

EPA sets strict emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks and buses in bid to fight climate change

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Motor vehicle traffic moves along the Interstate 76 highway in Philadelphia, March 31, 2021. The EPA on Friday, March 29, 2024, set new greenhouse gas emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks, buses and other large vehicles, an action that officials said will clean up some of the nation's largest sources of planet-warming pollution. Credit: AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File

The Environmental Protection Agency on Friday set strict emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks, buses and other large vehicles, an action that officials said will help clean up some of the nation's largest sources of planet-warming greenhouse gases.

The new rules, which take effect for model years 2027 through 2032, will avoid up to 1 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions over the next three decades and provide \$13 billion in net benefits in the form of fewer hospital visits, lost work days and deaths, the EPA said. The new standards will especially benefit an estimated 72 million people in the United States who live near freight routes used by trucks and other heavy vehicles and bear a disproportionate burden of dangerous air pollution, the agency said.

"Heavy-duty vehicles are essential for moving goods and services throughout our country, keeping our economy moving. They're also significant contributors to pollution from the transportation sector—emissions that are fueling climate change and creating poor air quality in too many American communities," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said.

"Reducing emissions from our heavy-duty vehicles means cleaner air and less pollution. It means safer and more vibrant communities. It means lower fuel and maintenance costs for truck owners and operators. And it means healthier Americans," Regan said.

The new rules for [heavy trucks](#) and buses come a week after the EPA announced new automobile emissions standards for passenger vehicles. Those rules relax initial tailpipe limits proposed last year but get close to the same strict standards set out by the EPA for model year 2032.

The auto industry could meet the limits if 56% of new passenger vehicle sales are electric by 2032, along with at least 13% plug-in hybrids or

other partially [electric cars](#), the EPA said.

The rule for trucks is more complex, with a range of electric-vehicle or other non-traditional sales projected, depending on the type of vehicle and use, the agency said. For instance, 30% of "heavy-heavy-duty vocational" trucks would need to be zero-emission by 2032, the EPA said, while 40% of short-haul "day cabs" would need be zero emission vehicles.

The new rules for cars and trucks come as sales of EVs, which are needed to meet both standards, have begun to slow. The auto industry cited lower sales growth in objecting to the EPA's preferred standards unveiled last April for passenger vehicles, a key part of President Joe Biden's ambitious plan to cut planet-warming emissions.

"Our Clean Trucks plan works in tandem with President Biden's unprecedented investments in America and delivers on this administration's commitment to tackling climate change while advancing environmental justice," Regan said.



A tanker truck transports crude oil on a highway near Duchesne, Utah on July 13, 2023. The EPA on Friday, March 29, 2024, set new greenhouse gas emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks, buses and other large vehicles, an action that officials said will clean up some of the nation's largest sources of planet-warming pollution. Credit: AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File

The new rule will provide greater certainty for the industry, while supporting U.S. manufacturing jobs in advanced vehicle technologies, Regan said. Over the next decade, the standards "will set the U.S. heavy-duty sector on a trajectory for sustained growth," he said.

Industry groups strongly disagreed. They lambasted the new standards as unreachable with current electric-vehicle technology and complained about a lack of EV charging stations and power grid capacity limits.

The American Trucking Associations and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, which represent large swaths of the industry, predicted supply chain failures and said that smaller independent firms would likely hang onto older diesel trucks that spew more pollution, running counter to the EPA's goals.

The new limits lower zero-emission sales rates proposed for the 2027 through 2029 model years but require higher sales later, resulting in a practical mandate for electric and hydrogen-powered trucks, the trucking associations said in a statement. The EPA rule limits choices for trucks and buses to unproven technology, the group said.

"The post-2030 targets remain entirely unachievable," said Chris Spear, the trucking group's CEO. "Any regulation that fails to account for the operational realities of trucking will set the industry and America's supply chain up for failure."

Todd Spencer, president of the independent drivers association, which represents small trucking companies, said the Democratic administration "seems dead-set on regulating every local mom-and-pop business out of existence with its flurry of unworkable environmental mandates."

The American Petroleum Institute, the top lobbying group for the oil and gas industry, said in a joint statement with the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers that the new rule "is yet another example of the Biden administration's whole-of-government effort to eliminate choices for American consumers, businesses and industries."

The rule relies principally on zero-emission vehicles and "disincentivizes the development of other fuel-based technologies—including American-made renewable diesel—that are working in today's heavy-duty fleet to reduce emissions," the groups said.

They called for the rule to be overturned by Congress but said they are prepared to challenge it in court.



Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan speaks on Capitol Hill, Sept. 27, 2023, in Washington. The EPA on Friday, March 29, 2024, set new greenhouse gas emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks, buses and other large vehicles, an action that officials said will clean up some of the nation's largest sources of planet-warming pollution. "Our Clean Trucks plan works in tandem with President Biden's unprecedented investments in America and delivers on this administration's commitment to tackling climate change while advancing environmental justice," Regan said. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File

Regan said the EPA crafted the limits to give truck owners a choice of powertrains including advanced combustion vehicles, hybrids and electric and hydrogen fuel cells.

"There's a list of options that truck drivers, owners and operators can choose from ... while we (do) not sacrifice the very stringent environmental goals that we have set," he told reporters Thursday.

The EPA calculated that new trucks would save operators a total of \$3.5 billion in fuel and other costs from 2027 to 2032, paying for themselves in two to four years. The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act also provides tax credits that subsidize the purchase price of new electric vehicles, Regan said.

The new emissions limits will bring immediate health benefits, especially in communities burdened by heavy truck traffic, said Harold Wimmer, CEO of the American Lung Association.

"Transportation is the largest source of pollution driving climate change," he said in a statement. "These strong standards that will help drive toward a zero-emission future for trucks, buses and other heavy-duty vehicles are a critical part of the solution."

Margo Oge, a former director of the EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality, said medium and heavy diesel trucks make up less than 6% of vehicles on the road "but spew more than half the smog and soot Americans breathe" and contribute to global warming. The EPA standards "are a big step in the right direction to fight [climate change](#) and help us breathe cleaner air," she said.

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