Effective Date: April 16, 2015

New Information
Most vehicles, including hybrid vehicles, have always had smog check requirements according to state law and rules set by the Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR); however, BAR temporarily exempted smog certification for certain hybrid vehicles pending the statewide implementation of appropriate testing equipment. BAR has now repealed that exemption.

Recent legislation, Chapter 258, Statutes of 2010 (AB 2298, Eng), authorized BAR to adopt new on-board diagnostic testing equipment for California’s smog check test program. In accordance with this legislation, BAR has specified that hybrid vehicles will be subject to the same smog check inspection requirements and exemptions as gasoline-powered vehicles under the BAR smog check program.

Procedures
When an application for a hybrid vehicle (including those converted to hybrid) is submitted, a smog check inspection will be required upon:
- Original registration (nonresident, revived junk, etc.) when the date fees became due is April 16, 2015, or later.
- Transfer of ownership when the transfer date is April 16, 2015, or later.
- Registration renewal when the expiration date is July 17, 2015, or later.

Refer to the attached Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) Q&As: Hybrid Vehicles in the Smog Check Program and New Smog Check Test Fact Sheet (attached) regarding hybrid vehicles in the Smog Check program to address common questions about hybrid vehicle smog requirements.

Smog requirements and exemption information is available on the BAR website at www.smogcheck.ca.gov or by calling BAR’s Consumer Information Center at 1-800-952-5210.

Background
Hybrid vehicles have traditionally been exempted from smog certification because of issues with testing equipment that have since been resolved by the BAR.

Distribution
Notification that this memo is available, at www.dmv.ca.gov under Publications was made via California DMV’s Automated E-mail Alert System in April 2015.

References
California Vehicle Code §4000.1 and 4000.2
California Health and Safety Code §44011, 44011.1, 44060, and 44040.5
Vehicle Industry Registration Procedures Manual, Chapters 7, 10, 11, 12, and 22
Jim Woodward, Acting Deputy Director
Communication Programs Division

Attachments (2)
Q&As: Hybrid Vehicles in the Smog Check Program

Implementation Schedule

1. Why are hybrids being brought into the Smog Check Program?

Hybrids are designed to meet strict emission standards and to provide improved fuel economy over conventional vehicles. However, hybrid emission control systems experience the same causes of long-term deterioration affecting other vehicles. Emission control system malfunctions on hybrids can cause emissions to sharply increase. By ensuring that hybrid emission-related problems are identified and then properly repaired, emission levels will remain low over the life of the vehicle.

Since their introduction to the California market in 2000, hybrid vehicles could not be properly tested on the BAR-97 equipment that was introduced in 1997. This equipment could not test the emissions of hybrids as the vehicles would switch into electric mode during an inspection. The new Bureau of Automotive Repair On-Board Diagnostic Inspection System (BAR-OIS), which is based on a visual inspection of emission control components and a scan of the vehicle's On-Board Diagnostic (OBD) system, has resolved this testing issue.

2. When will hybrid inspections begin?

Change-of-ownership inspections and inspections for all out-of-state hybrid vehicles registering in California for the first time will require a Smog Check starting April 2015. The Department of Motor Vehicles will also begin mailing registration renewal notices requiring a Smog Check to hybrid owners in April 2015 for registrations due in July 2015.

3. Which types of hybrids will be required to receive a Smog Check?

All hybrid vehicles will be subject to a Smog Check. Just like traditional gasoline-powered vehicles, hybrid vehicles six model-years and newer are exempt from the biennial Smog Check requirement. Hybrid vehicles four model-years and newer are also exempt from the change-of-ownership Smog Check requirement.

For more information, refer to BAR’s Smog Check Requirements by Vehicle Type table.
Hybrid Inspection Procedures

4. What is the Smog Check procedure for a hybrid vehicle?

The Smog Check procedure for a hybrid is similar to the procedure for model-year 2000 and newer gasoline-powered vehicles. This includes both a visual inspection of emission control components and a scan of the vehicle’s OBD system. However, the procedure for hybrids does not include a visible smoke test.

This procedure is consistent with other hybrid inspection practices implemented in other states across the country.

For more information on inspection procedures, refer to the 2013 Smog Check Manual.

5. Are hybrids required to have a tailpipe emissions test?

No. A tailpipe emissions test is not required for hybrid vehicles.

6. What Smog Check equipment is used to inspect hybrids?

Hybrids can only be inspected using the Bureau of Automotive Repair OBD Inspection System (BAR-OIS). The BAR-OIS is the only equipment compatible for testing hybrid vehicles in California.

Tampering and Engine Changes

7. Will hybrids be checked for emissions related aftermarket parts?

Yes. Hybrids with non-approved aftermarket equipment or devices will fail their Smog Check. However, hybrid battery enhancements, such as plug-in charger kits and increased battery capacity, are not cause for Smog Check failure. The only exception would be if illumination of the vehicle’s “Check Engine” light is caused by the aftermarket system.

