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# Car Owners: Protect The Environment And Your Health

*Don't Tamper  
With Emissions  
Controls!*



# Don't Tamper With Emission Controls!

Do you know that tampering with a car's emission controls is illegal? This federal law is one of the 1990 amendments to the U.S. Clean Air Act. You or your auto mechanic can be penalized as much as \$2,500 for each violation. Most states also have laws against tampering, so you might owe additional fines as well.

Is getting caught the only reason to avoid tampering? Absolutely not! Think about these facts:

- Tampering adds to air pollution, because it increases your car or truck's emissions.
- It won't improve your car or truck's gas mileage or driveability. Instead, adjusting or disconnecting emission controls is likely to reduce your mileage and have a negative impact on driveability.
- Tampering is expensive. If you have a new car or truck, you paid about \$500 for the emission controls. When you tamper with them, you are throwing that money away. And tampering will reduce the trade-in value of your car or truck.
- Tampering will probably reduce the life of your vehicle's engine.
- Tampering may void your emission control warranties.

## What Is Tampering?

You are tampering if you remove, bypass, defeat, disconnect, damage or in any way render ineffective any emission control device or element of design that has been installed on a motor vehicle or a motor vehicle engine, or have someone else do it for you.

Tampering includes:

- Removing such devices as the catalytic converter, air pump and EGR valve, or doing anything to them to keep them from working properly.

- Disconnecting vacuum lines and electrical or mechanical parts of the pollution control system, such as electrical solenoids, sensors, or vacuum-activated valves
- Adjusting any element of a car or truck's emission control design so that it no longer meets the manufacturer's specifications.
- Installing a replacement part that is not the same in design and function as the part that was originally on the vehicle, such as an incorrect exhaust part.
- Adding a part that was not originally certified on the car, such as installing a turbocharger

You can avoid making innocent mistakes that could be tampering, if you simply make all adjustments according to the manufacturer's specifications, and install parts designed to properly replace the original parts.

## Why Do We Need An Antitampering Law?

Motor vehicles contribute nearly half the total amount of man-made air pollution in the United States today. They emit nearly sixty percent of the total amount of carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas. They also emit one-fourth of the hydrocarbons and nearly one-third of the oxides of nitrogen. These last two substances are major causes of the unhealthy smog that hangs over so many cities and suburbs.

Congress established motor vehicle emission standards for cars and trucks to reduce this pollution and protect the American public's health. Car and truck manufacturers are required to certify that their designs meet these standards.

Tampering changes a car's certified design and causes it to exceed emission standards. EPA surveys show that tampering is widespread. Some service and repair shops even claim that removing emission controls improves gas mileage, which is not true.

To put an end to tampering, and to make sure that cars meet emission standards for as long as they are being driven, Congress broadened the antitampering provision of the Clean Air Act

## What Is The Antitampering Law?

The original law was part of the Clean Air Act of 1970. It applied to new cars before they are sold and delivered to the buyer, and it only affected manufacturers and car dealers. Violators may have to pay as much as \$25,000 for each new car or truck they tamper with.

The antitampering law that was included in the 1977 Amendments to the Clean Air Act expanded liability for violators to include automobile services, repair facilities, and fleet operators. These facilities can be penalized up to \$2,500 per car or truck that is tampered with.

The 1990 Amendments broadened the tampering provision even further and now it applies to **every-one**, including car owners. Anyone who tampers can be penalized up to \$2,500 per vehicle. Many states also impose additional penalties.

## Does Tampering Improve Gas Mileage and Driveability?

No! Tampering does not improve gas mileage, performance or driveability. In many cases, it worsens them.

In cars that were manufactured after 1974, the catalytic converter is the primary means of emission control. It's important to understand that these devices do not decrease gas mileage or driveability.

The pollution control systems used in cars since the mid-1970's have contributed to a dramatic improvement in fuel economy. If you damage or disconnect the catalytic converter, all you accomplish is to increase air pollution and waste an expensive piece of equipment.

Tampering can shorten an engine's life and cause performance problems. In today's cars and trucks, emissions control is part of the total design and function of many of the engine's components. This includes all parts of the fuel, ignition and air management system, intake and exhaust manifolds, and the EGR valve. When the emission control design of one of these systems or components is changed, performance will likely suffer. Often, the result is loss of fuel efficiency and increased emissions. Maintenance, fuel system adjustments, ignition tuning, compression ratio, and EGR can all affect an engine's durability. Cars and trucks should always be properly maintained, according to the manufacturer's specifications.

## **Can Keeping A Car Well Tuned Help Gas Mileage And Emission Control?**

Yes! Maintaining your car according to the manufacturer's specifications will almost always give you better gas mileage and lower emissions. Studies show that cars that fail the emission test improve their gas mileage between four and ten percent after their emission controls are professionally serviced. Keeping your car or truck well tuned, and following the manufacturer's maintenance schedule, are the best ways to improve its driveability and lengthen the engine's life.

## **Can Tampering Void A Car's Warranty?**

Yes! Under the Clean Air Act, car manufacturers must provide warranties that cover emission control and emission related systems and devices. But if these components are tampered with, the manufacturer may not have to honor the warranty, because the car has not been properly maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications.

# What Can I Do To Help?

Emission controls are our best bet for reducing pollution. Removing them or disconnecting them defeats a vital aspect of our national program to clean up the air. You can help by not tampering with your car or truck's emission controls, and not asking anyone else to do so. Instead, make sure your mechanic follows the manufacturer's tune-up specifications for best performance and emission control.

If you know that an automobile service or repair facility is breaking the antitampering law, or if you have any other questions, contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Field Operations and Support Division (6406J), Washington, DC 20460 (202-233-9100).

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*Your cooperation is important. Keeping your car's emission controls working correctly helps protect the air we all breathe. This leaflet was prepared by the American Lung Association and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to answer your questions about your car's pollution controls. Please read it carefully.*

*The information in this document has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement CX-818718-01-0 to the American Lung Association. It has been subjected to the Agency's peer and administrative review and has been approved for publication as an EPA document. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.*



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