

Proposals to increase fuel economy standards could cause more highway deaths, limit vehicle choice

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Light Truck Owners Group Available to Comment on Fuel Economy Proposals in State of the Union

Amid speculation that President Bush may propose higher fuel economy standards in tonight's State of the Union address and similar proposals by other regulators and elected officials, the SUV Owners of America (SUVOA) warns that increases in the corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards can come with unintended consequences.

"History shows us that when the government has raised fuel economy standards, it has forced auto manufacturers to make more unsafe smaller vehicles in order to comply with the regulation, which puts drivers at far greater risk of death or injury in crashes," said SUVOA President Barry McCahill. "Thousands of lives already have been lost as a result of previous CAFE increases, and we will lose thousands more if some of the current proposals are enacted."

History also shows that CAFE increasingly limits consumers' options for vehicle utility functions such as towing for recreation. In the late 1970s, shortly after federal corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards took effect, nearly 70 percent of domestic passenger car models were capable of towing 2,100 pounds or more, about the size of an average bass fishing boat and trailer. By 1986, because cars had been downsized dramatically to meet ever-increasing CAFE standards, only 20 percent could tow that load. By the mid-1990s, the percentage slipped to 12 percent, and today, only 1 percent of domestic passenger cars can tow 2,100 pounds. And now light trucks could face the same fate if unrealistic fuel economy mandates are adopted.

Faced with a shrinking selection of passenger cars with sufficient towing power, America's outdoor enthusiasts have turned to light trucks for recreation. Light trucks have become workhorses for families heading out on vacations, towing trailers and hauling clothes, mountain bikes, skis, fishing and camping equipment, and other outdoor gear. If they tried to do that in high-miles-per-gallon compacts, the better decision probably would be to stay home and add to the pattern of physical inactivity and the obesity epidemic it has spawned. Further information on this issue is available in a towing guide developed by SUVOA and posted on <http://www.suvoa.com/>.

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