



**Minnesota  
Pollution  
Control  
Agency**

Metro District,  
Operations &  
Planning

# Vehicle Tampering

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Emissions from the millions of vehicles on the road have combined to make the automobile the single greatest air polluter in many cities across the country. Motor vehicle emissions account for nearly two-thirds of the carbon monoxide (CO), one-third of the hydrocarbons (HC) and almost one-half of the nitrogen oxides (NOx) in our nation's air.

Equipment to reduce these levels of harmful automobile emissions are included on most 1975 or newer vehicles. To protect our health, the Clean Air Act does not allow individuals to remove or alter this pollution-control equipment.

## What exactly is tampering?

Tampering is when someone removes, disconnects, alters, damages or in any way renders ineffective any pollution-control device installed on a motor vehicle engine.

For example, a tampered vehicle may:

- Be missing such devices as a properly operating catalytic converter, air pump or exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) valves;
- Contain an emission control design that is different from the vehicle manufacturer's specifications;
- Have disconnected vacuum lines;
- Contain a knowingly-installed replacement part not equivalent in design and function to the original

part. (This doesn't mean you have to use replacement parts sold by the vehicle manufacturer or its franchised dealer.); or

- Have a part not originally certified for the vehicle (for example, dual carburetors are installed to replace a single carburetor).

## What does the law say about tampering?

The 1990 amendments to the federal Clean Air Act do not allow anyone to tamper with a vehicle's emission controls unless the individual is making necessary changes or repairs (Section 203 (a) (3) A and B). In addition, most of the 50 states have similar prohibitions about automotive tampering.

Minnesota State Statute 325E.0951 requires that anyone selling a vehicle in the state must certify, in writing, that the vehicle has all its proper pollution control equipment. The law parallels Minnesota Rule 7023.0120 that prohibits the transfer of a vehicle title unless the emission controls are in place and working properly.

Because new owners become responsible for recently-purchased vehicles if they are discovered to be missing pollution control equipment, vehicle buyers should inspect their purchases thoroughly.



## Why do people tamper with vehicles?

Some people still believe that tampering with a car's emission controls will improve the vehicle's performance. Others simply don't realize the importance of repairing or replacing pollution control devices.

Here are some other commonly-held myths about automotive tampering.

*Myth: Adjusting my car to something other than the manufacturer's specifications will improve its gas mileage.*

**Fact:** Changing the manufacturer's recommended settings for the engine may actually reduce fuel efficiency. Today's automakers design cars to meet the best possible balance between performance, mileage and low emissions. Tuning your car to the manufacturer's specifications will maximize the engine's performance and save fuel.

*Myth: Using leaded gasoline in a car designed for unleaded gas will not damage its pollution-control equipment.*

**Fact:** Leaded gasoline dirties the oil, reduces spark plug life, corrodes the exhaust system and destroys the catalytic converter, an important pollution-control device. In addition, studies show that disabling the catalytic converter can reduce engine power and fuel economy while increasing harmful emissions by more than 800 percent.

*Myth: Pollution controls on cars don't work and have little effect on improving air quality.*

**Fact:** Vehicles with proper emission controls are largely responsible for reducing smog, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide pollutants in urban areas. Vehicles with proper emission-control devices can reduce their emissions by 90 percent.

*Myth: Tampering would not affect my car's warranty.*

**Fact:** Under the Clean Air Act, car manufacturers are required to provide a warranty covering emission control-devices for five years or 50,000 miles, whichever comes first. However, when a car's emission controls have been tampered with or leaded gasoline used improperly, the manufacturer may suggest the car has not been properly maintained and refuse to honor the vehicle's warranty.

*Myth: There is no punishment for tampering with my car's emission control devices.*

**Fact:** Federal and state laws do not allow tampering with emission-control equipment. Violation of these laws could result in stiff fines and/or imprisonment.

## How can car owners help protect our air?

Emission control devices installed on motor vehicles and engines are there to protect your health by reducing air pollution. You can help this equipment keep our air clean by following these general guidelines.

- When buying a used vehicle, ask the seller to demonstrate that all the pollution control equipment is present and working.
- Keep your vehicle's emission controls intact and operating effectively.
- Never deviate from the manufacturer's specifications for your car's engine. (If you do not know what the proper specifications are, consult a reputable automotive technician or an authorized manufacturer's representative.)
- Help your vehicle's pollution-control equipment remain effective by following a regular maintenance and repair schedule.

## Where Can I Call to Find Out More?

MPCA: St. Paul	(651) 296-6300 toll-free/TDD (800) 657-3864
Brainerd	(218) 828-2492
Detroit Lakes	(218) 847-1519
Duluth	(218) 723-4660
Marshall	(507) 537-7146
Rochester	(507) 285-7343