E&E NEWS

“With weak rules, automakers will keep pushing gas guzzlers, sticking consumers with high gas bills and plentiful pollution,” Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

“With strong new rules, the administration can take the biggest single step of any nation to fight climate change, slashing auto pollution and requiring automakers to mass-produce clean electric vehicles,” he said.

Top automakers trail in fuel economy

BY: ARIANNA SKIBELL
11/22/202

American car companies Ford Motor Co., General Motors Co. and Stellantis trailed their competitors in fuel economy performance last year, according to a U.S. EPA report released late last week.

A continued uptick in gas-guzzling SUV and truck sales offset companies’ fleetwide benefits, the report found.

Overall, 2020 saw record high fuel economy and low emissions levels, but the vast majority of companies bought fuel efficiency credits to meet federal standards. Only Tesla Inc., Subaru Corp. and Honda Motor Co. met tailpipe requirements without using credits.

Since 2004, planet-warming pollution has decreased 24 percent while fuel economy has increased 32 percent, hitting a record 25.4 mpg in model year 2020, the report found. Yet no further gains are currently projected for 2021.

Of the 14 major carmakers, Ford, GM and Stellantis had the lowest fuel economy. Stellantis — formerly Chrysler — came in last with a fleet average of 21.8 mpg, behind Ford and GM, both with 23 mpg. Honda topped the charts with 29.1 mpg.

And five companies — Nissan Motor Co., Mazda Motor Corp., BMW AG, Volkswagen AG and Stellantis — backslid, producing worse fuel efficiency than their 2015 rates.

The report comes as President Biden is weighing a new fuel economy rule to tighten tailpipe emissions. The draft rule, which has largely garnered auto industry support, aims to restore former President Obama’s greenhouse gas and fuel economy standards for light-duty vehicles, which were rolled back under President Trump.

Under Obama, automakers were required to raise fuel economy 5 percent a year through 2025. But Trump reduced that rate to 1.5 percent annually through 2026. Trump also repealed California's legal authority to set its own standards, which the Biden administration is working to restore.

Biden's proposed rule would increase the average fuel economy of new passenger cars and trucks 10 percent in 2023 and then 5 percent each year after that, totaling 25 percent by model year 2026.

The White House said the rule could preserve around 200 billion gallons of gasoline and reduce carbon pollution by about 2 billion metric tons. But environmental and public health groups, along with some state regulators, say the rule is not strong enough to achieve needed carbon reductions (*Climatewire*, Sept. 28).

The transportation sector is the single-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the country.

The new EPA report, some say, demonstrates car companies need a stronger standard.

"With weak rules, automakers will keep pushing gas guzzlers, sticking consumers with high gas bills and plentiful pollution," Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

"With strong new rules, the administration can take the biggest single step of any nation to fight climate change, slashing auto pollution and requiring automakers to mass-produce clean electric vehicles," he said.

In August, Biden set a goal to have 50 percent of new car sales be electric by 2030. The industry has widely agreed to target those numbers, pouring billions of dollars into fleet electrification. A generous EV tax credit included in the sprawling social spending bill making its way through Congress should expedite consumer adoption.

Without Biden's cornerstone Clean Electricity Performance Program, which was nixed in Democratic negotiations, the forthcoming clean car standard is more important than ever, a recent analysis from the Rhodium Group found (*Climatewire*, Oct. 26).

"This EPA trends report reiterates the need for the agency to adopt the strongest possible federal clean car standards to drive the most impactful emissions reductions in communities across the nation to advance bold climate action, public health and justice," said Katherine García, acting director of the Sierra Club's Clean Transportation for All campaign.