

Porsche and Audi suspected of involvement in VW emissions scandal

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The scale of the criminal manipulation of emissions at Volkswagen continues to expand. VW announced on Tuesday evening that more irregularities in emissions levels had been detected. Around 800,000 vehicles could be affected. The declaration that the affected vehicles are “overwhelmingly” those with diesel engines suggests that vehicles with petrol engines could also now be involved.

The illegal software, which VW built into at least 11 million diesel engines, aimed to underestimate emission of nitrous oxide (NOX) so as to stay within emissions limits in the US. In Europe alone, 8.5 million diesel-engined vehicles have to be recalled to plants to be reequipped in order that the legal limit on nitrous oxide is observed in the future. Due to the lower restrictions in the US, this is likely to prove impossible to achieve with the cars sold there. VW chose to manipulate emissions readings precisely to cut costs on investing in clean engine technology.

The petrol and diesel-engined vehicles referred to are releasing carbon dioxide, which is harmful to the climate, and also increasing fuel consumption. CO2 is the primary cause of global warming.

In Germany, car tax has been calculated for many years on the basis of CO2 emissions. The lower the level of emissions, the lower the rate of tax. One consequence—along with the impact on the climate and health—of the fraud now admitted by VW will likely be that vehicle taxes have been set too low.

“With the CO2 certification of some vehicle models, CO2 and as a result consumption figures were set too low,” Volkswagen wrote of the manipulation. The automaker either could not or did not want to provide the scale of these underestimations. A VW spokesman attempted to placate concerns, stating that the number of affected engines was low.

According to VW, all of the affected engines originated in the company’s Wolfsburg plant and were built into several brands. The Polo, Golf and Passat models were involved, as well as VW’s subsidiary Audi, including the A1 and A3 models, Skoda’s Octavia and Seat’s Leon and Ibiza models. In addition, abnormalities had been detected with a petrol engine with automatic shutdown, the VW spokesman said. The 1.4, 1.6 and 2.0 litre variants of the diesel engine were affected.

The acknowledgement of false CO2 figures is the latest, but by all indications not the last chapter in the emissions scandal. At the beginning of the week, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued new accusations of suspected manipulation involving further diesel-engined vehicles at VW.

According to the US government, VW also manipulated the emissions tests of 3-litre diesel engines. These are used by VW subsidiaries Porsche and Audi. The EPA has been reviewing several vehicles since the end of September to determine whether they meet US emissions limits not only when being tested, but also on the road.

Although tests are still underway, the US agency has already identified clear signs of further violations. The company has allegedly equipped large utility vehicles with the software. This affects 10,000 vehicles, among them the 2014 VW Touareg, the Porsche Cayenne 2015 model series and the 2016 Audi models A6 Quattro, A7 Quattro, A8 and Q5. According to the EPA, the impact of the software means that the engines emit nine times more harmful gases on the road than when they are tested.

If this is correct, it will have massive consequences. Porsche alone sells a quarter of its vehicles in the US.

VW immediately contradicted this: “Volkswagen AG

notes that no software was installed in the 3-litre V6 diesel aggregators so as to illegally change emissions.” It insisted once again that the company would “cooperate to the fullest extent to clarify everything without exception” with EPA.

Audi also denied involvement. “Our software conforms with the law,” said company spokesman Udo Rügheimer. The programme did not know if the vehicle was being tested in order to underestimate emissions as had been done with the 2-litre engine, he explained. The software actually responded to various situations, adjusting engine performance and emissions purification according to driving style and the situation. An Audi spokesman stated: “For us, these are standard components of software.” Audi was therefore unsure how the EPA had obtained its measurements.

The company only acknowledged a “failure in communication.” The authorities had been informed “inadequately about the configuration of the entirely legal AECED software” in new diesel engines.

Porsche indicated its “surprise” in a statement. Thus far, all available information indicated that the Porsche Cayenne fully complied with US regulations. A spokesman announced that around 3,000 Porsche vehicles were involved.

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Porsche nonetheless announced on Wednesday that the sale of the 3-litre Porsche Cayenne model in North America would be temporarily suspended. Porsche noted that this was a voluntary measure.

However, VW chief executive Matthias Müller stated the company wanted to work “relentlessly and fully to get to the bottom of this.” If Porsche is proved to have manipulated emissions readings, this could have serious consequences for Müller. He was head of Porsche for five years before taking over as VW chief from Martin Winterkorn in September.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the “legal trickery” to keep emissions levels low proceed seamlessly into criminal manipulation. For years, environmental institutions have been criticising automakers, not just VW, for legally “deceiving,” and going ever further in this practice.

The European environmental organisation Transport and Environment (T&E) and the research organisation ICCT uncovered that the difference between emissions

levels provided by the companies and that detected in road tests was 8 percent in 2001, but by last year averaged between 38 and 40 percent. The VW Golf, with an underestimation of 42 percent, was in the middle of the pack. Mercedes, PSA (Citroen-Peugeot) and GM (Opel) actually performed worse than VW.

The criminality, which is sure to be uncovered at other companies as well as VW, puts hundreds of thousands of jobs in the auto industry at risk. After VW set aside an initial €6.7 billion of funds to pay for the emissions scandal in the last quarter, resulting in a loss of €3.5 billion, the company is already anticipating an additional €2 billion in costs. Estimates range from between €30 billion and €100 billion in total costs for VW.

VW stock fell by more than 10 percent at the opening of trading on the Frankfurt stock exchange on Wednesday. It was just above the €100 mark. VW shares were worth more than €250 at the beginning of the year. Shareholders are now demanding a radical cost-cutting programme. They intend to claw back the money they have lost on the stock market from the workforce through job cuts and wage reductions.



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