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EPA Releases New Auto Emissions Rule

By Steve Hanley

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A year ago, the EPA proposed new exhaust emissions rules for cars and light-duty trucks that would reduce the acceptable limits by 56 percent compared to the rules in place today. While the new rules did not specify how car companies would comply with them, in reality they would have to significantly increase the number of battery electric vehicles they sell in order to meet the new standard. That led to howls of protest from automakers, [especially Toyota and Stellantis](#).

In its comments on the proposed new rules, Stellantis said the EPA had an “overly optimistic expectation for EV market growth” and was “assuming a ‘perfect’

transition,” while underestimating challenges such as lagging manufacturing capacity and consumer support. The EPA’s envisioned EV “adoption rate far exceeds what is supported by the policy actions in place and adds significant risk to the automotive industry who must comply with these standards whether these assumptions hold true or not.”

Singing from the same song book, Toyota said the EPA had an “overly optimistic expectation for EV market growth” and was “assuming a ‘perfect’ transition,” while underestimating challenges such as lagging manufacturing capacity and consumer support. The EPA’s envisioned EV “adoption rate far exceeds what is supported by the policy actions in place and adds significant risk to the automotive industry who must comply with these standards whether these assumptions hold true or not.”

The United Auto Workers also resisted the new rules, saying that EV jobs often pay less than traditional autoworker jobs and that the EPA should revise its standards to increase stringency “more gradually” in an effort to ensure they do not “disproportionately impact domestic union auto production.”

EPA Announces Final Emissions Rules

In a move being hailed as one of the most significant climate rules in US history, the Biden administration announced new regulations regulating tailpipe emissions on March 20. The rule, which calls for a 56% reduction in fleetwide average carbon emissions by 2032, constitutes the strictest ever limit on pollution from the nation’s cars and light trucks. “Today, we’re setting new pollution standards for cars and trucks,” President Biden said in a statement. “US workers will lead the

world on autos making clean cars and trucks, each stamped ‘Made in America.’ You have my word.”

In essence, the new rule dials back the stringency of the emissions standards now and for the next few years but makes up the difference later. In theory, as sales of electric cars ramp up after 2030, the net effect will be pretty much the same as the rules as first proposed — a dramatic reduction in exhaust emissions that will go a long way toward lowering carbon emissions. But other forms of pollution will be impacted as well. EVs made up just 7.6 percent of new car sales in the US last year. The EPA said it expects EV sales will increase to between 35 and 56 percent by 2032.

By the time the new rule is fully implemented in 2055, it will have cumulatively slashed more than 7 billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions, senior administration officials [told reporters](#) on Tuesday. It will also tackle toxic pollution by slashing fine particulate emissions 95 percent and oxides of nitrogen and other volatile organic compounds by 75%.

The reduction in fine particulates should make people sit up and notice. Those are the tiny particles less than 2.5 microns in size that pass directly into the human bloodstream in the lungs and cause pulmonary and cardiovascular damage, especially in children. Only Donald Trump and his supporters are unconcerned about the health of children. The magalomaniac of Mar-A-Lago has vowed to repeal any and all exhaust emissions rules “on day one” of the reign of terror that will occur if he is re-elected.

Automakers And UAW Say They Are Pleased By The New EPA Rule

In a statement on the day the rule change was announced, the UAW said, “By taking seriously the concerns of workers and communities, the EPA has created a more feasible emissions rule that protects workers building ICE vehicles, while providing a path forward for automakers to implement the full range of automotive technologies to reduce emissions.”

Automakers also applauded the changes. “The right pace for something this consequential and transformative ... gives us a chance to secure manufacturing and industrial base needed for long term success,” said John Bozzella, president of the automaker trade group Alliance for Automotive Innovation, in an EPA press conference on Wednesday.

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Lame duck senator Joe Manchin said he would support Republican efforts to overturn the rule. In a Wednesday statement, he called it “reckless and ill-informed” and said it “will impose what is effectively an EV mandate without ensuring the security of our supply chains from nations like China and without a realistic transition plan that addresses our domestic infrastructure needs.” Manchin, who makes a fortune every year peddling a particularly dirty form of coal, could care less about the lungs and brains of children — not if it means less money in his pocket.

Plug-In Hybrids Take On New Prominence

In a shift from the 2023 proposal, which did not mention plug-in hybrid vehicles, the EPA's final rule suggests manufacturers achieve the same reduction by ensuring 56% of cars sold are fully electric and 13% are [plug-in hybrids](#) by 2032. The EPA says the rule will save the nation \$99 billion a year, including \$46 billion in reduced fuel costs and nearly \$16 billion in auto repair and maintenance. The rule is also expected to prevent 2,500 premature deaths by 2055 thanks to cuts in pollution.

Some environmental groups applauded the new limits. "Every single day, millions of Americans suffer under the weight of vehicle pollution, unsustainable gas prices and the climate crisis, all fueled by tailpipe emissions spewing from gas cars throughout our communities," said Ben Jealous, executive director of the Sierra Club. "Today, President Biden, in one of the most significant actions his administration can take on climate change, has put forward standards with benefits extending far beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions." The new standards will "save lives and money for families," he added.

EV sales are accelerating. Last year, they were up by 54% compared with 2022, which was a 46% increase from 2021, according to Wards Auto Data. "From [plug-in hybrids](#) to fuel cells to fully electric, drivers have more choices today," said Biden's national climate adviser, Ali Zaidi, in an emailed statement. "This growth means jobs, and it means we are moving faster and faster to take on the climate crisis."

Advocates say the rule will benefit communities of color who are more likely to breathe in pollution from roads and highways. "While there's undoubtedly more

work ahead to improve our environment, today marks a positive step forward in protecting communities like mine,” Asada Rashidi, environmental justice organizer for the South Ward Environmental Alliance and member of the National Environmental Youth Advisory Council, said at the EPA’s Wednesday press conference. Regan said the rule “marks a historic win for public health, for the environment and for the future of our country.”

The Takeaway

Politics is a dirty business. The UAW has said it will spend a boatload of cash to get Biden re-elected, so nobody in the administration wants to annoy the union. The automakers have flotillas of lobbyists oozing through the corridors of power every day to spread some cash around and see to it that their interests are protected.

What we have here is a compromise, one that is intended to annoy as few people as possible while moving the ball toward the goal line. If it works, it will go down as a master class in policy making in a fractured world.

<https://cleantechnica.com/2024/03/20/epa-releases-new-auto-emissions-rule/>