

Chart of the Week #2024-23

Revisited: Progress in U.S. Motor Vehicle Pollution Reduction Since 1970

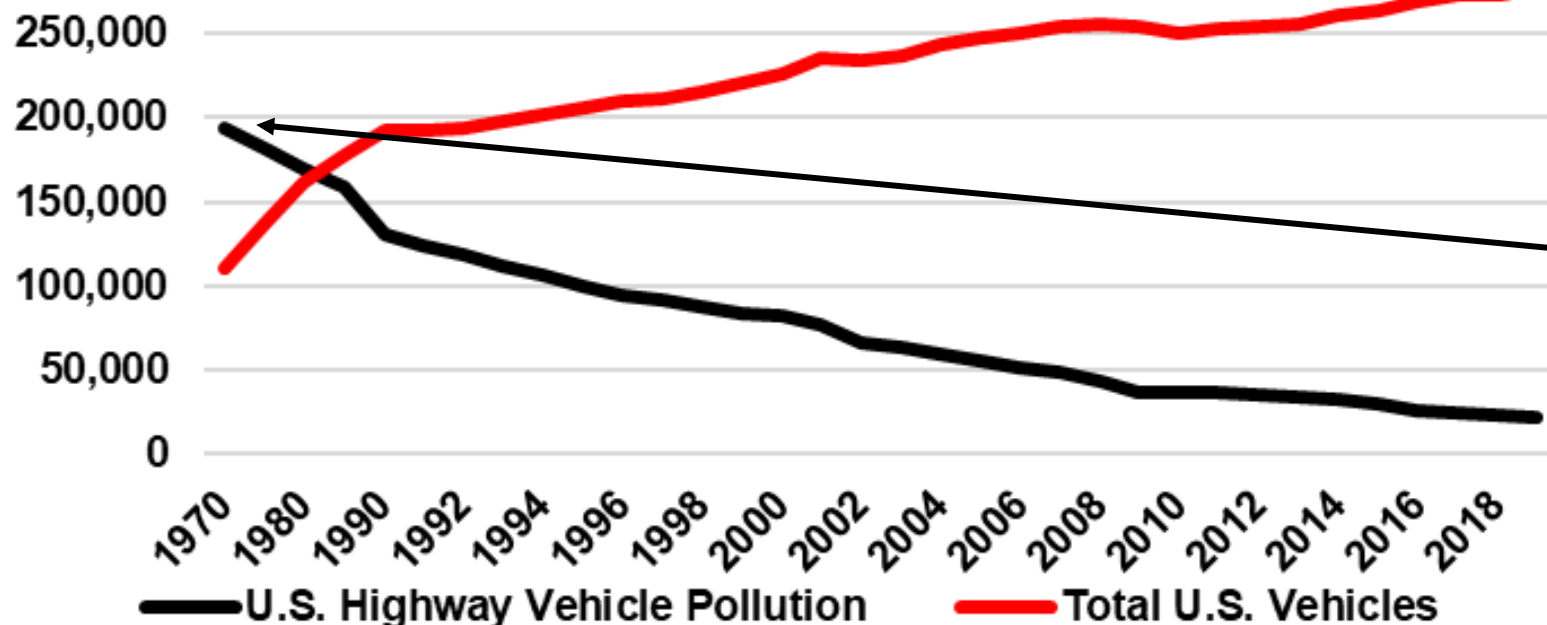


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Revisited: Progress in U.S. Motor Vehicle Pollution Reduction Since 1970

U.S. Motor Vehicle Pollution vs Number of Operating Vehicles - 1970-2019

Vehicles and short tons of pollution in thousands



Analysis Based on ORNL & EPA Annual Data

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In 1970, U.S. motor vehicles emitted 387 billion pounds (193 million short tons) of criteria pollutants, the largest amount of which was carbon monoxide.

In 2019, that amount had declined to 43 billion (21.5 million short tons), or 11.1% of the 1970 total.

Revisited: Progress in U.S. Motor Vehicle Pollution Reduction Since 1970



- In 1970, there were a combined 111 million light- and heavy-duty motor vehicles in use in the United States. By 2019, that number had risen to 276 million.
- Light-duty vehicles comprised 94% of the total in 1970. In 2019, they made up 90%.
- The total amount of criteria pollutants emitted by all U.S. motor vehicles was 387 billion pounds (193 million short tons) in 1970. Despite the increase in vehicles, that number declined to 43 billion (21.5 million short tons) in 2019, or 11.1% of the 1970 total.
- In 1970, a typical light-duty vehicle emitted approximately 3,500 thousand pounds of criteria pollutants per year. By 2019 considerable progress had been made, and that total number had declined to 148 pounds, 4.3% of the 1970 average.
- Heavy-duty vehicles exhibited a similar trend, emitting on average 4,700 pounds per year in 1970, declining to 298 pounds in 2019, or 6.4% of the 1970 average.
- This slide deck is available at: <https://eprinc.org/chart-of-the-week/>
- For more information on these charts, please contact Max Pyziur (maxp@eprinc.org).