

# The New York Times

## Next Item on Obama's Climate Agenda: Airplane Pollution

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WASHINGTON — The Obama administration on Monday announced its plan to start regulating planet-warming pollution from airplanes, setting off a battle between environmentalists and the airline industry.

The plan to curb airplane emissions comes as President Obama looks to strengthen his climate change legacy with new policies in the waning months of his administration. The airline rules would be among the final pieces of his sweeping and contentious second-term climate agenda, which has included rules to rein in greenhouse pollution from cars, trucks and power plants, and his role in forging last year's Paris agreement committing nearly 200 countries to take action to reduce emissions that are warming the planet.

The Environmental Protection Agency released the aviation plan, known as an "endangerment finding," which concludes that the planet-warming pollution produced by airplanes endangers human health by contributing to climate change. The endangerment finding does not include the details of a regulation, but it sets off a legal requirement under the Clean Air Act for the E.P.A. to establish a rule.

"Addressing pollution from aircraft is an important element of U.S. efforts to address climate change," said Janet McCabe, the agency's acting assistant administrator for air and radiation. "E.P.A. has already set effective greenhouse gas standards for cars and trucks, and any future aircraft engine standards will also provide important climate and public health benefits."

The announcement did not include a timetable for releasing the rule, but people tracking the administration's climate change policies said it was possible that the E.P.A. could release a draft rule by early January, most likely making it Mr. Obama's last climate action. However, the next administration would have the authority to rewrite the draft rule.

"The Obama administration has the opportunity to do something really meaningful here, by writing stronger rules that will actually reduce pollution," said Vera Pardee, a lawyer with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Lobbyists for the airline industry said that the international standards reflected the limits of the best available technology to control airplane pollution and that tightening them could endanger passengers.

“We’re already at the edge of feasibility,” said Nancy Young, the vice president for environmental affairs at Airlines for America, a group that lobbies for the airline industry. “You cannot adopt a standard that you don’t know you can meet for an aircraft. Safety is job No. 1 in aviation. And if you say maybe we can push technology to meet this, that’s a worry.”

Ms. Young also said a separate United States standard could hurt American companies like Boeing and General Electric, which make planes and parts for planes.

“They’ll have to do one thing while companies like Airbus in France and Mitsubishi in Japan won’t have to meet the standard,” she said.

Airlines account for just 2 percent of global emissions, but many analysts think the emissions could triple by the middle of the century given the expected growth in air travel. Regulating such pollution from commercial airplanes could present major legal and engineering hurdles.

The airline industry is pushing the E.P.A. to draft a regulation modeled after a global airline emissions standard passed this year by the International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nations’ aviation agency. But environmentalists say that standard, drafted with heavy input from major airlines, is weaker than a business-as-usual plan and will do little to substantially curb aviation emissions.

They are pushing for the United States to establish a tighter standard, in hopes that it would serve as a de facto standard for the rest of the world. Airline companies said that would create a costly patchwork of different standards that would put American companies at a disadvantage and create safety risks.

The international standards would require a 4 percent reduction in fuel consumption of new aircraft starting in 2028 compared with 2015. They also set new limits for airplanes in production that are delivered after 2023. The limit would depend on the size of the aircraft — actual reductions would be from zero to 11 percent — with a bigger emphasis on larger commercial airplanes.

Over the weekend, Secretary of State John Kerry attended negotiations in Vienna aimed at forging a new global deal to ban the use of hydrofluorocarbons, planet-warming chemicals used in refrigerators and air-conditioners. That agreement is expected to be completed in October.