

E&E NEWS

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, said he's hopeful that once President Trump leaves office, the next administration will return to more stringent standards.

"In the longer term, these standards are set to expire in 2025," Becker said. "Ultimately, we think California will begin preparing post-2025 standards that will begin to set the stage for federal standards that will continue to reduce emissions."

Industry walks fine line over EPA fuel economy rollback

By: Maxine Joselow

March 26, 2018

One of the largest lobbying groups for automakers is staying publicly neutral about U.S. EPA's reported plans to relax Obama-era fuel economy standards.

EPA plans to loosen the limits on tailpipe emissions from cars made from 2022 to 2025, according to people familiar with the decision that will be announced this week (Climatewire, March 26).

Gloria Bergquist, a spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, declined to comment on EPA's reported decision.

Asked whether the alliance would support less stringent standards, Bergquist said while current market conditions make it hard for automakers to reach the Obama-era standards, the industry must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change.

EPA under Obama "didn't include all the data they should have," such as sales data for 2016 and 2017, when issuing the standards, Bergquist said.

The data would have shown that electric vehicles still account for fewer than 1 percent of cars sold in the country, which "makes it challenging to reach higher targets," she said.

At the same time, "we believe that climate change is real and that we are taking steps to reduce carbon emissions," Bergquist said. "Of course, carbon is formed through combustion. So if you burn less gasoline, you produce less carbon. So higher fuel economy is helpful."

Companies that belong to the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, including General Motors Co. and Fiat Chrysler, referred requests for comment to the alliance.

EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman confirmed to E&E News that the agency had sent a draft decision to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review.

"The draft determination has been sent to OMB and is undergoing interagency review. A final determination will be signed by April 1, 2018, consistent with the original timeline," Bowman said in an email. She declined to comment on the details of the decision.

California, enviros react

The California Air Resources Board is troubled by EPA's decision, said spokesman Stanley Young. California has a waiver under the Clean Air Act that lets the state set its own, more stringent fuel economy standards.

"California paved the way for a single national program and is fully committed to maintaining it," Young said in a statement. "[EPA's decision] places that program in jeopardy. We feel strongly that weakening the program will waste fuel, increase emissions and cost consumers more money."

Environmentalists have blasted EPA's move, saying it undermines global progress toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"It's a surprise to no one that [EPA Administrator Scott] Pruitt would side with Ford and the Auto Alliance to weaken widely-supported standards that helps drive down pollution and cuts the cost for Americans at the pump," Sierra Club Deputy Director for Clean Transportation Andrew Linhardt said in a statement.

"After all, this is an Administrator and an administration that focuses solely on doing what's best for corporate polluters, not the American people," Linhardt added.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, said he's hopeful that once President Trump leaves office, the next administration will return to more stringent standards.

"In the longer term, these standards are set to expire in 2025," Becker said. "Ultimately, we think California will begin preparing post-2025 standards that will begin to set the stage for federal standards that will continue to reduce emissions."