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Biden Calls for the Tough Clean Car Standards, to 40 MPG by 2026

By Jim Motavalli
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- **The EPA announced clean-car standards that would see the fleet average rise to 40 mpg by 2026.**
- **Compared to the standards under previous administrations, these rules would result in efficiency increases up to 10% a year, compared to 5% under Obama and just 1.5% under Trump.**
- **Most environmentalist groups praised the move, citing improvements in both emissions reductions and cost to the consumer at the pump.**

The Biden Administration’s Environmental Protection Agency on Monday announced [tougher final clean car standards](#) for light-duty vehicles through 2026. The action, which would result in a fleet-wide average of 40 miles per gallon by 2026, was praised by most—but not all—environmental groups.

Under President Trump, the US fleet would have reached a 32-mpg average by 2026. The new rules go into effect in the 2023 model year, and require a 28.3 percent reduction in emissions through 2026. Efficiency increases will be between five and 10 percent annually through that year. They ramped up five percent annually under Obama, and only 1.5 percent annually under Trump’s plan.

The EPA said in announcing the new rules, “These standards are the strongest vehicle emissions standards ever established for the light-duty vehicle sector, and are based on sound science and grounded in a rigorous assessment of current and future technologies. The updated standards will result in avoiding more than three billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions through 2050.” The administration also said the program’s benefits, based on reduced climate impacts, better public

health and fuel cost savings for consumers, will exceed its costs by \$120 billion to \$190 billion in the same time period.

Luke Tonachel, director of the clean vehicles and fuel program at the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) (NRDC), said in an interview that the new standards are “good for Americans because they reduce climate pollution and save consumers money at the pump. These rules will put us on track to where we need to be, which is zeroing out new car tailpipe emissions by 2035.” He said the administration recognized technological improvements in electric car technology to justify tightening the standards, and that the goals are achievable by the auto industry.

Also in an interview, Paul Cort, an attorney for [the environmental group Earthjustice](#), said the new standards are “an improvement over where things were. It’s a short-term solution as we focus on fully transitioning to EVs.” He said Earthjustice is working with California towards a statewide target of 70 to 80 percent fully electric car sales by 2030.

Cort said that electrifying the cars in showrooms is one part of the battle; also important are building a robust public charging infrastructure and “changing how we think about cars and transportation.” But, he said, the transition to electric is already well underway. “We’re skating to where the puck is going,” he said.

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To reach the EV penetration sought by the Biden Administration and the environmental groups will require a considerable ramp-up. Battery EVs were 1.8 percent of US vehicle sales in 2020, [said IHS Markit](#). Still, that was a record. And considerably improved and cheaper EVs, with much longer range, are coming onto the market and will undoubtedly make the prospect of ownership much happier for consumers.

Share your thoughts on the EPA’s push for higher fleet-wide efficiencies and how it would effect you in the comments below.