

VW employee chief urges US to consider fallout of fines

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Bernd Osterloh, center, chairman of the Volkswagen general workers council, talks to Volkswagen AG CEO Matthias Mueller, right, during an employee meeting at the plant of the German car manufacturer in Wolfsburg, Germany, Tuesday March 8, 2016. (Julian Stratenschulte/dpa via AP)

penalty of a so-far unique size, this will also have dramatic social consequences—not just at our U.S. locations, but also in Europe and elsewhere," the company's influential employee council chief, Bernd Osterloh, told a workers' assembly at VW's Wolfsburg headquarters.

"We very much hope that U.S. authorities also ultimately have this social and employment dimension in view," he added, news agency dpa reported.

News of the scandal broke on Sept. 18 when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Volkswagen had installed software on 482,000 cars that enabled them to cheat on emissions tests. Four days later, Volkswagen said about 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide were fitted with the software.

The head of Volkswagen's employee council said Tuesday he hopes that American authorities will consider the potential fallout on jobs in the U.S. and beyond as they mull what fines to impose on the company over its emissions-rigging scandal.

The cost to Volkswagen of the scandal that erupted in September remains unclear. In January, the U.S. Justice Department sued it over the emissions-cheating software found in hundreds of thousands of vehicles sold in the country, potentially exposing VW to more than \$20 billion in penalties for clean air violations.

The company and its executives could also still face separate criminal charges, while a raft of private class-action lawsuits filed by angry VW owners are pending.

"If Volkswagen's sustainability is endangered by a



Bernd Osterloh, chairman of the Volkswagen general workers council, speaks during an employee meeting at the plant of the German car manufacturer in Wolfsburg, Germany, Tuesday March 8, ,2016. (Julian Stratenschulte/dpa via AP)



Volkswagen AG CEO Matthias Mueller attends an employee meeting at the plant of the German car manufacturer in Wolfsburg, Germany, Tuesday March 8, , 2016. (Julian Stratenschulte/dpa via AP)

On Wednesday, Braunschweig prosecutors' spokesman Klaus Ziehe confirmed a report by the Funke newspaper group Tuesday that the number of people under investigation has increased to 17 from six.

He didn't identify them or give further details, though the newspaper report said without citing sources that the suspects didn't include any current or former management board members.

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The governor of Volkswagen's home state of Lower Saxony, who sits on Volkswagen's supervisory board as a minority shareholder, cautioned that more bad news can be expected.

"We will repeatedly be confronted this year with unpleasant news in connection with 'Dieselgate,'" Stephan Weil told workers. He didn't elaborate.

Prosecutors in Germany have been investigating suspected fraud connected to the emissions-rigging scandal since September.

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