

FACTSHEET

Smog Checks in California

To meet federal air quality standards, existing law requires California-registered, gasoline-powered vehicles, and certain diesel-powered vehicles to undergo biennial smog inspections to measure motor vehicle-related pollutants. The Smog Check Program is an important part of the state's efforts to improve air quality. According to the California Air Resources Board, the program removes about 400 tons of smog-forming pollutants from California's air every day.

What Is the Smog Check Program?

The Smog Check Program requires an owner to take his or her vehicle to a designated smog check station in order to verify that the vehicle's emissions are within designated limits in three cases:

- Upon initial registration of out of state vehicles.
- Change of ownership.
- Every two years for specified vehicles.

In each of these cases, the registered owner must submit a certificate of compliance to the Department of Motor Vehicles in order to renew the vehicle's registration.

The California Department of Consumer Affairs, Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) administers the Smog Check Program. According to BAR, approximately 8,000 smog check stations and 15,000 licensed smog check technicians conduct roughly 10 million smog tests annually.

Vehicles Subject to the Smog Check Program

- Gas-powered vehicles from model year 1976 and newer are subject to the Smog Check Program with the following exceptions:
 - Vehicles six model years or newer are exempt from the biennial Smog Check inspection requirement. (The model year counts as the first year in these calculations.)
 - Vehicles four model years or newer are exempt from the change-of-ownership inspection requirement.
- Diesel-powered vehicles from model year 1998 and newer, up to 14,000 pounds gross vehicle weight, are subject to the Smog Check Program without exception.

Vehicles Exempt from the Smog Check Program

- Two-cylinder vehicles, such as the proposed Fiat 500.
- Electric-powered vehicles.
- Two-cycle-powered vehicles, such as mopeds.
- Hybrids.
- Motorcycles.

California's Enhanced Inspection and Maintenance Program (Smog Check II)

Under the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act, the federal government required urbanized areas that did not meet federal ozone standards (nonattainment areas) and that federal law classified as serious, severe, or extreme, to implement an enhanced inspection and maintenance program (also referred to as "Smog Check II"). In California, about 97 percent of all vehicles are located within these Smog Check II areas and are subject to some or all Smog Check II requirements described below. The

remaining vehicles reside in scarcely populated areas that only require a smog check upon change of vehicle ownership.

The Smog Check II program includes a number of requirements:

- First, the program requires the establishment of “test-only” stations, which are stations that test vehicles’ emissions but are not allowed to make necessary repairs.
- Through DMV annual registration renewal notices, BAR directs a portion of vehicles registered in Smog Check II areas to test-only stations. (California law also authorizes some repair stations known as Gold Shield Stations to inspect these directed vehicles.) Vehicles directed to these stations are generally either:
 - Vehicles that fit the profile of high emitters and thus are most likely to fail their initial smog test, or
 - Vehicles that had been repaired after failing their initial test to assure that the resulting repair was effective.
- In addition, state law requires BAR to direct two percent of vehicles it chooses at random in these areas to test-only stations in order to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the Smog Check Program.
- Finally, the program requires the testing of oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emissions using a treadmill-like device known as a dynamometer.

The Consumer Assistance Program

Under existing law, BAR administers a Consumer Assistance Program that provides financial support to vehicle owners whose cars fail their smog inspections. To be eligible for this program, the vehicle must have failed its smog inspection and have been continuously registered in California for at least 24 months, with some exceptions, in an area where vehicles are subject to biennial smog inspection. Vehicle owners have the following options:

- *Repair cost waiver:* A waiver allows a qualifying vehicle owner to register his or her vehicle, even if it does not pass a smog inspection.
- *Repair assistance:* Under the repair assistance program, BAR will pay up to \$500 to qualifying owners for repair costs, subject to a co-payment of \$20 for low-income persons and \$100 for all other persons.
- *Vehicle retirement:* The vehicle retirement program provides vehicle owners compensation to voluntarily retire (or scrap) their vehicles that have failed a smog inspection.

For more information on the Consumer Assistance Program, visit the BAR website at www.bar.ca.gov.

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