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Trump ratchets down Biden-era mpg fuel standards in new cars, trucks

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Becker also argued that without tough standards, American automakers have no incentive to make more fuel-efficient vehicles while other countries, especially China, are moving ahead quickly with more efficient and technologically advanced EVs.

By: Todd Spangler and Jamie L. LaReau
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The Trump administration has finalized new rules that reduce vehicle mile-per-gallon standards previously set by the Biden administration.

- The new rule requires a fleet-wide average of 34.9 mpg by 2031, down from the previous goal of 50.4 mpg.
- The auto industry has largely supported the new rule, citing the need for standards that align with current market realities.

President Donald Trump's administration finalized a new set of rules regarding mile-per-gallon standards for passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks, reducing standards set by the Joe Biden administration two years ago by nearly a third.

While the Trump administration [ballyhooed the Sept. 28 announcement](#) as the end of an electric vehicle "mandate" it says former President Biden enacted and environmentalists decried it as foolhardy and illegal, the practical effect is likely to be little in the short term other than spurring litigation.

It does, however, continue the Trump administration's efforts — which Trump campaigned on — to revive production of vehicles that use internal combustion engines at the expense of new investment in, and government subsidies for, electric vehicle production.

On Sept. 26, Trump signaled the rule had been finalized, saying on his Truth Social site: "These new Standards will take the waste out of building cars in America. That means LOWER PRICES, saving families thousands on a new, beautiful, and safe car — Far better than the Environmental Monsters that we were building heretofore."

Congress, under Trump, had already taken steps to gut fuel standards requirements [by removing penalties for noncompliance](#) and the Environmental Protection Agency had reversed the policy justifying its [regulation of greenhouse gases](#). In December 2025, [Trump appeared with auto executives in the White House](#) to announce this change in the Biden fuel standards — which were intended to spur the sale of electric vehicles, or EVs — was imminent.

At that White House gathering, Ford CEO Jim Farley said the president's plans were a win for affordability, saying that it "aligned with customer demand" and was "the right move."

U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy reiterated that sentiment as he formalized the new rules on Sept. 28, saying, "We have finally ended the illegal mandate that forced automakers to produce more expensive electric vehicles that American families didn't want. With our commonsense standards in place, we are making the American dream affordable again, putting safer cars on the road, and investing in the American autoworker."

In June 2024, five months before Trump's reelection to a nonconsecutive second term, Biden's Transportation Department finalized a rule that bolstered the administration's EV push, which included greenhouse gas standards set by the EPA that, if followed through to completion, would have virtually [required two-thirds of new cars and light-duty trucks sold by 2032 to be EVs](#).

This new rule, however, winds back those mile-per-gallon standards, which the Trump administration has said repeatedly violated statutes that disallow the consideration of alternative fuel sources in setting them, significantly.

Where the Biden-era rules estimated a national fleet-wide mpg average for all new cars and light-duty trucks of 35.8 mpg in 2027 to ramp up to 50.4 mpg in 2031, Trump's new rules would require the average to be 32.3 mpg in 2027 model year vehicles sold in the U.S. and increase that to just 34.9 mpg fleet-wide by 2031.

Duffy said this new rule will give automakers the flexibility to make "the cars the public wants to buy" and reduce the average price of a new vehicle by \$1,300. But it also comes at a time [when EVs appear to be getting a push](#) by a significant increase in gas prices caused by Trump's war in Iran and its impact on fuel shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

The new rule, meanwhile, does nothing to temper an abrupt back-and-forth change in mpg standards with every new presidential administration that goes back to President George W. Bush. The corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, program under the Transportation Department has been in place for nearly five decades, but it was only during Bush's second term

that the EPA was told to begin regulating greenhouse gases in transportation sources, which also impacted mpg standards, under the Clean Air Act [following a U.S. Supreme Court decision](#).

The new rule appears destined to be tested in court as well, with environmentalists latching on to the fact that the statute requiring the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, or NHTSA, which is part of the Transportation Department, to set its standards requires it do so at the "maximum feasible" level. Millions of more fuel-efficient vehicles already on the road proves this new set of standards doesn't hit that target, they say.

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Kathy Harris, director for clean vehicles at the Natural Resources Defense Council, echoed those comments, saying, "With Americans struggling to afford gasoline that is more than \$4 a gallon, the Trump administration is going to force them to pay more at the pump. 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."

“This rollback is not only bad policy, it also violates the law. Stay tuned," she said. Trump's [EPA is already engaged in a legal battle with the state of California](#) for the EPA's attempt to roll back stricter automobile emission standards California and several other states say they are entitled to enforce under the Clean Air Act.

In its final rule, the Trump administration made the case that it meets the "maximum feasible" standard for mpg regulations, saying it is required to set a standard that balances "technological feasibility, economic practicability, the need of the United States to conserve energy, and the effect of other motor vehicle standards of the government on fuel economy." But the administration said the statutes do not allow it to take into account "the availability of alternative fuel technologies," such as lithium batteries, in setting those standards.

This set of rules makes several other changes as well, altering the definition of what qualifies as a passenger or non-passenger vehicle in some cases, and removing fuel-use credits that had previously been awarded for more efficient air conditioning systems and "off-cycle" technologies, such as those that shut a vehicle off when idling. It also would eliminate the exchange system by which credits for more fuel-efficient fleets, such as those earned by

companies that primarily made EVs, could be traded or sold to other automakers with less-efficient fleets.

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a lobbying group representing the full auto industry, including General Motors, Ford, Stellantis, Toyota and others, said it was reviewing the rules, but that NHTSA made the right call, noting this rule will better align fuel economy standards with the law and current market conditions.

“The standards finalized under the previous administration effectively required a switchover to electric vehicles that was out of step with market realities and customer demand,” said John Bozzella, president and CEO. “What the industry needs is long-term regulatory stability that includes balanced, durable and achievable fuel economy standards that continue to reduce emissions and improve fuel economy.”

Ford Motor spokeswoman Robyn Jackson said the company also appreciated Duffy and the administration's work "to align regulations with market realities."

Ford Motor leaders have been talking about bringing more affordable cars to market, including more affordable EVs.

“If you look globally, EVs are doing incredibly well and we’re participating in that and we have more EVs coming and we have a very affordable EV coming here, which I think was a big problem with EVs. They simply were not affordable,” Executive Chair Bill Ford told a group of reporters on the sidelines of the Detroit Auto Show on Jan. 13. “We’re attacking that problem.”

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