

# Vehicle Inspection FAQs



## Overview

All vehicles registered in Massachusetts must pass a yearly vehicle inspection.

- Newly purchased vehicles must be inspected within 7 days of registration
- Inspections cost \$35 for most vehicles. Inspection stations can charge more for commercial inspection.
- Motorcycle inspections cost \$15, and must be done at a licensed Class M motorcycle inspection station

Driving any motor vehicle without a valid inspection sticker is a traffic violation. It may result in a fine and affect your insurance rate.

### **What Happens When I Take My Vehicle for an Inspection?**

First, a state-licensed inspector will give your vehicle a brief visual inspection to make sure there are no conditions, such as a gasoline leak, that present an immediate danger to either the inspector or the general public. These conditions must be fixed before the inspection proceeds.

Once your vehicle has passed the visual inspection, you will need to provide:

- A current (and active) registration document with a valid vehicle identification number (VIN) that matches the one found on the left front side of the dashboard; and
- The \$35 inspection fee.

More information here: <https://www.mavehiclecheck.com/motorists-welcome>

## General Inspection Questions

### **Where is the nearest inspection station?**

You can [find the nearest inspection station using our locator tool](#).

### **Where is the nearest Registered Emissions Repair Facility?**

You can [find the nearest Registered Emissions Repair Facility using our locator tool](#).

### **My vehicle failed its inspection. What do I do now?**

If your vehicle failed either its safety or emissions inspection, it must be repaired and pass its re-test within 60 days of the initial inspection. It's important to complete the necessary repairs as soon as possible, especially since it's illegal to drive your vehicle before safety repairs have been made. Until your vehicle is re-inspected, be sure to keep the repair receipts in your vehicle as proof that you are in

compliance with the law. It's also good practice to keep emissions-related repair receipts in case your vehicle does not pass its re-test and you need to apply for a waiver or extension. For more information, download the brochure, [My Vehicle Failed its Inspection - What Do I Do Now?](#)

**If my vehicle failed the inspection, can I apply for an emissions Waiver for my vehicle? Can I apply for an Economic Hardship Failure Repair Extension for my vehicle?**

Yes. If your vehicle is repaired by a Registered Emissions Repair Technician and it fails its re-test, it may qualify for a one-year emissions Waiver . If your vehicle requires a major repair, such as a transmission or engine overhaul, you may qualify for a one-year, non-renewable Economic Hardship Failure Repair Extension. Obtaining an emissions waiver or an extension will meet program requirements, but must be completed within 60 days of your initial inspection.

**Why do I need to bring my vehicle to a Motorist Assistance Center (MAC)? How do I get an appointment at a MAC?**

Your Vehicle Inspection Report explains why. Reasons may include repeated problems with on-board computer "readiness" issues that appear unique to your vehicle; you have a specialty vehicle such as a kit car; random selection for program evaluation purposes, or to protect your rights as a consumer. To schedule an appointment at a MAC, please contact our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135.

**What are the safety inspection requirements for vehicles?**

A safety inspection takes around 12 minutes during which 14 key of the vehicle are examined. For more information, please [click here](#).

**Does my trailer need to be inspected?**

If your trailer is used to make money, it needs to undergo a commercial inspection if the trailer has a manufacturer's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) over 3,000 pounds, or if the gross combination vehicle weight rating (GCVWR) is over 10,000 pounds.

**My vehicle is currently out of state. How do I get it inspected?**

If your vehicle is out of state, you must submit an Out-of-State Verification Inspection Form (available in the [Motorist Resources](#) section), then have it inspected at a Massachusetts Vehicle Check Inspection Station within 15 days of your return to the Commonwealth.

**My vehicle is registered in another state or jurisdiction. Can I get it inspected in Massachusetts?**

Depending on the state in which your vehicle is registered, your vehicle may be able to be inspected at a Massachusetts Vehicle Check inspection station. To check whether a particular state's inspection has reciprocity with the Commonwealth, please contact our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135.

