Focus On: Emission Standards

Background Information

The Washington Legislature adopted California's clean car standards in 2005, including standards for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Washington is one of 16 states that have adopted or plan to adopt the California standards.

The Clean Air Act, passed by Congress in 1963, allows California to require auto emission standards that are stricter than federal rules. To do so, California must receive a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). California must be granted the waiver before other states can implement California standards.

Over the last 40 years, EPA has never denied a waiver request. EPA has granted California about 50 waivers for new technology like catalytic converters, exhaust emission standards, and leaded gasoline regulations. According to California's Air Resources Board, the National Academy of Sciences has reviewed the waiver system and strongly supports California's role as a proving ground for new-emission control technologies that benefit California and the rest of the nation.

The Problem

In December 2007, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson denied California's greenhouse gas waiver request. This is the first waiver request EPA has ever denied. In part, Johnson said he believed the just-adopted federal Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards provide a nationwide solution for greenhouse gas emissions, making California's standards unneeded.

The Solution

Washington needs clean car standards to meet its goal to reduce climate-changing greenhouse gases. While the new federal CAFE standards do much to reduce greenhouse gases, the California standards are more effective.

The California Air Resources Board estimates California clean car standards would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in

Why it Matters

Washington needs clean car standards to reduce climate-changing greenhouse gases (GHGs). Motor vehicles are Washington's main source of GHGs. California's clean car standards reduce GHGs more than the federal standards do. They are also more effective at reducing other air pollutants that cause serious health problems.

Washington is especially vulnerable to climate change because:

- We depend on snow pack for much of our public water supply and for hydroelectricity.
- Our nearly 3,000 miles of coastline are vulnerable to the expected rise in sea levels, threatening our coastal communities.
- Losses in coastline habitat threaten our fish and wildlife.

Visit Ecology's Climate Change web site:
www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange/index.htm

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Washington by about 5.5 million metric tons by 2020.

This is equivalent to eliminating about one million cars from Washington's roads. In comparison, the federal standards would reduce greenhouse gases by only 3.5 million metric tons in 2020. The California standards would also start sooner and be completely phased in sooner than the federal standards (CAFE).

In Washington, there are key differences between California's greenhouse gas emission standards and the federal government's recently adopted fuel economy standards:

- **Purpose:** The standards have completely different purposes. Washington's standards directly regulate greenhouse gases to reduce the causes of climate change. The federal standards (CAFE) regulate fuel use to cut energy consumption.
- **Starting point:** Washington's standards start with 2009 model vehicles. Federal requirements start two years later, with the 2011 model year.
- **Full phase-in:** Washington's standards will be fully phased-in by the 2016 models. The federal standards are not fully in place until four years later (2020 models).
- **Greenhouse gas reductions:** By calendar year 2016, Washington's standards will have reduced greenhouse gas emissions from cars by 75 percent more (1.1 million metric tons) than the federal CAFE standard. As a result, greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 57 percent more (2.0 million metric tons) than the federal standard by 2020. (See chart below.)

Benefits of the California Standards in Washington

The graphs below compare the amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2), a major greenhouse gas, that would be emitted in Washington under the federal standards versus the California standards.

(It should be noted that California's estimation of greenhouse gas emissions relied, in part, on California's vehicle and travel characteristics such as vehicle turnover rates, annual mileage rates, and growth assumptions. Using Washington-specific data for these and other characteristics, the estimated benefits for Washington may be less.)