

Biden moves to end Trump's attack on California car, air quality regulations

“It’s great that President Biden will make it a top priority to issue new clean cars standards. His challenge will be making them as stringent as they will need to be to prevent severe climate change and its devastating consequences,” said Dan Becker, Safe Climate Transport Campaign director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The first step Biden should take, he said, is to “restore California’s Clean Air Act authority to protect its own people with tough clean air rules.”

By [Michael Wilner](#) and [Sophia Bollag](#)

January 20, 2021 02:13 PM,

Updated January 20, 2021 09:41 PM

President Joe Biden signed an executive order on his first day in office directing his government to revise fuel economy standards, a stark reversal from the Trump administration that for years battled California’s effort to maintain a strict cap on emissions from cars.

Transportation emissions are the single largest source of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

The new policy is one of 15 executive actions Biden took in the Oval Office just hours after his inauguration, and is part of a larger order directing his administration to “roll back President Trump’s environmental actions in order to protect public health and the environment.”

In a separate action, Biden brought the United States back into the Paris climate agreement, a global pact to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The Trump administration argued that a national tailpipe standard should be set and that California should be required to follow it — a position that California regulators fought aggressively in the courts due to the lower standard proposed by the Republican administration. The Trump team argued their standard would make new cars cheaper, giving Americans an incentive to buy newer, safer vehicles.

Now the newly inaugurated Biden administration plans a quick reversal of Trump’s policy, “directing agencies to consider revising vehicle fuel economy and emissions standards” to ensure “that such standards cut pollution,” Biden administration officials said of the president’s executive order.

Former Trump administration officials hope the lengthy rulemaking process they took to reach their standard, known as the Safer Affordable Fuel Efficient (SAFE) rule, [will make it difficult for the Biden team](#) to reverse course.

But the automotive industry already seems to be accommodating to the new Biden era. Days after Biden was declared the victor in the 2020 presidential election, General Motors Corp., America's largest automaker, announced it would break with the Trump administration's effort and side with California by dropping out of litigation over the rule.

New relationship with California

Environmental groups lauded Biden's early actions on Wednesday, including Greenpeace and the Center for Biological Diversity.

“It's great that President Biden will make it a top priority to issue new clean cars standards. His challenge will be making them as stringent as they will need to be to prevent severe climate change and its devastating consequences,” said Dan Becker, Safe Climate Transport Campaign director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The first step Biden should take, he said, is to “restore California's Clean Air Act authority to protect its own people with tough clean air rules.”

In a Tuesday letter to Biden, California Gov. Gavin Newsom asked the new president to let California continue setting its own car pollution standards.

Biden's order is an early symbol of the changed relationship between the federal government and the nation's largest state. During Trump's four years in office, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra sued the federal government more than 100 times. That includes [nine lawsuits filed on Trump's last full day in office](#) over his efforts to loosen environmental and greenhouse gas standards.

Now, Becerra is poised to join Biden in Washington as one of the new president's cabinet picks. Newsom's Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Jared Blumenfeld said California has served for the last four years as an “environmental backstop,” working to lower emissions even as the Trump administration rolled back environmental regulations.

“For decades, California has led the nation in crafting ambitious and innovative clean car standards,” he wrote in a statement. “Thankfully, on day one of the Biden administration, the President has reinforced and validated California's role in setting strong zero-emission vehicle standards.”

With Biden in the White House, California's posture switches from offensive to defensive. In his Tuesday letter, Newsom pledged that his state will help Biden implement a Democratic policy agenda.

With his executive order on emissions standards, Biden is also helping Newsom with his agenda, which includes a push to ban sales of gas-powered cars in California by 2035.

“In the past few years, the White House abdicated its responsibility on key issues like climate change, wildfires, and infrastructure,” Newsom wrote. “Having a true partner in the White House - and an Administration aligned with so many of our values – is a game-changer for Californians.”

<https://www.mcclatchydc.com/customer-service/contact-us/article206876009.html>