



**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Inspector General**

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At a Glance

Why We Did This Project

We conducted this audit to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) oversight has ensured that vehicle inspection and maintenance programs are effective and efficient in reducing vehicle emissions in enhanced inspection and maintenance areas.

Cars and light-duty trucks are significant sources of pollutant emissions to the nation's air. Some of these pollutants chemically react in sunlight to form harmful ground-level ozone. Vehicles that are poorly maintained or have malfunctioning emission controls significantly contribute to these pollutants. To address this problem, the Clean Air Act (CAA) made vehicle inspection and maintenance programs mandatory for areas where air quality does not meet health-based standards set by the EPA. The CAA requires areas with the most severe air quality problems to implement more stringent programs. As of June 2018, 23 states run these enhanced programs.

This report addresses the following:

- *Improving air quality.*

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Collecting Additional Performance Data from States Would Help EPA Better Assess the Effectiveness of Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Programs

What We Found

The EPA should collect additional program performance data to better assess the effectiveness of enhanced inspection and maintenance programs for reducing vehicle emissions. For example, nine states operating enhanced programs did not conduct the required biennial program evaluations to assess the effectiveness of their programs in reducing vehicle emissions. Another four state programs did not conduct the CAA-required on-road testing to obtain information about the performance of in-use vehicles. For three states, a lack of clarity in the EPA's guidance on program evaluation and on-road testing methodologies contributed to states' failure to conduct required reviews and tests.

Inspection and maintenance programs help improve air quality and protect human health by identifying vehicles in need of repair.

As a result of states failing to meet the program evaluation and/or on-road testing requirements, the EPA lacks data to determine the effectiveness of their enhanced vehicle inspection and maintenance programs. The EPA lowered the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone in 2015, which will require states to further reduce emissions of ozone precursors. Knowing the effectiveness of these programs in reducing emissions will be critical for states as they plan how to comply with the new standard.

In addition, states are required to submit annual reports about the performance of their vehicle inspection and maintenance programs to the EPA. The agency strengthened its oversight of these annual reports since we issued our report on the vehicle inspection and maintenance program in 2006. However, further improvements should be made. For example, in our current audit, we found that the EPA did not consistently communicate errors in reports back to states. Also, three states continued to report a significant number of repair waivers for vehicles that failed emission tests.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation take actions to assure consistent and effective implementation of enhanced inspection and maintenance programs; determine why states did not conduct mandated on-road testing and assist these states, as necessary, to comply with statutory requirements; and conduct outreach to states with deficiencies in program implementation and issue guidance to address any common problems identified. The EPA agreed with our recommendations and provided acceptable corrective actions and completion dates.