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## Cars get stickers despite failing E-Check

### EPA, BMV unsure how 2,970 motorists in 7 counties avoided law

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A review of what happens to vehicles in Northeast Ohio that fail the E-Check emissions test has turned up a new and embarrassing problem.

Nearly 3,000 Ohio motorists have skirted the law over the past five years and illegally gotten license plate stickers on cars and light trucks despite failing the test, the EPA said in a new report.

The EPA and the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles are unsure how that happened and are investigating, EPA spokeswoman Heidi Griesmer said.

The data show that 717 dirty vehicles in the Akron-Cleveland area failed the E-Check test in 2008 and still got license plate stickers, the report said.

That included 155 in Summit County, 38 in Medina, 79 in Portage, 291 in Cuyahoga, 40 in Lake, 27 in Geauga and 87 in Lorain.

A total of 2,970 motorists in those seven counties failed E-Check and illegally got license plate stickers from 2004 to 2008, according to the report.

That total includes 658 vehicles in Summit County, 191 in Medina, 286 in Portage, 1,194 in Cuyahoga, 162 in Lake, 126 in Geauga and 353 in Lorain.

"Something like that should never have happened," said state Sen. Timothy Grendell, R-Chesterland, who released the EPA report to the Beacon Journal.

"That's an embarrassment. We need to get that answered. . . . Most Ohio motorists comply with E-Check, and now we find out that some do not. That's wrong. We need to find out what happened and how it happened and fix it," he said.

"It's not fair to the rest of us," Grendell said.

#### E-Check background

The E-Check program began in late 1995 because the Akron-Cleveland, Cincinnati and Dayton areas failed to comply with federal limits for ozone. It was dropped in 2006 in the Cincinnati and Dayton areas.

The test is required every other year to obtain license plate stickers. It initially cost motorists \$19.50, but the state now pays the contractor providing the federally mandated test.

In October, Grendell had asked the Ohio EPA and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles for additional information on what happened to vehicles that fail E-Check. He asked the agencies to provide vehicle identification numbers for missing cars and trucks and their current locations.

He made his request after the Beacon Journal contacted him about the fact that in 2008, one in five vehicles that failed the E-Check test disappeared and no one was tracking them.

The vehicles never received a successful recheck, waiver or extension. No one could say what happened to them.

Some of the vehicles could be parked in driveways, garages and backyards. Some might have been traded in for another vehicle, scrapped or sold for parts.

But many of those 11,410 vehicles probably were sold and re-registered outside of the area where E-Check is required, the Beacon Journal reported Oct. 4.

#### Spreading pollution

Selling a car that failed E-Check and registering it in a county without the emissions test is legal. But from a policy perspective, such actions don't help solve Ohio's air problems. It just spreads out the pollution, environmentalists say.

Those vehicles might have moved outside the E-Check area, improving air quality here but adding significantly to air pollution

elsewhere. Some might be close enough to be driving back into the Akron-Cleveland area and continue to add to local air problems.

Ohio, however, had no numbers to quantify how many dirty vehicles might be on the road in other counties, the Beacon Journal reported previously.

The new analysis shows that nearly 20 percent of vehicles in Northeast Ohio that fail the E-Check test remain on the road — in eight nearby counties.

That number probably would climb if the EPA analysis had extended beyond the eight counties surrounding the Akron-Cleveland area that were analyzed.

### **Dirty cars to Stark**

From 2004 to 2008, nearly 2,400 polluting vehicles that failed E-Check moved into Stark County alone, the EPA said.

Stark was No. 1 for getting dirty vehicles from the Akron-Cleveland area.

Canton Health Commissioner James Adams called the number surprising and said those vehicles probably are making the air dirtier in Stark County.

"What's happening is that the vehicles failing E-Check are just being moved around Ohio and it's spreading the air-quality problem to other parts of Ohio. And that's troubling," he said.

"If you add more pollution to the mix, that adds to our problem of being in compliance," said Adams, whose agency handles air pollution in Stark County for the Ohio EPA.

Vehicle emissions contribute to unhealthy ozone, or smog, and to soot pollution, he said.

Wayne County got 781 polluting vehicles from 2004 to 2008, according to the EPA report.

Trumbull County got 751 dirty cars and light trucks and Ashtabula County got 1,027 failed E-Check vehicles in those five years, the report said.

Other counties surveyed were Ashland (314), Erie (619), Huron (348) and Mahoning (474).

Those eight counties got 9,663 vehicles that had failed E-Check between 2004 and 2008, the EPA report said.

Those were the counties that Grendell had asked the state agencies to check, and no other counties were analyzed, Griesmer said.

Grendell, long a vocal critic of E-Check, said it is troubling that vehicles failing E-Check simply are moving around.

It is wrong that Ohio is aware that polluting vehicles from E-Check counties are sold and relocated to counties without the test, he said.

"We've got a state-backed program that creates state-sanctioned polluting vehicles and no one cares what they are doing outside of E-Check counties," he said. "That's just not right."

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