

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why test auto emissions systems?**

Cars and trucks are major air pollution sources, despite controls that have dramatically reduced vehicle emissions over the past two decades. Collectively, highway vehicles account for about one-third of the ozone-forming emissions across North Carolina and up to 70 percent in urban areas. Tests are needed to ensure that vehicle emissions controls are working properly.

### **When are emissions inspections conducted?**

Emissions systems are tested along with the annual safety inspection required for most cars and trucks in North Carolina. Your car should have a sticker in the lower corner of the windshield on the driver's side indicating what month the inspection is due.

### **How much does an emissions inspection cost?**

The maximum annual fee for the motor vehicle emissions test and safety inspection is \$30, but inspection stations can charge less.

### **Where does the inspection fee go?**

Inspection stations receive most (\$23.50) of the total fee for the safety and emissions test. The remainder of the fee (\$6.50) goes to support various related state programs, including oversight for emissions testing, the highway trust fund, air quality, and emergency and rescue squads. (See chart on reverse side.)

### **What vehicles must have emissions systems tested?**

All gasoline-powered vehicles less than 25 years old and registered in Cabarrus, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Orange, Union and Wake must be tested through December 31, 2005. Vehicle models 1996 and newer, excluding new vehicles that have never been titled, must be tested using OBD systems. The testing is being expanded to eventually include 48 counties. (See map on reverse side.)

### **What is On Board Diagnostics (OBD)?**

OBD is a system that assesses and monitors the

performance of engine components, emission controls and sensors, and the car computer itself, and communicates its findings to the technician by means of diagnostic trouble codes.

### **Do all vehicles require an emissions inspection?**

No. Emissions system tests are not required for current model-year vehicles, diesel-powered vehicles, motorcycles and registered motor homes. Tests are not required for any vehicles in counties not included in the program, but all highway vehicles must have annual safety inspections. (See map on reverse side.)

### **What happens if a car fails the emissions inspection?**

If a car fails the test, the vehicle owner must attempt to get the problem fixed. The federal Clean Air Act requires manufacturers to provide an 8-year/80,000-mile warranty on major emissions control equipment, such as catalytic converters and OBD computers.

### **What if a car is unable to pass the test after repairs?**

The Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) can provide a waiver if the owner has made a good-faith effort to repair the problems and has met minimum expenditure levels. To qualify for waivers, owners must have spent at least \$75 for model years 1976-1980 and \$200 for model years 1981 and newer.



### **Can a car fail if its emissions controls are working?**

In some cases, cars may fail the test even though their emissions controls are working. If there is an outstanding recall or service bulletin on a car, it may fail the test until the repairs are made. A car also may fail the test if it has recently been repaired and it hasn't had time for the OBD system to reset all readiness monitors. Some car models have OBD systems that do not function properly, and the DMV can issue waivers on a case-by-case basis.

### **The "check engine" light is lit on my dashboard. Will my car pass the inspection if a mechanic "clears the codes" to turn out the light?**

No. By clearing the codes, the mechanic has also reset the readiness monitors to "not ready" and your vehicle will be rejected from testing. If your "check engine" light is on, something is wrong with the car and you should take it to a qualified technician for diagnosis.

### **Why don't we test cars older than 1996?**

Vehicle emissions are related more to vehicle maintenance than to vehicle age. Cars older than 1996 do not have OBD systems, and methods for testing older vehicles are prohibitively expensive. By 2006, about three-fourths of the state's urban highway emissions are expected to come from 1996 and newer vehicles. However, the older cars are subject to an annual visual inspection of their emissions control devices. Smoking vehicles also can be cited by law enforcement officers, or reported to the DAQ. To report a smoking vehicle, go to this web address: <http://daq.state.nc.us/motor/>

### **For More Information**

**Air Quality:** N.C. Division of Air Quality, Mobile Sources Branch, 919-707-8400, <http://daq.state.nc.us/motor/inspect/> or [www.ncair.org](http://www.ncair.org)

**Motor Vehicles:** N.C. Department of Transportation, Division of Motor Vehicles, 919-733-0133, <http://www.dmv.dot.state.nc.us/>



North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources



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# Smokestacks on Wheels

North Carolina Department of  
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Division of Air Quality

