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California Could Lose Its Fuel Efficiency Waiver. What Would That Mean For the Country?

**By: Emily Moon
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The Environmental Protection Agency does not allow states to set their own fuel efficiency standards, but California alone can seek a waiver under the Clean Air Act. Now, that waiver has come under fire. In a plan to loosen federal fuel efficiency standards announced Thursday, the EPA took further aim at the California waiver, which it said is "still being reexamined."

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said in a statement. "It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

What is exactly in America's best interest? Some state legislators seem to agree that California's standards hold the answer. The state has the largest number of new car registrations per year, and 13 states and Washington D.C. have adopted its standard in the interest of both preserving the climate and streamlining industry; together, they represent 40 percent of the car market.

Under the Clean Air Act, California's waiver must meet three criteria: The new standards must be as protective of public health as federal ones; California must demonstrate "compelling and extraordinary conditions," which has meant, so far, its poor air quality; and the new regulations must take effect within what the EPA believes is an adequate timeframe.

In the past, the EPA has decided that the California standards meet these criteria. Now, the plan criticizes the waiver for requiring automakers to "spend tens of billions of dollars to develop products that a significant majority of consumers have not adopted."

This is not necessarily the end of the waiver as we know it: California has already vowed to sue the EPA over changes to the national standard and elimination of the state waiver will likely result in another legal battle, the Los Angeles Times reports.

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Until then, here's how the plans break down:

CALIFORNIA WAIVER

The waiver that cleared the EPA in 2009, known as the Pavley standard, was projected to result in a 30 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through 2016 in California, and more throughout its partner states, according to the California Department of Justice and Air Resources Board. The waiver also set limitations on other emissions, such as non-methane gas, carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and particulate matter.

OBAMA-ERA NATIONAL STANDARD

These regulations planned to increase the average fuel efficiency for cars to more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025, up from 27.5 miles per gallon in 2010. Target carbon emissions were roughly equivalent to Pavley's 2016 greenhouse gas emission standard, and well below what Congress had required in earlier legislation, according to the California Department of Justice.

PROPOSED NATIONAL STANDARD

The new plan would halt all efforts to meet the Obama-era target for greenhouse gas emissions. The state's estimated amount of carbon dioxide emissions is significantly higher than California's last projected standard. It also looks to eliminate the California waiver entirely.

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