

Press release

124,000 premature deaths in EU and UK so far linked to illegally high Dieselgate emissions, new report reveals

HELSINKI/LONDON, 28 May 2025 - Almost 10 years after the original Dieselgate scandal, a new [report](#) paints the most comprehensive picture yet of the alarming health and economic impacts of illegally high emissions likely linked to the use of prohibited defeat devices [1].

The report, which was published by the [Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air \(CREA\)](#) and commissioned by environmental law organisation [ClientEarth](#), looks at suspiciously high nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions that are well above the legal limits [2] and evaluates the impacts of such emissions on public health and the economy across the UK and EU.

The report was based on remote sensing data collated by the [TRUE initiative](#) and the [International Council on Clean Transportation \(ICCT\)](#), the organisation that broke the original Dieselgate scandal. The emissions covered are from a wide range of manufacturers from across the auto-industry.

In the EU and UK between 2009 and 2024, the report found these emissions have caused an estimated:

- 124,000 premature deaths
- 98,000 new cases of asthma in children
- 25,000 years lived with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- 15,000,000 days of sick leave

The associated economic burden of these health impacts equals EUR 760 billion.

If no measures are taken to remove prohibited defeat devices, the report estimates an additional 81,000 premature deaths and EUR 430 billion in economic impacts, between 2025 and 2040.

Dr Jamie Kelly of the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air and lead author of the study said, *'our calculations reveal the widespread and devastating health impacts of excessive diesel emissions – thousands of lives cut short, countless children developing asthma, and an immense burden of chronic illness. This is a crisis with a long and lingering legacy. Without action, these impacts will stretch far into the future, affecting generations to come. It's not too late to act. Governments have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to break this cycle.'*

On Monday, 26 May, a [German court convicted four former Volkswagen managers](#) of fraud and gave two of them prison sentences for their part in the Dieseldgate scandal, which was first exposed in 2015.

Since the original scandal was exposed in 2015, a wealth of evidence has emerged indicating that the use of defeat device technology is an [industry-wide problem](#). Despite this, little has been done by authorities in the EU and UK to address the problem and require manufacturers to provide effective solutions. Instead, individual consumers have been left to fight for financial compensation from manufacturers through the courts – leaving these excessively polluting vehicles on our roads.

Under EU law, national authorities and the European Commission have to actively investigate the issue and force manufacturers to act where the use of illegal defeat devices is found. Similar duties apply in UK law. In addition, the European Commission also has coordination duties to help ensure a ripple effect of action across the EU if illegal activity is established. The rules are clear that vehicle owners should not be left to pay for the costs of any recalls.

ClientEarth lawyer Emily Kearsey said, ‘auto manufacturers have been trying to sweep the Dieseldgate scandal under the carpet for too long. It’s been nearly a decade – governments must stop stalling and hold polluters accountable now. The EU Commission also has a key role to play to ensure joined up action. If any recalls take place, the law makes it clear that it’s up to manufacturers to foot the bill.’

In 2023, [ClientEarth](#) and national NGOs sent legal complaints to the French, German and UK governments over their failure to tackle the epidemic of illegal defeat devices.

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Notes to editors

[1] Defeat devices affect the operation of an engine’s emissions control system – switching it off or reducing its effectiveness in certain conditions. This means that in the real world, vehicles with defeat devices can emit levels of pollution well over regulatory limits, resulting in excessive, illegally high emissions. The use of defeat devices is prohibited under EU and UK law, subject to a very limited number of narrow exceptions.

[2] ‘Suspiciously high emissions’, referred to as ‘excess emissions’ in the report, are emissions measured in real-world conditions by remote sensing technology that are considered suspiciously high and likely linked to the use of prohibited defeat devices. The threshold for such emissions is set at 2.1 times above the legal emissions limit. This is a conservative methodology and reflects the margin of tolerance that was initially allowed when Real Driving Emission (RDE) testing was introduced in 2017. It is also based on [analysis](#) by the International Council on Clean Transportation.

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Note to editors

The publication related to this press release can be found [here](#).

All CREA publications can be found here:

energyandcleanair.org/publications

About CREA

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts, as well as the solutions, to air pollution. CREA was founded in December 2019 in Helsinki and has staff in several Asian and European countries. The organisation's work is funded through philanthropic grants and revenue from commissioned research.

www.energyandcleanair.org

About Client Earth

ClientEarth is a non-profit organisation that uses the law to create systemic change that protects the Earth for – and with – its inhabitants. We are tackling climate change, protecting nature and stopping pollution, with partners and citizens around the globe. We hold industry and governments to account, and defend everyone's right to a healthy world. From our offices in Europe, Asia and the USA we shape, implement and enforce the law, to build a future for our planet in which people and nature can thrive together.