



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine whether selected Inspection and Maintenance (I/M) programs have been effective in identifying poorly performing vehicles, ensuring they are adequately repaired, and achieving emissions reductions. We also assessed whether EPA oversight has ensured that I/M programs are achieving program goals in a timely manner.

Background

About 237 million vehicles were registered in the United States in 2004. On-road mobile source emissions account for from 29 to 51 percent of three key pollutants in our nation's air, and even more in major urban areas. In the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, Congress outlined a four-point strategy to reduce emissions from mobile sources, including the vehicle I/M program. If not properly maintained, even newer vehicles will not perform as designed, causing them to work harder, wear out faster, and pollute more.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20061005-2007-P-00001.pdf

EPA's Oversight of the Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program Needs Improvement

What We Found

Properly implemented, I/M programs ensure that poorly performing vehicles are identified and timely repaired. These programs represent a key component of the pollution control strategies for major urban areas. Although States in Region 3, where we focused our review, have achieved substantial emissions reductions from vehicles, EPA has not ensured that States have fully met their I/M program commitments. Four of 5 I/M programs in Region 3 reported substantial percentages of vehicles with no known final outcome, ranging from 12 to 22 percent of vehicles that failed their I/M inspection. The fifth program did not report this measure to EPA and, since September 2005, has used a less stringent testing procedure than required. Our in-depth work in one State showed that 12 percent of failing vehicles were not resolved after a year, and that 5 percent were still not resolved after 21 months. Because State I/M programs generally do not have access to each others' databases, they have been unable to verify the outcome of many vehicles that failed their I/M tests.

Our nationwide survey of all 10 EPA regions covering 34 I/M programs, as well as our detailed work in Region 3, indicate that EPA has not been obtaining sufficient information to ensure that States are meeting their I/M program commitments. In the last 5 years (1999-2004), 11 of the 34 I/M programs submitted timely reports, 14 programs had either never submitted the required reports or the regions were unsure whether the reports were submitted, and 4 programs submitted reports but they were not timely (typically 1-2 years late in the Region we examined). The remaining five programs had mixed results (some reports from these programs were submitted timely but some reports were not received). Also, EPA regions only audited/evaluated 9 of the 34 I/M programs, and EPA reduced resources for overseeing and assisting I/M programs. As a result, EPA does not have reasonable assurance that emission reductions claimed by some I/M programs have been achieved.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA obtain and evaluate all required I/M reports to ensure that the programs are operating effectively, and follow up with States on significant issues identified. We also recommend that EPA provide more technical assistance and guidance to States, and work with State I/M programs to follow up on vehicles with no known final outcome to a degree proportional to the problem. EPA generally concurred with our recommendations.