

Province begins planning to get old vehicles off roads

Auto industry to face tougher emissions standards in future

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REGINA -- Federal and provincial efforts to cut greenhouse-gas emissions will drive major changes to the cars and trucks on Saskatchewan roads in the next few years.

New vehicles will almost certainly face toughened tailpipe emissions regulations even as debate flares over whether the rules will match the particularly stringent standards being proposed for California, standards recently backed by almost all provinces, including Saskatchewan.

As well, with Saskatchewan residents driving one of the oldest collections of vehicles on average in the country, it appears likely the provincial government will step up efforts to get those higher-emitting cars off the road.

The federal government has indicated it will work toward developing a "vehicle scrappage" program and Scott Robinson of Saskatchewan Environment's corporate policy and planning secretariat said that preliminary work on a provincial plan is also underway.

"It would be in the shorter-term future rather than in the longer-term. It's something we've been given some direction to start working on," he said this week in an interview.

"I think Saskatchewan is one of the few jurisdictions that doesn't have a program that gives incentives to remove pre-1994 or older vehicles from the roads because of their emissions," said Robinson.

There are few details, but Robinson said the government wants to work with existing charitable programs such as the Car Heaven program affiliated with the Canadian Diabetes Association or the Kidney Foundation's Kidney Car program to develop a more broadly supported program.

Existing programs pay for the cost of towing and ensure the vehicles are recycled properly while the donors receive a tax receipt for a charitable donation. Donors of pre-1994 vehicles to the Car Heaven program can also be eligible for a rebate



CREDIT: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix
 Rush-hour traffic in Saskatoon Friday afternoon

of up to \$1,000 on a General Motors vehicle.

Likely to be much more contentious, however, is the issue of adopting California's planned tailpipe-emissions standards for new vehicles, which call for a 25 to 30 per cent reduction in emissions between 2009 and 2016.

At the end of the Council of the Federation meeting held last week in New Brunswick, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell touted an agreement of all provinces and territories -- except Ontario -- to the California regulations.

In a conference call with reporters following that meeting, Premier Lorne Calvert said Saskatchewan hasn't signed on to anything yet, but is willing to move toward the standards with other provinces.

"My argument is that California has set these emissions standards for tailpipes. I understand that New York state will be soon to follow. If you take those two markets, California and New York, well even California alone, they will set the standard for North America and we're going there. So the auto manufacturers need to understand that and move along with the times," he said.

Personal transportation is estimated to account for between 13 to 16 per cent of the greenhouse-gas emissions blamed for accelerating climate change.

Provincial Environment officials said this week that moving to the California standards would be in "perfect harmony" with the government's recently released climate-change plan and its emphasis on cleaner-burning ethanol and biofuels for vehicles.

But there are questions over whether provinces have the power to adopt those emission standards on their own or even in concert with each other.

The federal government reached a voluntary memorandum of understanding with the auto industry in 2005 that called for a 5.3 megatonne annual reduction in overall vehicle emissions by 2010. The Conservative government has indicated that it will implement new fuel-efficiency standards after that agreement expires.

Saskatchewan Environment's Robinson said the province does not have the jurisdiction under current legislation to set emission standards and an attempt to do so could set off a trade dispute.

However, "with the provinces and territories supporting California-style emissions that certainly is a strong signal for the . . . federal government," said Robinson.

But the prospect of either federal or provincial governments enacting regulations based on California's sets off alarm bells in the auto industry.

Susan Buckle, executive director of the Saskatchewan Auto Dealers Association, said new vehicles are only a miniscule part of the emissions problem given the improvements that have already been made.

California's standards would hurt consumers by raising the average cost of a vehicle by about \$2,500, she said.

Mark Nantais, president of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association, said the auto industry is already the most responsive to the emissions issue, having introduced 70 fuel-efficiency innovations since the memorandum of understanding

was signed.

The industry wants a common North American standard for fuel efficiency, he said, but analysis shows that 97 per cent of vehicles currently produced and sold in Canada would not be available in 2012 if California's standards are adopted.

"When the premiers say they can adopt California, I'm not sure they knew what they were getting into because we can't develop standards for one province, we can't develop products for Canada alone unless there's going to be some pretty severe product curtailment, in other words, consumers may not be able to purchase certain vehicles," said Nantais, who points out that California is still waiting for approval of its standards by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

But Dale Marshall of the David Suzuki Foundation environmental group said the technology is already there to cut auto emissions much further and jurisdictions outside of North America such as the European Union and Japan are adopting even stricter standards than California's.

With Canadian provinces and American states following California's lead, the auto industry has to respond, he said.

"If Canada is going to reduce its emissions coming from personal transportation, there's a variety of policy and technological situations that are going to have to be put into place. One of the major ones is that we're going to have to improve the efficiency of the vehicles we drive," said Marshall.

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