



The Problems with Weight Based Fuel Economy Standards

Setting fuel economy standards based on vehicle weight could result in increased dependence on oil and reduce overall vehicle safety.

- **Weight based standards will create incentives to make vehicles heavier, resulting in increased fuel use.** Congress created fuel economy standards in large part as a measure to reduce U.S. dependence on oil. Because weight based fuel economy standards establish lower requirements for heavier vehicles, automakers would have an incentive to add weight to their vehicles and would be able to sell more heavy gas guzzlers. The result would be a decrease in fuel economy and an increase in our oil dependence.
- **Size and design are the key factors for vehicle safety, not weight.** Design and size are key factors in determining the safety of a vehicle. Increased vehicle weight can exacerbate rollover fatalities and create more dangerous crashes. Therefore, not only is weight a poor surrogate for a vehicle's safety, increased weight may in fact denigrate the overall safety of our roads.
- **Reducing the weight of heavier vehicles is an important safety and fuel economy tool.** Technologies – such as high strength steel - can both reduce vehicle weight while improving vehicle safety and improving fuel economy. Weight based standards eliminate or reduce the incentive to employ such technologies.
- **Increasing existing light truck standards can achieve the desired safety/fuel economy goal.** Simply increasing the standard for light trucks will result in safety benefits similar to or better than those purported to result from weight-based standards. Because saving weight on the heaviest vehicles is a cost effective fuel economy option, the heaviest vehicles are likely to get lighter and the lightest vehicles will stay the same, or even increase in weight and size as it becomes easier for the fleet as a whole to reach the fuel economy target.
- **Weight-based standards are founded on the fallacy that reductions in vehicle weight inherently lead to increased fatalities.** The analysis of a fleet wide weight reduction done by NHTSA researcher Charles Kahane is a poor tool for understanding the safety implications of vehicle weight reductions.
 - The study does not separate the effects of a reduction in weight from the effects of a reduction in size. A recent study by Dynamics Research Inc. indicates that the reduction in *size* is likely driving his interpretation of safety impacts rather than the reduction in *weight*.
 - The study does not represent a historical or likely future market response to changes in fuel economy standards. It is more cost-effective to reduce the weight of the heaviest vehicles rather than slimming down the lightest vehicles. The result of such a cost effective approach would be an overall improvement in safety, with the dangerous, heavy vehicles being replaced by safe vehicles that are also less dangerous for others on the road.