



‘Consumers Will Pay the Price’: Fury as Trump Pushes Through Rule Change to Make Vehicles Less Efficient, More Polluting

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“This move spells short- and long-term disaster for people’s health, the planet, and even US automakers who’ll sit on the sidelines while clean cars advance around the world,” said Dan Becker, the director of the group’s Safe Climate Transport Campaign. “This standard was the biggest single step any nation has taken to save gas, money at the pump, and auto pollution.”

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By: Stephen Prager
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Scientists and environmental advocates are warning that the Trump administration’s rollback of fuel economy standards for cars and trucks will not only lead to more pollution but also hurt cash-strapped consumers already reeling from gas price spikes.

The administration announced on Monday that it was weakening the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, which require automakers to increase the fuel efficiency of their vehicles each year.

Biden administration rules required a 2% annual increase in fuel-efficiency standards, with the goal of bringing most vehicles to an average of 50.4 miles per gallon by 2031. Under President

Donald Trump, the annual target has been reduced to just a 1% improvement each year, meaning five years from now the average car would be required to get just under 34.9 mpg.

The Department of Transportation, which finalized the rule, has argued that efficiency standards put an unnecessary burden on carmakers and has projected that lowering them will “reduce the average cost of a new vehicle by \$1,300 for American families” and “save the American people \$138 billion over the next five years.”

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy described the Biden-era increase as one that “forced automakers to produce more expensive electric vehicles that American families didn’t want.”

But Dave Cooke, senior vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists’ (UCS) Clean Transportation Program, argues that rather than being a benefit to consumers, “the federal government’s decision to gut fuel economy standards is a handout to automakers and oil companies that will strap American consumers already struggling with an affordability crisis.”

His group has estimated that since CAFE standards were first introduced in 2010, they have saved auto owners about \$321 billion at the gas pump. And over just the past seven months, during which Trump’s war with Iran has caused gas prices to soar around the country, UCS estimates that consumers have saved \$32 billion.

“Any small reduction in upfront vehicle costs will be outweighed by higher fuel expenses,” Cooke said.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) itself estimated in an impact analysis for the rule days ago that, as a result of the rule change, Americans will consume roughly 122 billion more gallons of gas than they would under the 2024 standards, resulting in average lifetime fuel costs of more than \$1,600 more per vehicle—more than the administration estimates consumers will save by buying cheaper cars.

Transportation already accounted for about 17% of average US household spending in 2024, the latest year for which the Bureau of Labor Statistics has published data. Meanwhile, as the war with Iran has driven up costs, oil companies are reporting record profits. The top eight brought in nearly \$93 billion in earnings in the second quarter of this year alone, according to an analysis by The Guardian.

“Oil companies will get a windfall from gutting the fuel economy standards, but the rest of us are going to be handing over more of our hard-earned paychecks to fill up the tank,” said Atid Kimelman, an attorney at the NRDC.

Americans won’t just spend more money; they’ll also produce way more planet-heating greenhouse gases. The standards being rolled back were projected by NHTSA to prevent about 659 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, 825,000 metric tons of methane, and roughly 24,000 metric tons of nitrous oxide emissions through 2050.

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“This move spells short- and long-term disaster for people’s health, the planet, and even US automakers who’ll sit on the sidelines while clean cars advance around the world,” said Dan Becker, the director of the group’s Safe Climate Transport Campaign. “This standard was the biggest single step any nation has taken to save gas, money at the pump, and auto pollution.”

Matthew Davis, vice president of federal policy for the League of Conservation Voters, emphasized that fuel efficiency standards are popular with the American public. A nationwide survey last month by the Global Strategy Group found that 73% of voters nationwide said they’d support “reestablishing fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks.”

“It is no secret that Trump promised handouts to Big Oil in exchange for campaign spending,” Davis said, “and he is delivering for those billionaire CEOs and polluters while he hurts working families, American manufacturing competitiveness, public health, and the environment at every turn.”

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/trump-fuel-efficiency-rules>