Turkey in the aftermath of the Volkswagen scandal

PETER MOCK

On Sept. 21, Volkswagen lost almost a quarter of its market value within one day after the company publicly admitted that it had installed illegal software on up to 11 million of its diesel cars worldwide. The software, as so-called “defeat device,” is programmed to detect when the car is being tested for emissions in a laboratory and change the emissions test results. If passed, the car is driven inside a testing laboratory under normal driving conditions to ensure that the car stays below the regulatory emissions limit. As soon as the car is driven outside a testing laboratory under normal driving conditions, the exhaust emission levels are drastically higher. As of at least one Volkswagen model, the emission levels of nitrogen oxides, a group of chemical substances harmful to the human respiratory system, are up to 35 times the regulatory limit.

The Volkswagen scandal led to a public outcry in the United States, even though the local market share of diesel cars is below 1 percent and the number of customers affected is relatively low. In Turkey, on the other hand, diesel cars account for more than 60 percent of new sales. And no other manufacturer sells more of them than Volkswagen: in 2013 alone in every five new cars bought in Turkey was made by the Volkswagen Group. The VW Jettas and Passat EOS diesel configurations, the models that were found to have very high emissions in the U.S., were sold to more than 37,000 customers in Turkey in 2014. And a similar number of these vehicles were sold in previous years. Hence it is likely that thousands of customers in Turkey are directly affected by the Volkswagen scandal.

Doga Ozturk, director of automotive models in Turkey, issued a press statement emphasizing that all its vehicles for sale in Turkey comply with official regulations and are safe to drive and roadworthy. It is true that the affected vehicles are not a safety hazard, and it is also true that they meet the official Euro emission limits. However, the defeat device is clearly forbidden by Turkish law, and every vehicle that emits high emissions under real-world driving conditions is a serious hazard for the health of the Turkish population, particularly in urban areas. The underlying issue goes far beyond just illegal defeat devices in the case of Volkswagen. Previous studies found that the real-world nitrogen oxide emission levels of modern diesel cars in Europe, on average, is about seven times higher than the regulatory limit value. Certainly most of these vehicles do not make use of illegal software. Instead, there are a number of loopholes in the existing regulations that allow vehicle manufacturers to pass emission tests under laboratory conditions, even though their vehicles may have significantly higher emission levels under real-world driving conditions, without breaking any legal rules.

As managing director of the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), I am not in a position to be an expert in the testing of vehicles that have been shipped to Europe. However, I can confirm that the test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem. The test vehicles sent to Europe are not a significant problem.