

The Detroit News

The Center for Biological Diversity urged the Biden administration Monday to strengthen pollution controls and criticized automakers for cutting emissions more slowly than they have said they could.

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Detroit Three making vehicles with most emissions, lowest fuel economy, EPA says

By Riley Beggin
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Washington — The Detroit Three automakers again produced vehicles with the most emissions and the lowest fuel economy of any major manufacturers in model year 2021, according to [new data](#) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Stellantis NV came in last in a field of 14 automakers for both measures, General Motors Co. was second-to-last and Ford Motor Co. was third-to-last. Both Stellantis and GM's fuel economy decreased and emissions increased between model years 2016 and 2021, according to EPA.

The three automakers also lagged behind their peers in model years 2019, 2018 and 2017. Stellantis has had the lowest fuel economy of any manufacturer every year since 2012. Tesla Inc., which produces only electric vehicles, has had the highest fuel economy every year since 2018.

"While the vehicles that generated this data featured attributes our customers preferred at the time, they do not reflect our current or future product plan," Stellantis spokesperson Eric Mayne said. He added that Stellantis has since introduced the best-selling plug-in hybrid vehicle in the U.S. — the Jeep Wrangler 4xe — and that the company has announced \$35 billion in investments in electrification.

EPA's annual Automotive Trends Report released Monday showed a field of major automakers primarily using credits to maintain compliance with federal emissions and fuel economy standards as they continue to sell more trucks and SUVs, even as they improve vehicle efficiency overall. Industry-wide, fuel economy remained at a high point of 25.4 miles per gallon.

“Today’s report demonstrates the significant progress we’ve made to ensure clean air for all as automakers continue to innovate and utilize more advanced technologies to cut pollution,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement. “Working together across the public and private sector, we can deliver on EPA’s mission to protect public health, especially our most vulnerable populations, and advance President Biden’s ambitious agenda to combat the climate crisis.”

Only six of the automakers — Tesla, Ford, Subaru Corp., Honda Motor Co., Toyota Motor Corp. and Volvo Cars Ltd. — met their standards without the use of credits. However, average new vehicle fuel economy overall has increased 32% since 2004, EPA reported.

Spokespeople for Ford and GM did not immediately respond to requests for comment Monday.

Sam Abuelsamid, a principal research analyst at Guidehouse Insights, said the reason the Detroit Three have been trailing their competitors isn't a mystery: They produce more trucks and SUVs than the rest of the industry.

"When you sell a lot of big, heavy trucks you're going to be at the bottom of the fuel economy rankings," he said. "Simple as that."

But they may not be at the back of the pack for long. The three automakers have invested heavily in electrifying their fleets.

They could begin to overtake rivals like Honda and Toyota in Model Year 2023 when those investments start to come to fruition, Abuelsamid said. Ford could see improvements as soon as next year's report on Model Year 2022, which for the first time will include sales of the Dearborn automaker's electric pickup, the F-150 Lightning.

Ford is spending \$50 billion on a plan to boost EV production to 600,000 vehicles annually by the end of next year and 2 million units annually by the end of 2026.

GM is spending \$35 billion on EV and autonomous vehicle investment to grow its North American EV capacity to 1 million vehicles annually by 2025. The Detroit automaker will begin production next year of the Chevrolet Silverado EV, the Blazer EV and the Equinox EV.

Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, battery electric vehicles and fuel cell vehicles remained a tiny share of all vehicles produced in model year 2021 — 4%. Preliminary estimates for the 2022 model year showed that number doubled to more than 8%.

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Encompassing vehicles built in 2020, the report represents a snapshot of the U.S. auto industry's performance before major investments in electric vehicles began to impact production.

Since then, automakers have announced tens of billions of dollars in new or revamped factories to build EVs and batteries, and new partnerships to source the minerals and semiconductor chips necessary to power the transition. Analysts expect EV production to skyrocket in coming years.

