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EPA report: Vehicle fuel efficiency flat in 2021

By Zack Budryk
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U.S. automakers’ improvements on fuel efficiency were flat in 2021 despite an overall decline in carbon emissions, according to an annual Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [report released this week](#).

In its annual Automotive Trends Report, the EPA found new vehicles had an average fuel economy of 25.4 miles per gallon in 2021, roughly unchanged from 2020. Although the Trump administration rolled back a number of fuel efficiency regulations between 2017 and 2021, the EPA attributed much of the lack of progress to the decreasing popularity of more fuel-efficient sedans and station wagons during the same period.

Five percent of automakers increased vehicle emission rates from model years 2016 to 2021, according to the EPA. The largest increase came from Mazda, with an increase of 24 g/mi, which the EPA attributed to the company doubling their percentage of SUVs during that period. Volkswagen saw its new emissions increase 18 g/mi, followed by General Motors, which increased 17 g/mi.

“The trend away from sedan/wagons, which remain the vehicle type with the highest fuel economy and lowest CO2 emissions, and towards vehicle types with lower fuel economy and higher CO2 emissions has offset some of the fleetwide benefits that otherwise would have been achieved from the improvements within each vehicle type,” the report states.

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Improvements in fuel economy may still lie ahead. In 2021, the Biden EPA restored many of the requirements rolled back under Trump, with the tighter rules set to take effect in model year 2023. Under those rules, automakers will be required to improve efficiency 5 to 10 percent between now and 2026.