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Great Timing: Trump’s Gutting of Fuel Efficiency Rule Will “Likely Contribute to Thousands of Premature Deaths”

The president is not letting the coronavirus distract him from killing the environment, people.



By [Bess Levin](#)

March 31, 2020

With the bulk of his recent time and energy being devoted to the coronavirus crisis—[denying it](#), [accepting it](#), [flirting with catastrophic measures that would no doubt prolong it](#)—you might have thought that **Donald Trump** would have had to momentarily put his passion project—[destroying the environment](#)—on the back burner. After all, it takes a lot of time to come up with uniquely evil conspiracy theories, like that maybe medical workers on the front lines of the pandemic are [stealing masks and other supplies](#). But like a cartoon villain, the president has apparently made time for *all* the items on his to-do list

(working title: *Ruin as Much as I Can in the Little Time I've Got*), and on Tuesday he turned his attention to burying the planet, and some of its inhabitants, in a shallow grave.

Yes, despite the current public health catastrophe, the Trump administration today gutted Obama-era fuel-efficiency standards for cars and trucks and replaced them with a set of new ones from the Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department that will most certainly do significant harm. While Team Trump had its heart set on setting no requirements for improvements in fuel efficiency, which it didn't quite achieve, the new rule is still an extremely far cry from the one implemented by the **Barack Obama** administration. Now, instead of mandating an annual increase of 5% fuel efficiency per year, with a 54-mpg average by 2025, automakers will only be asked to increase fuel economy across their fleets by 1.5% annually with a "goal" of hitting 40 mpg by 2026. Not surprisingly, those interested in avoiding an untimely death or living in an uninhabitable earth are less than enthused:

The effort has sparked a furious response by consumer and environmental advocates, who accused President Donald Trump's administration of obliterating the most effective policy ever enacted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change.

The new rule is "a deliberate decision to steer us at high speed toward a more dangerous climate," said **Ken Kimmell**, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists. "It also cedes American leadership in vehicle manufacturing, putting the automakers at risk in a global market."

Also, at a time when a terrifying virus is proving particularly lethal to those with respiratory issues, a regulatory change that will "likely contribute to thousands of premature deaths and asthma attacks," according to environmentalists and public health advocates cited by the *Los Angeles Times*, seems a particularly bad idea, but maybe that's just us with our silly notions of wanting to be able to breathe. Naturally, the Trump administration has attempted to spin the move as not just a boon to business but—wait for it—the average lifespan, which seems...dubious at best. "As we have done numerous times over the last three years, today's announcement again delivers on President Trump's promise to remove and replace undue—and in this case, unrealistic—regulatory burdens," EPA Administrator **Andrew Wheeler** said in statement, adding that the new rules will save lives and money. (The administration has previously claimed that the Obama standards drove up the cost of new cars and lead Americans to drive older, less-safe models longer.)

Yet according to both consumer-advocacy groups and the government's own analysis, the effects of the forthcoming changes are not *quite* as rosy as Wheeler & Co. would have us believe:

Its estimates showed that while loosening fuel-economy standards could shave about \$1,000 off the price of a new car, drivers would have to buy more gas than they would have under the current rule. **David Friedman**, vice president of advocacy for Consumer

Reports, said his group's projections show that each vehicle sold under the Trump rule will cost its owner on average \$2,100 more, even if gas prices continue to fall.

Automakers and their suppliers could also suffer. The government's analysis shows that American car companies could experience a loss of thousands of jobs by making dirtier cars that would be locked out of many overseas markets. The change is also expected to result in significantly more greenhouse gas emissions, which trap the sun's heat, worsening the effects of climate change. Hotter temperatures contribute to more smog, which can damage the lungs and cause other serious health problems.

The good news is that the new rule will almost immediately be challenged by environmental groups and states with stricter standards like California, whose right to clean air Trump [tried to take away last year](#). The less good news is that, should the administration be successful, the results will be catastrophic. **“Of all the bad things President Trump has done to the environment, this is the worst,”** Dan Becker, **head of the Safe Climate Campaign, told the *Los Angeles Times*. “He is rolling back the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming, cut oil use and save money at the pump.”** One group that would likely be in agreement? The EPA's science advisory board, which warned in a February report to Wheeler that the technical analysis used in the government's draft proposal was, to use a scientific term, horse shit. They also noted that “the standards in the 2012 rule might provide a better outcome for society than the proposed revision,” a piece of advice that Wheeler presumably proceeded to run over with his car while burning rubber in the EPA parking lot.

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