

DMV NOTICE ASKING FOR STAR STATION: The DMV has started requesting STAR smog checks from certain vehicle owners even though the STAR smog check program has not officially been rolled out by the Bureau of Automotive Repairs.

If the DMV has requested your vehicle be smog tested at a STAR certified smog check center, and you are obtaining the smog inspection prior to January 1st, 2013, you must have your vehicle smog checked at a Test Only or Gold Shield smog station only. After January 1st, 2013 you'll be able, and required, to locate and have your vehicle smog inspected at a STAR certified smog test or smog test & repair station.

SmogTips.com will implement STAR certified station search criteria after December 31, 2012, and which time the Bureau of Automotive Repairs announces the official roll-out of the STAR Certified Smog Station Program.

STAR Smog Check Program Arriving January 2013

On January 1st 2013 the State of California will revolutionize the smog check industry once again with the implementation of the new STAR Smog Station program. The STAR program aims to restrict smog check centers with low smog check performance scores from inspecting "directed" vehicles. Directed vehicles are those which the state has recognized as gross polluters and/or vehicles which fall under the HEP (High Emitter Profile) group, and which currently make-up approximately 18 percent of vehicles on California roadways.

In the past, in order to smog test a "directed" vehicle, a smog station owner would either have to be certified by the state of California as a Test Only center or a Gold Shield smog station. Under the new STAR program, neither certification will matter. The only smog test facilities which will be eligible to smog check "directed" vehicles, or for that matter, even be referred "directed" vehicles, will be the new STAR smog check stations. Either test & repair or test-only stations may apply and be eligible to participate in the new STAR program if they pass the stringent requirements set by the BAR (Bureau of Automotive Repairs).

The State will start accepting applications for the STAR program on July 1st, 2012. The STAR smog station program will be implemented January 1st, 2013, on which date smog stations which applied in 2012 will learn whether they have been accepted into the program or not. If you are a station owner, the lead time in finding out whether your station was accepted into the program or not is not great, in fact it's zero (0) days. However, in the unfortunate event you are not accepted into the STAR program due to FPR scores, the State will re-evaluate your performance once a month.

What are the STAR Smog Station Program requirements?

First and foremost, a smog station can not have received a citation within one year from the effective date of its last citation. In the event a smog test center or smog repair station has received a citation within the last 12 months the State encourages the smog station owner and smog technician(s) to be extra careful during smog inspections. Second, the BAR wants and needs smog stations to perform accurate smog inspections, and in their own words "If a vehicle should fail, let it fail". The scoring criteria is very complex. The gist of it is this: if a particular year, make, model of vehicle has a tendency of failing throughout California yet these vehicles repeatedly pass at a particular smog center, that smog station and smog technician(s) will receive a low FPR (Fail/Pass Rate) score. Smog check centers with a FPR score less than 0.4 and will not be eligible for the STAR program. The FPR score rating system is zero to one (0 to 1). One (1) being the highest score a smog station or smog technician can receive.

A few more criteria go into developing the emission test center's or smog check repair center's FPR score, such as the number of aborted smog tests, incomplete tests, smog tests which required OBD II but were not administered, test where EVAP was required and not administered, missing ignition timing inspections when a vehicle did not have electronic timing, gear shift incidents, and so on. The serious concern here is in the passing of vehicles which the State says should not have passed, or at least not as often as they did at a particular smog station.

The expert advice for smog check technicians is to perform smog checks as accurately as possible, and to be extremely cautious to avoid, pre-conditioning the engine, over-conditioning the catalytic converter, and using incorrect gear during ASM.

If my station is not accepted into the STAR Program what do I do?

If your smog station or smog technician has a low FPR score and does not get accepted into the STAR program you may continue to operate your smog check business but will not be allowed to smog test or be referred "directed" vehicles. The State will re-evaluate your FPR score each month for re-consideration. Regular test & repair stations which are accepted into the STAR program will be allowed to smog check & repair directed vehicles, very similar to current Gold Shield Smog Stations (which will be phased out Jan 1st, 2013).

What should I do to insure I become a STAR smog check center?

It is in the best interest of every smog technician and smog station owner to evaluate their business practice now. Smog stations which solely rely on Directed Vehicles, such as test only centers, will need to absolutely insure they are accepted into STAR program in order to stay profitable.

Experts recommend now is the time to tidy up skills and increase performance. At all expense avoid citations, and inform each customer prior to the smog check that the State has never been stricter when dealing with smog checks. For the most part, this explanation should prepare them for their vehicle's smog inspection results.

We've summed up the new STAR program the best we can without getting complicated.