiency gain? ... The huge markups on its biggest SUVs and pickups explain why the industry spends so much of its roughly \$15 billion annual marketing budget cajoling consumers to buy trucks.”

Feds: Carmakers averaged nearly 25 mpg in 2016

**By: Keith Laing
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Washington — Automakers achieved an average of 24.7 miles per gallon for vehicles made during the 2016 model year, according to data released Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The figure, which is the most recent finalized data available, is 0.1 mpg higher than the 2015 model year and a record high, the EPA said. Preliminary fuel economy for the 2017 model year, which will not be finalized until 2019, is projected to be 25.2 mpg.

The findings come as President Donald Trump’s administration is nearing a decision on whether to ease stringent gas mileage rules that could affect models made after 2021; the government’s review is set to conclude by April.

Automakers facing deadlines to produce fleets averaging over 50 miles per gallon by 2025 are hoping for relief from the mandate from a business-friendly administration.

Environmentalists say automakers were projected to increase fuel economy by a full mile-per-gallon last year. They blame the increase in SUV sales for the slowdown in fuel economy growth in the past couple of years.

The EPA said Thursday that cars and trucks both achieved record adjusted fuel economy in the 2016 model. The agency said the average adjusted fuel economy for 2016 cars increased to 28.5 mpg, a 0.3-mpg increase over the 2015 model year. Model year 2016 trucks increased 0.1 mpg to 21.2 mpg, according to the EPA.

The agency said automakers have made steady progress toward increasing fuel economy, with an average annual improvement of about 0.5 mpg per year since 2004.

Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) and greenhouse gas emission standards that were put in place in 2012 by former President Barack Obama’s administration began taking effect with the 2017 model year.

The rules, which were put in place when gas prices were topping \$4 per gallon, call for ramping up fuel-economy standards to between 50 and 52.6 miles per gallon by 2025. The goal was revised down from an initial target of 54.5 miles per gallon.

Automakers have sought relief from the stringent gas mileage rules, contending drivers have demonstrated in recent years that they are less interested in fuel-efficient cars and electric vehicles with gas prices now around \$2.50.

They pushed the Trump administration to reverse a decision by the Obama administration to finalize the mileage rules for the model years between 2022-2025 last year and reinstate a mid-term review that was initially scheduled to take place in April 2018.

“EPA’s report indicates continued progress across the entire fleet, which shows that automakers are deploying a wide range of technologies that improve fuel economy as well as alternative fuel options,” Wade Newton, director of communications at the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which lobbies for U.S. automakers in Washington, said in an email Thursday.

“However, it’s important to remember that the standards don’t measure what we put in showrooms, they measure what consumers put in driveways. So no matter what technologies we offer, consumer choices are crucial,” Newton continued.

Environmentalists have argued that automakers should be making even more progress toward the lofty mileage goal. They have accused automakers of backtracking on a commitment to keep up with the higher standards and pushing customers to buy less fuel-efficient SUVs and trucks.

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David Friedman, director of cars and product policy and analysis for Consumers Union, said the EPA’s figures show “fuel economy standards are working and consumers are better off as a result.”

“Automaker innovations are saving consumers money at the pump in everything from compact cars to pickups and SUVs,” Friedman said in a statement.

“This shows consumers can save money at the pump while getting the performance and utility they need,” Friedman continued. “The report is more evidence that the fuel economy standards should remain strong in the future.”