

Vehicle Emissions Testing (1998-99)

Most vehicles must undergo in-service tests of exhaust emissions as part of their annual roadworthiness test. Cars and light goods vehicles are tested by garages approved by the Vehicle Inspectorate. Heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches are tested by the Inspectorate. These annual tests are supplemented by roadside tests carried out by the Inspectorate and, since 1998, on a trial basis by seven local authorities. Emissions testing costs vehicle owners around £100 million each year, some £4 per vehicle. Our report examined the design of the test regime, the way it is applied in practice, and its impact and cost-effectiveness.

We found significant technical limitations with the current test techniques, especially the reliability of the diesel test, and that tests are often incorrectly applied in practice. Whilst the test regime has had a significant impact on emissions this is expected to decline rapidly as catalyst-equipped vehicles replace their non-catalyst predecessors. In Britain tests start earlier in the life of a vehicle and are more frequent than the minimum required by the European Community - at a higher cost to the motorist of around £40 million a year; and the annual test does not prevent between 10 and 20 per cent of vehicles being driven every day on Britain's roads with illegal emissions.