

MASSACHUSETTS



NEWS RELEASE

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STATE ROLLING OUT NEW VEHICLE INSPECTION PROGRAM

For Most Massachusetts Motorists, It Will Be Business As Usual

Massachusetts will introduce its “next generation” vehicle emissions testing and safety inspection program on Wednesday, October 1, but officials from the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) said today that except for a new name, Massachusetts Vehicle Check, most motorists shouldn’t notice much of a difference.

“People will still be able to take their vehicles to familiar neighborhood inspection stations and will pay the same \$29 fee for a sticker that they have since 1999,” said Registrar of Motor Vehicles Rachel Kaprielian. “In designing a stronger program to keep our state’s roads safe and air clean, we wanted to keep it convenient and affordable for the motoring public.”

To ensure that vehicles with faulty emissions control systems are identified and repaired more quickly than under the current program, RMV and MassDEP will require model year 1996 and newer passenger cars, trucks and SUVs, as well as 2008 and newer medium-duty vehicles, to undergo annual on-board diagnostic (OBD) emissions testing.

“This simple, plug-in test takes only minutes and has been a cornerstone of the Massachusetts vehicle inspection program for more than four years now,” said MassDEP Commissioner Laurie Burt. “Now we can more easily check for emissions control problems each time vehicles are brought in for inspection, instead of every other year. This is good for engine efficiency and for the environment.”

Commissioner Burt said OBD emissions testing will also be introduced for 1997 and newer light-duty diesel vehicles (weighing 8,500 pounds or less) and 2007 and newer medium-duty diesel vehicles (weighing 8,501 to 14,000 pounds). Beginning next April, diesel trucks, buses and other heavy-duty vehicles weighing 10,000 pounds or more but not subject to OBD testing will receive opacity tests that measure the density of the emissions they produce.

Cars, trucks and SUVs manufactured before 1996 – which, at less than 15 percent of the fleet, currently comprise a small and declining share of all vehicles registered in Massachusetts – are either not equipped with on-board computers or not uniformly compatible with the OBD test. These older vehicles will fail their safety tests if inspectors can see smoke coming from their tailpipes. Dynamometer tailpipe testing is ending for these vehicles because their declining numbers do not justify an investment of up to \$80,000 per inspection station on required equipment and maintenance.

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As with the current inspection program, a motorist whose private passenger vehicle fails its Massachusetts Vehicle Check OBD emissions test will have 60 days from the initial inspection to get the vehicle repaired and bring it to the same station for a free re-test. When a vehicle is fixed by a state-registered emissions repair technician but fails again, the motorist may qualify for a one-year emissions waiver if repair costs exceed \$750, \$650 or \$550, depending on the age of the vehicle. These financial thresholds will be adjusted annually based on changes in the Consumer Price Index.

Under the new program, a motorist facing major repairs of a private passenger vehicle that fails its emissions test – such as a transmission replacement or an engine overhaul – will also have the option of applying for an economic hardship extension. This will give the motorist a one-time, one-year sticker to continue operating the car, truck or SUV while deciding whether to fix or replace the vehicle.

Registrar Kaprielian noted that Massachusetts Vehicle Check will offer added “one-stop shopping” convenience for commercial vehicle owners. Beginning on October 1, state safety inspections will be expanded to satisfy federal Department of Transportation requirements, so commercial vehicles required to get the federal inspection will need to undergo only one check, instead of two at different times and locations. Fees for commercial vehicle inspections will be market-based, as they are across the country.

A new program contractor, Parsons Commercial Technology Group Inc., will manage the day-to-day operations of Massachusetts Vehicle Check for MassDEP and RMV, supporting a statewide network of more than 1,400 inspection stations and hundreds of registered emissions repair shops and technicians.

Parsons is opening a network of conveniently located Motorist Assistance Centers (MACs) across the state to provide advice to motorists, technical assistance to repair technicians, help with getting vehicles “ready” for testing after emissions repairs, vehicle evaluations for repair waivers and economic hardship extensions, and vehicle testing quality assurance.

Parsons is also operating a toll-free Massachusetts Vehicle Check Motorist Hotline (866-941-6277) to provide motorists with inspection station and registered emissions repair shop locations, advice and referrals when vehicles fail, and other inspection-related information. Hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, with extended hours (until 8 p.m.) on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The new Massachusetts Vehicle Check web site will be available next Wednesday, October 1, at: <http://www.mass.gov/vehiclecheck>

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Note to Editors: A fact sheet summarizing the features of the new Massachusetts Vehicle Check program is included with this news release.