

## TRANSPORTATION

# General Motors announces plans for carbon neutrality

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter Published: Thursday, January 28, 2021



General Motors Co. headquarters in Detroit. General Motors headquarters

General Motors Co. today unveiled plans to become carbon neutral by 2040 and eliminate tailpipe emissions from new cars by 2035.

The splashy climate commitment from the major automaker comes as President Biden looks to curb emissions from transportation, the country's largest source of greenhouse gases.

It also raises questions about the company's potential reliance on carbon offsets, which some environmentalists view with skepticism.

"General Motors is joining governments and companies around the globe working to establish a safer, greener and better world," GM CEO Mary Barra said in a statement this morning.

"We encourage others to follow suit and make a significant impact on our industry and on the economy as a whole," Barra added.

In a [news release](#), GM said its carbon neutrality goal would extend to its global products and operations, including its full lineup of vehicles.

The automaker said it has "committed to setting science-based targets" and has signed the Business Ambition for 1.5°C pledge, a framework for reducing emissions in line with the Paris Agreement.

The company plans to continue producing gasoline-powered cars and trucks until 2035, including the popular Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck, while offering 30 electric vehicle models globally by 2025.

Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund, which worked with GM to craft the commitment, called the move "an extraordinary step forward."

"GM is making it crystal clear that taking action to eliminate pollution from all new light-duty vehicles by 2035 is an essential element of any automaker's business plan," Krupp said in a statement.

But Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity, expressed concern that GM plans to rely on carbon offsets to mitigate the emissions from its future gasoline-powered vehicles.

"They're basically still going to make polluting vehicles during this period, but they're going to rely on some magical offset to clean up their mess," Becker said in an interview this morning.

"And those magical offsets often don't work. For example, a forest in Honduras would need to stay up and not be cut down for timber," he added.

A recent [investigation](#) by ProPublica found that many forestry preservation offsets in Brazil were not reducing emissions as intended.

The investigation looked at a project that began selling offsets in 2013 to protect a remote forest in western Brazil. Using satellite imagery, it found that only half the project areas had actually been forested.

Asked for comment on the company's offset plans, GM spokesperson Jessica James said in an email, "Our focus is to decarbonize our business model by transitioning to EVs and sourcing 100% renewable energy. If we need to leverage carbon offsets, it should be minimal."

Ford Motor Co., another major American automaker, announced plans to become carbon neutral last summer ([Greenwire](#), June 24, 2020).

A recent E&E News investigation found that both GM and Ford conducted internal research in the 1960s showing that car emissions contributed to climate change ([Climatewire](#), Oct. 26, 2020).

Paul Bledsoe, who writes on electric vehicle policy for the Progressive Policy Institute, said in an email that automakers are keenly aware of the reputational risks of being perceived as laggards on global warming.

"This commitment is definitely about positioning with consumers and investors, as well as GM's overall climate reputation," said Bledsoe, a former climate adviser in the Clinton White House.