

The hypocrisy behind Ford's 'green' reputation | Guest column

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By Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang

Bill Ford Jr., the executive chairman of Ford Motor Co., portrays his company as a leader in the fight against global warming. Earlier this year, he promised to deliver up to 40 electric and gas-electric hybrid models in four years. That sounds admirably green.

Unfortunately, what his company says and what it sells have been two different creatures.

In 2011, Ford Motor Co.'s then-CEO Alan Mulally [signed a commitment](#) promising that the company would not fight strong auto mileage-and-emissions rules it negotiated with the Obama administration, as did GM, FCA and Toyota, among others. Last August, acknowledging the global warming reality, Ford said his company would work with world leaders "in support of ambitious global greenhouse gas reduction targets. Now, Ford, its Detroit brethren and other major auto companies, are lobbying to roll back federal clean-car rules. And it looks like they'll get what they want, with reports that the Trump administration is planning to reject the Obama administration's fuel economy rules.

In the [Environmental Protection Agency's latest report](#) on auto mileage and emissions, Ford fell behind nine major competitors in the most important automotive environmental measure, air pollution. Only GM and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles ranked worse. And it has [announced it will boost near-term production](#) of its most-polluting vehicles — SUVs and pickups — while putting the brakes on production of cars, its cleaner segment. The EPA report, published Jan. 11, found that Ford lagged on the use of key efficiency technologies, trailing its competitors in adopting such long-established gas-saving components as continuously variable and seven-gear transmissions.

Meeting with President Trump in the administration's first week in office, Ford's then-CEO, Mark Fields, with GM and Fiat Chrysler counterparts, urged the president to roll back stringent auto mileage and emissions standard to which they had agreed. The standard is the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming. The Obama administration projected it would save consumers [\\$1 trillion](#) at the pump, while boosting U.S. global competitiveness.

Fields last year claimed the rules could cost the U.S. industry more than 1 million jobs. In fact, good jobs and efficiency can go hand in hand. Even as the rules grew tougher, the U.S. auto industry, added more than 700,000 retail and manufacturing jobs since the recession, according to the Blue Green Alliance, a coalition of organized labor and environmental groups.

Ford's stubborn pursuit of truck sales risks putting it on the wrong side of competition and technology. In contrast, China has recognizes the environmental and economic necessity of making clean cars to build a world class auto industry.

Ford knows how to improve fuel economy. Because a lighter vehicle requires less fuel, Ford has replaced steel bodies with high-strength, light-weight aluminum in many of its F-150 pickup trucks, its biggest seller. It has installed turbochargers, which can cut gas use if used properly, in roughly half its vehicles.

The [company's 2016-2017 environmental sustainability](#) report declares that fighting “climate change is a key priority.” But in 2016 Ford only built nearly 24,800 plug-in or hybrid models of its Focus, C-Max and Fusion, and cut production of those vehicles to [19,600 last year](#), according to InsideEVs. It can't sell what it doesn't build.

On Jan. 14 at Detroit's auto show Bill Ford promised as many as 16 pure electric models in 2022. But the company has not said how many such vehicles it would make — 3 million or merely 30,000? By comparison, it built more than [1.5 million gas-guzzling trucks](#) in 2017. Because trucks pollute far more than cars, Ford would have to build one EV to balance the emissions of each pickup or SUV that rolls off its line instead of a gas-powered car.

Ford argues it is simply responding to consumer demand when it churns out SUVs and pickups, but the markup is much greater on trucks than cars. Ford has lobbied Trump administration to roll back the clean car standards. It should instead roll back its production of gas-guzzling trucks and ramp up production of electric and other clean vehicles. Otherwise, its environmental claims are just flim flam.

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