

CA Passes New Auto Emission Rules

Jason Dearen, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Seeking to influence other states and Washington, California air regulators passed sweeping auto emission standards Friday that include a mandate to have 1.4 million electric and hybrid vehicles on state roads by 2025.

The California Air Resources Board unanimously approved the new rules that require that one in seven of the new cars sold in the state in 2025 be an electric or other zero-emission vehicle.

The plan also mandates a 75 percent reduction in smog-forming pollutants by 2025, and a 50 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from today's standards.

Automakers worked with the board and federal regulators on the greenhouse gas mandates in an effort to create one national standard for those pollutants.

"Today's vote ... represents a new chapter for clean cars in California and in the nation as a whole," said Mary Nichols, the board's chairman. "Californians have always loved their cars. We buy a lot of them and drive them. Now we will have cleaner and more efficient cars to love."

California's auto emissions standards are influential and often more strict than federal rules. The state began passing regulations for cleaner cars in the 1960s to help ease some of the world's worst smog, and has since helped spur the auto industry's innovations in emissions-control technology.

Currently 14 other states — including New York, Washington and Massachusetts — have adopted California's smog emissions rules as their own.

California has also previously set zero-emissions vehicle mandates, which 10 other states have also currently adopted.

Companies including Ford Motor Corp., Chrysler Group LLC, General Motors Co., Nissan Motor Co. Ltd. and others submitted testimony Thursday supportive of the new standards.

Some of the companies protested the inclusion of a system that will give some automakers credit toward their zero-emission vehicle mandate for exceeding federal greenhouse gas emissions standards in other cars. These credits, which can be used to reduce the number of clean vehicles made, can be used from 2018-2021.

Some called it a loophole that will take hundreds of thousands of clean cars off the road, hurting the emerging market for these vehicles.

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"This is a temporary way station," Nichols said about the credits. "But by 2021 all companies will be producing the full complement of zero-emission vehicles."

Trade groups representing auto dealers worried that the new regulations would increase the costs of vehicles for consumers and stifle the industry's growth.

The California New Car Dealers Association and other industry groups representing those who sell cars said the board is overestimating consumer demand for electric vehicles and other so-called "zero-emission vehicles."

Dealers are concerned that the regulations will lead to higher costs in all cars, and say consumers have been slow to warm to electric and other zero-emission vehicles.

Board member Sandra Berg, who said she drives the all-electric Nissan Leaf, said before the vote that regulators need to take consumer behavior and choice seriously in this equation.

She said a lot of work must be done to educate dealers to sell the new generation of cars.

"Early adopters (of electric cars) are willing to go without heat to save the miles they need to get to their destination, but that is not going to help grow the consumer base," Berg said, referring to the range issues with some current electric vehicles.

The board's research staff disputes the argument from dealers that the mandates for new technology will increase costs for cars. They point to steady increases in hybrid and other sales and argue that fuel cost savings will make up for any vehicle price increase.

"Our research shows a \$1,400 to \$1,900 car price increase. But over the life of the vehicles, the owners save \$6,000 in reduced fuel and maintenance costs," board spokesman David Clegern said.

One of the nation's foremost consumer groups, the Consumers' Union, the policy and advocacy division of Consumer Reports, supported the changes.

The rules will "protect consumers by encouraging the development of cleaner, more efficient cars that save families money, help reduce the American economy's vulnerability to oil price shocks and reduce harmful air pollution," according to a letter from the group.

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