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To save money and the planet, Biden needs stronger clean car rules

By Dan Becker and Maya Golden-Krasner
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The weeks leading up to this month's COP27 Climate Summit in Egypt have laid bare the many challenges facing President [Joe Biden](#), from OPEC-induced gas price [volatility](#) to [damning reports](#) showing that the planet is careening toward climate catastrophe.

But there's a single step Biden can take to fight the climate crisis and save consumers at the pump: make cars cleaner, faster.

Transportation accounts for about [one quarter](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions and is the [largest source](#) of U.S. climate pollution. Switching to clean, electric cars is a shortcut to confronting climate change, breaking petrostates' power and saving money at the pump.

That doesn't happen overnight. But President Biden has the power to signal the market and accelerate the transition with new auto mileage and emissions standards being written now for release next year.

The challenge will be making the rules strong enough to shift rapidly to the electric vehicles that liberate consumers from gas pump price shocks. And they must protect the climate by dramatically reducing pollution from new gas cars—millions of which will still be manufactured—in the meantime. And let's eliminate the industry-demanded loopholes that only undermine emissions reductions.

Other leaders have already paved the way. [The European Union is in the process of adopting a rule requiring only electric vehicles](#) be sold after 2035, as [California](#) and [several other states](#) have already done.

The cars, SUVs and pickups that make up the bulk of U.S. greenhouse gases also contribute significantly to the smog choking our cities, which will only worsen as temperatures rise. Meanwhile, Americans and people around the world are suffering from [heatwaves](#), [megadroughts](#), [wildfires](#) and [deadly hurricanes](#).

Emissions and mileage standards work. They cut pollution and conserve gas, saving us money. In fact, even the moderate mileage standards of the last two decades [save consumers about a dollar per gallon](#) today, according to Dave Cooke, a senior analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists. Strengthened protections will allow us to tell Russia, Saudi Arabia and other untrustworthy "oilgarchies" what they can do with their oil.

Automakers claim that they're all aboard the electric bandwagon, Yet while [promising an EV future](#), GM is falling short in the present. EVs constituted a mere 4 percent of its total sales in the third quarter of 2022. That's fewer than 15,000 cars. Meanwhile, GM [sold](#) almost 170,000 gas-swilling Silverados and Sierras over the same time period.

Trusting automakers to reduce pollution voluntarily won't cut it. Car companies and dealers continue to heavily advertise gas-guzzling pickups and SUVs. Despite grandiose [promises](#) of vast numbers of EVs, the only way to ensure companies deliver is for the president to issue tough new emissions standards that protect our air and climate. The much-ballyhooed Inflation Reduction Act provides some tax credits for some EVs but doesn't require automakers themselves to manufacture a single one.

Automakers have rarely gone beyond the bare minimum of what the government requires. As soon as [Donald Trump](#) landed in office, they [renege](#)d on their commitments to the Environmental Protection Agency to make cleaner cars. There's no reason to think they'll rush to green their fleets now unless the federal government pushes them.

This is auto mechanics, not rocket science. Components, such as improved engines and transmissions, hybrid systems and high strength, and lightweight materials will reduce pollution and save gas. These technologies are sitting on automakers' shelves and are [cheaper than the gas they save](#). As for electric cars, [studies show](#) that many EVs are already cheaper to buy and run than their gas-powered doppelclunkers—and virtually all will be within a few years.

As Biden looks to lead on climate at COP27 and stem gas-price frustration, he can't afford to let automakers keep pumping the brakes on clean cars. The president must use his power to protect the climate and our wallets with robust standards requiring automakers to deliver clean cars instead of just promises.

Dan Becker is the director of the [Center for Biological Diversity's Safe Climate Transport Campaign](#).

Maya Golden-Krasner is deputy director of the Center's [Climate Law Institute](#).

The views expressed in this article are the writers' own.

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