

Environment MEPs oppose relaxing diesel car emission test limits

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A draft decision to raise diesel car emission limits for nitrogen oxides (NOx) by up to 110%, along with the introduction of the long-awaited Real Driving Emissions (RDE) test procedure, is neither explained nor justified, and would undermine the enforcement of existing EU standards, said Environment Committee MEPs, in a resolution, voted on Monday, which objects to the draft. Parliament has a right to veto the proposal.

The new RDE procedure is designed to allow for a more realistic testing of car emissions, by using a portable device and performing the test on the road. The current laboratory-based procedure suffers from a number of loopholes, which are exploited by carmakers to brand their products as cleaner than they really are.

Technical uncertainties

In a draft delegated act endorsed by member states in the Technical Committee for Motor Vehicles (TCMV) on 28 October, the European Commission proposed, as part of a package of measures setting up the RDE test procedure, to raise the maximum car NOx emission limits by up to 110%. It justified this by referring to the need to take account of technical uncertainties to do with the use of the new Portable Emission Measurement Systems (PEMS) device.

However, MEPs point out that the Commission itself concluded, on the basis of an analysis by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), that the maximum margin of measurement error with this device is 30%, and on average 18.75%.

The committee therefore opposed the adoption of the measure, also stressing that:

- air pollution causes over 430,000 premature deaths in the EU every year and costs up to an estimated €940 billion per year as a result of its health impacts,
- nitrogen oxides (NOx) are major air pollutants which cause, inter alia, lung cancer, asthma and many respiratory diseases, as well as environmental degradation such as eutrophication and acidification,
- diesel vehicle exhausts are a principal source of NOx in urban areas in Europe, and
- recent air pollution analyses by the European Environment Agency attribute 75,000 premature deaths to NO2 emissions in Europe, with 93% of all exceedances occurring close to roads.

Next steps

The motion for a resolution, tabled by the S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL and EFDD groups, was passed by 40 votes to 9, with 13 abstentions. It will be put to a vote by the full Parliament at the 18-21 January plenary session in Strasbourg.

Background: second RDE package

The second RDE package, approved by the Technical Committee on Motor Vehicles (TCMV) on 28 October, seeks to establish quantitative RDE requirements to limit the

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tailpipe emissions of light passenger and commercial (Euro 6) vehicles.

The proposed requirements are to be introduced in two steps:

- as a first step, car manufacturers would have to bring down the discrepancy to a “conformity factor” of a maximum of 2.1 (110%) for new models by September 2017 (and for new vehicles by September 2019);*
- as a second step, this discrepancy would be brought down to a factor of 1.5 (50%), taking account of technical margins of error, by January 2020 for all new models (and by January 2021 for all new cars). A conformity factor for the number of particles (PN) remains to be determined.*

Further information

- Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/envi/home.html>
- Meeting documents:
[http://www.emeeting.europarl.europa.eu/committees/agenda/201512/ENVI/ENVI\(2015\)1214_1P/sitt-1701653](http://www.emeeting.europarl.europa.eu/committees/agenda/201512/ENVI/ENVI(2015)1214_1P/sitt-1701653)

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