



THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

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United States Attorney's Office
Western District of North Carolina

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**CHARLOTTE AUTO REPAIR SHOP OWNER IS SENTENCED AND FINED FOR
VIOLATING THE CLEAN AIR ACT**

The Defendant Fraudulently Coded over 15,000 Vehicles to Avoid Emissions Inspections

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Today, U.S. District Judge Frank D. Whitney sentenced Jamal Saymeh, 59, of Charlotte, N.C., to 12 months and one day in prison followed by two years of supervised release for violating the Clean Air Act, by fraudulently coding over 15,000 vehicles that would have otherwise failed the required State emissions inspection, announced Dena J. King, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina. Judge Whitney also ordered Saymeh to pay a \$1,202,288.50 fine and \$82,026 in restitution to the State of North Carolina.

Michael Sparks, Special Agent in Charge of the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General (EPA-OIG), Charles Carfagno, Special Agent in Charge of the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division (EPA-CID), and Colonel Michael Oates of the North Carolina Department of Transportation License and Theft Bureau (NCDOT) join U.S. Attorney King in making today's announcement.

Saymeh is the owner and operator of Friendly Auto Repair (FAR) shop, located in Charlotte. In addition to auto repairs, in 2017, FAR became licensed by the North Carolina Department of Transportation to perform emissions inspections. According to filed documents and court proceedings, between 2017 and 2022, Saymeh used his business to execute a scheme to violate the Clean Air Act by falsely changing the information of vehicles that would have otherwise failed the required State emissions testing, so that they were no longer required by the State's registration system to have a passing emissions test.

According to court records, in some instances Saymeh executed the scheme by doing "county swaps," meaning by falsifying in the system the county of registration for 11,568 vehicles from a county that required an emissions test to a county where no emissions testing was required. In other instances, Saymeh changed in the system the characterization of 3,622 trucks, from light duty trucks that require emissions inspections to heavy duty trucks that do not require such testing. During the relevant time period, court documents show that Saymeh falsified the information for at least 15,190 vehicles that would have otherwise failed their State emissions inspections.

In exchange for falsifying vehicle information, Saymeh received cash payments from customers that far exceeded what customers would have paid to have an emissions inspection. In addition,

Saymeh paid the State of North Carolina only \$0.85 per non-emissions/safety inspection, instead of the \$6.25 per vehicle charge he should have paid for an inspection.

“Vehicle emissions testing is required to protect the health and safety of our communities,” said U.S. Attorney King. “As part of my Office’s [Environmental Justice Initiative](#), we will hold polluters accountable for their actions and protect communities harmed by environmental violations.”

“Today, Jamal Saymeh faced the consequences of knowingly and intentionally making false material statements affecting an EPA program,” said Special Agent in Charge Sparks.

“Fraudulent activities like these harm our fellow Americans and diminish the public’s trust in EPA programs and operations. The EPA Office of Inspector General will continue to diligently protect both.”

“Mr. Saymeh was sentenced today for conspiring to violate the Clean Air Act and for fraudulent vehicle emissions testing,” said Special Agent in Charge Carfagno. “The defendant’s criminal activity intentionally increased air pollution in communities where these vehicles operate further exacerbating respiratory illnesses and environmental degradation. Today’s sentence serves as a reminder that EPA and our partners are steadfast in our commitment to protect human health and the environment.”

On December 14, 2022, Saymeh pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to defraud the Clean Air Act, and two counts of violating the Clean Air Act. Saymeh will be ordered to report to the federal Bureau of Prisons upon designation of a federal facility.

In making today’s announcement, U.S. Attorney King thanked the EPA-OIG, EPA-CID, and NC DOT for their coordination and investigation of the case.

Assistant United States Attorney Steven Kaufman, of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Charlotte, prosecuted the case.

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United States v. Saymeh, 3:22-cr-284-FDW