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Biden EPA Accused of Caving to Big Auto, Big Oil by Weakening Historic Car Emissions Rule

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By Jake Johnson
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The Biden administration received a mixture of praise and criticism from green groups on Wednesday after the Environmental Protection Agency unveiled new tailpipe pollution standards for passenger cars and light-duty trucks.

The finalized rules were simultaneously described as the strongest ever of their kind and a disappointing step backward compared to the EPA's [original proposal](#) and what experts say is possible—and necessary—to combat the climate crisis.

The new [tailpipe standards](#) would strengthen emissions limits more slowly than the EPA's original proposal, which came under fire from the auto industry and Big Oil. The American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) [falsely claimed](#) the EPA's proposed standards amounted to an effort to "ban new gas, diesel, and flex-fuel vehicles from the U.S. market."

AFPM and the American Petroleum Institute [threatened](#) to challenge the finalized standards in court.

As *The New York Times* [reported](#) Wednesday, the finalized rule "does not mandate the sales of electric vehicles, and gas-powered cars and trucks could still be sold."

"Rather," the *Times* explained, "it requires carmakers to meet tough new average emissions limits across their entire product line. It's up to the manufacturers to decide how to comply... EPA officials said automakers could comply with the emissions caps by selling a mix of conventional gasoline-burning cars, hybrids, electric vehicles, or other types of vehicles, such as cars powered by hydrogen."

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Public Citizen also [accused](#) the Biden EPA of weakening the vehicle emissions standards to appease the auto industry. One industry trade group, Alliance for Automotive Innovation, [applauded](#) the administration for "moderating the pace of EV adoption in 2027, 2028, 2029, and 2030."

Chelsea Hodgkins, a senior policy advocate for Public Citizen, said that while "more vehicle pollution will be avoided and more lives saved" under the new rules "than would have been under current regulations," the EPA's new standards fall "far short of what is needed to protect public health and our planet."

"We are in a crisis, and clean vehicle technology that will help solve it is here and available now," said Hodgkins. "The Biden administration had the opportunity to shift the automotive industry away from a model that's driving record profits for automakers while literally killing us, toward one that still provides strong profits but keeps the world safer for humans. It made improvements but is coming up well short, which is deeply disappointing at a time when we need ever-stronger climate leadership."

Transportation is the largest single source of air pollution in the U.S., spewing [benzene and other toxins](#) into the environment to the detriment of the climate and public health.

The EPA [estimates](#) its standards would help the U.S. avoid more than 7 billion tons of carbon emissions and reap \$13 billion worth of public health benefits "due to improved air quality."

Steven Higashide, director of the Clean Transportation Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, described the EPA's new rules as "the strongest standards ever finalized and vital for meeting U.S. climate goals" and said they would "shift

the trajectory of the automobile market and put us on a path to real emissions reductions."

"However, EPA should have gone even further because we have the technology to be more ambitious," said Higashide. "The science is clear on both the urgent need to cut climate-endangering emissions and the fact that we can make the cuts we need. We don't have many opportunities to reduce transportation pollution and it's disappointing that this rule falls short of what's possible. We'll continue to push the administration to create, implement, and enforce the strongest rules possible."

The EPA unveiled its finalized standards weeks after the agency opted in the face of industry pressure to [delay a regulatory crackdown](#) on existing gas-fired power plants, exempting them from a separate anti-pollution rule.

The EPA's moves come during a critical election year in which the presumptive Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump, and his allies are [threatening to undo](#) any climate progress the Biden administration makes if they regain power.

A recent [analysis](#) by Carbon Brief estimated that a second Trump term would likely result in an additional 4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions at a time when quickly slashing planet-warming pollution is necessary to avoid the worst of the climate emergency.

Trump has [vowed](#) to roll back the EPA's tailpipe emissions standards on day two of a second term and warned during a campaign rally over the weekend that the reelection of President Joe Biden would mean a "[bloodbath](#)" for the U.S. auto industry.

The United Auto Workers, which has [endorsed](#) Biden and vocally pushed for a just transition to electric vehicles, welcomed the EPA's new pollution standards on Wednesday, saying the agency "has made significant progress on its final greenhouse gas emissions rule for light-duty vehicles."

The UAW [criticized](#) the original proposal and urged the EPA to make changes to "ensure the new rules do not disproportionately impact domestic union auto production."

"By taking seriously the concerns of workers and communities," the union said in a [statement](#) Wednesday, "the EPA has come a long way to create a more feasible emissions rule that protects workers building [internal combustion engine] vehicles, while providing a path forward for automakers to implement the full range of automotive technologies to reduce emissions."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/biden-epa-car-pollution>