

German court orders diesel bans in Cologne, Bonn

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A number of German cities have been slapped with orders to cut emissions

A German court Thursday ordered Cologne and Bonn to join a slew of cities in banning older diesels from its roads to combat air pollution, as the government struggled to reach a deal with carmakers on cleaning up

the cars.

The Cologne administrative court said Cologne must ban the dirtiest diesels from its centre and other streets from April 2019 to tackle dangerously high levels of [nitrogen dioxide](#) (NO₂) emissions.

In the smaller city of Bonn, the restrictions would apply to two streets.

The ruling, which can be appealed, is the latest victory for German environmental group DUH which has launched a raft of court cases to force local authorities to boost air quality.

Major urban areas including Stuttgart, Frankfurt and the capital Berlin have already been slapped with legal orders to cut emissions, while Hamburg decided of its own accord to expel the worst polluters from some zones.

Faced with mounting public anger, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government is scrambling to ward off the unpopular driving bans that promise to not only cause transport upheaval but further hammer the resale value of diesels.

Diesel engines have come under intense scrutiny since Volkswagen admitted in 2015 to installing cheating software in millions of cars to dupe emissions tests.

The scam made the cars seem far less polluting in labs than they were on the road, and suspicions of similar trickery have since spread to other carmakers as well.

But the country's mighty car giants have been stubborn in their refusal to foot the bill for cleaning up diesels in order to bring them into compliance with EU law.

The government wants automakers like Daimler, VW and BMW to pay for hardware fixes to retrofit older diesels with more effective exhaust treatment systems.

But carmakers have so far responded mainly by offering software upgrades for newer diesels and trade-in bonuses—which would still leave drivers shelling out thousands for new cars.

Merkel is also backing a proposed law that would exempt cities from [diesel](#) bans when only "minor" infractions against legal pollution limits have been registered.

A total of 65 German cities last year recorded NO₂ levels that surpassed European norms of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre of air.

In Cologne, the level spiked to 62 microgrammes while Bonn peaked at 47.

Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) including NO₂ are estimated to cause thousands of premature deaths in Germany each year.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the gases aggravate asthma and bronchitis symptoms and are linked to cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

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