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CAR RULES

EPA report fuels debate over rollback

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A new EPA report is fueling debate over whether auto manufacturers could meet the clean car standards established by former President Obama. Those rules are being rolled back by President Trump.

At issue is EPA's annual Automotive Trends Report, which provides information on 14 major automakers' compliance with greenhouse gas and fuel economy standards for passenger cars and light trucks.

The latest [report](#), released yesterday, focused on model years 2013 to 2018.

It found that only three out of the 14 car companies — Honda Motor Co., Subaru Corp. and Mazda Motor Corp. — met the standards in that time period without resorting to credits that some environmentalists call "loopholes."

Honda led the pack as the most efficient manufacturer. Its vehicles had the lowest CO2 emissions and the highest gas mileage over that period.

Three other companies — Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV, Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co. — were described as the least efficient. Two of them — Fiat Chrysler and GM — have expressed support for the Trump administration's effort to block California from setting its own tailpipe pollution rules.

Fiat Chrysler had the highest CO2 emissions and the lowest fuel economy in model year 2018.

Overall, the report showed that the American market for passenger cars is trending toward SUVs, which now account for 46% of new vehicle sales.

The findings, which come as EPA and the Department of Transportation seek to roll back the clean car standards through model year 2026, were met with competing interpretations.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler seized on the findings as evidence that the standards established under Obama were largely unachievable.

He said the rollback, which is formally known as the Safe Affordable Fuel Efficient Vehicles Rule, would fix that problem for manufacturers and the public.

"Once again we see marginal improvements in fuel economy, but they are yet a far cry from the unfeasible Obama Administration's standards," Wheeler said in a statement.

"These concerns are top of mind and play a key role in the finalization of our Safe Affordable Fuel Efficient Vehicles Rule with the U.S. Department of Transportation, which when finalized will reduce the cost of new vehicles and protect consumer choice," he said.

Environmental groups said the findings show that automakers continue to favor large vehicles that guzzle gas and the standards must be strengthened to force companies to lower emissions.

"The new EPA report shows that rather than gutting the auto emissions and [corporate average fuel economy] standards as the Trump administration is trying to do, the rules should be strengthened to cut pollution and save consumers money at the pump," Dan Becker, executive director of the Safe Climate Campaign, said in a statement.

"Automakers are flooding the market with more gas hogs and Trump's EPA rollback only encourages them to guzzle and pollute more," Becker said.

Representatives for Fiat Chrysler and GM redirected inquiries about the report to the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a newly formed trade association for the U.S. auto industry.

"The EPA's nonpartisan 'Automotive Trends Report' highlights the industry's continued success in improving fuel economy and reducing carbon emissions, with model year 2018 vehicles achieving record levels of fuel efficiency," alliance spokesman Wade Newton said in an email.

"While the industry continues to support year-over-year increases in fuel economy standards going forward, this report also demonstrates the market challenges that exist," he said.

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