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SUV Gas Mileage To Increase

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They're the biggest, baddest and right now most popular vehicles on the road. They're also one of the biggest reasons, Americans spend so much on gas.

"We can and we must save more fuel." United States Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta on new federal fuel standards requiring light trucks and SUV's to get an average, 24 miles per gallon by the year 2011.

Right now, the standard is 21.6 miles per gallon. Mineta says the 2 and half mile increase will save the country 10.7 billion gallons of fuel each year.

"You'd like to say... 'yeah, that's great.' But it doesn't really mean a whole lot." Bryan Oneal is with the Center For Biological Diversity in Tucson. And he says the new requirements are nothing more than political posturing. Americans are addicted to oil, he says, to oversized vehicles and to driving in general.

"People don't need SUV's

when they're just driving in the city," Oneal says. "We would encourage people to bicycle, walk when they can, use public transportation."

"I just bought these vehicles and the Suburban is sold. The Explorer is sold." Wanslee Auto Sales owner Tom Epperson has been in the car business his entire career. Trucks have always been popular he says, but never quite like this.

"I have a lot of cars on the lot and I don't have enough sport utilities. I can't buy them fast enough." This despite, the ever-rising cost of fuel. "If they're looking for a truck or an SUV, that's not an issue," Epperson says. "it's just not."

Bottom line, manufacturers will make their vehicles a little more fuel efficient and Americans will keep driving them. Will it save on oil? In the long run...perhaps. Then again, there's already an entire generation of new drivers just waiting to get behind the wheel.

"We have a lot of money. We are a wealthy nation," says Charles

Kuess, a concerned citizen we spoke to downtown Thursday. "We can afford to drive them-- but it doesn't make it right."