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TRANSPORTATION

Automakers pump brakes on emissions cuts — EPA report

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Automakers are backpedaling on gas mileage improvements and emissions reductions at the end of President Trump's first term, according to an EPA report released today.

The agency's annual "[Automotive Trends Report](#)" comes as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to set stringent new clean car standards to spur greater environmental progress for the industry.

This year's report surveyed the average fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions of 14 major automakers from model years 2014 to 2019.

For the first time in five years, the automakers failed to improve their average fuel economy and cut their average tailpipe emissions, the report shows.

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV, General Motors Co., Ford Motor Co. and Mercedes-Benz emerged at the bottom of the pack with the lowest fuel efficiency and highest emissions.

Leading the pack with the best environmental records were Tesla Inc., Honda Motor Co., Hyundai Motor Co. and Subaru Corp.

Environmentalists said the findings show the importance of the clean car standards established by President Obama, which were rolled back by the Trump administration.

"This report demonstrates that strong standards work. For much of the past decade, automakers delivered cleaner, more efficient vehicles, saving drivers money at the pump while also cutting air pollution," Luke Tonachel, director of clean vehicles and fuels at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in an email.

"But, after the Trump administration moved to gut those standards, the efficiency of new vehicles dropped in 2019 and carbon dioxide emissions jumped," Tonachel added.

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The report also found that 11 of the 14 major manufacturers needed to rely on "off-cycle credits" to comply with federal requirements. Environmentalists view these credits as loopholes because their benefits aren't well verified.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, however, said the heavy reliance on credits means the Obama-era rules weren't achievable.

"This report shows in detail how few auto manufactures were able to meet the unrealistic emissions standards set by the Obama Administration without resorting to purchasing emission credits," Wheeler said in a statement.

"We have set realistic standards in 2020 that will reduce emissions as well as vehicle costs and maintain consumer choice going forward," he added.

The EPA chief made the same argument when the agency released its 2019 "Automotive Trends Report" last spring ([*Climatewire*](#), March 3).

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