

# Germany tweaks law to limit diesel car bans

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The German government is to ease air pollution laws aimed at curbing diesel vehicle use in urban areas

The German government will ease air pollution law so as to spare cities that only slightly exceed limits on harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) from diesel vehicle bans, ministers agreed Thursday, sparking sharp criticism by environmentalists.

Major cities like Hamburg, Frankfurt and Stuttgart have put in place or are preparing exclusion zones for older diesel vehicles in order to bring NO<sub>2</sub> levels under the EU-wide annual average limit of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre, with more towns on the way.

Judges have ordered some of the bans, while politicians in other urban areas moved to preempt the courts.

Underscoring the pressure on the [government](#), a court in North Rhine-Westphalia state ruled Thursday that stretches of a major motorway in Essen must be closed to older diesels.

Such measures have outraged diesel drivers, who complain that affected vehicles are set to lose a massive chunk of their resale value as a result.

The car industry—the heart of the German economy and politically well-connected—has escaped at home the tens of billions in fines it has had to pay out in the United States over [diesel](#) emissions cheating.

It has also avoided any binding obligation to refit older cars to meet the latest emissions norms.

In measures still to be approved by parliament, Berlin wants to soften the threshold for implementing a ban from 40 to 50 microgrammes per cubic metre.

Ministers also want to allay fears among owners in the most-polluted cities still subject to bans.

They will further alter the law to allow cars meeting the older Euro 4 and 5 standards and emitting less than 270 milligrammes of NO<sub>2</sub> per kilometre to enter the zones.

"The government is obviously in panic mode. Otherwise there would be no explanation for its rushing through an update to the law that infringes in several ways EU law," said Juergen Resch, head of environmental pressure group DUH.

"We will secure the right for clean air in all cities in 2019, the courts will ignore the weakening of the thresholds," he added.

DUH plans to sue the federal government for breaking EU law if it presses ahead with the changes.

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