

The car industry is appealing for President Trump's help against stricter carbon standards for cars. The industry's action is disappointing for those who believed industry claims to embrace sustainability and technological innovation. There's no good excuse for the industry's about-face on a regulation it had originally agreed to. As one of the architects of the rule has [pointed out](#), the industry is "now thriving, with record sales," and "it has easily exceeded the fuel efficiency standard every year since 2012." But this kind of conduct is consistent with past episodes of resistance to pollution control, which date back to the 1950s.

There are books to be written about the history of air pollution and the car industry over the decades since scientists figured out that cars were the cause of smog. Here's a timeline with the highlights up to today.

1969. U.S. Department of Justice files an antitrust suit against the major U.S. carmakers for a conspiracy beginning in the 1950s to prevent or delay the introduction of pollution control. In September, the industry agrees to a consent decree.

1970. Nixon signs the Clean Air Act on the last day of the year. The car industry went along because of fears of a patchwork of state regulations. Given that California had already begun regulating, the statute prohibited other states from setting their own regulations but allowed waivers for California, in part due to the severity of auto pollution in Southern California.

1972. Industry petitions to delay air pollution standards, claiming that compliance isn't feasible, even though Ford had already started use of the catalytic converter. The request is denied by the Nixon Administration.

1973. The D.C. Circuit [upholds](#) the industry argument based on uncertainty about whether the standard is achievable by firms other than Ford. This begins a long series of delays in attaining the standards (originally scheduled for 1975.) On remand, EPA imposes a less rigorous standard but allows California to be more demanding in order to maintain pressure on industry.

1975. Congress amends standards and timetable.

1977. More amendments by Congress. Notably, for the first time, other states were permitted to piggyback on California's emissions standards for vehicles. (Rick Frank provides excellent analysis of the history and scope of the waiver authority [here](#).)

1981. Industry meets amended standards (finally).

1985. EPA issues rule banning lead in gas.

1990. Congress passes major amendments to the Clean Air Act, including tougher standards for areas with serious ozone problems.

1990s. EPA starts paying serious attention to diesel engines, SUVs, and light trucks. (See [here](#) for some additional details on regulatory actions during the Clinton and Bush Administrations.)

2002. California passes the Pavley Act, requiring the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to set standards for carbon emissions from cars.

2004. CARB adopts new standards and applies to EPA for a waiver of federal preemption under the Clean Air Act. In the meantime, industry files suit claiming that the standards are preempted by another statute, the federal law setting CAFÉ (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards.

2007. EPA denies California's waiver request, despite having granted dozens previously. According to the [NY Times](#), this was part of a Bush Administration deal with industry, in return for support on a new energy bill.

2009. Auto industry – which not coincidentally has needed a federal bailout — agrees not to contest new federal greenhouse gas standards for cars or a waiver of federal preemption for California. (This [article](#) explains the detail. [Here](#) is a very detailed timeline of the events from the Bush denial to the Obama reconsideration.)

2012. EPA issues a second round of emissions standards covering 2017-2025. The regulation requires a Mid Term Evaluation of whether the standards are still appropriate for 2022-2025. Because of the long delays required for changes in car models, the decision is anticipated by early 2018.

2015. CEOs of major car companies (including GM and Ford, but not Toyota or VW) issue a [joint commitment](#) to work to decarbonize transportation.

January 2017. Faced with Trump's impending inauguration, EPA [issues](#) a final determination that the standards remain appropriate. EPA concludes that compliance is feasible for the industry, will save consumers millions of dollars, and greatly reduce carbon emissions.

February 2017. Industry lobbying groups write to Scott Pruitt, urging a reversal of the finding. Given sharp declines in oil prices, consumer demand has switched back to heavier vehicles like SUVs, making higher fuel efficiency requirements less palatable to firms.

March 2017. On March 3, the [NY Times](#) reports that, in accord with industry requests, the Administration is poised to reverse EPA's determination and roll back the planning cuts for 2022-2025. The government will also reportedly begin proceedings to revoke California's waiver for the first time ever.

The industry hasn't always been united against regulation, and companies have sometimes taken the initiative in developing better technology or more efficient cars, such as Ford's introduction of the catalytic converter or Toyota's introduction of the Prius. But the struggle to make the car industry clean up its act hasn't been an easy one. Current events show that's unlikely to change.