



Regulatory Announcement

Final Amendments to Inspection and Maintenance Programs

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is issuing a final rulemaking to incorporate the use of Onboard Diagnostic (OBD) technology into motor vehicle inspection and maintenance (I/M) programs. EPA is amending the current I/M rule and OBD testing requirements to provide states with greater flexibility so they can maximize the cost effectiveness and efficiency of their I/M programs, while still achieving the air quality goals of the program.

Background

Under the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, states required to implement vehicle I/M programs are also required to incorporate a check of the OBD computer as part of those I/M programs. On November 5, 1992, EPA published the I/M rule but did not address OBD requirements because certification regulations for OBD had not been finalized. The 1992 rule has been amended twice to address OBD requirements in 1996 and again in 1998. Since these amendments, EPA has learned much about the effective implementation of OBD in I/M programs as a result of pilot testing conducted by EPA and the states. The amendments in this final rule reflect EPA's findings as well as comments received in response to the September 20, 2000, proposed rule. The amendments streamline requirements and remove regulatory obstacles to help achieve effective implementation of the OBD-I/M testing required of all I/M programs under the 1990 Clean Air Act.

Final Rule Overview

EPA is amending the I/M rule and OBD testing requirements to provide states with the greater flexibility they need to better meet local needs and to update requirements based on technological changes. These amendments will also help states optimize program efficiency and the cost effectiveness of their I/M programs by allowing them to eliminate functionally redundant testing requirements. The amendments will allow OBD system checks to replace traditional I/M tests on model year 1996 and newer vehicles.

EPA based these amendments on: the results of four OBD-I/M pilot studies, EPA's discussions with states regarding their preparedness for OBD-I/M testing, recommendations made by the OBD Workgroup of the Mobile Source Technical Review Committee of the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, and comments received in response to the September 20, 2000, proposed rule.

The amendments will also allow three options for delaying and/or phasing in the mandatory start date for conducting OBD system checks. These options will provide states the time necessary to better educate the public and the testing and repair industries about OBD emission control technology, and to help achieve effective implementation of I/M programs.

Key Elements of the Final Rule

- Extends the current deadline for mandatory implementation of the OBD-I/M inspection from January 1, 2001, to January 1, 2002.
- Allows states showing good cause up to an additional 12 months beyond January 1, 2002, before mandatory OBD failure and immediate repair occurs.
- Allows I/M programs a one-test-cycle phase-in period for the OBD check during which OBD-failing vehicles will only require repair if the vehicle also fails a tailpipe emission test.
- Clarifies that I/M programs may use periodic checks of the OBD system on model year 1996 and newer OBD-equipped vehicles in lieu of (as opposed to in addition to) existing exhaust and evaporative system purge and fill-neck pressure tests on those same vehicles.

- Establishes the modeling methodology to be used by states in their State Implementation Plans (SIPs) to account for the replacement of traditional I/M tests by OBD-I/M testing and repair, prior to mandatory use of MOBILE6 and subsequent iterations of EPA's mobile source emission factor model.
- Simplifies the OBD-I/M failure criteria to include any trouble code that causes the "Check Engine" light to go on.

For More Information

You can access documents on OBD in I/M programs electronically on the Office of Transportation and Air Quality Web site at:

www.epa.gov/otaq/regs/im/obd/obd-im.htm

For more information on this final rulemaking, please contact Dave Sosnowski at:

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