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Trump revokes California’s electric vehicle rules

First-in-nation rules would ban the sale of new gasoline cars by 2035, as issue heads to court

By Paul Rogers
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President Donald Trump on Thursday signed a resolution blocking California’s first-in-the-nation regulations to ban the sale of new gasoline-powered passenger vehicles statewide in 2035.

The measure, which the Republican-led House and Senate passed weeks ago, sets up a major legal battle. Gov. Gavin Newsom and Attorney General Rob Bonta [filed a lawsuit](#) over the issue minutes after Trump acted.

Trump held a White House ceremony Thursday morning, saying California’s rules limited consumer choice. He [revoked federal permission](#), called “a waiver,” that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had given to California last year when President Biden was in office.

“We officially rescue the U.S. auto industry from destruction by terminating the California electric vehicle mandate once and for all,” Trump said. “They said it couldn’t be done. It’s had us tied in knots for years. They passed these crazy rules.”

Republicans said California's rules were overly broad and would effectively set a national standard because California is the largest car market in the United States and under the Clean Air Act, other states are allowed to copy its rules.

Environmental groups and Democratic leaders said Trump's rollback will lead to more air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and health problems for Californian residents.

California was joined by 10 other states in filing the lawsuit — Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.

“Trump's all-out assault on California continues — and this time he's destroying our clean air and America's global competitiveness in the process,” Newsom said.

Environmentalists also condemned the action.

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The auto industry cheered the move.

“Everyone agreed these E.V. sales mandates were never achievable and wildly unrealistic,” said John Bozzella, CEO of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents major automakers. “Customers don't want the government telling them what kind of car to buy.”

For more than 50 years since President Nixon signed the Clean Air Act in 1970, federal law has allowed California, which often has had the nation's smoggiest skies in Southern California, to set its own tailpipe standards. Those can be stricter than federal standards, and other states are allowed to copy the rules California sets.

Since automakers don't want to build different models of cars for different states, this has meant California has often set clean air rules for cars and trucks, which

other states, and then eventually the federal government, and the industry implement nationwide.

But the Clean Air Act says California can only set those stricter standards if it receives permission, called “a waiver,” from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Trump also revoked two other Biden-era waivers on Thursday. Those would have allowed California to [require vehicle makers to produce an increasing number of zero-emission heavy-duty trucks](#), and to reduce [nitrogen oxides, a component of smog, from heavy-duty highway and off-road vehicles and engines](#).

Since the 1970s, Republican and Democratic presidents have routinely approved such waivers. Vehicles today are dramatically cleaner than they were a generation ago, with catalytic converters, on-board computer systems and other technology that has cut tailpipe pollution by 95% or more from new cars compared to models from the 1970s and 1980s.

In 2020, saying more action was needed to curb climate change and the wildfires and droughts associated with it, Newsom [signed an executive order](#) to prohibit the sale of all new cars and light trucks that run on gasoline starting in California in 2035.

Newsom’s phase-out of gasoline-burning passenger vehicles would not affect the sale of used cars. It would prohibit automakers from selling new cars, SUVs and minivans by 2035 in California unless they are “zero emission.”

More than a dozen countries already have similar laws imposing a ban between 2030 and 2040, including England, Germany, France, Mexico, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Israel, China and India.

Newsom’s move to make California the first U.S. state to take such a step was reinforced in 2022 by the California Air Resources Board, and copied by 11 other states: New York, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, New Jersey, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Delaware and Maryland.

During his first term in office, Trump took a similar action and California sued. But the case was still pending when President Biden took office in 2021 and reversed the move, giving back authority to California.

Polls show a large majority of Californians are concerned about climate change and its impacts on droughts, wildfires and heatwaves. But a majority oppose Newsom's rules.

Last July, 77% of Californian adults described climate change as a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” threat to the state’s economy and environment in [a survey by the Public Policy Institute of California](#). But just 39% said they supported the state’s looming ban on new gasoline vehicles by 2035, with 60% opposing it.

Trump raised the issue multiple times during the 2024 presidential campaign, and several House Democrats including Rep. George Whitesides, D-Santa Clarita and Rep. Lou Correa, D-Santa Ana, voted with Republicans when the issue came before the House.

Experts have said that while the court case is pending, or if California loses, the state could take other steps to encourage electric vehicles — which currently make up 25% of all new car sales statewide. Those include offering new tax incentives for EV purchases. State air regulators also could crack down more on other sources of air pollution and greenhouse gases, such as ports and power plants, to meet federal smog standards and state climate goals.

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