

Pollution

Petrol cars allowed to exceed pollution limits by 50% under draft EU laws

Car industry successfully lobbied for loopholes to dilute EU laws limiting toxic particulates emissions for new cars, the Guardian has learned

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Particulate matter is the largest single contributor to the estimated 600,000 premature deaths across Europe from pollution-related heart and lung diseases each year. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

New European cars with petrol engines will be allowed to overshoot a limit on toxic particulates emissions by 50% under a draft EU regulation backed by the UK and most other EU states.

Campaigners say that a simple €25 (£22) filter could drastically cut the pollution, but the Guardian has learned that car-makers have instead mounted a successful push for loopholes and legislative delay.

Bas Eickhout, a Green MEP on the European parliament's environment committee and [dieselgate](#) inquiry panel, promised action to ensure that the lessons of the [VW scandal](#) were learned.

"With this ridiculous proposal, the EU's member states are again trying to dilute EU laws at a terrible cost to human health. We will call on the European commission to come to the European parliament and explain themselves on this issue," he said.

Particulate matter (PM) is the [largest single contributor](#) to the estimated [600,000 premature deaths](#) across Europe from pollution-related heart and lung diseases each year. Children and the elderly are worst affected, and the associated health costs could be as high as €1.6tn a year in Europe, [according to the World Health Organisation](#).

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Although exhaust fumes from diesel and petrol engines are one of the largest sources of particulates emissions, most EU member states support raising the EU's pollution standard 50% above the legal limit set down in the Euro 6 regulation. Behind the scenes, vehicle makers have pushed strongly for a staggering 300% over, according to material seen by the Guardian.

The draft regulation is still being discussed by EU member states and the auto industry has not given up hopes of wrenching further concessions on particulate emissions ahead of a final decision on 7 December.

One Powerpoint slide shown to EU expert groups by the European automobile manufacturers association (Acea) says that a 300% latitude in meeting the letter of the law would be "realistic" because of "measurement uncertainty" in emissions tests.

Florent Grelier, a clean vehicles engineer at the Transport and Environment (T&E) campaign group, told the Guardian he feared that EU attempts to improve air quality were being "bent to the will of the automotive industry".

"This is a petrolgate scandal in the making," he said. "Unless the European commission and governments establish strict test procedures to protect the industry from its own short-sightedness, within a few years we will see continuing high levels of particles killing hundreds of thousands of citizens prematurely."

Under EU law, car-manufacturers are already obliged to use filters for diesel engines, but not for the rapidly-growing 40% of the petrol engine market which is made up by uncontrolled gasoline direct injection engines. These release more particulate matter than modern diesel cars.

Gasoline particulate filters could reduce these emissions by a factor of around 100, and would cost manufacturers just €25 per car, according to research by T&E. But car manufacturers have argued this would violate the principle of technology neutrality.

A spokesman for Acea declined to comment on the issue.

Calls by the auto industry for a delay in implementing the new regulation have been well received by several car-producing EU countries. Spain and Sweden argued for a one-year legislative delay that would push its introduction back to 2019, in minutes of a technical committee meeting earlier this month seen by the Guardian.

The UK took no formal position on when the new regulation should enter into force but warned of "unintended adverse effects" if PM limits were given a separate starting date to standards for another pollutant, nitrogen oxide (NOx), which will now begin in 2019.

An EU group of national experts - the technical committee on motor vehicles - is now expected to sign off on the final proposal to amend the Euro 6 regulation for real world driving emissions, in December.

The issue of "conformity factors" - or compensating for uncertainties in emissions tests - last year [led the committee to impose a NOx limit 110% higher](#) than the one written into the Euro 6 regulations last year.

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