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Joel Levin, executive director of the advocacy group Plug In America, also thinks the rules could have been better. “We’re somewhat sympathetic to Dan Becker’s views,” he told Autoweek. “We’re concerned that the trajectory outlined here is not quite enough to get us there. The rules could be stronger, cleaning up more tailpipes in the intervening years. In the near term, we would have wanted to see something more robust.”

Until 2025, California’s emissions rules are in line with those of the federal government, after which they diverge. And Becker charges that post-2025 “the federal rule is tougher than California’s.” Obviously, however, selling a lot more EVs will cut California’s tailpipe emissions significantly. CARB says that it expects the clean car rules to eliminate more than 50 percent of the climate emissions by 2040 that would have existed in the absence of legislation. The state’s estimate is 395 million metric tons of avoided CO₂.

Do California’s Zero Emission by 2035 Rules Go Far Enough?

While widely applauded, the new rules passed by California air regulators leave some to ask why rules weren't also applied to gas-powered cars, as a means of lowering emissions in the walk up to a full zero-emissions future.

By Jim Motavalli
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- California air regulators voted to ban the sale of new gasoline-powered cars by 2035.
- Interim targets will call for battery electrics and plug-in hybrids (PHEVs) to be 35 percent of the sales mix in 2026, with the percentage rising annually until only zero-tailpipe cars can be sold.

- The news was met with both enthusiasm and criticism, with some calling for more stringent rules applied to internal-combustion-powered cars during that transitional period, as well.

California's new clean car rules, approved Thursday, put the state in line with the European Union (EU) in requiring that all new cars [sold there by 2035 be zero emission](#). Under California's new rules, battery electrics and plug-in hybrids (PHEVs) are required to be 35 percent of the sales mix in 2026, with the percentage rising annually until only zero-tailpipe cars can be sold. By 2028 it's 51 percent, and by 2033, 88 percent.

In the first half of 2022, 15.1 percent of new vehicles sold in California were either battery electric vehicles (EVs) or PHEVs (up from 9.5 percent in 2021), says the [California New Car Dealers Association](#). Nationally, Edmunds data shows that EV market share from January through July this year was 5.8 percent—up rather dramatically from 2.68 percent in the same period of 2021, but still comparatively low.

What California's Air Resources Board (CARB) calls Advanced Clean Cars II is certainly a landmark ruling, and has been met with widespread praise from EV advocates. But not everyone is applauding. Why? The new rules don't add any new requirements that internal-combustion (IC) cars sold before 2035 clean up their acts.

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Scott Hochberg, an attorney at CBD's Climate Law Institute, claims the new standards “leave Californians making sputtering progress in the slow lane. California needs to act strongly on gas-powered cars instead of ignoring them, and shift to EVs much sooner or watch our climate stability slip away.”

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Until 2025, California's emissions rules are in line with those of the federal government, after which they diverge. And Becker charges that post-2025 “the federal rule is tougher than California's.” Obviously, however, selling a lot more EVs will cut California's tailpipe emissions significantly. CARB says that it expects the clean car rules to eliminate more than 50 percent of the climate emissions by 2040 that would have existed in the absence of legislation. The state's estimate is 395 million metric tons of avoided CO₂.

Among EV champions, the naysaying is a minority opinion. Kathy Harris, clean vehicles advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), says that “California is once again leading the way by establishing common-sense standards that will transition to sales of all zero-polluting cars and light duty trucks in the state.”

NRDC’s Harris likes the argument that selling EVs will offset a lot of emissions. She told Autoweek, “Under these standards, 35 percent of vehicles sold in 2026 will be zero emissions, which will lead to a substantial cut in tailpipe emissions that year and every year that follows. Taken together with the existing clean car standards in California and the upcoming new federal emission standards, this action will lead to substantial reductions in tailpipe pollution—and put us on track to eliminate them altogether.”

Dylan Jaff, policy analyst at Consumer Reports, is also supportive. He said, “This common-sense rule is a critical tool to bring an increased array of zero-emission vehicle options to California consumers, increasing their ability to reduce their carbon footprint.” A Consumer Reports survey last January and February [found](#) that 71 percent of Americans expressed at least some interest in buying or leasing an electric-only vehicle.

For automakers, the main pushback concerns meeting the standards amid inflation, supply chain and semiconductor challenges, EV income tax credit eligibility issues, plus a sometimes less-than-robust EV charging infrastructure. John Bozzella, president and CEO of the [Alliance for Automotive Innovation](#), which says it represents manufacturers producing nearly 98 percent of cars and light trucks sold in the US, told Autoweek that it’s good that EVs are selling in California. “But despite this positive trend, [the state’s] EV sale mandates are still very aggressive—even in California, with decades of supportive EV policies—and will be extremely challenging. That’s just a fact.”

But Jessica Caldwell, executive director of Insights at Edmunds, says the 35 percent goal by 2026 “isn’t too far of a stretch, especially since buying conditions are less than ideal right now due to shortages. If automakers can pick up production, sufficient investments are made in charging infrastructure and the power grid, and financial incentives can be made more available, this milestone should be achievable—if not surpassable.”

Direct automaker reaction was somewhat muted, but supportive of the overall goals. According to Elizabeth Winter, a General Motors spokeswoman, “General Motors and California have a shared vision of an all-electric future, eliminating tailpipe emissions from new light-duty vehicles by 2035. GM is focused on delivering zero-emissions vehicles across a range of categories and price points for retail and commercial customers.” And [according to](#) Bob Holycross, chief sustainability officer at Ford, “The CARB Advanced Clean Cars II rule is a landmark standard that will define clean transportation and set an example for the United States.”

Honda said [in a statement](#), “Reaching these targets will require thoughtful collaboration between all parties in a number of key areas, including infrastructure buildout, the development of robust supply chains, and policy and market incentives. And while we fully share the goals of the recently revised federal EV tax credit, the reality is that very few to no electric vehicles will be eligible for this critical incentive in the near term.” Toyota [simply](#) “acknowledged CARB’s

leadership in climate policies and its authority to set vehicle emissions standards under the Clean Air Act.”

[As Autoweek reported](#), the EU provisions for 100 percent clean cars by 2035 includes a possible loophole for what’s called e-fuel—carbon-neutral gasoline and diesel produced from renewably sourced hydrogen and captured carbon dioxide (CO₂). According to CARB spokesman Dave Clegern, there’s no such provision in its own rules. “This regulation is strictly about vehicles,” he told Autoweek, adding that the state’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard, which regulates transportation fuels sold in California based on their carbon intensity, does have provisions for such non-zero alternatives as biodiesel.

<https://www.autoweek.com/news/industry-news/a40993559/california-zero-emission-by-2035-rules-passed/>