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Advocates for electrification said the rule failed to meet legal requirements. They also questioned whether weaker standards would help U.S. auto manufacturers in the long run, or if they'll struggle to compete with global competitors to produce the electric models the international market demands. Dan Becker, who directs the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, said increased pollution from laxer rules for long-haul trucks would disproportionately effect neighborhoods near major transportation hubs, like ports.

"Trucks tend to be concentrated around poorer neighborhoods," he said.

Trump DOT sets stage for weaker truck fuel economy rules

The revision will impact standards for work trucks like tractor-trailers and dump trucks.

By Jean Chemnick
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GREENWIRE | The Transportation Department on Friday advanced a new legal interpretation that will allow it to weaken fuel economy standards for heavy-duty commercial vehicles — work trucks like tractor-trailers and dump trucks. Opponents say the move will drive up fuel demand and prices.

What happened: The "interpretive rule" by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will not immediately lower so-called corporate average fuel economy standards for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. But it paves the way for DOT to propose substantially lower standards by reversing an Obama-era interpretation of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which held

that the law authorized the agency to regulate the fuel economy of medium- and heavy-duty vehicle engines separately from the overall vehicles.

The move demolishes yet another prong of the push to incentivize electric vehicle adoption. A fuel economy standards revision for cars, SUVs and other passenger vehicles is also expected to be released soon.

Why it matters: The changes come as gasoline stays above $4 per gallon, due in large part to President Donald Trump's war with Iran. The Trump administration and Republican-controlled Congress have spent the last year undoing Biden- and Obama-era policies that were aimed at accelerating the deployment of electric cars and trucks — including the repeal of EV tax incentives, greenhouse gas emissions rules for motor vehicles and fees for carmakers that fail to meet CAFE standards.

The details: NHTSA said in a statement that the revision would stay within the statutory limits, which previous administrations did not do. And which, NHTSA said, "restricted manufacturers' ability to design innovative approaches to meet commercial truck fuel efficiency standards."

″American innovators — not Big Government — know how best to design vehicle engines," said NHTSA Administrator Jonathan Morrison in a statement. "The Trump Administration is getting out of the way so manufacturers can decide how they want to meet fuel efficiency requirements."

Reaction: Advocates for electrification said the rule failed to meet legal requirements. They also questioned whether weaker standards would help U.S. auto manufacturers in the long run, or if they'll struggle to compete with global competitors to produce the electric models the international market demands.

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What's next: The revision paves the way for NHTSA to propose weaker standards for working vehicles. A final CAFE standards revision for passenger vehicles completed White House review more than two weeks ago and is likely to be issued shortly.

***Correction**: A previous version of the story incorrectly characterized the rule released by the Transportation Department; it revises an Obama-era statutory interpretation used in setting fuel economy standards for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles.*

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