Trump EPA Announces the Reversal of Obama Fuel Economy Mandate

The Trump administration continues its efforts to roll back Obama programs, announcing plans to eliminate the fuel economy mandate that requires automakers to reach a fleet average of 54.5 mpg by 2025. In light of the announcement, the fuel efficiency standards will be frozen at approximately 37 mpg, the standard for the year 2020. President Obama brokered the previous agreement with nearly all major auto manufacturers (Volkswagen being the notable exception), United Auto Workers (UAW), and the State of California. According to Andrew Wheeler, the acting head of the Environmental Protection Agency,

> *We are delivering on President Trump's promise to the American public that his administration would address and fix the current fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions standards…Our proposal aims to strike the right regulatory balance based on the most recent information and create a 50-state solution that will enable more Americans to afford newer, safer vehicles that pollute less."*

A New Twist on States Rights

It's interesting that Wheeler cites the need for a 50 state solution. The state of California has played an outsized role in determining nationwide emissions standards. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is responsible for setting California's emission standards, a power the federal government approved as a part of the Clean Air Act in 1970. Other states are free to follow the California standards, and at least 12 states do.

The proposed rollback takes aim at California's ability to set its own vehicle emissions standards. This is a stark change from the way the EPA previously handled this situation, with the agency frequently consulting with CARB before implementing rule changes.

California Fighting Back

The decision by the Trump administration to move forward with the rollback of emissions standards is bold, especially since they will have a fight on their hands. California, Washington D.C., and 16 other states filed a lawsuit in back May to prevent the rollback from occurring. The state of California, in particular, has been vocal in opposing many Trump policies and regulations and has sued the administration more than 30 times on a variety of topics. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi is from CA and released a statement on the decision, calling the rollback a "dangerous assault on clean air and public health in California and across the nation."

It's also important to remember that California is not the only state requiring automakers to adhere to the more stringent vehicle emission standards. Those states account for nearly a third of all car purchases in the nation, giving them a quite a bit of buying power. State governments that realize the impact of greener, more environmentally-friendly initiatives will continue to side with CA. According to a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection representative, Lawrence Hajna,

> *We've had the California CARB program in place for a while…I've not heard that we have any intent on changing it for any reason; our position has always been that it's important for us to maintain the standard for overall air quality."*

Shortsighted

Eliminating the higher standards for vehicle emissions is negligent. Why are car sales and prices more important addressing air pollution and climate issues? The EPA believes the rollback can prevent 1,000 highway fatalities a year. Meanwhile, pollution is linked to 9 million deaths a year worldwide, with 6.5 million of those attributed to air pollution. Then again, this administration isn't known for thinking ahead.

Sources:

- *Trump administration moves to revoke Obama-era fuel economy standards* – NBC News
- *CARB vs. the EPA: What the New Federal Emissions Standards Could Mean for the Country* – DMV.org
- *Pollution Linked to Nine Million Deaths A Year Worldwide* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine
- *California Sues Over Plan to Scrap Car Emission Standards* – US News