

# VW's US CEO to face tough questions in congressional hearing

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Volkswagen's top U.S. executive is expected to face tough questions on Capitol Hill as the emissions-rigging scandal enveloping the world's largest automaker appears to be deepening.

Volkswagen of America CEO Michael Horn is scheduled to testify Thursday before a U.S. House subcommittee investigating last month's admission the company had installed on-board computer software designed to cheat on government emissions tests in nearly 500,000 of its four-cylinder "clean diesel" cars starting with the 2009 model year.

An advance copy of Horn's prepared remarks provided to the committee Wednesday revealed VW's plans to withdraw applications seeking U.S. emissions certifications for its 2016 model Jettas, Golfs, Passats and Beetles with diesel engines. That raised questions about whether a so-called "defeat device" similar to that in earlier models is also in the new cars.

By withdrawing the applications for the 2016 models, VW is leaving thousands of diesel vehicles stranded at ports nationwide, giving dealers no new diesel-powered vehicles to sell. It wasn't immediately clear when VW would refile its application, but Horn's testimony said the company is working with regulators to get certification.

It was also unclear late Wednesday exactly what the newly disclosed device does. EPA spokeswoman Liz Purchia said VW recently gave the agency information on an "auxiliary emissions control device." The EPA

and California Air Resources Board are investigating "the nature and purpose" of the device, she said.

A Volkswagen spokesman in the U.S. said he didn't know what the device did, but the company said that such devices sense engine performance, road speed "and any other parameter for activating, modulating, delaying or deactivating" emissions controls.

The lack of certification is bad news for American VW dealers, who were hoping to put the new models on sale soon. For some dealerships, the diesel models accounted for about a third of sales.

Tom Backer, general manager of Lash Volkswagen in White Plains, N.Y., said Wednesday his dealership had already lost three deals with potential buyers because he couldn't get the new cars.

"It's not good," said Backer, who said he typically sells only a small number of diesels. "It's definitely a stain on the brand's image."

Thursday's appearance will be the first on Capitol Hill by Horn, a 51-year-old German and veteran VW manager who took the reins of the brand's American subsidiary last year. He is expected to face blistering questions about when top executives at the company first learned of the scheme.

Horn will tell Congress he only learned about the cheating software "over the past several weeks," VW spokeswoman Jeannine Ginivan told The Associated Press Wednesday.

He will also echo prior statements by the company's global chief executive apologizing for the cheating.

"These events are deeply troubling," Horn will say, according to his

prepared remarks. "I did not think that something like this was possible at the Volkswagen Group. We have broken the trust of our customers, dealerships, and employees, as well as the public and regulators."

Also scheduled to testify Thursday are two officials at the EPA who oversee emissions testing and compliance with clean air rules.

VW first confessed the deception to U.S. regulators on Sept. 3, more than a year after researchers at West Virginia University published a study showing the real-world emissions of the company's Jetta and Passat models were far higher than allowed. The same cars had met emissions standards when tested in the lab.

VW was able to fool the EPA because the agency only tested the cars on treadmill-like devices called dynamometers and didn't use portable test equipment on real roads. The software in the cars' engine-control computers determined when dynamometer tests were under way. It then turned on pollution controls that reduced the output of nitrogen oxides that contribute to smog and other pollution, the EPA has said.

Only when the EPA and California regulators refused to approve VW's 2016 diesel models for sale did the company admit earlier what it had done.

Though VW and U.S. regulators have not yet announced a fix for illegal emissions under a nationwide recall, Horn will say the company is "determined to make things right."

"This includes accepting the consequences of our acts, providing a remedy, and beginning to restore the trust of our customers, dealerships, employees, the regulators, and the American public," Horn will say, according to his written testimony.

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