**What are the OBD Diagnostic Trouble Codes (DTCs) listed on my Vehicle Inspection Report?**

An "OBD DTC" is an alphanumeric code that is stored in your vehicle's onboard diagnostic (OBD) computer system when it detects an emissions-related problem. There is a common misconception that a DTC identifies a specific component that is faulty. While this is sometimes the case, there are many more instances in which it identifies only a symptom that a Registered Emissions Repair Technician uses to narrow down and, ultimately, identify the cause of the problem. Some DTCs have the same meaning for all vehicles, while others are manufacturer-specific. Emissions-related problems can be caused by the engine, transmission, anti-lock brakes, body control module and even the power steering system. For

detailed information on the “OBD DTCs”, “OBD Permanent Fault Codes”, and “Additional OBD Data” provided on your VIR (“Miles Since Code Clearing”, “Warm-ups Since Code Clearing” and “Pin 16 Voltage”), you should take your vehicle to a Registered Emissions Repair Facility.

### **How can I get another copy of my VIR?**

You can print a copy yourself from this website. You will need your Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), license plate number and license plate “type,” all of which are on your vehicle registration. [Click here to print your VIR.](#)

### **Where does the VIR explain why my vehicle failed its inspection?**

If your vehicle fails its inspection, the results of your vehicle’s safety inspection and emissions test results are found on page two of the VIR. These sections list the specific reasons why your vehicle failed.

### **My vehicle failed its inspection for a lost or damaged license plate. What do I do now?**

If your vehicle failed its safety inspection for a lost or damaged license plate you should order a replacement plate(s) immediately. Replacement plates may be ordered online at [Mass.Gov/myRMV](http://Mass.Gov/myRMV). Once you have ordered your replacement plate(s), you will receive a payment receipt. A Number Plate Permit will also be mailed to you within 5-7 business days. The Payment Receipt and the Number Plate Permit both may be used as proof for your free vehicle reinspection prior to receipt of your replacement plates provided that you return to the original inspection station within 60 days from the date of the initial inspection.

---

## Safety Inspections

1. Visual Overview
2. Brake Tests
3. Exhaust System
4. Steering and Suspension
5. Horn
6. Glazing, Glass and Windshield Wipers
7. Rear View Mirror
8. Lighting Devices
9. Tires and Wheels
10. Bumper, Fenders and Fuel Tank
11. Altered Vehicle Height
12. Seat Belts
13. Airbags
14. Fuel Tank Cap

## Safety Inspection Questions

### **The VIR states that the manufacturer has issued a recall on my vehicle. What should I do?**

Contact your dealer or the vehicle’s manufacturer to determine if the recall repairs have been made. For more information about vehicle recalls, [click here](#) and scroll down to Safety & Emissions Recall Information.

### **What if the recall on the VIR happened before I owned my vehicle?**

Depending on the subject of the recall, you may need to determine if the previous owner took care of the recall repair(s). Please contact a dealer or the manufacturer for more information on a specific recall.

### **What happens if I get pulled over by police when I have a safety rejection sticker, but have already scheduled an appointment to have repairs made?**

You should not drive a vehicle that failed its safety inspection and has not yet been repaired. If you continue to drive your vehicle, you may be cited by police for operating an unsafe vehicle. After you get safety defects fixed, your Certificate of Rejection allows you to operate your vehicle for up to 60 days, while arranging for re-inspection. Until your vehicle is re-inspected, be sure to keep the repair receipts in your vehicle as proof that you are complying with the law. This is especially important for safety defects because you are required to have them repaired right away.

---

## Emissions Tests

Vehicles listed below must receive the following types of emissions tests each year, in addition to mandatory safety tests for all registered vehicles:

### **On-Board Diagnostic (OBD) Test:**

- Model years 2009 and newer passenger cars, trucks and SUVs
- Model years 2009 and newer light-duty diesel vehicles (with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating or "GVWR" of 8,500 pounds or less)
- Model years 2009 and newer medium-duty diesel vehicles (with a GVWR of 8,501 to 14,000 pounds)
- Model years 2009 and newer medium-duty non-diesel vehicles (with a GVWR of 8,501 to 14,000 pounds)

### **Opacity Test:**

Model year 1984 and newer, medium- and heavy-duty diesel vehicles (with a GVWR of 10,001 pounds or more) not subject to an OBD test.

