

washingtonpost.com

## Calif. Takes Lead on Auto Emissions

Gov. Davis to Sign Law On Pollution That May Affect All U.S. Drivers

By William Booth  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Monday, July 22, 2002; Page A01

LOS ANGELES -- California today will enact legislation that for the first time will reduce the amount of greenhouse gases coming from the tailpipes of all passenger vehicles sold in the state, even the beloved SUV, in a move that could change the kinds of cars Americans drive in coming years.

The new law, to be signed today by Gov. Gray Davis (D), is the first in the United States to directly affect consumers and to enlist American drivers in reducing the potential of global warming. The law addresses not the gases that cause smog but the invisible, odorless emissions that scientists say appear to be contributing to slow but risky heating of the planet.

Although the new regulations will grant engineers wide latitude for design solutions, the new greenhouse gas emission standards for California will affect drivers nationwide, because California, with its 35 million residents -- more than Canada -- represents 10 percent of the national car market.

"You can't make one car for California and another car for Washington, D.C.," said Eron Shosteck, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers. The industry group opposes the new law, saying it will limit consumer choice, raise prices on the car lot and press smaller, lighter, gas-stingy vehicles upon buyers -- the cars that today are not selling.

Shosteck said that so far as he knew, the California measure was the first of its kind, and is without a counterpart in the Washington metropolitan region or elsewhere in the nation.

A federal decision giving the Washington area until 2005 to meet ozone limits was rejected earlier this month by an appeals court action that will force the region's officials to take more aggressive steps to improve air quality by reducing levels of ozone, as distinct from the greenhouse gases.

Davis said in an interview Friday that he had hoped that Washington would take the lead in tackling global warming, "but the worst thing we could do in California is to do nothing."

He challenged the Bush administration to take warming seriously and begin working to reduce emissions with federal regulations.

The law grants the California Air Resources Board power to set "maximum" but "economically feasible" emissions standards for gases such as carbon dioxide. Those standards will be set by 2005 and must be in automobiles sold by 2009.

Among the possibilities for the coming models: cars outfitted with harder, stiffer "low friction" tires; vehicles with five- or even six-speed automatic and manual transmissions, or even an infinite number of computer-orchestrated gears; more finely tuned catalytic converters; and changes in the coolants used in air-conditioning systems.

In the future, cars may look the same but have more sophisticated technology beneath the hood. Their designs also may be more streamlined, aerodynamic.

California is the only state that is allowed, under a 1967 law, to set its own, tougher regulations for emissions, a loophole that exists because of the previously extreme levels of smog around Los Angeles.

"We have the cleanest cars, the cleanest burning fuel; we even have the cleanest lawn mowers," said Michael Kenny, the California Air Resources Board executive officer. Kenny points out that today's automobile is 98 percent less polluting than models from the 1970s, and that Los Angeles has not experienced a smog alert since 1998.

Once California increases its standards, other states are allowed to adopt the state's stricter rules.

Regardless, domestic and foreign automakers will have to create California cars that reduce the amount of gases such as carbon dioxide, the signal product of internal combustion engines.

But automakers are still contemplating a legal challenge and might also put the matter before voters in a statewide ballot.

Ultimately, the cars will likely be required to burn less gasoline, because increasing fuel efficiency is the way to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, the main culprit in global warming scenarios.

This could produce fleets of vehicles using more sophisticated composite materials, for example, that offer safety and strength but are lighter.

Yet increasing fuel efficiency of the auto fleet flies in the face of recent consumer demand for bigger, more powerful vehicles, such as SUVs, minivans and trucks.

Efforts to increase fuel efficiency -- the so-called CAFE standards -- failed to pass in Congress, essentially blocked by lawmakers from Michigan and Texas.

"The downside of all the advanced technology we're talking about is that it costs more," said Robert Sawyer, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley who studies vehicle emissions and regulatory policy. "There's not a market for fuel efficiency. Gasoline is cheap, so it's no big deal. The auto industry has been putting all its advanced technology into increased power."

The bitterly fought legislation represents a clear victory for environmentalists over the auto and oil industries. Davis sat on the fence during the debates and lobbying campaigns of the spring and summer, which saw an advertising blitz by the auto and oil industries warning consumers that the faceless bureaucrats were going to take away their SUVs.

But California environmentalists, joined by national organizations, pressed celebrities like Paul Newman and senators like John McCain, the Republican from Arizona, to make personal appeals to wavering Sacramento legislators.

Davis only recently said he would sign the bill, which won approval along a mostly party-line vote in Sacramento, where Democratic lawmakers are a clear majority.

"California led the nation with the introduction of the catalytic converter, unleaded gasoline, hybrid vehicles, and now we will lead on global warming," said Russell Long, executive director of the Bluewater Network, a San Francisco-based environmental advocacy group that helped craft the legislation.

Long emphasized that California is the fifth-largest economy in the world, and "we've proven time after time that protecting the environment is consistent with protecting the economy, and we believe other states will adopt the California standards and the impact will be enormous."

Davis said that warming could have profound impacts upon a state dependent on such things as snow fall in the Sierra mountains, which melts and then pours into the aqueducts that irrigate farmland and fills the taps of water-hungry cities. Davis also said that every coastal state should be worried about projections for sea level rise caused by melting glaciers at the north and south poles.

The governor, who will sign the bill into law in ceremonies today, said he is under no illusion that California alone will slow warming. Researchers estimate that California drivers contribute only about 0.5 percent of the planet's increases in carbon dioxide.

But Davis also believed that other states will follow California's lead, and that eventually the federal government will enact laws to decrease tailpipe emissions of greenhouse gases.

The European Union also recently began to set higher greenhouse gas standards for vehicles.

Davis promised: "I think you'll have more SUVs but less pollution coming out of their tailpipes. We don't want to change the cars, but change the pollution."

Detroit automakers scoff at the notion, and their representatives say the new regulations are an end-run around efforts that failed in Washington to increase fuel efficiency standards.

"California motorists are going to be extremely angry when they find they are going to lose access to SUVs, trucks and minivans," said Shosteck, the spokesman for the automakers alliance.

Shosteck said there are already 50 models that get more than 30 miles per gallon, and "consumers don't want them. . . . High mileage cars sit on dealer lots and don't sell."

Nonsense, says Roland Hwang, an engineer and senior policy analyst with the National Resources Defense Council, an environmental group.

"There's plenty of technology that already exists that is cost-effective, that will reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, while they save money for consumers at the gas pump," he said.

Hwang argues that each small change in reducing carbon dioxide will only measure a few percent, "but added up, you can get 10 or 20 or 30 percent reductions overall; that is something."

Hwang and other advocates against global warming do their own scoffing, saying that Detroit has consistently resisted change, only to find that adding such "extras" as catalytic converters, air bags, seat belts and other technologies end up saving lives and money, and cleaning up the air over time.

*Staff writer Martin Weil in Washington contributed to this report.*

© 2002 The Washington Post Company