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Trump's EPA Is Poised To Void California's Greenhouse Gas Emission Standards

By: Greg Gardner

The Trump administration is planning to revoke California's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles' tailpipes as early as this week, according to a Bloomberg report.

The move, which has been expected for some time, would escalate an already bitter legal fight between states that account for about one-third of the U.S. automobile market and a climate change-denying federal administration intent on dismantling seemingly every environmental regulation established and enforced by the Obama administration.

In 2009, the federal government authorized California to set emission standards for cars and trucks that are more stringent than those set by the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The fight has implications far beyond California because nine other states already adopt the California standards. In May, California, 16 other states and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit to protect their authority to enforce those tougher standards.

"We have the law on our side, as well as the people of the country and the people of the world," Dan Sperling, a member of the California Air Resources Board, told Bloomberg.

A CARB spokesman declined to comment further until EPA announces its next move.

Automakers and its advocates such as the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers want one national set of rules for both emissions and greenhouse gases. Without a national regulatory framework, the California-led states, which together account for about one-third of the U.S. new vehicle market, could create a separate market, raising complexity and costs for the industry.

Last month AAM urged the federal EPA to encourage incentives and infrastructure investments for electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles. An AAM spokesman could not be reached for comment on reports the Trump administration plans to take away California's power to regulate emissions and mandate a certain level of sales for electrified and hydrogen-powered vehicles.

The Trump administration has proposed fuel economy standards that would freeze the Obama targets at 2020 levels and require no improvement beyond that.

Transportation is the largest source of climate-changing greenhouse-gas pollution in the United States, and the biggest share of that comes from cars and trucks, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration and the EPA.

Environmental groups came to California's defense.

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Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, called any decision to take away California's regulatory authority "an outrageous attack on public health and state's rights.

"It's a dumb move for an administration that claims it wants peace, because this will lead to an emissions war: progressive states versus a reactionary federal government. The big question: who will the car companies back?"

American consumers aren't embracing electric vehicles, but the industry is investing billions of dollars in them, both to improve fuel economy and because electric powertrains are the foundation of the ride-hailing and, eventually, autonomous fleets that will soon become a significant component of the transportation menu in large cities.

General Motors plans to introduce 20 new electric models by 2023. Ford is investing \$11 billion to offer 40 hybrid or fully-electric vehicles globally by 2022.

Last year in the U.S. zero-emission vehicles represented only 1.15% of industry sales. But California and the other states, mostly on the West Coast and New England, are requiring that electrified or hydrogen-fueled vehicles account for about 15% of sales by 2025.

But China and most European countries are setting ambitious targets for sales of electric and other clean-fuel vehicles. For example, the U.K. and France have announced plans to phase out and by 2040 ban sales of new cars that burn fossil-fuels.

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