

Oregon bans sales of new gas-powered cars by 2035

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Oregon and Washington have joined California in requiring automakers to sell only new electric or hybrid cars and passenger trucks beginning with the 2035 model year.

The rules were adopted Monday by the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission on a 4-1 vote and by the Washington Department of Ecology.

Oregon and Washington are among the 17 states that follow California's stricter emissions requirements for vehicles as allowed under the federal Clean Air Act.

California's Air Resources Board, which has authority over vehicle emissions, voted for the stricter standards on Aug. 25.

The actions do not ban the sale or use of gasoline- or diesel-powered cars and light trucks in those states after 2035.

But they will require manufacturers to offer for sale increasing shares of their future vehicles to be carbon-free, until the 100% mark is reached in the 2035 model year.

Under federal law, states can choose to go with California's stricter emissions standards for vehicles or the more lenient federal standards – but states cannot devise their own standards. Some other states have indicated they do not plan to follow California's zero-emission vehicle standards.

"I think there is a large part of this state that thinks we are crazy to follow California on anything," said Greg Addington of Klamath Falls, the only dissenter on the Environmental Quality Commission vote.

Addington was hired a couple of months ago to lead the Oregon Farm Bureau, where he once worked.

But Amy Schlusser, another commission member, said the realities of climate change are forcing change.

"If we don't adopt this rule here today, I think the transportation system will still electrify," said Schlusser, a staff lawyer with the Green Energy Institute at Lewis & Clark College law school. "We just won't have the same number of options. We will not be providing the regulatory certainty to utilities and auto manufacturers. We won't be upgrading the (power) grid in a strategic and cohesive way that is proactive, rather than reactive."

Addington also was the lone vote a year ago when the commission adopted a statewide plan aimed at reducing heat-trapping greenhouse gases 50% by 2035 and 90% by 2050, based on 2007-11 levels. That plan was aimed mainly at transportation fuels.

Several groups have challenged that plan in the Oregon Court of Appeals, which is considering their argument that the commission lacked authority from the Legislature to do it.

Transportation still accounts for the greatest share of Oregon's greenhouse gases at more than 30%.

Addington did join the four other members in voting for progress reports, starting in 2028 and updated every two years, that cover six points. Among them: Manufacturer compliance with the share of zero-emission vehicles they offer, the cost of such vehicles and batteries, how the rules affect low-income communities and rural areas, the status of electric-charging stations and infrastructure.

"It has made me more comfortable with the notion of electric vehicles and what that might mean in places such as Eastern Oregon," Addington said. "But I do have some things I can't quite get over," he added, such as the availability of such vehicles in rural areas, the lack of charging stations and the suitability of vehicles for agriculture, forestry and construction. The rules do not apply to heavy-duty trucks.

"I think there are a whole lot of people in this state who don't get where this is going and why this is going there," he said. "We have not done a good job talking about what this means."

The original recommendation from the Department of Environmental Quality staff was for a single update in 2030.

The new timetable, Commission Chairwoman Kathleen George said, “gives us the opportunity to check along the way and work with others to take the actions needed to allow these goals to be implemented.”

The Oregon Transportation Commission has approved \$100 million from federal funds over the next five years to upgrade electric-charging stations and other infrastructure along already-designated highways.

According to a DEQ staff study, the new rules are expected to result in 150 fewer deaths and between \$5 million and \$13 million in added health benefits.

The new rules also are projected to reduce carbon dioxide by 53 million metric tons by 2040, and 3,693 tons of oxides of nitrogen by 2025.

“Gasoline- and diesel-engine emissions can have a disproportionate impact ... which put some areas of Oregon at risk of exceeding the national ambient air quality standards,” said Rachel Sakata, a senior air quality planner with the agency. “These emissions can cause respiratory illnesses on a local level in addition to other health effects. So this proposed rulemaking helps achieve reductions in emissions, which will save more lives and result in fewer hospitalizations overall.”