

Smoking Vehicles

What's wrong with vehicle smoke?

A smoking vehicle contributes 10 to 15 times more pollutants than a properly maintained one. You don't want to breathe vehicle smoke, because you are exposed to toxic air pollutants including benzene and particulates that can have serious health impacts. This exhaust also gets into the air inside your vehicle and exposes you and your passengers to highly concentrated levels of toxic air pollutants. Vehicle smoke contains:

- **Nitrogen Oxides** contribute to ground-level ozone (smog) which can reduce lung function, inflame lung tissue, and lead to permanent lung damage.
- **Benzene** can cause respiratory damage and increase the risk of cancer.
- **Fine Particulates** can lodge deep in the lungs and lead to serious respiratory disorders and worsen existing heart and lung disease.

Why else should I care?

A poorly maintained vehicle gets poor gas mileage so you spend more for gas. Properly maintaining your vehicle will also prevent more costly repairs in the future.

Are older vehicles and diesels supposed to smoke?

No. If tailpipe smoke from any gasoline powered vehicle is visible while in operation on public streets or highways that vehicle is in violation of

Oregon law and needs repair.

Diesel vehicles should not be expected to smoke, except during hard acceleration and by law cannot display visible smoke on public streets or highways for longer than 7 seconds. It is normal to see smoke during the first few seconds after starting your diesel engine. Water vapor is also common during cold and wet months.

What do I do if I see a smoking vehicle?

Fill out a report online: [Make an Environmental Complaint to DEQ](#) or, report a smoking vehicle by calling **888-997-7888**. Please have the following information available:

- 1) License plate #
- 2) Make and model (or description) of vehicle
- 3) Location of vehicle (where traveling)
- 4) Date and time you saw the vehicle
- 5) Description of the smoke

What happens to drivers caught operating a smoking vehicle?

If a vehicle smokes, any city, county or state police office can issue the driver a citation. If a smoking vehicle is reported by a witness to DEQ the owner of the vehicle may be sent a warning letter that details the rules and penalties for operating a smoking vehicle. The owner is given 30 days to contact DEQ and describe actions taken to correct the problem.



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Air Quality
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www.oregon.gov/DEQ/

Common Causes of Vehicle Smoke

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Gasoline Engines		
Color of Smoke	Diagnosis	Probable Causes
White*	Coolant or water leaking into combustion chamber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad head gasket • Cracked block or cylinder head
Blue	Engine oil being burned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil leaking into combustion chamber • Worn piston rings, valves or cylinders • Faulty exhaust manifold • Worn head gasket
Black or Gray	Incomplete fuel combustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clogged air filter • Carburetor, choke fuel injection, or emission system malfunction • Ignition timing off • Low compression due to engine wear
Diesel Engines		
White*	Improper air/fuel mixture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faulty fuel injection system • Incorrect fuel injection and valve timing • Engine overheating • Faulty fuel pump and/or injection pump
Blue	Engine oil being burned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excess engine oil • Worn piston rings, valves or cylinders
Black or Gray	Incomplete fuel combustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damaged or clogged air filter • Faulty fuel injection system • Wrong grade of fuel • Incorrect fuel injection pump timing • Engine overheating • Low compression ratio

***Please note:** Water vapor (from condensation) is commonly mistaken for vehicle smoke during the winter season. Water vapor is not considered vehicle smoke and is normal for vehicles to emit.

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