



EPA finds fuel efficiency dropped, pollution spiked for 2019 vehicles

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Automakers' fuel efficiency went down and vehicle pollution went up for the first time in five years in 2019, according to a report released Wednesday by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The report, which analyzed data for model year 2019 vehicles, found fuel economy dropped by 0.2 percent in the U.S. when automakers were instead expected to increase their fuel efficiency by 5 percent. Carbon pollution went up 3 grams per mile.

For the Trump administration, the report was a rebuke of the Obama-era fuel efficiency standards they drastically weakened.

“This report shows in detail how few auto manufactures were able to meet the unrealistic emissions standards set by the Obama administration without resorting to purchasing emission credits,” EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in a release.

“We have set realistic standards in 2020 that will reduce emissions as well as vehicle costs and maintain consumer choice going forward.”

The previous standards were considered one of the most significant climate fighting actions of the Obama presidency, asking automakers to make year-over-year improvements, producing fleets that could average 55 miles per gallon (mpg) by 2025.

Under the Trump administration rule finalized in March, automakers would need to reach 40 mpg by 2026, bringing mileage below what automakers have said is possible for them to achieve.

“The automakers rolled back before Trump did,” Dan Becker, director at the Safe Climate Transport Campaign with the Center for Biological Diversity, said by email.

All fourteen large auto manufacturers met the 2018 mileage goals, but 11 only did so using various offsets not related to fuel economy, like using improved air conditioning refrigerant or by installing solar roof panels on their vehicles.

And three companies — Ford, GM and Mazda — delivered worse fleet-wide gas mileage and emissions than they did five years ago.

Transportation emissions are the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., accounting for 28 percent of total emissions, and will need to be addressed by President-elect Joe Biden in order to meet his goal of getting the U.S. on a path to net-zero emissions by 2050.

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

The Trump years have been a tumultuous time for the industry, with the Trump rollback causing a rift among manufacturers. Five major automakers signed a deal with California to meet mileage targets closer to those proposed under former President Obama, while others intervened in a lawsuit seeking to overturn the new Trump rules.

Some, like GM, have since withdrawn from that suit, announcing they want to work with the incoming Biden administration on a new set of standards and increase their electric vehicle production.

But Becker said the latest EPA data casts doubt on whether the industry will comply with meeting the standards they might agree to.

“The next chapter in the story is going to be ‘Oh let’s have another negotiation,’ ” he said of automakers, “but how do you negotiate with companies that already reneged?”

“Without tough rules from the Biden administration, automakers will keep pushing gas-guzzling Trumpmobiles on consumers rather than deliver clean cars that cut pollution.”

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