



NW Automotive Trades Assn.

April 15, 2013

Testimony AGAINST House Bill 3443-2

Before the House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development April 15, 2013

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."

Chair Tobias Read and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Houser, 3340 SE 10th Ave, Portland, OR 97202

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 the 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, 30 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 some 80% of our air pollution problem. 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.

The Oregon DEQ VIP (Vehicle Inspection Program), really an inspection and maintenance program, is designed to encourage motorists to maintain their vehicles. Most of our emission failure related work is performed shortly 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 arrive at our doorstep,

with the CEL on, clutching their DMV renewal notice, begging us to “turn off the light” so they can pass the “DEQ test”. As we can attest, the VIP program is working as designed.

Our experience tells us that, if vehicle emission testing isn't required during the first 8 years of vehicle ownership, many Portland and Medford area cars and trucks will be driven with failed emission components. A further consideration is, that by the time these vehicles finally do come in for emission related repairs, they will likely have exceeded the manufacturers emission warranty and the consumer will be stuck with the (almost always) expensive repair bill.

My second problem with HB 3443-2 is that it requires DEQ to revise its ozone plans before EPA has decided on a new ozone standard. HB 3443-2 requires DEQ to submit revised plans on July 1, 2014. EPA has announced that it would propose a new standard in December, 2013 and finalize the standard in September, 2014, after DEQ already submitted a plan.

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 recently when I asked for opinions about the possibility of big changes in the Oregon vehicle emission test model. He said, “Why would anyone want to shoot a running horse?” His sentiment mirrors my own. Such a change at this time would be harmful to Portland and Medford air quality, harmful to small businesses performing emission failure repairs, and harmful to Oregon's motoring public. Let's keep Oregon's Vehicle Inspection Program uniquely Oregon.

Thank you.