Govt. Aims To Up Fuel Economy Ante Past 2016

Erica Werner, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Looking to a day when cars and trucks use far less gasoline or none at all, President Barack Obama plans to order the government to prepare fuel efficiency standards for many years from now and renew its focus on electric-powered vehicles.

Obama is also asking federal agencies to extend a national fuel-efficiency program to big rig and work trucks for the first time, beginning in 2014.

Under a presidential memorandum Obama is expected to sign Friday, agencies would develop fuel efficiency and emissions standards for cars and light trucks beyond 2016.

Obama last month brought out new standards for cars and light trucks for the 2012-2016 model years that aimed at reaching a fleet average of 35.5 miles per gallon by 2016, nearly 10 miles per gallon more than now.

Now additional standards will be developed further into the future, and heavy trucks would also be regulated, something environmentalists have long sought. A White House official previewed the announcement on condition of anonymity because it was not yet public.

Obama is not expected to announce specific new mileage goals, but rather initiate steps toward developing them without help from Congress, and call for progress on next-generation and electric vehicles.

For future consumers, it could mean cars and trucks that go much farther on a tank of gas, though perhaps with a higher upfront cost.

For the auto industry, uniform national standards are preferable to a state-by-state approach that has been a threat ever since California started pushing years ago to be allowed more stringent standards than the federal government imposes.

California agreed last year not to adopt its own standards through 2016.

Environmental groups, meanwhile, have wanted standards for medium- and heavy-duty work trucks. The Union of Concerned Scientists, an environmental advocacy group, said these large trucks represent only 4 percent of all vehicles on U.S. highways but consume more than 20 percent of on-road transportation fuels.

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Associated Press writer Ken Thomas contributed to this report.

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