

California, EPA to Work on Joint Auto Standards

Tennille Tracy and Joshua Mitchell, Wall Street Journal, 1-24-11

WASHINGTON -- California state officials have agreed to work with federal officials to develop new greenhouse-gas standards for cars and light-duty trucks built for 2017 through 2025, following weeks of pressure from the auto industry.

In an announcement Monday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said California officials have scrapped their plans to issue state-specific standards in March. Instead, the EPA and California Air Resources Board will now issue standards jointly by Sept. 1.

The news was applauded by auto makers, which said California is now more likely to issue the same greenhouse-gas standard as the federal government, thereby reducing the risk that the state would adopt more stringent standards than federal officials.

A spokesman for the California Air Resources Board said the state would await the results of engineering studies before determining a standard.

Prior to Monday's announcement, car makers had identified California's plans for a state-specific standard as a source of concern. In a Jan. 11 letter to California Rep. Darrell Issa, the new Republican chair of the House of Representatives' government-reform committee, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers said it feared "a patchwork of state and federal standards."

Environmental groups also praised Monday's announcement, saying it reflects the growing role of California officials in the creation of national standards.

California has been known to set environmental standards before the federal government and first adopted greenhouse-gas rules for vehicles in 2004.

In April 2010, the EPA and the U.S. Transportation Department established similar standards on a national level for model-year 2012-2016 cars. Those rules require vehicles to meet an estimated combined average emissions level of 250 grams of carbon dioxide per mile by 2016, equivalent to 35.5 miles per gallon.

Stanley Young, a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board, said the state agreed to the White House's timetable after being assured the new fuel-economy targets would be based on studies currently being done on the feasibility of the proposed 62-mpg standard.

The studies are examining the technological and financial ramifications of the proposed standard, he said.

"We're looking forward to seeing the results of the final data from the engineering studies," Mr. Young said. He added that the board has always cooperated with the EPA and DOT and plans to continue to do so.