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Clean Air Program in Gear to Remove Polluting Cars from Texas Roads

AirCheckTexas Drive a Clean Machine Program Provides up to \$3,500 for Texans Willing to Partner with State in Effort to Meet Federal Air Quality Deadlines

The much-anticipated AirCheckTexas Drive a Clean Machine program is underway, as State Senator Kip Averitt (R-Waco), officials from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and stakeholders are scheduled to make appearances today in Austin, Dallas-Ft. Worth and Houston to officially kick off the program.

The Drive a Clean Machine program provides qualifying owners of older, high-polluting vehicles with vouchers worth up to \$3,500 toward the purchase of qualifying new, cleaner-running vehicles. Clean air is a major source of concern for all Texans, and mobile emissions produced by old cars are the primary source of NOx (the pollutant we must reduce to meet federal ozone standards) in our state's non-attainment areas.

To qualify for the program, an applicant's vehicle must be 10 years old or older, or have failed state emissions tests.

"Today's cars and trucks are significantly cleaner-running than their predecessors, up to 98 percent cleaner than those produced just 10 years ago," said State Sen. Kip Averitt, who wrote the bill that authorized the program. "The Drive a Clean Machine program will partner with Texans willing to purchase a new car and get these old polluters off the road, providing a good return on taxpayers' investment."

"Mobile emissions are perhaps the most challenging part of the state's air quality puzzle," said TCEQ Chairman Buddy Garcia. "Removing these old cars and replacing them with cleaner vehicles is arguably one of the most effective ways to significantly improve our air quality."

To qualify, vehicles must be registered in one of the 16 counties in nonattainment or near-nonattainment for federal ozone standards.

"Over 20 percent of the vehicles in these counties are 10 years old or older," said TCEQ Commissioner Larry R. Soward. "For those Texans that qualify for the program, it can help them to drive a newer, more reliable car and do something positive about cleaning up the air at the same time."

"Texas has once again proven to be a leader in identifying ways to reduce emissions as an incentive rather than as an onerous mandate," said TCEQ Commissioner Bryan Shaw. "Having a mechanism that will allow the state to remove sources of pollution that are preempted from state regulation will further ensure the success of our efforts to improve our air quality."

The Drive a Clean Machine program will provide the following incentives to qualifying families willing to purchase a new vehicle:

- \$3,000 for a car, current model year or up to three model years old.
- \$3,000 for a truck, current model year or up to two model years old.
- \$3,500 for a hybrid vehicle, current or previous model year.

To qualify, a household must make less than 300% of the federal poverty level. For example, a family of four with an annual net income up to \$61,950 would meet the income guidelines.

Vehicles that are turned in under the program will have their engines and emissions systems destroyed, so the cars cannot be sold again anywhere or return to the road to pollute Texas air.

The program will be administered by the North Central Texas Council of Governments in the Dallas-Fort Worth area; the Houston-Galveston Area Council in the Houston area; and Williamson and Travis counties in the Austin area. Those interested in using the program will apply for vouchers through these organizations, and qualified applicants will be awarded vouchers from these organizations.

Vehicles purchased must be on a list of qualifying vehicles and cost less than \$25,000. They must weigh less than 10,000 lbs, be at least 10 years old and/or have failed an emissions test. The vehicles must be purchased at participating car dealers. For a list of dealers, and for other qualifications and for more information go to www.driveacleanmachine.org or call 800-913-3321, or contact the administrating organization for your county.

The 16 participating counties in nonattainment or near-nonattainment for federal ozone standards are Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall and Tarrant counties in the Dallas-Fort Worth Area; Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris and Montgomery counties in the Houston area; and Travis and Williamson counties in the Austin area.