

# The ENERGY MIX

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## **Trump Rolls Back Fuel Economy Standard Aimed at Cleansing the Air, Cutting Emissions**

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With his country in the grips of an out-of-control pandemic of respiratory disease, Donald Trump is pressing ahead with his long-standing plan to gut vehicle fuel efficiency standards designed to cleanse the air and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in what InsideClimate News describes as the country’s “largest anti-climate rollback ever”.

The decision seals the need for the Trudeau government to adopt its own “made-in-Canada” vehicle regulations, Clean Energy Canada [said](#) in a release Tuesday. With just 214 days to go before the U.S. election, and 294 before a new head of state can be sworn in, Trump’s action also “sets up a legal battle, with California and 22 other states planning to challenge the rewrite of what had been one of most ambitious U.S. policies aimed at combating climate change,” Reuters [writes](#).

“Air pollution reduces our body’s ability to fight infection,” Moms Clean Air Force co-founder Dominique Browning [told](#) the Washington Post. “Pollution from power plants and trucks and cars is also one of the causes of the underlying heart and lung problems that make people more vulnerable to COVID-19.”

“Excusing the potential release of excess toxic air pollutants and other pollution that exacerbates asthma, breathing difficulty, and cardiovascular problems in the midst of a pandemic that can cause respiratory failure is irresponsible,” agreed the Environmental Integrity Project, a non-profit formed by former enforcement attorneys with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), referring to a bevy of regulatory rollbacks the White House has pushed forward during the pandemic.

James Owens, acting head of the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, claimed the plan “strikes the right balance between environmental considerations, health and safety considerations, and economic considerations.”

“Great news! American families will now be able to buy safer, more affordable, and environmentally friendly cars with our new SAFE VEHICLES RULE,” Trump [tweeted](#). “Get rid of those old, unsafe clunkers. Build better and safer American cars and create American jobs. Buy American!”

The rollback drew what the Cable News Network calls a “rare rebuke” from President Barack Obama, who seldom publicly criticizes a successor who has focused much of the last 3½ years on undoing the legacy of the previous eight. “We’ve seen all too terribly the consequences of those who denied warnings of a pandemic,” Obama [tweeted](#). “We can’t afford any more consequences of climate denial. All of us, especially young people, have to demand better of our government at every level and vote this fall.”

### ***Trump’s ‘Biggest Single Deregulatory Action’***

The Trump administration “called the move its largest single deregulatory action and said it would save automakers upwards of US\$100 billion in compliance costs,” Reuters says. “The policy reversal marks the latest step by Trump, a Republican, to erase environmental policies pursued by Obama, a Democrat.”

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Margo Oge, head of the EPA’s transportation office from 1994 to 2012, added that the regulation would put the country “dramatically out of step with the rest of the world”, InsideClimate adds.

“Globally the goal posts for fuel economy standards and greenhouse gas emissions have moved significantly in the last two years, with major markets moving forward as the U.S.

is moving backwards,” she said. “Adding insult to injury, even EPA’s own analysis found that the new rule will result in a loss of thousands of auto industry jobs.”

InsideClimate says the Obama-era standard would have saved six billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and points to an acknowledgement “deep in the 2,000-page final rule rescinding greenhouse gas standards for passenger vehicles” that less fuel-efficient vehicles will cost U.S. autoworkers about 10,000 jobs per year.

“That single statistic—especially jarring just days after the COVID-19 crisis caused the biggest spike in jobless claims in U.S. history—captures why the auto industry isn’t exactly celebrating the Trump administration’s most consequential retreat yet from climate action,” InsideClimate writes. “Instead, the industry’s leading trade group responded cautiously that it would review the decision, adding that transformation to address climate change is inevitable.”

“Looking to the future, we need policies that support a customer-friendly shift toward... electrified and other highly efficient technologies,” said Alliance for Automotive Innovation President John Bozzella.

The final rule does include incentives for automakers to phase out a hydrofluorocarbon, HFC-134a, that has historically been used in most cars’ air conditioning systems and is 3,710 more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Based on an assessment of 2018 federal data by the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (IGSD), InsideClimate says HFCs accounted for 6.5% of all emissions from cars and light trucks over the 20-year span.

An earlier draft of the regulation eliminated the incentives, but “they got enormous pushback that was across the board from automakers, the chemical industry, environmental groups, and states saying, ‘Don’t touch the AC credits,’ so they decided not to,” IGSD Senior Climate and Energy Advisor Kristen Taddonio told ICN. “I think the thing that remains to be seen is how much automakers will need to use these credits now that the [greenhouse gas] standards are lower.”

### ***Time for Canada to Go It Alone***

In its release, Clean Energy Canada noted that Canada has directly adopted U.S. fuel economy rules in the past, which means the rules automatically change in Canada when they do in the U.S. “This leaves the Canadian government little choice but to sever this reliance and develop made-in-Canada rules that will continue to protect Canadians’ health, environment, and wallets,” said Senior Policy Advisor Joanna Kyriazis. “Failing to do so will cost Canadians hundreds of dollars per year more at the pumps and lead to millions of tonnes of unnecessary carbon pollution.”

The release notes that light duty vehicles account for 11% of Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions, the average vehicle built to 2025 fuel economy standards saves \$383 per year

for cars and \$662 for sport utility vehicles, and two-thirds of Canadians support the country's current fuel economy rules.

“The current regulations—designed by the Obama administration and adopted by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper—were a no-brainer, requiring automakers to build increasingly clean, efficient vehicles,” Kyriazis said. “They deliver cheaper commutes, cleaner air and help fight climate change.” The government had already [signalled](#) its [intent](#) to “preserve stronger regulations” and align with California’s tougher standard, she added, and now “it’s time for Canada to follow through.”

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