### **OBD Testing**

On-board diagnostics (OBD) inspections are an important part of the Massachusetts Vehicle Check Program. No one wants to drive a vehicle that is wasting fuel or polluting. An inefficient engine or emissions control system adds pollutants to the air in our region and reduces a vehicle's fuel economy.

The OBD test typically takes about three minutes. The inspector connects your vehicle's on-board computer to an analyzer in the station, and then downloads engine and emissions control data.

The analyzer relies on the self-checks the vehicle's OBD system makes of several functions:

**Communication.** Does your vehicle's OBD system communicate with the analyzer? If your vehicle's OBD system cannot communicate with the station's analyzer, the OBD system must be repaired before the emissions test can be completed.

**Readiness.** Is your vehicle's OBD system "ready" to be tested? As you drive your vehicle, the internal OBD system checks the performance of various emissions-related components and systems. If the OBD system has not performed enough of these self-checks, your vehicle may not be ready for an emissions test, and the analyzer will return a "Not Ready" result.

When a vehicle fails or is turned away from the inspection because its OBD system is "not ready," this simply means that at the time it was presented for inspection, the vehicle's OBD system did not have enough valid data stored to accurately evaluate the vehicle's emissions control system. Certain common repairs or maintenance procedures can temporarily interrupt power from a vehicle's battery to its OBD computer, leaving monitors "not ready" for an emissions test because the power loss cleared all diagnostic results from the computer's memory. After power is restored, in order for the vehicle to be "ready" for an emissions test, the computer needs to monitor various driving conditions long enough to run the required number of checks again, determine whether emissions-related systems or components are performing correctly, and once again properly store this information.

Until the vehicle's on-board computer is "ready" for OBD emissions testing, the vehicle will fail its initial inspection or be turned away from a re-test. There may be nothing otherwise wrong with the vehicle; the computer simply needs to complete its checks. One week of combined highway and city driving is normally enough to reset the system and provide an accurate reading of vehicle performance.

To pass the emissions test:

- 2009 and newer model year non-diesel vehicles may have a maximum of one "not ready" non-continuous monitor.
- 2009 and newer model year diesel vehicles receiving an OBD test may have a maximum of one "not ready" non-continuous monitor.
- If the vehicle failed the emissions test with a catalytic converter-related diagnostic trouble code, the vehicle's catalyst monitor must be "ready" to pass the re-test.

**Diagnostic Trouble Codes (DTCs).** Why does the OBD system turn on the Check Engine light? Diagnostic trouble codes indicate which vehicle systems or components are not performing as designed. Reviewing these codes is the first step in diagnosing an emissions-related problem. These codes, along with other information in the OBD system, help guide emissions repair technicians to faulty parts and help take the "guess-work" out of the process.

**Check Engine Light.** Is the Check Engine light (sometimes labeled as "Service Engine Soon") turned on? When this light illuminated, it indicates that one or more components of your vehicle's emissions control system is not working as it was designed to work, and repairs are needed. If the light does not turn on when the OBD system tries to turn it on, this problem must be corrected.

**Emissions Test Results.** The results of your emissions test are printed on the Vehicle Inspection Report (VIR), which the inspector will give you when the inspection is finished. The VIR provides information that a repair technician can use to diagnose and repair your

vehicle before it adds more pollutants to the air. This will also save you from more expensive repairs down the road.

If your vehicle passes both its OBD emissions test and its safety inspection, it will be issued a new windshield sticker with a black number indicating the month of expiration. If a problem is detected during the OBD test, your vehicle will fail its inspection and will need to be repaired. It will receive a windshield sticker with a black R. When it passes a re-test, the black R sticker will be replaced with a black number sticker representing the month of expiration.

