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## Climate Progress Stalls Again, Thanks to Trump's New Auto Rules

*He's walking back a major effort to slow global warming.*

By Daniel F. Becker and James Gerstenzang

The authors are with the Center for Auto Safety's Safe Climate Campaign.

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President Trump's [rollback](#) on Tuesday of stringent automobile mileage and emissions standards torpedoes the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight the climate crisis. In dispensing with Obama-era rules in the name of imaginary regulatory reform, he will damage the health of the planet, our pocketbooks and even the very auto industry he thinks will benefit.

The Obama administration set the standards in [2012](#) to cut emissions and improve gas mileage roughly 5 percent a year from 2021 to 2025. Thirteen automakers agreed to them.

Now Mr. Trump's decision will slash required fuel-efficiency improvements to just 1.5 percent a year, beginning in 2021, but that won't even be achieved because of various credits automakers can receive for making vehicles that run on natural gas or employ more efficient air-conditioning refrigerants — even if emissions aren't reduced. The 2025 new-vehicle fleet would [average](#) 31.8 real-world m.p.g., compared with 37.5 m.p.g. under the rules Mr. Trump is eviscerating, according to Consumer Reports.

Under the Trump plan, which is almost certain to face a court challenge by states and environmental groups, including ours, by 2040, vehicles [will burn](#) 142 billion additional gallons of gasoline and emit as much as 1.5 billion more tons of pollutants that warm the planet, an Environmental Defense Fund analysis found. That's the equivalent of the pollution of 68 coal plants operating for five years, according to the E.D.F.

Those numbers certainly are not good for consumers, who will pay about \$3,200 more in fuel costs for a 2026 model year vehicle than they would under the Obama rules, according to Consumer Reports. Or for the climate.

Or for people. The Trump administration ignored long-established health threats that gas guzzlers pose. The lung-damaging soot produced from the refining of additional gasoline to power those vehicles will lead to an estimated [18,500 premature deaths](#) by midcentury, the E.D.F. concluded, using the government's modeling tools.

The administration's [data](#) supporting the new rule indicates that fuel efficiency for all vehicles would improve without the more-stringent standards. Moreover, the cost of clean-car technology would discourage Americans from replacing less-safe older cars and trucks, the administration argues.

But vehicles made with safe, light, high-strength aluminum, advanced engines and improved aerodynamics deliver greater gas mileage and save consumers thousands more at the pump over the life of the vehicle than they add to sticker prices. The Trump rollback will reverse that balance sheet, [increasing](#) net costs per average new vehicle by \$2,100, Consumer Reports calculated.

A [study](#) funded by automakers, comparing the Obama and Trump plans, suggests that the "positive effects on the economy" of the Obama rules "are ultimately larger in magnitude than the negative effects, primarily because the fuel savings are quite large relative to technology costs." Although the study was premised on an earlier version of the Trump plan that suggested no improvements in fuel efficiency, rather than the current meager advances, it remains applicable. As Margo Oge, a former top official in the E.P.A.'s vehicle-emissions program argues, the rollback will result in no progress and will do more harm than good. Notably, a co-author of the report was John Graham, who led President George W. Bush's deregulatory campaign.

Similarly, decades of reports by the E.P.A. counter the argument that fuel-efficiency mileage would improve without stringent rules. When the standard remained unchanged from 1989 to 2007, fuel efficiency mileage [actually fell](#), from 21.4 m.p.g. to 20.6 m.p.g.

The administration [asserts](#) the new rules would save up to 1,000 lives annually in vehicles built through 2029 because consumers would be more inclined to buy new vehicles with greater safety technology if they didn't have to also pay for greater efficiency. But experts and safety statistics have disproved that theory.

The government's own data demonstrate that better safety and fuel efficiency go hand-in-hand: From 2008 to 2017, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [reported](#) that road fatalities fell [6.2 percent](#). Over that same period, gas mileage improved by 18.6 percent, according to the E.P.A.

With these new rules, Mr. Trump is executing a two-pronged assault on decades of work by the government to clean up auto-fouled air. In September, the administration [revoked](#) California's 50-year-old authority under the national Clean Air Act to set tougher protections than those of the federal government. At least a dozen states, including New York and New Jersey, plus the District of Columbia, follow California's rules, which match the Obama standards. Blocking state clean-car provisions would set a dreadful precedent for future efforts by states to protect their residents and fight climate change.

Chasing their fattest markups, most U.S. automakers are abandoning their most efficient vehicles — sedans and compact cars — in favor of dirtier S.U.V.s, pickups and minivans. Producing these gas guzzlers [didn't end well](#) for U.S. automakers in the last recession. Consumers shunned S.U.V.s, which [helped to push](#) G.M. and Chrysler into bankruptcy.

Automakers have [enjoyed](#) huge profits and record sales under the tougher standards. Now, facing an uncertain future because of the coronavirus crisis, automakers are eyeing bailout legislation and have their hands out once again.

Making more fuel-efficient vehicles with modern technology is a competitive necessity. With overseas governments setting rules tougher than Mr. Trump's, European and Asian drivers will reap the benefit of

technologically advanced vehicles. So will Americans, and they will be mostly buying them from foreign manufacturers.

Mr. Trump, as George Orwell wrote, is giving “[an appearance of solidity to pure wind](#).” Under the cover of the pandemic crisis, Mr. Trump is rolling back rules that are essential to the fight against global warming and reducing the toll of air pollution on public health.

Daniel F. Becker directs the [Safe Climate Campaign](#) of the Center for Auto Safety. James Gerstenzang is the campaign’s editorial director.

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