

Daimler to recall 3 million vehicles to ease diesel doubts

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In this Feb. 5, 2015 file photo the logo of a Mercedes car is photographed during an annual press conference of Daimler AG in Stuttgart, Germany. German automaker Daimler says Tuesday, July 18, 2017 it is voluntarily recalling 3 million diesel cars in Europe to improve their emissions performance. The Stuttgart-based company, which makes Mercedes-Benz luxury cars, says it is taking the step to reassure drivers and strengthen confidence in diesel technology. (AP Photo/Michael Probst, File)

German automaker Daimler will voluntarily recall 3 million Mercedes-Benz brand cars with diesel engines in Europe to improve their emissions performance, the company said Tuesday, in the wake of widespread public debate over the future of diesel.

The Stuttgart-based company said it was taking the step to reassure drivers and strengthen confidence in the technology.

Diesels have been under a cloud since Daimler's competitor Volkswagen admitted equipping vehicles with illegal software that meant they passed emissions tests, but then exceeded limits in everyday driving. There has been a push for diesel bans in some German cities because of concerns about levels of nitrogen oxide emitted by diesels.

"The public debate about diesel engines is creating uncertainty—especially for our customers," Daimler CEO Dieter Zetsche said.

He said in a statement that "we have therefore decided on additional measures to reassure drivers of diesel cars and to strengthen confidence in diesel technology,"

The recall will cover nearly all vehicles made under the EU5 and EU6 emissions standards and will start in the next few weeks. The company said it would cost 220 million euros (\$254.21 million), but that customers wouldn't pay anything.

The recall expands a smaller, ongoing recall offered to owners of compact-class and Mercedes-Benz V-Class vehicles. It said the fix would involve a software update and would draw on knowledge gained through the development of the company's new family of diesel engines.

Daimler said in May that German investigators had searched its offices

in connection with investigations of Daimler employees because of suspicion of fraud and criminal advertising relating to the possible manipulation of exhaust controls in cars with diesel engines. The company has said it is cooperating with the investigation.

The company was also asked by the U.S. Justice Department to conduct an internal probe into its exhaust emissions certification process. Company spokesman Joerg Howe said Tuesday that he couldn't offer additional information about the two matters.

The Daimler announcement comes hours after the regional government in the company's home region of Baden-Wuerttemberg agreed to abandon proposals to restrict diesels if older diesels could be fixed to pollute less, the dpa news agency reported.

The current debate over diesel was launched in September 2015 when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice of violation against Volkswagen. VW has said it used illegal engine-control software that detected when cars were on test stands. Emission controls were turned up during testing and turned down during regular driving.

About 11 million cars worldwide were equipped with the software. The company pleaded guilty in the U.S. to criminal charges, eight executives were charged, and it agreed to pay more than \$20 billion in criminal penalties and civil settlements.

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