

Contact: Johannes Kleis: +32 (0)2 789 24 01
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Consumer trust in car sector goes up in (emissions) smoke

The car industry in Europe, the US and Japan is still making news headlines with unpleasant revelations. Last Friday, five major car makers announced a recall of 650,000 cars for emission irregularities while other car-makers are being investigated. At the same time Mitsubishi admitted to manipulating fuel efficiency tests in Japan for over 20 years. BEUC and its member organisations from across Europe expect governments to assume responsibility for this build-up of scandals and urge them to ensure car makers abide by the rules. Volkswagen has to take responsibility for cheating emissions testing and pay compensation to their customers across Europe – just as it agreed to do in the US.

Unanswered questions and half-baked measures keep piling up:

- 7 months after the scandal broke, only the niche Volkswagen Amarok has been repaired;
- There is uncertainty about whether the repairs will alter the performance and consumption of affected cars;
- The responsibility of national authorities to ensure carmakers abide by the rules remains unclear;
- There is a lack of clarity about car makers' legal obligation in relation to emission requirements.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation, commented:

"It is beyond belief how little car manufacturers are respecting both the letter and the spirit of the law. Every day there are new reports or investigations being opened into car makers' misconduct, from the use of a defeat device to reduce air pollution, to tricks that improve fuel efficiency performance.

"It is bewildering to see to what extent car makers have been left unchecked. All these revelations point to weak laws and a clear lack of enforcement. Governments need to provide answers regarding this blatant lack of supervision.

"Volkswagen should not get away with treating European car owners as second-class customers. It is striking how on the one hand the pressure of US courts and authorities has led to clear results for American consumers, while on the other hand European car-drivers have been left without redress options and political support for correcting the situation."

BEUC and its members call for:

- Governments to come forward with all available information about additional testing that has been carried out and possible discrepancies with emission limits.
- Volkswagen to better inform car owners about the timeline to recall affected cars as well as any possible implications on performance or emissions.
- Car owners in Europe to be fairly compensated for being misled on the emissions and fuel consumption of their cars.
- The proposed review of the EU's car approval law to be adopted swiftly, particularly given the greater role for the European Commission in carrying out additional inspections.

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