

# 'Unlawful Pollution': Volkswagen Charged With Crimes Against Climate

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The U.S. Department of Justice on Monday filed [suit](#) against Volkswagen, charging that the German auto-maker deliberately rigged cars to cheat emissions tests resulting in potentially millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions and untold damage to the atmosphere.

The civil suit, filed on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, alleges that nearly 600,000 diesel engine vehicles had illegal defeat devices installed that impair their emission control systems and cause emissions to exceed EPA's standards. Further, the complaint states that Volkswagen violated the Clean Air Act by bringing to U.S. market vehicles that were designed differently than the company had stated in applications for certification to EPA and the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

"With today's filing, we take an important step to protect public health by seeking to hold Volkswagen accountable for any unlawful air pollution, setting us on a path to resolution," [said](#) Cynthia Giles, assistant administrator for enforcement and compliance assurance at EPA.

Environmental groups have estimated that the cheating scandal caused at least 32.2 million tons of extra carbon pollution into the atmosphere, equal to roughly 6.8 million cars.

"What Volkswagen did wasn't just consumer fraud, it was a crime against our climate and against future generations relying on us for a livable planet," Peter Galvin, director of programs at the Center of Biological Diversity, [said](#) after the

scandal first [erupted](#) in September when the EPA sent a Notice of Violation of the Clean Air Act to the manufacturer and its subsidiaries.

CBD had previously calculated that Volkswagen should owe as much as \$25 billion in fines for damages to climate and air quality. In a statement on Monday, Galvin said he was “heartened” by the development and urged the DOJ to pursue the full estimated compensation for the emissions cheating.

In addition to its environmental impact, pollution by nitrogen oxides (or NOx) has been linked to grave health problems, namely asthma and other serious respiratory illnesses—with children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing respiratory disease particularly at risk. What’s more, recent studies have shown that the direct health effects of NOx are worse than previously understood, and may also include damage to lung tissue and premature death.

Monday’s suit seeks injunctive relief and the assessment of civil penalties. According to the EPA, it does not preclude the government from seeking other “legal remedies.” Though Giles noted that “recall discussions with the company have not produced an acceptable way forward.”

“Car manufacturers that fail to properly certify their cars and that defeat emission control systems breach the public trust, endanger public health and disadvantage competitors,” said assistant attorney general John C. Cruden for the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. “The United States will pursue all appropriate remedies against Volkswagen to redress the violations of our nation’s clean air laws alleged in the complaint.”

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