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States' Efforts Lead to First-ever National Greenhouse Gas Limits for Cars

April 1, 2010 (Boston) – Today the federal government set in place a cornerstone of a federal climate program by finalizing national greenhouse gas (GHG) emission limits for motor vehicles. The measure is the first-ever federal regulation to specifically target GHG reductions from cars and will lower passenger car GHG emissions from the U.S. vehicle fleet by 21 percent by 2030.

The action codifies a national program that was set in motion by California, 13 other states, and the District of Columbia. In 2004, California established the country's first motor vehicle GHG emission standards and subsequently 14 jurisdictions adopted the California program in order to tackle head-on the threat of climate change.

"We applaud the administration's bold action to reduce GHG emissions from motor vehicles," said Arthur N. Marin, Executive Director of the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NESCAUM). NESCAUM is the regional association of the air pollution control programs of eight northeast states that helped develop the technical basis for California's motor vehicle GHG limits.

A 2004 study by NESCAUM* found that California motor vehicle GHG standards, upon which the federal standards are based, could be met using technologies already in the marketplace. In addition, due to fuel savings over their lifetime, low GHG-emitting vehicles will save consumers money.

The federal action taken today will reduce GHG emissions from cars in all 50 states. Vehicles in the U.S. contribute approximately 20 percent of total national GHG emissions. Transportation is the fastest growing source of GHG emissions, accounting for 47 percent of the net increase in total U.S. GHG emissions from 1990-2006.

"The structure of the federal passenger car GHG standards finalized today demonstrates the shared authority of the states and EPA," said Coralie Cooper, NESCAUM's Transportation Program Manager. "It shows that the Clean Air Act is a workable and effective mechanism for sharing state and federal authority to reduce GHGs."

Under the federal Clean Air Act, California can implement more stringent motor vehicle emissions standards than the federal limits, and other states have the ability to adopt the California standards in lieu of the federal standards. This careful balance between state and federal authority over vehicle emissions standards crafted by Congress was central to the success of today's announcement.

The electricity and transportation sectors are the dominant sources of GHG emissions in the northeast region, with transportation responsible for more than one-third of the region's total. States in the region have developed the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to reduce emissions from electricity generation and have adopted the California motor vehicle GHG standards for reducing emissions from transportation. In addition, 11 states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are considering the role of a low carbon fuel standard for achieving even greater reductions in transportation-related GHG emissions.

With the new national program in place, NESCAUM will continue to support efforts to pursue a dynamic program for cleaner cars that continually re-visits and re-assesses the state of technology innovation for motor vehicles.

"We stand ready and willing to assist California, our states in the Northeast, and the federal government in ensuring that as new clean vehicle technologies are developed, they are quickly introduced into the vehicle fleet," said Coralie Cooper, NESCAUM's Transportation Program Manager.

* "Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Light-Duty Motor Vehicles" by the Northeast States Center for a Clean Air Future (a sister organization of NESCAUM), 2004 (Boston, MA), available at http://www.nescaum.org/documents/reducing-greenhouse-gas-emissions-from-light-duty-motor-vehicles-technical-support-study/.

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