

Compulsory Vehicle Inspections Producing Good Results

Little children leap up and down in glee and their parents smile when they see it. This source of pleasure for Chicago residents is a multi-colored "scoreboard" that flashes results of the recently-introduced compulsory emissions tests in the second largest U.S. city.

The scoreboard with its green and red lights that tells motorists they "Pass" or "Fail" their emissions probes may be a showman's touch to the serious program.

But when it flashes green for a car that has just completed the test, the car owner seems to feel genuine joy and a sense of satisfaction that his or her car is not part of Chicago's air pollution problem.

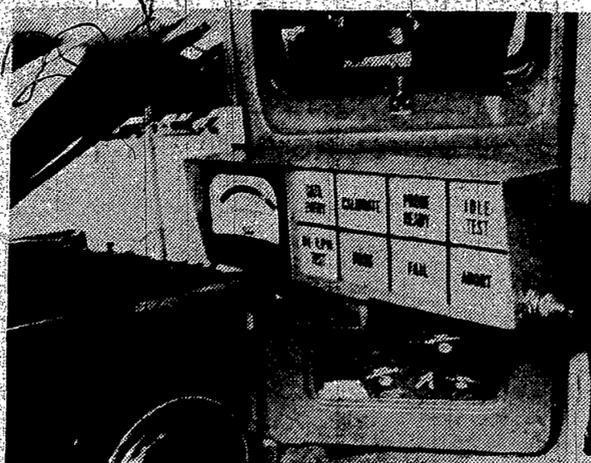
One Third Fail

The emissions inspection program was begun in Chicago in June of 1973. Since then tens of thousands of cars have been probed to see if they meet hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide limits established by the city.

To date, about two out of every three cars have been able to meet the standards. The one-third who have failed have been told the probable causes of their problems and asked to return for a retest after the necessary engine adjustments have been made.

The test itself is short and simple for the motorist. He drives to one of 18 check lanes situated in various parts of Chicago. The car is hooked up to a test equipment van, with an infra-red emissions probe inserted in the tail pipe and a lead attached to the ignition system. Information about the car is fed into a computer and emission readings are taken at two speeds—one at normal idle and a second at fast idle.

It is the computer and test machines, rather than the operator, that determines pass or fail. Since allowable limits differ for



All eyes are on the "scoreboard" that flashes results of the mandatory emissions test all Chicago cars must undergo. Since introduced in June 1973, tests have been held for tens of thousands of Chicago car-owners. About two of every three owners get the green "pass" light and one-third the red "fail" light. The "abort" light is for a small percentage of vehicles that cannot be tested due to major engine malfunctions or unadaptability to the testing equipment.

age of car and for private or commercial vehicles, the computer instantly compares the emissions of the car being tested and what permissible levels are. Results are simultaneously printed out for the car owner and flashed on the

"scoreboard" for him to see. Cars that pass are adorned with a blue and white sticker which is valid for 12 months.

One Major Problem

Despite the fact that the emissions checks are mandatory, helpful to the en-

vironment, fairly fast and painless, the Chicago inspection program has one major problem. Not enough cars are being brought in to utilize the capacity of the check lanes.

According to program director Joe Seliber, "We try

to remind motorists time is of the essence. While the law states a deadline for compliance, we urge motorists to have inspections done well before that deadline when facilities aren't crowded."

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