

FACTSHEET

Smog Check Program and Assistance

What Is the Smog Check Program?

The Motor Vehicle Inspection Program, commonly known as the smog check program, helps the state meet federal air quality standards by reducing vehicle-related emissions from passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks. According to the state Air Resources Board (ARB), the smog check program removes about 400 tons of smog-forming pollutants from California's air every day. The Department of Consumer Affairs administers the smog check program through the Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR). More than 10 million vehicles undergo smog tests each year at the more than 5,000 independently owned smog check stations throughout the state.

What Vehicles Are Subject to Smog Tests?

The smog check program requires a vehicle owner to take his or her vehicle to a smog check station to verify that the vehicle's emissions are within designated limits. This must be done upon initial registration of an out-of-state vehicle, upon a change of ownership for a vehicle that is less than four years old, and every two years for most vehicles that are more than five model years old. The smog check program does not apply to gas-powered vehicles manufactured prior to 1976, alternatively fueled vehicles, and motorcycles. A smog check is also required for all diesel-powered vehicles model year 1998 or newer, with a gross vehicle weight rating of up to 14,000 lbs.

What Is the STAR Program?

The STAR program, which took effect in January 2013, is the result of legislative and other efforts to reform and modernize the smog check program. Under the STAR program, BAR certifies smog check stations that meet specified standards for stations and inspectors as "STAR stations." Some STAR stations are licensed only to perform tests, while others may perform both tests and repairs. BAR evaluates program data on a quarterly basis to ensure that stations continue to meet STAR standards. More than two-thirds of smog check stations are STAR certified.

Through DMV annual registration renewal notices, BAR requires some vehicles to be tested at a STAR station. These vehicles include those that fail a smog test due to excessively high emissions levels and those that, based on smog check history and other data, are most likely to fail their next smog test.

What If a Vehicle Fails a Smog Test?

When a vehicle fails a smog test, it must undergo the necessary repairs and pass a subsequent smog test. DMV cannot renew the registration of a vehicle or register a vehicle to a new owner if the vehicle has not passed its smog test. The state administers two programs designed to help

owners of high-polluting vehicles: the Consumer Assistance Program and the Enhanced Fleet Modernization Program.

The Consumer Assistance Program (CAP), administered by BAR, provides three options:

- *Repair cost waiver.* A repair cost waiver allows a low-income vehicle owner (at or below 225% of the federal poverty level) to register the vehicle for two years even if it fails a smog test. In order to qualify for the waiver, the owner must first spend at least \$650 on repairs.
- *Repair cost assistance.* Vehicle owners who are current on their vehicle registration fees and whose vehicle has failed a smog test qualify for \$500 toward emissions-related repairs. The owner's household income must be at or below 225% of the federal poverty level and he or she cannot have previously received CAP assistance for the same vehicle. CAP does not cover the costs of testing, diagnosis, or maintenance-related repairs.
- *Vehicle retirement.* CAP offers two options for compensation in exchange for "retiring" (scrapping) a vehicle. In both cases, the vehicle must be currently registered as operable, with registration fees paid, and the registration must not have lapsed for more than 120 days in the current registration cycle and in the two years preceding the current registration expiration date.
 - If a vehicle has failed a smog test, the owner may apply for up to \$1,500 (household income at or below 225% of the federal poverty level) or \$1,000 (all other individuals).
 - If a vehicle has completed (pass or fail) a smog test within the past 180 days, and the owner has a household income at or below 225% of the federal poverty level, the owner may apply for up to \$1,500. If the owner cannot meet the proof of registration requirement, the vehicle may still be eligible if the owner can prove (through insurance and repair receipts) that it has been driven primarily in California for the past two years.

If a vehicle is accepted into the program, the vehicle owner takes the BAR approval letter to a BAR-approved vehicle dismantler, who destroys the vehicle and issues the owner a check.

A total of 97,984 vehicles have received repair assistance, and 107,572 vehicles have been retired, under CAP as of 2015-16.

The Enhanced Fleet Modernization Program (EFMP) enables a vehicle owner to retire a high-polluting passenger vehicle or light- or medium-duty truck. A vehicle need not have failed a smog test to qualify for EFMP, but it must meet ARB's definition of high polluting. To qualify for EFMP, the owner must be able to show proof of current registration and proof that either the vehicle has been continuously registered for two years prior to the application, or that the vehicle has been operated in the state during that period.

Under the statewide component of EFMP, ARB administers a program, in consultation with BAR, to scrap high-polluting vehicles. Under this program, EFMP offers a \$1,500 voucher to low-income vehicle owners (household income at or below 225% of federal poverty level), or a \$1,000 voucher to all other vehicle owners, to retire a high-polluting vehicle.

EFMP also has a vehicle replacement component, known as EFMP Plus-Up, which is operated by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the South Coast Air Quality Management District in partnership with ARB. Under EFMP Plus-Up, a low-income owner living in one of these districts can get a \$2,500 “replacement” voucher in addition to the \$1,500 base EFMP “retirement” voucher. The owner may use the funds to either purchase a car that is less than eight years old or to obtain a public transit voucher. If a low-income owner lives in a disadvantaged community in one of these air districts, and wants to purchase a hybrid, plug-in hybrid, or battery electric vehicle, he or she can “stack” additional incentives on top of these two vouchers. Depending on the owner’s income and the type of replacement vehicle, the owner can receive up to \$12,000 toward the purchase of a new car.

A total of 154,996 vehicles have been retired under EFMP through 2015-16, and 1,411 vehicles have been retired and replaced under EFMP Plus-Up through September 30, 2016.

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