

[\[Previous Story\]](#)[\[Next Story\]](#)

## **EPA set to tighten vehicle emission, gasoline standards**

*Julie Grisham*

Calling it "one of the most important steps we can take to clean the air we breathe and protect the health of all Americans," President Bill Clinton announced during his weekly radio address on May 1 the [Environmental Protection Agency's long-awaited proposal](#) tightening emission standards for motor vehicles and sulfur-control requirements for gasoline.

EPA is proposing for the first time that both automobiles and light-duty trucks--including pickups, minivans, and sport-utility vehicles (SUVs)--meet the same tailpipe emission standards. The proposed standard for nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) is 0.07 g per mile, a 77% reduction for cars and a 95% reduction for light-duty trucks. Vehicles under 6,000 lb would be phased into the standards between 2004 and 2007; vehicles weighing between 6,000 and 8,500 lb would be phased in by 2009. Automakers would still be able to average the standards over their entire fleets. EPA estimates the per-vehicle cost of meeting the new standards as \$100 for cars and \$200 for SUVs.

For gasoline, the agency wants oil refiners to reduce the average sulfur level to 30 ppm, down 90% from the current national average of about 330 ppm, by 2004. The maximum level of sulfur in gasoline could not exceed 80 ppm. Small refiners--those with fewer than 1,500 employees--would have four additional years to comply, and some would be able to apply for a further two-year extension. EPA estimates the cost of this proposal at 1 to 2 cents per gal of gasoline, or about \$12 to \$24 per car per year. California has had a 30-ppm sulfur requirement in place since 1996.

EPA calls the program "a comprehensive regulatory initiative that treats vehicles and fuels as a system, combining requirements for much cleaner vehicles with requirements for much lower levels of sulfur in gasoline." The proposed rule is part of the Tier 2 air-quality standards set forth in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments.

In addition to reducing the presence of sulfur oxides in the air, the sulfur requirement would help reduce NO<sub>x</sub> levels. Sulfur interferes with the ability of vehicles' catalytic converters to remove NO<sub>x</sub> and other pollutants from emissions. Automakers are in favor of the sulfur rule because it will make it easier for them to meet the NO<sub>x</sub> requirements. Proponents say the sulfur cuts could have the same air benefits as removing 54 million cars from the road.

But the oil industry and some members of Congress say such cuts are not needed in many areas of the country--especially parts of the West--where air quality generally meets federal standards. The [American Petroleum Institute](#) and the [National Petrochemical & Refiners Association](#) have urged EPA to support a phased, two-region approach that they say would benefit consumers rather than burden them with unnecessary costs and would allow industry more time to upgrade facilities.

Many environmental groups, on the other hand, say the rules are a step in the right direction but don't go far enough. Several such groups criticize EPA for giving automakers a full 10 years to bring the largest SUVs into compliance. They also say standards for diesel fuel should be tighter.

The sulfur rules are similar to those in the Clean Gasoline Act of 1999, introduced as S. 171 by Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and as H.R. 888 by Rep. Dale E. Kildee (D-Mich.). An amendment to the Clean Air Act, it would prohibit the sale, manufacture, supply, or transport of gasoline with sulfur levels above 40 ppm. No floor action has been taken on either bill.

The rulemaking, which will be published in the *Federal Register*, will be open for comment until Aug. 2. EPA will hold four public meetings throughout the U.S. during June to discuss the rules.

[\[Previous Story\]](#)[\[Next Story\]](#)

---