



## One decision can help get Biden's climate goals back on track

By Dan Becker and Maya Golden-Krasner, opinion contributors  
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As President Biden feels the [political heat](#) for approving destructive oil drilling in the [Alaskan Arctic](#) and [Gulf of Mexico](#), his climate goals — and his legacy — are in jeopardy. His best shot at getting back on track would be strong new auto pollution standards.

With these standards, a draft of which is expected next week, the U.S. could take the biggest single step of any nation to combat global warming. And Biden could help shore up his political base in the process.

Polls show that [most Americans](#), especially [young voters](#), want the president to take stronger action on climate. This one rule from Biden could slash climate-heating carbon emissions more than any other — but only if it's done right.

Biden's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should adopt a rule that achieves [at least a 75 percent reduction](#) in heat-trapping carbon dioxide pollution by 2030. But to do so, the agency will have to reject baby steps and resist automakers' entreaties for weak rules.

To hear them tell it, car companies are over the moon about making electric vehicles (EVs). GM, for example, recently [made a deal](#) with an environmental group, promising to quickly ramp up its EVs. However, details of the deal appear about as clear as mud and as enforceable as a shady car dealer's handshake. Almost immediately, GM [told](#) Wall Street that it was delaying its EV plans.

While automakers may talk out of both sides of their tailpipes, they do tend to follow laws. That's why Biden's EPA must issue strong rules that require automakers to actually do what they now only boast about — build and sell emissions-free EVs.

Crucially, the EPA must also require automakers to slash pollution from new gas-burning vehicles in the meantime.

While EVs are all the rage, gas-powered cars will continue to be on the road until the middle of this century, spewing [millions of tons](#) of climate-heating gases and smog-forming pollution in the meantime.

Given the millions of new gas vehicles that will be sold over the next decade or so, slashing pollution from new gas cars is just as important as scaling up EVs.

Automakers already have the technologies to cut carbon emissions through improved engines and transmissions, hybrid systems, as well as high strength, lightweight materials. And they're [cheaper](#) than the gas they save.

Strong car standards will reduce pollution and save consumers billions at the pump.

Automakers' track record shows that without strong mileage and emissions standards, they won't make clean cars that cut pollution and save money. As soon as former President Trump landed in office, they [renege](#)d on their commitments to President Obama to make cleaner cars. The auto lobby started [pressing](#) for weak new EPA standards as soon as they finished lobbying to weaken last year's rules.

Car companies and dealers make their [biggest profits](#) from gas-guzzling SUVs and pickups that ultimately [harm](#) the beautiful places they're named after. And they won't stop hawking their [Tundra-melters](#) or [Sierra-burners](#) easily.

The companies have drastically reduced production of sedans in favor of SUVs, pickups and vans that qualify for weaker standards than cars. Essentially, more pollution equals more profit. Automakers are even [lobbying](#) regulators to classify all crossover SUVs as "light trucks."

The EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should resist the pressure to allow small SUVs to meet the weaker truck standards. And they shouldn't give pollution credits for existing technologies that don't save much gas. These and other [loopholes](#) make Swiss cheese out of a solid regulation and must be rejected.

We're in a climate emergency. This is no time to kick the clunker down the road.

Biden needs to set standards that force the industry to do what they won't do otherwise: Rapidly ratchet up sales of EVs, hold the line on polluting crossover SUVs and clean up the millions of new gas-powered vehicles they'll sell in the meantime.

Instead of approving more drilling in the Arctic, Biden can drill down on forcing automakers to make cars that sip gas or don't use any.

One rule can make a world of difference. Biden shouldn't miss this chance. Our planet and the president's legacy are all on the line.

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

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

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