



Mechanics: An Important Law That Affects You

*Don't Tamper
With Emissions
Controls!*



Don't Tamper With Emission Controls!

Do you repair, service, lease, sell or trade motor vehicles or motor vehicle engines? Do you operate a motor vehicle fleet? If you do, a law against tampering with emission controls applies to you.

As of November 15, 1990, federal law prohibits **anyone** from removing or rendering inoperative any emission control device or element of design that is installed on a motor vehicle or a motor vehicle engine. Anyone who breaks this law can be penalized as much as \$2,500 for each motor vehicle or motor vehicle engine they tamper with. Dealerships and manufacturers can be penalized up to \$25,000 for each violation. This prohibition is one of the 1990 Amendments to the U.S. Clean Air Act.

The purpose of the law is to make sure that cars meet Federal emission standards. If you don't comply, the result will be dirtier air, a loss in fuel economy, and possibly fines.

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 two substances are major causes of the unhealthy smog that hangs over so many cities and suburbs.

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

Tampering changes a vehicle'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 only to manufacturers and car dealers. This law still applies to between 20,000 and 30,000 new car dealers and manufacturers, who may have to pay as much as \$25,000 for each car they tamper with.

The antitampering law was expanded by the 1977 Clean Air Act Amendments to apply to all automobile repair facilities, commercial mechanics, and fleet operators. These facilities can be penalized up to \$2,500 for each motor vehicle or motor vehicle engine that they tamper with.

The 1990 Clear Air Act Amendments broadened the tampering provision even further, and it now applies to **everyone**, including car owners. Anybody who tampers can be penalized up to \$2,500 per car or truck. Many states also impose additional fines.

Does Tampering Improve Gas Mileage And Driveability?

No! Tampering does not improve gas mileage, performance or driveability, and it sometimes makes them worse. In cars that were manufactured after 1974, the catalytic converter is the primary means of emission control. These devices do not decrease gas mileage or driveability. Cars with catalytic converters get the same or better mileage than cars made before they were being used.

The pollution control systems used on 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 also cause performance problems. In today's cars, emission 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 timing, compression ratio, and EGR can all affect how long the engine will last. You can shorten the engine's life and worsen its performance if you tamper.

Can Tampering Void A Car's Warranty?

Yes! Under the Clean Air Act, car manufacturers must provide warranties that cover emission control systems and devices. But if you tamper with the emission controls, the manufacturer may not have to honor the warranty. (These warranties may also be void if leaded gas is used in cars that require unleaded fuel.)

When an owner whose car has been tampered with discovers that the dealer won't honor the warranty, he or she may complain to federal authorities. When the complaint is investigated, the repair shop and the mechanic that did the tampering could be exposed and prosecuted.

Do Mechanics Have To Use Replacement Parts That Are Made By The Manufacturer?

No. You may also use rebuilt parts, or equipment made by independent aftermarket parts manufacturers.

Replacement parts must be equivalent in design and function to the parts that were originally on the car when it was certified. They must not have a negative effect on emission control. To be certain you're using acceptable replacement parts, get a written statement from the parts manufacturer, saying that the replacement part conforms in design and function with the original part.

When you install an aftermarket catalytic converter be sure you fulfill all the requirements of EPA's aftermarket catalytic converter policy. For information concerning this policy, please read EPA's pamphlet, "Aftermarket Catalytic Converters: Guide to Their Purchase, Installation, and Use."

Is The Public Being Informed About The Antitampering Law?

Yes, but many car owners still think they can get better gas mileage and driveability by removing or disconnecting emission controls. Some owners try to do it themselves, but others ask their automobile mechanic to tamper.

To prevent this, the Environmental Protection Agency has launched a public information pro-

gram about the antitampering law, and the penalty for tampering. Consumers are being told that tampering won't improve fuel economy or performance, and might make them worse. Since pollution controls on new cars cost about \$500, tampering is an expensive waste.

When a mechanic refuses to tamper with a car, the customer may ask for advice on how to disconnect emission controls. You and your customer are both at risk if you give such advice. Tampering by a car owner is against the federal law and is also prohibited by state law in most states.

What Can I Do To Help?

You can help keep the air clean by refusing to tamper with emission controls, and by learning how to properly service and maintain emission control systems. All work done on cars should be performed according to manufacturer's specifications.

If you have more questions about the antitampering law, contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Field Operations and Support Division (6406J), Washington, DC 20460 (telephone 202-233-9100).

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