

# California agrees to new, tougher national emissions standards

May 19 2009, By Renee Schoof

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Starting in 2012, U.S. cars and trucks will have stricter fuel emissions standards -- up to 39 miles per gallon for cars and 30 mpg for trucks by 2016 -- under a proposed new standard President Barack Obama plans to announce Tuesday, a senior administration official said Monday night.

As part of a deal with automakers, California agreed it would defer to the national standard and would not establish its own tougher emissions rule if it receives the waiver under the Clean Air Act that it's been seeking from the [Environmental Protection Agency](#), the official said. The EPA hasn't made a final decision about the waiver, the official said.

U.S. automakers had insisted on a uniform national standard, arguing it would be impossible to comply with different state rules.

The standard the Obama administration will propose will be the first U.S. restriction on [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and the nation's strongest fuel efficiency requirement.

The national program would reach the same goal in emissions reductions that California sought by 2016 but would start more slowly. Overall emissions would be cut by a bigger amount because the policy would apply to the whole country, and not just to California and states that wanted to follow its lead.

Much of the reduction of gases that trap heat in the atmosphere would come from better [fuel efficiency](#). Burning less fuel means a vehicle

emits less carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. But improvements in cars mandated in the new standards also will reduce three other gases causing global warming – [methane](#), nitrous oxide and hydrofluorocarbons.

The 2016 rates compare with today's 27.5 mpg for cars and 23.1 mpg for trucks.

The improvements will add \$600 in costs per vehicle beyond the \$700 cost of the latest CAFE (corporate average fuel economy) standards. Consumers will see savings in reduced fuel use, and people who buy cars on a 60-month loan might end up finding the slight increase in the monthly cost is made up in fuel savings, the official said, briefing reporters under White House rules that required anonymity.

The program will save 900 million metric tons of greenhouse gases through 2016, the equivalent of shutting down 194 coal plants, the administration said. It would become final after a comment period, but the [car](#) companies and California have committed to supporting it, reducing the likelihood of major changes.

The new standards will require all cars get cleaner. Previous CAFE standards allowed companies to offset less efficient cars by making some that were more efficient.

But the government does not plan any other carrots or sticks to get Americans to buy smaller cars. The official briefing reporters said consumers would still be able to pick from a range of vehicle sizes.

The agreement came out of talks between automakers, California, the EPA and the Department of Transportation. The Bush administration denied the waiver to California, and the state remained adamant in seeking it. President [Barack Obama](#) said before he was elected that he

supported it.

"This is a very big accomplishment, and it's really one where the credit belongs to the president but also to California and to environmentalists who pushed very hard for these California standards and defended them at every turn, and to the automakers who are agreeing to this," said David Doniger, an attorney who directs the climate policy program at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "All four of these interests -- the feds, the states, the environmentalists and the auto companies -- have found a way to come together around a very sensible solution."

David McCurdy, president and chief executive officer of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said automakers would continue to work with the administration on the details of the program. The national standard would do away with the problem of conflicting standards from state agencies and would give automakers certainty for long-term planning for new vehicles, he said.

McCurdy said automakers wanted to get a national policy finished and move on.

"Alliance members are supporting measures that reduce [carbon dioxide](#) even more, like low-carbon fuels, advancements in battery technology and consumer incentives to get more advanced technology autos on our roads," he said.

"This is good news for all us who have fought long and hard to reduce global warming pollution, create clean energy jobs and reduce our dangerous dependence on foreign oil," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., the chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Daniel J. Weiss, director of climate strategy at the Center for American

Progress, a policy research group that advocates policies in line with the administration's, said besides helping with a move away from foreign oil, the standard would save Americans money because cars would go farther on a gallon of gas. He said it also would spur businesses to develop clean-energy technologies, creating jobs.

And the policy will help the United States compete with China, he said. Chinese leaders "have already announced their intention to become the worldwide leader in the production of plug-in hybrid electric vehicles."

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