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White House Follows Maryland's Lead on Clean Cars

Congress Urged to Protect New Standards by Rejecting Efforts to Weaken the Clean Air Act

Baltimore— In a huge win for the environment, public health and energy security, the Obama administration today announced new standards for automobile fuel economy and global warming emissions. An Environment Maryland analysis found that these new federal standards—based on the “clean cars program” developed by California and adopted by 13 other states, including Maryland—will save Marylanders 219 million gallons of gasoline by 2016 as compared to the previous federal standards, while reducing emissions of global warming pollutants and providing a net economic savings to consumers.

“Thanks to Maryland’s leadership, the cars of tomorrow will be cleaner and cost less to fuel than the cars of today,” said Brad Heavner. “Environment Maryland applauds Gov. O’Malley, Sen. Frosh, and Del. Bobo, without whose leadership this historic victory would not have been possible.”

In addition to the significant expected gasoline savings, the new standards will also mean a reduction in global warming pollution in Maryland equivalent to eliminating the pollution from 404,000 of today’s cars for a year, as compared with the previous federal standards.

Environment Maryland was joined by Del. Elizabeth Bobo, Sen. Brian Frosh, and Jesse Prentice-Dunn of the Sierra Club in applauding today’s announcement.

“Finally, the Federal Government has caught up to the Maryland and the other States that have already adopted clean car rules,” said Sen. Brian Frosh of Montgomery County. The federal clean car regulations strike a blow for the health of our citizens and the health of our planet.”

“We passed the Clean Cars Act in 2007 to get the benefits for Maryland, but all the while we wanted to help spur a national program,” said Del. Elizabeth Bobo of Howard County. “The strategy worked.”

“With the release of historic new vehicle standards, the Obama Administration has hit a grand slam. Increasing the efficiency of our vehicles will save consumers billions at the pump, reduce dependence on oil by nearly 2 billion barrels, slash global warming pollution, and help a more sustainable, competitive domestic auto industry thrive,” said Jesse Prentice-Dunn of the Sierra Club.

He continued, “these final standards show that the Clean Air Act is an effective tool for curbing greenhouse gas pollution. We will all breathe easier and our climate will benefit. We call on our members of Congress to celebrate these new standards by opposing efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act.”

Maryland adopted the clean car standards in 2007, but the push for cleaner cars has been happening for decades. In the late 1960s, state officials in California responded to horrific air pollution in cities like Los Angeles by adopting the first-ever tailpipe emission standards for cars. This paved the way for federal adoption of vehicle standards in the Clean Air Act, though the Act allowed California to continue setting its own, tougher emission standards for cars, and enabled other states to adopt these standards.

In 2002, California enacted legislation designed to reduce global warming pollution from automobiles. This resulted in rules to reduce global warming pollution from new cars and light trucks by 30 percent by 2016 compared with 2002 levels – a step that would result in improved vehicle fuel economy.

Frustrated with federal inaction to address automobile emissions and fuel economy, 13 states – Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington – soon moved to adopt the program.

Automakers and auto dealers, who opposed the program at the state level, challenged the program in court, while the Bush administration Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) delayed a decision on whether to grant the waiver needed under the Clean Air Act for California and other states to implement the standards. Following the Supreme Court's 2007 ruling in *Massachusetts v. EPA* that the agency possessed the authority to regulate global warming pollution, and two years after California's initial request, the Bush administration EPA finally denied the waiver in December 2007.

As one of his first acts in office, President Obama instructed the EPA to reconsider California's waiver request, which later resulted in EPA granting the waiver. In May, the Obama administration announced an agreement with the automakers and the state of California that enabled the creation of a single, national fuel economy/global warming emissions program for cars based on the California standards. The just-announced standards are the result of that effort.

The new standards are expected to reduce gasoline consumption by as much as 11.6 billion gallons per year in 2016 nationally—nearly as much as is consumed by all the vehicles in Texas in a year—and save consumers up to \$31.8 billion annually at the pump in 2016. The new standard will also reduce global warming pollution from vehicles by 108 million metric tons per year in 2016, or as much global warming pollutions as is produced by 28 500-MW coal-fired power plants.

Despite the agreement between the Obama administration, automakers and California – and the fact that 80 percent of the public approves of stronger fuel economy standards for vehicles – the clean cars program still faces attacks. Senator Lisa Murkowski's Dirty Air Act (S.J.Res. 26), for example, would effectively veto EPA's scientific finding that global warming pollutants threaten human health and the environment – thereby blocking the standards. The companion resolution in the House – introduced by three separate sets of members, including the Republican leadership (H.J.Res. 77), Democrats Ike Skelton (MO) and Collin Peterson (MN; H.J.R. 76), and Republicans Jerry Moran (KS) and Marsha Blackburn (TN; H.J.Res. 66) – and three additional House bills (H.R. 391, H.R. 4396, H.R. 4572) also would block the clean cars program and otherwise undermine the Clean Air Act.

“Weakening the Clean Air Act would be one of the worst moves Congress could make for Maryland's environment,” said Brad Heavner. “We urge Maryland's U.S. Representatives and Senators to let the country reap the benefits of these clean car standards by opposing any and all efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act.”

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Environment Maryland is a state-based, citizen-funded environmental organization working for clean air, clean water, and open space.