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Groups seek 60 percent stringency hike in vehicle GHG limits by 2030

February 26, 2021
Correction Appended

Major environmental groups are urging President Joe Biden to significantly tighten vehicle greenhouse gas and fuel economy standards, including requiring an ambitious 60 percent reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to current levels and setting a goal of making all new cars and light-duty trucks zero-emitting by 2035.

In [a Feb. 25 letter to Biden](#), a coalition of 24 groups including the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and others ask to work with the administration on “strong vehicle standards to boost the economy, create jobs and protect health.”

The groups ask Biden to reinstate vehicle GHG rules for model years 2021-2025 that the Obama administration set in 2012 but the Trump EPA weakened.

Environmentalists suggest that the new interim rules could be even stronger while urging the administration to reject use of a weaker voluntary emissions deal that California negotiated with five automakers in 2020 that has been touted as a possible near-term compromise.

The California deal would only “put us partially back on the pathway” to cutting emissions along the lines of the Obama rules. “[I]t is now time to restore the Obama-Biden standards and go even further.”

The Obama limits would require about a 4.7 percent increase in fuel efficiency each year while the California compromise would achieve about half as much.

The letter asks the president to direct EPA to lead development of new long-term multi-pollutant standard to put the nation on track to make all new cars and light-duty trucks zero emissions later

than 2035, including a 2030 standard that achieves at least a 60 percent fleet standard below today's average.

And it calls for "immediate" action on medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, including a goal of all urban delivery, school and transit buses being zero-emissions by 2035.

"In order to meet President Biden's bold and historic climate commitments and create good American jobs, we need to move quickly to producing and selling pollution-free vehicles. We can cut tailpipe emissions by 60 percent by the end of the decade and establish the U.S. as the global powerhouse in clean, electric vehicle manufacturing," NRDC's Luke Tonachel tells *Inside EPA*.

Environmentalists [have been stepping up their efforts](#) to urge the administration to adopt standards that are stricter than California's deal as officials work to comply with Biden's Jan. 20 executive order requiring issuance of a proposed rule to replace the Trump standards by July and a proposed reinstatement of state's ability to adopt strict standards by April.

But one source said earlier this week that environmentalists have been "trying to figure out how to best articulate concerns" over the California agreement, especially since Biden's position on it is unknown, and he is facing strong pressure from other groups, including automakers and labor groups, to support it.

As such, sources say the letter was carefully crafted to balance a number of concerns. "I see it as an effort to head off adopting the California rule, others will see it as a signal to the unions that we want to work with them and to the President that we share his goals but need tougher standards to achieve them than the California rules," Daniel Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at CBD, tells *Inside EPA*.

'Visionary Climate Leadership'

The letter also praises Biden's "visionary climate leadership" and his Jan. 20 order to revisit the Trump clean car standards rollback through MY2025 as well as its "illegal preemption of California emission standards."

The groups urge Biden "to next act quickly to reinstate California's waiver and restore national standards at least to levels set during the Obama-Biden Administration," noting the standards set in 2012 "were and are achievable."

The letter also says new long-term standards, "which build on the legacy of these interim standards are critical to realize your vision of full vehicle electrification that eliminates tailpipe pollution while securing and growing high road auto sector jobs and manufacturing, ensuring pocketbook and health gains for families as well as frontline communities struggling with pollution from roadways."

In addition to NRDC and Sierra Club, groups signing the letter include Mom's Clean Air Force, the Environmental Working Group, Elected Officials Protecting America, the Climate Group,

Earthjustice, Elders Climate Action, the Ecology Center, Interfaith Light & Power, Alliance of Nurses for Health Environments, the League of Conservation Voters, the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Coltura, the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, the Union of Concerned Scientists, Dream Corps Green For All, CBD, EVHybridNoire, Environment America, the Health Environment Alliance of Utah and the Hip Hop Caucus.

The groups also sent the letter to top White House climate officials including Gina McCarthy, domestic climate adviser; Brian Deese, director of the National Economic Council; Ali Zaidi, deputy domestic climate advisor; and Austin Brown, senior director for transportation emissions.

-- Dawn Reeves (dreeves@iwppnews.com) & Doug Obey (dobey@iwppnews.com)

Editor's Note: *This story has been revised to correct environmentalists' request on heavy-duty vehicles.*

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