Japanese car giant Toyota announced Monday that it will stop selling diesel cars in Europe, beginning the phase-out this year.

"Diesel will be phased out in our passenger cars in 2018," Johan van Zyl, president of Toyota Motor Europe, said in Geneva, where Europe's first major car show of the year opens this week.

"We will not develop new diesel technology for passenger cars, we'll continue to focus on hybrid" vehicles, he added.

An emissions cheating scandal, which blew up at Volkswagen in 2015, has heaped discredit on diesel technology, criticised for belching out nitrogen oxide and harmful particulates.

This has been a major blow for car makers, who had essentially sought to bet the house on diesel as they strove for years to cut CO2 emissions with the support of public authorities.

Major cities including Paris have announced plans to ban diesel, while a top German court last month opened the way for cities to ban older diesel cars.