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1:14 pm ET
Jan 8, 2016

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By JO CRAVEN MCGINTY

Hendrik Wolff loves **Volkswagen** VOW.XE +1.71% with the passion of an evangelist. He drives Volkswagens. He recommends Volkswagens. When he goes camping, he loads up a **Vanagon** camper, **a cult favorite that VW stopped making decades ago.**

So, when the **German** auto maker admitted to installing software in some of its diesel cars to cheat on emissions tests, Mr. Wolff, an environmental economist who moved to the U.S. in 2003, took it personally.

"I'm German," Mr. Wolff said. "That's why I feel so upset. I drove VW all my life. I try to convince so many of my friends to purchase VW. I tell them it's a good, reliable car, it's safe and the diesel technology from Germany has huge advantages."



Volkswagen Passats were among the models the German auto maker rigged to evade emissions standards. — Denis Ballobou/REUTERS

Turns out the technology wasn't so great after all.

Volkswagen has said it decided to launch a large-scale promotion of diesel vehicles in the U.S. in 2005 but then found it impossible to meet **the strict nitrogen oxide requirements in the U.S. within the required timeframe and budget by legal means.**

Unable to legally meet the requirements, the company said it used software to adjust nitrogen-oxide emission levels according to whether vehicles were on the road or being tested.

Mr. Wolff estimates the affected cars—including 580,000 diesel Volkswagens, **Porsches** and **Audis** sold in the U.S. since model year 2009—have contributed up to 56,000 tons of nitrogen oxide above what is allowed.

That's a fraction of all pollution caused by cars and trucks in the U.S.

According to the **Environmental Protection Agency**, the affected cars are responsible for about one-tenth of 1% of all nitrogen oxide emissions in the country, and antique cars—like Mr. Wolff's Vanagon—are exempt from emissions testing.

But Volkswagen allegedly outfitted its vehicles with "defeat devices"—in this case, special software—specifically intended to circumvent emissions standards, and the **Department of Justice**, acting on behalf of the EPA, is demanding restitution.

This past week, **the DOJ sued Volkswagen** and is seeking to collect fines amounting to at least \$46 billion for four different violations of the **Clean Air Act**.

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The Wall Street Journal examines numbers in the news, business and politics. Some numbers are flat-out wrong or biased, while others are valid and help us make informed decisions. We tell the stories behind the stats in occasional updates on this blog.

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Specifically, for violations occurring on or after Jan. 13, 2009, the suit asks for \$37,500 per vehicle for violating emissions standards, \$37,500 per vehicle for tampering, \$3,750 per vehicle for using the emissions control "defeat devices," and \$37,500 per day for violating reporting requirements. The requested fines for violations occurring before Jan. 13, 2009, are slightly less.

Read more about how experts have assessed the damage caused by the rigged vehicles in [The Numbers](#).

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4:52 pm January 8, 2016

Anonymous wrote:

The propaganda never stops. Next week media will suit a different interest. It is up to the wind.

2:00 pm January 8, 2016

satisfiedvwowner wrote:

I, for one, am quite happy with my 2013 diesel Passat. It still performs in all the ways that I based my purchase upon. The environmental aspect of the car was secondary when I considered the impact my previous gasoline burning vehicle had upon the environment. Very few consider the environmental impact wrought by producing the unleaded, ethanol-enhanced gasoline that the vast majority of internal combustion vehicles burn.

Also, I don't hear any more about the so called "Elon Musk letter" sent to the California EPA suggesting rather than penalize VW with fines, negotiate a deal that VW will fund an accelerated program for non-emission producing vehicles. What a much more reasoned and practical way to ameliorate the problem.



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