



NW Automotive Trades Assn.

February 9, 2012

Testimony AGAINST House Bill 4112

Before the House Committee on Energy, Environment and Water ■ February 9, 2012

By Jim Houser, Hawthorne Auto Clinic, Portland, Oregon

Such a change at this time to Oregon's Vehicle Inspection Program would be harmful to Portland and Medford air quality, harmful to small automotive-related businesses performing emission failure repairs, and harmful to the employees of our Vehicle Inspection Program. Let's keep Oregon's V.I.P. uniquely Oregon.

Co-Chairs Jules Bailey and Vic Gilliam and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Houser. My business is Hawthorne Auto Clinic, Inc, 4307 SE Hawthorne Blvd, Portland, OR 97215. I am here today representing my business and the 500 members of Northwest Automotive Trades Association, of which I am a member in good standing. My wife, Liz Dally, and I started Hawthorne Auto Clinic, a full-service mechanical repair shop, 29 years ago, in SE Portland. Hawthorne Auto Clinic is both a DEQ Recognized Repair Facility and a Washington DOE Certified Automotive Repair Facility, so I have extensive experience with both emission test models.

First, I would like to emphasize cars and trucks still account for a significant proportion of our air pollution problems. In Oregon, more cars are daily being driven more miles and, probably most important; people are keeping their cars longer. That simple statistic means more emission control components will fail, increasing the likelihood of even greater air pollution problems. If vehicle emissions can't be contained, then the necessary pollution reductions will fall on our manufacturing sector.

Yes, modern cars and trucks are cleaner than in years past, if their emission control components are functioning properly. But there are more of those components, and they do fail, frequently. As an ASE Master Automobile Technician I regularly witness, firsthand, through the use of our own emission testing equipment, the beneficial effect to both air quality and fuel economy of having offending vehicles returned to peak efficiency

Most of our emission failure-related work is performed before the car or truck is due for DEQ testing. Nearly everyone now knows if your "check engine" light (CEL) is on, you won't pass the test, so many consumers with the CEL on make an appointment when their license renewal notice arrives from

Oregon DMV. It is clear to me that many motorists would never have arrived at our doorstep to correct their pollution problem if not for the emission test requirement.

If the Legislature is considering abandoning the Oregon way of conducting vehicle emission testing, I would like to point out what we Oregonians currently enjoy that is unique and what we will be missing if we abandon our own way of doing things.

The Oregon DEQ VIP (Vehicle Inspection Program), really an inspection and maintenance program, is unique among the many emission inspection programs around the country. VIP does not charge consumers for the inspection, only for the compliance certificate. For the many consumers who don't have a new car dealership or other professional shop perform an emission repair, who want or need to perform their own repairs, this feature of the VIP is a huge benefit. In Oregon a motorist can return for a re-test until the emission failure is repaired. In Washington motorists pay before the test is performed. If they fail they get one free retest, but only if they have the repair work done at a DOE Authorized shop or dealership. Otherwise, they pay for each test until the car is fixed.

Oregon VIP tests more older cars than Washington does. Many of these old cars and trucks will potentially have much higher emissions than more modern cars.

In my experience the VIP test center staff are helpful and professional. If one of our customers loses or forgets their failure report, the test center staff is always willing to fax a copy. If we have a problem vehicle to test, VIP staff are always willing to accommodate extra trips through the test lane. If Oregon gives up the test centers to a Washington model, the VIP will have to relinquish responsibility for employee training and discipline and for the customer service shop owners and consumers have come to expect.

Washington is considering abandoning vehicle emission testing altogether. If Oregon follows the Washington model, not only will our air quality suffer, but all of our small auto repair businesses who employ auto repair techs who keep Oregon's fleet running cleanly and efficiently, will suffer.

The EPA is currently preparing to release new air quality standards. A vehicle emission testing program has the greatest chance of success if it is flexible and perceived by the public to be a responsive and dynamic program. It will need to have the ability to adapt to new technologies, new air quality standards mandated by EPA, problems discovered by vehicles manufacturers, and changing consumer expectations. Since 1975 DEQ has been able to successfully manage all of these challenges. An Oregon DEQ-run program has the greatest chance of success with the best short and long-term benefits for Portland (and Medford's) air quality and the motoring public's consumer satisfaction.

Finally, I will share a comment from one of my emission repair techs at our shop staff meeting yesterday when I asked for opinions about the possibility of giving up the Oregon vehicle emission test model. He said, "Why would anyone want to shoot a running horse?" His sentiment mirrors my own.

Thank you.