For more information on aftermarket parts, refer to the Smog Check Reference Guide and the Air Resources Board’s (ARB) Aftermarket Parts Database.

8. How do inspectors determine which emissions equipment is required on a hybrid?

The same methods used to determine required emissions components for conventional vehicles will apply to hybrids, including, but not limited to the following:

- Underhood emissions labels
- Emission control application guides
9. Are engine changes allowed on hybrids?

The same Engine Change Guidelines applied to conventional vehicles also applies to hybrids. If a hybrid engine is changed to a different year or type of engine, the complete electrical and emissions control systems must also be changed.

Engine changes on any vehicle subject to the Smog Check Program will require an inspection at a Referee Center. To make an appointment, consumers may contact the state Referee at (800) 622-7733.

Emissions Warranty

10. What types of emissions warranties are offered for hybrid vehicles?

Hybrid emissions warranties vary by vehicle manufacturer and model. Many 2005 and newer model-year hybrids are certified to California's Partial Zero Emission Vehicle (PZEV) standard. The PZEV standard requires an emissions system warranty of 15 years or 150,000 miles AND a battery warranty of 10 years or 150,000 miles. Model-year 2004 and older hybrids typically have the same emissions system warranties as traditional gasoline-powered vehicles.

Technicians should encourage vehicle owners to check their owner’s manual or contact the vehicle manufacturer directly for emissions warranty information. This will help the consumer better understand the emission warranty coverage for their vehicle and whether any necessary repairs will be covered under the warranty.

The Consumer Assistance Program

11. Is there financial help available to consumers whose hybrid vehicles fail Smog Check?

The Consumer Assistance Program (CAP) offers both repair assistance and vehicle retirement options to eligible consumers. Up to $500 in emission-related repairs is available to income-eligible consumers whose vehicles fail a biennial Smog Check. Up to $1,500 is available to consumers who choose to retire an eligible vehicle from operation.

Station and Technician Licensing

12. Are special licenses required for stations and technicians who perform inspections and/or repairs on hybrid vehicles?

No. The same license requirements for the inspecting and repairing of traditional gasoline-powered and diesel-powered vehicles also apply to hybrid vehicles.
New Smog Check Test Fact Sheet

Smog Check Program’s Updated Test Technology

Californians getting Smog Checks today may notice that the traditional tailpipe test used for many years has been replaced by a quicker, computer-based test for gasoline-powered cars model-year 2000 and newer, and for most diesel vehicles that are model-year 1998 and newer.

This updated test uses the diagnostic capabilities of the vehicle’s computer system instead of the traditional tailpipe probe to measure the vehicle’s emissions. This On-Board Diagnostic (OBD) system gathers information and determines if the vehicle’s emission control systems are operating properly. A visual inspection of emission control components is still required as well.

The OBD only method of testing vehicles is the result of 2010 legislation (AB 2289-Eng) which is designed to improve the Smog Check Program and further reduce air pollution. The Smog Check program removes hundreds of tons of smog-forming pollutants from California’s air every day.

Gasoline-powered vehicles model-year 1999 and older will continue to receive Smog Checks using a tailpipe probe as well as the OBD test.

Hybrid Vehicles

Hybrid vehicles have always been subject to Smog Check inspections. However, since their introduction to the California market in 2000, hybrid vehicles could not be properly tested using the traditional tailpipe test. During a traditional Smog Check, emissions are measured at low speeds or idle rates. At these lower speeds, however, hybrids switch to their electric motors, making it impossible to measure the emissions of their gasoline engines. The OBD only test now makes it possible to test these vehicles. It is important to remember that hybrids have internal combustion engines which generate pollution.

Registration renewal notices for hybrid vehicles needing a Smog Check will begin going out in the mail starting in April 2015 (for registrations due in July 2015). As with other vehicles, owners selling their hybrid vehicles are required to have a change of ownership Smog Check inspection done before they can sell their vehicles. Smog Checks are also now required for all out-of-state hybrid vehicles registering in California for the first time.

Smog Check Requirements

A Smog Check is required every other year for registration renewal of:
- 1976 and newer model-year gas-powered, hybrid, and flex-fuel vehicles
- 1998 and newer model-year diesel-powered vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of 14,000 pounds and less

Exceptions:
- Vehicles that are six model-years old and newer are not subject to the every-other-year Smog Check requirement since newer vehicles are considered cleaner, and less likely to fail a Smog Check.
- Vehicles four model-years old and newer do not require a Smog Check upon change of ownership.
- Note: These exceptions are not applicable to diesel-powered vehicles.

For More Information

More information can be found at www.smogcheck.ca.gov or by calling (800) 952-5210.

About Smog Check

The Smog Check Program is administered by the California Department of Consumer Affairs’ Bureau of Automotive Repair and is an important part of the State’s efforts to improve the quality of the air we breathe. The Smog Check Program removes hundreds of tons of smog-forming pollutants from California’s air every day. Smog Check inspections are designed to identify vehicles with excess emissions so they can be properly repaired to meet state and federal emissions standards.