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## News

Friday, January 16, 2004

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## Owners ridicule ban on VW diesels

By MEREDITH GOAD, Portland Press Herald Writer

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AUGUSTA — A proposal to lift a statewide ban on the sale of new diesel-powered Volkswagens ran into opposition from state and federal environmental officials Thursday.

Under the ban, cars with the turbo direct injection - or TDI - diesel engine cannot be sold in Maine for the next three years because they do not meet California emission standards, which Maine adopted in 2000.

A Cape Porpoise man who drives a diesel-powered Volkswagen beetle has asked the Maine Board of Environmental Protection for an exemption for the cars, which he and other diesel fans argue are actually much more fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly than other cars on the road.

"The emissions regulations that Sacramento finds necessary in California should be re-examined here in the state of Maine,"

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William Lord told the board at a public hearing Thursday. Their air is not our air. Their geography is not our geography, and their driving conditions are not Maine's driving conditions. In this case, one size should not fit all."

But the Maine Department of Environmental Protection opposed the exemption, telling the board that the Volkswagen TDI should not be sold in Maine because it cannot meet emission requirements for nitrogen oxide, a key ingredient of ozone, which every year contributes to coastal summer smog from Kittery to Acadia National Park.

"We'd all agree that while we often hear that Maine isn't California, ozone pollution is ozone pollution no matter where you are," said Ron Severance of the DEP's Bureau of Air Quality.

Severance presented the board with a letter from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that said an exemption for Volkswagen diesels may violate Section 177 of the Clean Air Act.

Assistant Attorney General Jerry Reid said he is still reviewing that question, but said that when a state adopts California emission requirements, it is generally expected to do so "in wholesale fashion."

The ban applies to diesel versions of Beetles, Jettas, Golfs, Passats and Tourags that have been driven less than 7,500 miles. It covers model years 2004 through 2006, when the ban will be lifted because cleaner-burning, low-sulfur fuel will be available.

Consumers can still drive to New Hampshire to buy one of cars, then register and drive it in Maine, and used cars can still be sold here.

There are seven Volkswagen dealerships in Maine from Saco to Bangor, Bill Sowles, owner of dealerships in Brunswick and Falmouth, told the BEP. Once diesel versions of the Passat and Tourag are introduced, he said, dealers could lose 20 to 30 percent of their sales to other states.

But in the letter from EPA's regional office in Boston, David Conroy, chief of the air programs branch, challenged the notion that it is legal to buy one of the cars in New Hampshire and bring it to Maine.

Conroy suggested the loophole could be closed by denying registration to vehicles purchased out of state, as is the practice in Massachusetts, New York and Vermont.

The logic of banning VW diesels while allowing SUVs the run of the road was lost on fans who testified Thursday.

Lord, who lives in a solar house in Cape Porpoise and teaches journalism at Boston University, told the board the cars use biodiesel fuel, get up to 50 miles per gallon on the highway, and



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## Maine



emit far less global warming gases than most vehicles.

The 2004 Volkswagen TDI Beetle is 86 percent more fuel efficient than the gas-powered 2004 Chrysler Concorde and 193 percent more fuel efficient than the 2004 Toyota Land Cruiser, Lord said. The car emits 41 percent less greenhouse gases than the Concorde, he said, and 61 percent less than the Land Cruiser.

Lord noted that the state of Maine is using biodiesel to heat various state buildings, and the Maine Legislature is considering a bill to provide a tax credit to biodiesel producers.

"Here's the ultimate contradiction," he said. "We have all these initiatives within Maine . . . yet the only 2004 passenger vehicle that can use this fuel is not allowed to be sold in Maine."

DEP officials say while they realize that TDIs have many environmental benefits, they are concerned that allowing one exemption to emission standards would open the door to others.

Scott Steitz of Saco said he was supporting Lord's proposal "with reluctance because I am concerned about the air I breathe."

But driving his own VW diesel has convinced him of its environmental merits, he said

"The state's kind of being a little neurotic here," he said. "The (DEP) is saying well, yeah, it's good environmentally but yeah, it's bad environmentally."

The BEP will make a decision on the exemption request at a future meeting, according to chairman Richard Wardwell of Orono.

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