



IF YOU HAVE TO MAKE A CHOICE between trusting a politician or a car company, it's probably safer to trust the politician.

In case you don't know already, car companies routinely lie but get really upset when you point this out.

The most obvious case of people getting hurt by car company lies was the [2015 'Dieselgate' scandal](#).

Volkswagen secretly fitted its cars with software that could detect when a car was being tested by the government for emissions.





Patrick Pleul/EPA

Volkswagen's cheat software activated full emission controls during government emissions testing. However, as soon as the government testing was over, the software switched off most of the vehicle's emissions controls.

As a result, these vehicles produced up to 40 times the legal emissions in the U.S.

It was later revealed that roughly 11 million vehicles worldwide were fitted with the same software.

Subsequent investigations uncovered that multiple other manufacturers, including Audi, Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and Nissan, were also found to have used similar software to cheat on emissions regulations.



This scandal cost VW around US\$33.3 billion in fines, penalties, financial settlements and the costs of buying back cars from angry customers. Government and civil actions were taken in the U.S. and the European Union, where most of the affected vehicles were located.



Diesels put out far less CO₂ than petrol engines, but they also emit other nasties, including particulates – tiny particles that are absorbed when you breathe them in. Inside your body these tiny particles float around, causing serious health problems including cancer. It is estimated that Volkswagen's emissions cheating helped cause 124,000 premature deaths globally.





The emissions cheating problem is unresolved: a 2025 report concluded: “The available evidence suggests that fleet-wide impacts of cheating and tampering on emissions are **undeniable, substantial, and cannot be ignored.**”

And before you get smug about electric cars, be aware that: “Electric cars and hybrid cars create **more carbon emissions during their production than standard vehicles.**”

“some EVs emit more CO₂ than a petrol car... On average....[each new electric car is responsible for] four tonnes of extra CO₂... which has to be offset by 0.5 tonnes annually of prevented emissions. According to these figures, it would take some 8 years to break even. (assuming these electric cars run on 100% renewable energy).

But few countries in the world generate 100% renewable energy.





In the longer term, emissions regulations are having a dramatic, positive effect on the air people breathe. Emissions controls are getting tougher all the time, so a ‘green’ car from ten years ago would not pass recent tests.

But to simplify your choices, we use three main symbols ☹️ 😐 😊 to guide your car choices, with an explanation of the actual rating for this vehicle. For example:



- 😊 **All versions meet Euro6D emissions standards.**

The smiley face means that this a ‘green’ car by the standards that were in place when it was offered for sale •