



EPA head: New carbon controls on big trucks and buses 'win for planet'

By Darren Goode - 10/25/10 02:07 PM ET

The Obama administration on Monday continued its push to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, proposing the first-ever emissions limits for medium- and heavy-duty trucks and buses.

The joint requirement from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) would require a 20 percent cut in emissions and fuel use from long-haul tractor-trailer trucks for model years 2014 to 2018.

“This will be a win-win-win,” for reducing oil dependence, mitigating climate change and strengthening energy security, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said on a conference call with reporters.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson also called it a “win for the planet” in cutting emissions from vehicles that represent the second largest and fastest-growing group in oil consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector. Overall, the sector represents about 20 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

The new rule proposes separate performance standards for three categories of vehicles: combination tractors, heavy-duty pickups and vans, and vocational vehicles. For long-haul combination tractors, the standards would require a 20-percent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and fuel consumption by the 2018 model year. For heavy-duty pickup trucks and vans, the standards would differ by fuel type.

The rule is estimated to achieve a 10-percent reduction for gasoline vehicles and 15 percent for diesel vehicles. This could increase to a reduction of 12 percent and 17 percent, respectively, if air conditioner leakage is taken into account, EPA and NHTSA said.

For delivery trucks and other vocational vehicles, up to a 10-percent reduction in fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions is required by model year 2018.

EPA and NHTSA say the auto industry can meet the new performance standards through improvements to tires and engines, along with more aerodynamic designs. This would especially reduce fuel use and carbon emissions from those larger trucks that travel long distances on highways.

The announcement sparked mixed reactions from environmental and energy-efficiency advocates.

Many of them said the Obama administration could have done more.

“It’s an OK first start,” said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign. “On the other hand, they left almost half of the emission reductions on the table.”

“President Obama did the right thing to encourage the creation of these standards,” said Luke Tonachel of the Natural Resources Defense Council. “But today’s proposal should be strengthened.”

Environmentalists say one way to promote further emissions reductions would be to encourage more hybrid technologies in smaller, short-haul delivery trucks.

“We will be urging EPA to do more to bring those advanced technologies into the vocational truck fleet through this standard,” said Therese Langer, transportation program director at the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. That could include providing a “relatively straightforward way” for manufacturers to receive credit for incorporating advanced technologies, Langer said.

President Obama first announced in May that the administration would develop a first-time proposed rule for these heavy-duty vehicles, which follows rules for cars and light trucks — including SUVs — finalized in April that cover model years 2012-2016.

White House officials — including Obama — have touted the rules as an example of progress on oil reliance and emissions even in the absence of a sweeping climate and energy bill, which collapsed in the Senate over the summer.