### **Common Reasons Vehicles Fail the Emissions Test**

The most common causes of emissions test failures include:

- Malfunctioning components that regulate fuel/air ratio, such as oxygen sensors
- Exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) valves
- Engine misfire
- Catalytic converters
- Evaporative controls, including poor-fitting gas caps

The VIR provides information that a repair technician can use to diagnose and repair your vehicle. This may also save you from more expensive repairs down the road.

### **Opacity Testing of Heavy-Duty Diesel Vehicles**

"Snap acceleration opacity" tests are used for diesel trucks, buses and other heavy-duty vehicles (with a GVWR of 10,001 pounds or more) not subject to an OBD emissions test.

In this test, the inspector uses an opacity meter or "smoke meter" to measure the smoke from the vehicle's exhaust pipe. The darker the smoke, the more the vehicle is polluting and the higher its opacity reading will be.

Readings from three acceleration "snaps" are averaged. The final average is compared to the emissions standard for the model year and type of vehicle. Newer vehicles have more sophisticated emissions controls, and must meet stricter standards.

## **Emissions Test Questions**

### **My vehicle failed its emissions test for non-communication. What should I do?**

Take your vehicle to a Registered Emissions Repair Facility to determine why it's on board computer was not able to communicate with the inspection station's testing equipment.

### **My inspector told me that I have to take my car to a Motorist Assistance Center (MAC). What will happen when I go there?**

MAC technicians will perform additional analyses of your vehicle based on the reason for the referral. They will be able to answer your questions and explain why your vehicle was referred and what you need to do next.

### **I took my vehicle in for its free re-test within 60 days of the initial inspection, but was charged for another inspection. Why?**

You are entitled to one free re-test within 60 days at the station that initially inspected your vehicle. If you go to a different station for the re-test, you will be charged.

If you believe you were improperly charged for your re-test, you may be eligible for a refund. The Massachusetts Vehicle Check Customer Service staff can explain the refund procedure.

**I had my initial inspection more than 60 days ago. If I go back for a re-test, pay the full amount and fail again, will I get another 60 days or is the 60 days counted only from the initial inspection date?**

The 60 days is counted from the original inspection date.

**Where can I find a Registered Emissions Repair Facility?**

If your vehicle fails its emissions test, you will find a list of Registered Emissions Repair Facilities on the Vehicle Inspection Report (VIR) that the inspector will give you. You can also call our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135, or [use the RERF locator tool](#) to find a location convenient for you.

**I want to apply for an emissions Waiver or Economic Hardship Failure Repair Extension. What is the first step?**

Call our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135 after your vehicle fails its initial emissions inspection to begin this process.

**I had a Registered Emissions Repair Facility prepare a repair estimate so that I could apply for an Economic Hardship Failure Repair Extension. How can I find out if the amounts listed are eligible?**

Contact our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135 to determine your eligibility for an Economic Hardship Failure Repair Extension.

**How much money do I need to spend on repairs to qualify for an Emissions Waiver if my vehicle failed for diagnostic trouble codes (DTCs)?**

Because this varies based on the specific DTCs, and the model year of your vehicle, you need to contact our Customer Service Center at 1-844-358-0135.

**I performed a few repairs to my vehicle before getting additional repairs at a Registered Emissions Repair Facility, and then took it back to the original inspection station for a re-test. If I apply for an emissions Waiver, will the repairs I did count toward my eligibility?**

No, only repairs performed by a Registered Emissions Repair Technician at a Registered Emissions Repair Facility may be applied to the emissions waiver eligibility threshold.

**Why do I have to go for a re-test before applying for an emissions waiver if I know my vehicle is going to fail?**

The re-test helps evaluate the effectiveness of the repairs made to your vehicle and determine whether any conditions exist that would make your vehicle ineligible for a waiver. Vehicles with certain problems that cause excessive emissions, such as catalytic converter failure, do not meet waiver criteria.

**May I apply for an emissions waiver if my 60 days have run out?**

If your vehicle failed its emissions test, it must be issued a waiver within 60 days of its initial inspection to continue operating legally.