



COURTHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

California gets federal waivers for ban on gas-powered vehicles

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Republicans pushed back against the waivers, saying they aren't practical in rural areas and will make life harder and more expensive.

Alan Riquelmy

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. (CN) — The Biden administration on Wednesday granted California waivers to the Clean Air Act, giving the green light to the Golden State to implement its zero-emission vehicle plan by 2035.

Under the state’s Advance Clean Cars II regulation — which received a waiver — 35% of new cars delivered for sale in California starting with model year 2026 must be zero-emission. That includes plug-in hybrids, electric and hydrogen-powered. Deliveries of new vehicles for sale must achieve 100% zero-emission by 2035.

The federal government also approved a waiver for California’s heavy-duty vehicle regulation, which state officials say will significantly reduce nitrogen oxide emissions from heavy-duty trucks.

“Clean cars are here to stay,” Governor Gavin Newsom said in a statement. “The Biden-Harris administration reaffirmed what we’ve known for decades — California can rise to the challenge of protecting our people by cleaning our air and cutting pollution.”

California can adopt emissions standards that are separate from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s rules to achieve its own air quality goals. However, it must get a waiver from the EPA for new motor vehicle emission standards.

According to Newsom's office, fossil-fueled transportation is the biggest contributor to air pollution in the state. Phasing out fully gas-powered vehicles will help address this issue.

Newsom noted the ban won't completely remove the internal combustion engine from California roads. It regulates only new vehicles, not existing ones. Also, new plug-in hybrid sales can still occur.

Gas-powered vehicles are expected on state roads past 2050, though they'll have cleaner fuel because of the law carbon fuel standard.

The governor argued that the regulation will save people money, as zero-emission vehicles have lower maintenance and fuel costs. He estimated that would bring a \$7,500 savings per switch to zero emission and over \$90 billion in savings for all Californians.

It'll also provide more choices for consumers, as automakers must provide a regularly increasing number of clean vehicles to the state. Additionally, job creation and a boost to business are anticipated by Newsom.

Banning gas-powered vehicles will lead to a cut in pollutants of over 25%, saving lives and \$13 billion in health costs linked to respiratory issues.

"California's ongoing success in tackling pollution challenges and improving public health is possible thanks to landmark regulations that support technological innovation and move us toward a zero-emissions future for transportation," said Liane Randolph, chair of the California Air Resources Board, in a statement. "Consumers and fleets are increasingly making the choice to drive clean vehicles, and today's waiver approvals will further that progress."

The EPA's waivers come about a month before President-elect Donald Trump takes the oath of office. He's battled before with California, which led Newsom just days after the election to call a special session to Trump-proof the state.

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Republicans blasted the waivers, saying a lame-duck federal administration opted to approve Newsom's "radical" ban on gas-powered vehicles.

According to Assembly member James Gallagher, the Republican minority leader from Yuba City, lawmakers twice rejected a gas car ban, leading Newsom to issue an executive order.

“Never mind that the technology isn’t there and the charging infrastructure is falling apart,” Gallagher said in a statement. “Never mind that this isn’t practical in rural areas or that people can’t afford to pay even higher up-front costs for cars. Newsom and his Democrat allies are all in on making life harder and more expensive for working Californians. Looks like the governor’s tour of red parts of California was just a publicity stunt, because Newsom clearly hasn’t learned anything from it.”

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